

Book IV

EKPYROSIS

DE BELLO GALLICO

War is the orgasm of universal life which fructifies and moves chaos, the prelude for all creations, and which like Christ the Saviour triumphs beyond death through death itself.

P.J. Proudhon, French theorizer (1846)

If there is ever another war in Europe, it will come out of some damned silly thing in the Balkans.

Otto von Bismarck, German practitioner, probably apocryphal (1877)

Beyond the mistakes of individuals, the outbreak of the Great War may be seen as a result of the self-aggravating interplay of three processes: the ruin of the balance of powers, i.e., the replacement of the concert-of-powers by two antagonistic alliance systems, the rise of liberalism and nationalism, and rapid industrialization, which, for purposes of war, made available railways, telegraphs, and improved gun technology. The improvement of agriculture also allowed to feed more conscripts.

We recall that the last two major reorganizations of the continent's political order had occurred at the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, which, ending the Thirty-Years War together with most of the former imperial prerogatives, augured in the eventual collapse of the Holy Roman Empire, and within the structure formalized at the Congress of Vienna, which administered the receivership of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars. Both designs accelerated the demise of feudalism, even if monarchical decorum was often maintained, and the rise of the bourgeoisie; the replacement of the divine authority of the kings with the cooperative structures of the modern nation-state. The French Revolution had evidenced that monarchs were expendable, tyrants even more so, and that the future belonged to more liberal interpretations of statehood.

It had been the clandestine intent of the Congress of Vienna not to allow any *real* change in the continent's political order, which continued to be an expression of the status quo ante: characterized by a territorial balance between France and the German states, the taking out of the equation of the Low Countries by obliging them to perpetual neutrality, the reining in of Russia by giving her a common border with Prussia, and the forced retention of the maritime hegemony of Great Britain. In more than one respect it remained the same order of things which had existed since the realm of Charlemagne had been divided between his heirs, but a new moneyed aristocracy had taken a place in the

governance of the state beside the old nobility. The latter's ancient privileges, however, were increasingly challenged by the bourgeoisie, which longed to turn economical success into political power.

The war kindled, in a way, by the old system - the majority of the European nations were still monarchies and their politicians, diplomats and generals still predominantly of noble descent - was to sweep away the remnants of traditional monarchy. All post-1918 governments had to acknowledge the bankruptcy of the old order - tyrannical and less tyrannical kings and emperors were deposed, sometimes shot, revolutions failed or succeeded, and the German, Austrian and Russian monarchies vanished like the smile of the Cheshire Cat.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, a new philosophy began to jeopardize the freshly won powers of the bourgeoisie. In the aftermath of the uprisings of 1848/49, all states - with the reactionary monarchies of Austria and Russia in the lead - had created clandestine police forces to control and, if necessary, suppress unwelcome political activity. Initially, the suspects deemed worthy of such extracurricular attention had been liberals and nationalists, the movements of the bourgeoisie. The constantly growing industrial proletariat, however, had lacked hitherto a theory of political participation, but, thirty-one years after the Congress of Vienna, the two German philosophers Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels founded a third, potentially more serious threat to noble and bourgeois privileges, influenced by Hegel's vision of history as the development of man. A pamphlet they published in 1848 opened with the alarming news that "A spectre is haunting Europe, the spectre of Communism!" and ended with the rallying cry "Workers of the World - Unite!" (1) It was the Communist Manifesto, here introduced by Konrad Heiden:

To understand the enormous effect of this Communist Manifesto, it must be realized that ever since Hegel the entire West had been permeated by a belief in the necessary and meaningful course of history. The world proletariat, ¹ instructed by Marx and Engels in the spirit of Hegel, fights for its interests in the conviction that it is thus accomplishing the work of the world spirit. And there was something in it; for the Marxist proletariat was the heir and successor of the European national and democratic revolution. Economics became destiny.
(2)

The powers-that-be soon realized that the threat of socialism was a potentially greater peril than those that emanated from liberalism or nationalism, and decided to employ the latter two, the lesser evils, perhaps, to fight the former. The bourgeoisie was to be mobilized against the socialist danger, but, for this purpose, nationalism had to be turned from an originally liberal, anti-monarchical and anti-clerical, leftist issue, to an instrument of reactionary conservatism, the weapon of a crusade of the Right. Thus by the concerted powers of nobility, clergy and imperialistic historians, nationalism was slowly canalized into a patronage of the existing system, robbed of its political roots, and translated into the sort of "patriotism" that equated the interests of the people with those of its rulers.

Konrad Heiden observed that one of the expressions of this instrumentalized "patriotism" was the formulation of national security issues.

In the seventeenth century Armand Duplessis, Cardinal de Richelieu, established a basic principle of French foreign policy: the security of France demands that Germany must never be united. From then on, the dream of German unity became a vain struggle against superior French strength, against French conquest, even against the French language, which at times forced the German language out of educated German society.

France oppressed Germany out of a panic fear, resulting from the Spanish-Habsburg embrace in the sixteenth century. At the beginning of that century a Spanish king became German Emperor; the ruling houses of Spain and Austria (Habsburg) fused and Spain, vanguard of the Roman Catholic Church in defending its tottering rule over the souls of Europe, used her increasing power to crush rising Protestantism in Germany as well as in encircled France.

In Germany the attempt succeeded only partially, but for a hundred years France, torn by her own religious parties and powerful nobles, was strangled by the Spanish-Habsburg ring. Spain interfered in France's

¹From Latin "proles", children - the class of people that could give the state nothing but their children.

internal affairs, dictated French policies, maintained parties in France; and France remained Catholic. If France was not utterly defeated, it was because of two factors which came to her aid: first, the rising British sea-power, which distracted and paralyzed Spain; second, the Protestant German princes, who were continuously rising up against the Catholic, Habsburg-Spanish Emperor, thus immobilizing at least one of his arms. It is understandable that France should henceforth have placed her hope in this strife between German Emperor and German princes, and viewed it as the immutable aim of her foreign policy. For two centuries she did her best to tear Germany apart.

The split of European civilization into two enraged religious parties gave France an advantage which her own strength would not have given her. At the end of the sixteenth century, she settled her own religious conflicts, while Germany was torn by religious wars, culminating in the most terrible conflict of modern times. For thirty years (1618-1648) the soldiers of Europe staged on German soil the most frightful slaughter in modern history and the German nation nearly bled to death.

For thirty years Swedes from the Arctic regions and Spaniards from the south streamed into Germany to fight battles and massacre the population; German cities, situated but half an hour's journey from one another, but worlds apart by reason of religion, fought on opposing sides. Provinces were turned into deserts, covered with heaps of ashes; cities vanished forever from the face of the earth; men died by murder, fire, starvation, and plague; cannibalism was not unknown.

When the thirty years' butchery was over, the number of Germans had fallen from about twelve to four million. No other modern people have ever experienced anything of the sort. A generation later the war broke out anew at the western borders of the country: France tried to snatch the left bank of the Rhine from Germany, and when this failed, Louvois, the French Minister of War, gave orders to create an artificial desert in the border province of the Palatinate: "Brulez le Palatinat"² was his order, and the ruins of Heidelberg Castle remain a monument to this policy. A century and a half later the armies of Napoleon, Emperor of the French, marched across Europe, and Germany was more torn than ever. (3)

Overcoming French domination proved no simple recipe for the success of German nationalism, for in the 'liberation wars' of 1813 and 1814 against foreign oppression, the German bourgeoisie found itself unwillingly bound to the princes, for there was no way to get rid of Napoleon and the French without at the same time involuntarily re-establishing aristocratic rule - for German nationalism, the wars of liberation were a lose-lose scenario. The Congress of Vienna essentially re-established the pre-1789, pre-revolutionary status quo in a bid to uphold the authority of the German princes and their particularism, with the result that it eerily continued to dominate the country's politics until the Franco-German conflict was resolved by force in 1870/71 and France was no longer in a position to impede German unification. This war also conclusively established that the strategies and tactics of the Napoleonic age were passé. A monumental shift in military paradigm had occurred around the middle of the nineteenth century, the most significant since the longbow had so devastatingly been introduced at Agincourt in AD 1415. Railways, telegraph, machine guns and modern artillery fuses changed the face of war forever.

Warfare was adapted to the requirements of the nation-state, and citizenship of the nation indissolubly tied to military service. The ancient empires had bestowed citizenship liberally -- for three reasons: the primarily determinative factor was adherence to a culture, not descent, because the military relied on small trained cadres, fortified, in the case of war, by volunteers or ad hoc conscription, and because citizens had to pay taxes. Since the Roman legions had been dissolved in the late fifth century, no state had been able to afford large standing armies until well into the nineteenth century -- feudalism, the system of landed nobility liable to military service for their lord evolved when the collapse of the Roman tax system had necessitated a completely new financing of arms. Even Rome had relied for the first about 650 years of her history on acquiring soldiers only from the propertied classes, who could pay for their weapons and expenses. That worked until they literally ran out of soldiers after Servilius Caepio's escapade at Arausio in 105 BC, and Gaius Marius had to take in the poor.

²"Burn the Palatinate", the Pfalz, the region south of the Main River and west of the Rhine, which at that time belonged to Bavaria.

Socialization and citizenship in nation-states were different matters. The reforms of Scharnhorst and Gneisenau in Prussia at the beginning of the nineteenth century had provided the groundwork upon which the General Staff and especially (the elder) Moltke could build, and pay for, a modern army. Meanwhile Bismarck, having done his homework of analyzing French strategy on Germany, signed secret alliances with the southern German kingdoms and agreements that ensured Russian and Austrian neutrality in the case of a Franco-Prussian war. These precautions allowed Moltke to beat Napoleon III at Sedan, and Bismarck to proclaim the Second Empire.

This pronouncement, in the famous Hall of Mirrors in the Palace of Versailles where the generals of Louis XIII and XIV had celebrated so many victories over hopelessly outnumbered troops of German principalities, shocked France to the core. Consternation over the unprecedented defeat of Napoleon III at Sedan, which had netted the Germans 100,000 French prisoners-of-war, literally petrified France's military self-respect. That she would have her mind set on revenge, Bismarck doubted not, and concluded the Reinsurance Treaty with Russia to keep her at bay.

But German - and the almost simultaneous Italian unification - had also changed the continent's political map to a degree unknown since 1816, essentially by the removal of so many of the leftovers of the medieval First Reich, independent duchies and principalities. The numbers of political entities on the continent had shrunk, and the task of formulating a solid German foreign policy for the future should have become easier for Bismarck, not more complicated -- had there not been one factor that aroused his disdain, as Niall Ferguson explains:

[It was] the extraordinary integration of Europe's nominal ruling elite. The Archduke Francis Ferdinand was, of course, a Habsburg. But he was also a member of that genealogically intertwined elite of predominantly German royal dynasties that had provided the majority of European sovereigns since the seventeenth century.

Aside from Switzerland, France (after the advent of the Third Republic) and a smattering of city-states, nearly all the states of Europe between 1815 and 1917 were either empires, kingdoms, principalities or grand duchies. In all of them, the office of head of state was hereditary, not elective. Between the more or less enlightened despotism of Russia and the liberal monarchy of Norway there was a bewildering variety of constitutional forms.

Yet none of these entirely deprived the hereditary sovereign of power, nor did away with that crucial institution of government, the royal court. Moreover, quite apart from their domestic political powers - which remained great in terms of patronage even if they were circumscribed in other respects - the emperors, kings, queens, princes and grand dukes had a distinctive role in the sphere of interstate relations.

Despite industrialization and all the other associated phenomena of modernization, dynastic politics still mattered. Wars were fought over the successions to the dukedoms of Schleswig and Holstein and the throne of Spain - to give just two examples - not merely because they furnished ingenious statesmen with convenient pretexts for nation-building. When attention is focused on the most important of all the nineteenth-century dynasties, the Saxe-Coburgs, it becomes apparent that there was much about this supposedly modern epoch that was still distinctly early-modern.

The rise of the House of Saxe-Coburg can be dated from the Napoleonic Wars and can be followed in the diary of Augusta, second wife, and, from 1806, widow of Francis Frederick, Duke of Coburg. Coburg was one of those petty German states threatened with extinction when Napoleon swept away the Holy Roman Empire and created the Confederation of the Rhine; but Augusta's sons managed to steer a careful course between France and Russia and were duly rewarded when, under Russian pressure, the duchy was restored to her eldest son Ernest in 1807.

Augusta's children married well. With the exception of one daughter, all either married royalty, achieved royal status in their own right or secured it for their children. One daughter married a brother of Alexander I of Russia; another, the King of Württemberg; a third married Britain's Duke of Kent, a brother of George IV. But it was Augusta's youngest son, Leopold, who was the real founder of the Saxe-Coburg fortunes.

Leopold suffered a setback when his first wife, Princess Charlotte, daughter of George IV of Britain, died in childbirth in November 1817, just eighteen months after their marriage. But his circumstances were transformed when, having previously toyed with the idea of accepting the Greece throne, he became King of the Belgians in 1831. (4)

Although Belgium had achieved statehood barely a year earlier, the principality of Flanders had long been one of the richest parts of the continent, and the new nation dived enthusiastically into the Industrial Revolution. The new country struck it rich in the true sense of the word when her principal colony, the Congo - a private property of the king - turned out a veritably endless reservoir of raw materials that could be readily converted into industrial products: ores, minerals, oil, gold and gemstones galore.

As the London "Times" and Niall Ferguson went on to observe, such an incredible fortune made the Saxe-Coburg family irresistibly attractive in the marriage market:

As the Times noted in 1863, the history of the Saxe-Coburgs showed "how much one success leads to another in Princely life." They had been able to advance to a position in Europe almost beyond the dreams of German ambition. [They] have spread far and wide, and filled the lands with their race. They have created a new Royal House in England, the Queen is a daughter of Leopold's sister; her children are the children of Leopold's nephew. The Coburgs reign in Portugal; they are connected with the Royal though fallen House of Orleans, and more or less closely related to the principal families of their own country. Prince Leopold has himself for thirty years governed one of the most important of the minor states of Europe, and his eldest son is wedded to an Archduchess of the Imperial House of Austria."

Moreover, all but one of [Queen] Victoria and Albert's nine children married royalty. Queen Victoria's sons-in-laws included Frederick of Prussia, briefly Prussian King and German Emperor [for 99 days in 1888, as Friedrich III, ¶], Prince Christian of Schleswig-Holstein and Henry von Battenberg, whose brother became Prince of Bulgaria; her daughters-in-law included Princess Alexandra of Denmark and Princess Maria, daughter of Tsar Alexander II and sister of Tsar Alexander III.

Besides George V, Victoria's grandchildren included Sophie, who married Constantine, King of Greece; Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany; Prince Henry of Prussia; Elizabeth, who married Sergei, brother of Tsar Alexander III of Russia; Marie, who married Ferdinand I of Romania; Margaret, who married Gustav Adolf VI of Sweden; Victoria Eugénie, who married Alfonso XIII of Spain; and Maud, who married Carl of Denmark, later Haakon VII of Norway. By the time the future [Tsar] Nicholas II made his first visit to England in 1893, a family reunion had come to resemble an international summit:

"We drew into Charing Cross. There we were met by: Uncle Bertie [the future Edward VII], Aunt Alix [Alexandra of Denmark], Georgie [the future George V], Louise, Victoria and Maud. ...

Two hours later Apapa [Christian IX of Denmark], Amama and Uncle Valdemar [Prince of Denmark] arrived. It is wonderful to have so many of our family gathered together. ...

At 4:30 I went to see Aunt Marie [wife of Alfred, Duke of Saxe-Coburg] at Clarence House and had tea in the garden with her, Uncle Alfred, and Ducky [their daughter Victoria Melita]."

When this last married Ernst Ludwig, heir to the Grand Duchy of Hesse-Darmstadt, the guests included an emperor and empress, a future emperor and empress, a queen, a future king and queen, seven princes, ten princesses, two dukes, two duchesses and a marquess. They were all related.

In 1901, the year of Queen Victoria's death, members of the extended kinship group to which she belonged thus sat on the thrones not only of Great Britain and Ireland, but also of Austria-Hungary, Russia, Denmark, Spain, Portugal, Germany, Belgium, Greece, Romania, Bulgaria, Sweden and Norway. (5)

Yet since envy is the eternal companion of success...

... it was scarcely surprising that this inbred multinational elite aroused enmity in certain quarters. What really made the Saxe-Coburgs so successful, and what rankled so much with Bismarck, was that they were broadly liberal in their social and political inclinations (something that distinguished them from that other German dynasty associated with Britain, one which was to come to grief at Bismarck's hands, the Hanoverians).

The French polemicist who compared the Saxe-Coburgs with the Rothschilds in the 1840's was closer to the mark than he knew;³ for these two South German dynasties had an almost symbiotic relationship with one another. Dismayed by the influence of Queen Victoria's daughter and namesake⁴ over her husband, the ill-starred Frederick III, Bismarck did his utmost to drive a wedge between their son⁵ and the so-called 'Coburg cabal'. (6)

Yet despite these misgivings, and aware of France's continuing enmity, Bismarck directed his efforts at the creation of a new continental equilibrium, which would take into account the demise of a number of former German and Italian states resulting from their dissolution in the newly unified nations. Five powers, five-and-a-half perhaps, if one counts Italy in, were to form the new pentagon of European political pre-eminence: Great Britain, France, Germany, Russia, and Austria-Hungary. They were orbited by a dozen or so of minor powers which included Belgium, the Netherlands, Spain and Sweden. After Bismarck had finalized his desired treaties with Russia, Austria and Italy, he declared the new Reich "saturated" - Germany would not seek territorial addenda, guarantee her present borders, and embrace a policy of peaceful coexistence. The political concept superimposed over the serene rhetoric was, of course, to keep France isolated.

Yet the death of his old master, Kaiser Wilhelm, chimed in the decline of Bismarck's authority. Early in 1888, the liberal Friedrich III had served briefly as emperor before succumbing to throat cancer, and was succeeded by his son, Wilhelm II. The young monarch had a high opinion of his own talents in foreign politics, and after a few contretemps with the old chancellor Bismarck had to relinquish, in 1890, the Wilhelmstrasse offices he had directed for twenty-eight years. His successor was Count Caprivi, who did not know and was not interested in foreign politics. It seemed that he genuinely did not understand the necessity of the Reinsurance Treaty, which lapsed when a Russian plenipotentiary showed up in Berlin for its renewal in 1891 but had to find out that nobody was interested in or familiar with the issue.

This was, of course, Holstein's doing, who relished in the fact that because of the new chancellor's unfamiliarity with foreign politics, it was upon him to formulate German policies, which he moulded into a form as anti-Bismarckian as possible. It could never truly be ascertained why Holstein thought the Reinsurance Treaty expendable, but this mistake did not remain the only one; indeed, under his direction German foreign policy began to oscillate between a grandiose loquaciousness - which would have sounded pompous had Jupiter himself used it - or expressed itself in a puerile activism closely resembling the behaviour of a classroom bully. The golden middle was completely absent.

It was not that Bismarck's designs were complicated at any rate. They were based on three simple thoughts which a child could understand: keep Russia off France, remain friendly with England, and do not get caught between Austria and Russia in the Balkans. Yet, as the preceding chapters have illustrated, in a ridiculous frenzy of mismanagement the German government succeeded in obliterating the pillars of Bismarck's security system one by one within less than a decade and a half - in the annals of homo politicus, few examples exist of such amazing incompetence.

We may recapitulate here briefly the stages of the German diplomatic bankruptcy. It had been clear to Bismarck that challenges to the post-1871 equilibrium would principally emanate from the southeast, where the Ottoman Empire slowly but steadily disintegrated and indigenous populations hoped for the eventual establishments of their own nation-states. These feuding ethnicities, which had been restrained by Turkish overlordship for centuries, were in the process of untying their fetters, which they attempted in ways that vacillated between the sublimely inept, say, in Greece, and the out-and-out lunatic, as in Serbia. As soon as they gained liberty from the tottering Ottoman Sultanate, they turned enthusiastically

³ Meyer Amschel Rothschild, who had founded the family banking operation in Frankfurt, had started out as the financial advisor to the Landgrave of Hesse, a family which married into the Saxe-Coburg clan in the nineteenth century.

⁴ Victoria ["Vicky"], the Empress Frederick III.

⁵ Wilhelm II.

at each other, as was demonstrated by the Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913. The problem for Germany was that the issues on the Balkans tended to separate Austria and Russia, the original partners of Bismarck's Three-Emperor-League, and were Germany to heed calls for arbitration; her siding with one ally could not but discomfort the other.

After a protracted period of indecisiveness in the early 1890s, the Foreign Office began to evidence a tendency of endorsing Austrian claims and rejecting Russian ones, not because certain arguments favoured her support of Austria in this or that matter, but because of anti-Russian sentiment - and the crisis of July 1914 would have never grown to such enormous dimensions had not Germany pledged herself ab initio to support Austria in principle - not because it was the clever choice. After the subsequent cooling of her relations with Germany, Russia cast her eyes upon a different partner in the West - perhaps a more pliable one - and found France, ready and willing. With the Franco-Russian alliance, the first pillar of Bismarck's policy had collapsed - what about the other one, friendship with Great Britain?

Since the Seven-Years-War, and even more so after their success over Napoleon fifty years later, England and Prussia had not only been military allies but had enjoyed the most amicable relations. With the exception of the medieval Hanseatic League, Germany had never been much of a naval power, and what warships she had were chiefly relegated to coastal defence. Most of her coastline was in the Baltic Sea, which is, at best, of secondary strategic importance, and hard to get in or out unobserved or unchallenged. The remainder of her coast, in the North Sea, is also more of a strategic burden than a boon; the traffic in its major harbours Hamburg, Wilhelmshaven and Bremerhaven is too easily monitored or intercepted.

It was the late nineteenth century's general interest in colonization that changed the realities of German maritime politics. Germany was not in possession of any colonies in 1871 and little indicated that her disinterest might change before, in the years of Wilhelm II's quest for a "Place in the Sun", there arose a public demand for colonies, created by patriotic school teachers and history professors and solicited by Pan-German politicians, newspapers and magazines. It promoted the glory that - apparently - comes with an extensive colonial realm, and this propaganda succeeded within a few years in the building of an armada of mighty ships that could protect the German colonies once they had been found and established.

Subtly sponsored by the Department of the Navy, the German bourgeoisie began to ponder questions of maritime policy for the first time, and agreed that only a great fleet of modern battleships could safeguard the prospective new territories from the prying arms of the competition and project the global reach of German WELTPOLITIK.

Yet because the country's entry into the colonial age had not occurred before the 1880s, one could not really be surprised that the best, and even most of the average places, had long since been taken by other powers, and the German flag was consequently raised over those destitute remnants of the globe that had failed to attract the attention of anyone yet: fever-infested Togo and Cameroon, the stark desert of Namibia, the steppes of Tanganyika, Tsing-Tao in China, and a few Pacific islands around cannibalistic Papua-New Guinea.

Since none of these places bore fortunes which might be exploited, the efforts never yielded a penny's profit, and no foreign powers sent fleets to wrest these splendid possessions from Germany. A different purpose for the German "High Seas Fleet", which in the meantime had grown to be second in size to the Royal Navy only, could not be found - except that her existence alone challenged the British Empire. Being an island nation, England depended on her navy to keep the lifelines of commerce and communication open. She tried to come to an agreement with Berlin, but when Chamberlain's and Haldane's efforts failed, British diplomats made certain important visits on a quest for support against the German menace at Chorister's Bridge and the Quai d'Orsey. These consultations laid the groundwork for what would become the Triple Entente - indeed, the German diplomats who let this happen could not have wrought greater harm had they been paid agents of France.

After the protracted period of peace that had followed the Congress of Berlin 1878, the first decades of the new century brought armed conflict back to the headlines - viz. the Russo-Japanese War in 1905/06 and the Balkan Wars of 1912/13. Coincidentally, the introduction of the new British battleship DREADNOUGHT started a new round of a feverish naval race in 1906, for her innovative design made all elder ships of the line obsolete - the battleship counters of all nations had been reset to zero. On land, three changes led to the mothballing of most of Napoleon's and Wellington's war craft:

the invention of the General Staff, the numerical expansion of the armies by conscription, and industrial and technological development. The latter occurred chiefly in gun technology, which in turn invented the breech-loading rifle, the machine gun, and armour-penetrating shell fuses. Railways meanwhile had revolutionized the mobility of troops and the electric telegraph brought almost instantaneous communication to the battlefield.

The brisk pace of population growth due to improved agriculture enabled the maintenance of larger standing armies complete with cheaper, mass-produced weaponry; where formerly thousands had fought, tens of thousands, perhaps more, would now engage in battle. John Keegan summarizes the changes from the days of yore:

International, which chiefly meant European, policy was indeed, in the opening years of the twentieth century, guided not by a search for a secure means of averting conflict but by the age-old quest for security in military superiority. That means, as the Tsar had so eloquently warned at the Hague in 1899, translated into the creation of ever larger armies and navies, the acquisition of more and heavier guns and the building of stronger and wider belts of frontier fortification.

Fortification, however, was intellectually out of fashion with Europe's advanced military thinkers, who were persuaded by the success of heavy artillery in recent attacks on masonry and concrete - as at Port Arthur, during the Russo-Japanese War of 1905/06 - that guns had achieved a decisive advantage.

Power had transferred, it was believed, from static defence to the mobile offensive as represented particularly by large masses of infantry manoeuvring, with the support of mobile field guns, at speed across the battlefield. There was still thought to be a role for cavalry, in which European armies abounded: the German army, in the years before 1914, added thirteen regiments of mounted riflemen (Jäger zu Pferde) to its order of battle, while the French, Austrians and Russians also expanded their horse arm.

It was on numbers of infantrymen, equipped with the new magazine-rifle, trained in close-order tactics and taught, above all, to accept that casualties would be heavy until a decision was gained, that, nevertheless, the generals counted upon to achieve victory.

The significance of improved fortification - the entrenchments and earthworks thrown up at speed which, defended by riflemen, had caused such loss to the attacker on the Tugela and Modder rivers during the Boer War, in Manchuria during the Russo-Japanese War and at the lines of Chatalja during the Second Balkan War - had been noted, but discounted. Given enough well-led and well-motivated infantry, the European military theorists believed, no line of trenches could be held against them.

Among the other great industrial enterprises of Europe in the first years of the twentieth century, therefore, the industry of creating soldiers flourished. Since the triumph of Prussia's army of conscripts and reservists over the Austrians in 1866 and the French in 1870, all leading European states (Britain, sea-girt and guarded by the world's largest navy was the exception) had accepted the necessity of submitting their young men to military training in early manhood and of requiring them, once trained, to remain at the state's disposition, as reservists, into late maturity.

The result of this requirement was to produce enormous armies of serving and potential soldiers. In the German army, model for all others, a conscript spent the first two years of full adulthood in uniform, effectively imprisoned by sergeants too close at hand. During the first five years after his discharge from duty he was obliged to return to the reserve unit of his regiment for annual training. Then, until the age of thirty-nine, he was enrolled in a unit of the secondary reserve, or LANDWEHR; thereafter, until the age of forty-five, in the third-line reserve, the LANDSTURM.

The effect was to maintain inside European civil society a second, submerged and normally invisible military society, millions strong, of men who had shouldered a rifle, marched in step, born the lash of a sergeant's tongue and learnt to obey orders. (7)

The days when kings rode to war on horseback leading their vassals were gone - modern war became an industrialized mass product. The sheer number of combatants grew by factors of ten or more.

The extent of Europe's militarization in the nineteenth century is difficult to convey by any means that catch its psychological and technological dimensions as well as its scale. Scale itself is elusive enough. Something of its magnitude may be transmitted by contrasting the sight Friedrich Engels had of the military organization of the independent North-German city states in which he served his commercial apprenticeship in the 1830s with the force which the same German military districts supplied to the Kaiser of the unified German Reich on the eve of the First World War.

Engel's testimony is significant. A father of Marxist theory, he never diverged from the view that the revolution would triumph only if the proletariat succeeded in defeating the armed forces of the state. As a young revolutionary he pinned his hopes of that victory on the proletariat winning the battle of the barricades; as an old and increasingly dispirited ideologue, he sought to persuade himself that the proletariat, by then the captive of Europe's conscription laws, would liberate itself by subverting the state's armies from within.

His passage from the hopes of youth to the doubts of old age can best be charted by following the transformation of the Hanseatic towns' troops during his lifetime.

In August 1840 he rode for three hours from his office in to watch the combined manoeuvres of the armies of Bremen, Hamburg, Lübeck free city and the Grand Duchy of Oldenburg. Together they formed a force of a regiment - say, to err on the side of generosity, 3000 - men strong. In the year of his death in 1895 the same cities provided most of the 17th and part of the 19th Divisions of the German army, together with a cavalry and artillery regiment - at least a fourfold increase. That accounts for only first-line troops, conscripts enrolled and under arms. Behind the active 17th and 19th Divisions stood the 17th and 19th Reserve Divisions, to which the Hanseatic cities would contribute an equal number of reservists - trained former conscripts - on mobilisation. And behind the Reserve Divisions stood the Landwehr of older ex-conscripts who in 1914 would provide half of another division again.

Taken together, these units represent a tenfold increase in strength between 1840 and 1895, far outstripping contemporary population growth. (8)

In addition, these numbers must be seen under the proviso that Germany conscripted barely 55% of each annual class - chiefly farm boys untainted by socialism or big-city liberalism - while her smaller population and lower birth rate obliged France to conscript almost 90% of her youth. It was the policies described above by John Keegan that made the million-men armies of 1914 to 1918 possible, which in turn necessitated the development of completely new supply systems and mass-production of weapons and ammunitions. More than thirty-five million men were to fight in the Great War, about ten million of which were killed by the latest creations of the vultures of war, Creuzot, Skoda, Krupp or Enfield, the fertile European steel industry.

A metamorphosis of even more decisive character occurred in the "science" of war. The century of scientific progress and industrialization took the execution of war to a new, more effective level and the visions of ancient generals were replaced by exact computations. In the early nineteenth century, Prussia invented the "General Staff", a concept subsequently adopted by all states. The idea facilitated enormous improvements in the age-old endeavour of the formulation and execution of war plans, as introduced here by John Keegan:

Armies make plans. Alexander the Great had a plan for the invasion of the Persian Empire, which was to bring the army of the Emperor Darius to battle and to kill or make him prisoner. Hannibal had a plan for the Second Punic War: to evade Rome's naval control of the Mediterranean by transferring the Carthagian army via the short sea route to Spain, crossing the Alps - everybody remembers the story of the elephants - and confronting the legions in their homeland.

Philipp II had a plan to win a war against England in 1588: sail the Armada up the channel, load the army which was fighting his rebellious Dutch subjects and land it in Kent. Marlborough's plan to save Holland in 1704 was to draw the French army down the Rhine and fight it when distance from its bases made its defeat possible.

Napoleon made a plan almost every year of his strategic life: in 1798 to open a second front against his European enemies in Egypt, in 1800 to defeat Austria in Italy, in 1806 to blitzkrieg Russia, in 1808 to conquer Spain, in 1812 to knock Russia out of the continuing war.

The United States had a plan in 1861, the Anaconda Plan, designed to strangle the rebellious South by blockade of the coasts and seizure of the Mississippi river. Napoleon III even had a plan of sorts for his catastrophic war against Prussia in 1870: to advance into southern Germany and turn the non-Prussian kingdoms against Berlin. (9)

Much of pre-modern war planning was relegated to an ad-hoc basis, devised when an opportunity presented itself or an invasion had to be repelled. Commanders who did thoroughly plan their campaigns ahead thus often turned out fortune's favourites - Alexander, Caesar and Charlemagne are examples. To a degree, success could be planned. Yet the emergence of the French "citizen army" following the revolution of 1789, and the resulting coalition and Napoleonic wars, set in motion not only the "division" of armies - to counter threats on multiple fronts or to effect flanking manoeuvres - but the scientification of planning - the diligent work of future General Staffs that was to allow, in Keegan's often referenced phrase, the planning of war "in the abstract, plans conceived at leisure, pigeonholed and pulled out when eventuality became reality." (10) The General Staff was invented in Prussia and revolutioned the execution of modern war. Max Boot introduces the topic as follows:

As with so many military renaissances, Prussia's rise had its origins in defeat. At the battles of Jena and Auerstaedt in 1806, Napoleon shattered the Prussian army and destroyed any mystique remaining from the days of Frederick the Great. The French army then entered Berlin and turned Prussia into a tributary state. The memory of this humiliation was only partially erased seven years later when Prussia joined Austria, Russia and Sweden to defeat Napoleon at the epic Battle of the Nations near Leipzig in 1813.

To a whole generation of Prussians, Jena had shown the rotten underpinnings of the Old Prussian state. The years after 1806 saw a burst of reforms including the freeing of serfs, the emancipation of Jews, the strengthening of government bureaucracy, and the weakening of trade guilds. The changes were especially significant in the military realm.

The overhaul of the army was lead by two officers, General Gerhard von Scharnhorst and Count August von Gneisenau, who sought to replace Frederick the Great's force of aristocrats and mercenaries with a French-style nation in arms. They stopped recruiting foreigners and instituted a universal draft that did not allow the rich to buy an exception.

They also created a citizen militia called the Landwehr and a substantial force of reserves. After 1813, the army would conscript forty thousand men annually to serve for three years. Upon leaving active duty they would serve a further two years in the reserves and fourteen years in the Landwehr. By 1850 Berlin had around half a million trained soldiers at its beck and call.

And increasingly these soldiers were not the ignorant peasants of old. Starting in 1809, under the direction of Baron Wilhelm von Humboldt, Prussia created one of the best systems of public education in the world, offering elementary schooling for all, secondary schools for some, and university education for the elite. ... Special schools were set up to train a corps of non-commissioned officers, the sergeants and corporals who would become the backbone of the Prussian army.

As important as Scharnhorst's and Gneisenau's reforms were for the rank and file, they were equally significant for the officer corps. Their goal, in which they were only partially successful, was to break the

stranglehold of the Junker aristocracy ("heartless, wooden, half-educated men", one reformer called them) on the leadership ranks in the army. They wanted to make merit, not birth, the most important criterion for officer selection, so they put many old warhorses out to pasture and forced every officer seeking promotion to pass an exam.

Military academies and staff colleges were set up to train officers, the first one being the Kriegsakademie (War Academy), whose most illustrious early director was Carl von Clausewitz, author of the classic exposition of military philosophy, On War. Under the guidance of Clausewitz and his colleagues, soldiering became a profession, not a pastime for the nobility. (11)

From the graduates of the Kriegsakademie were chosen the officer students that were to become members of this new and, for a time, unique Prussian institution, the GROSSE GENERALSTAB, the Great General Staff. It was set up as a separate department of the Ministry of War and dedicated itself solely to the study of strategies, tactics and supplies deemed necessary to develop plans for likely military scenarios. Its members, who initially numbered a dozen or so men and never exceeded one hundred, were the best and the brightest - as much as possible, for the influence of the old military families could not entirely be neutralized. The General Staff, however, did not exert military command; it made plans, devised strategies, and "shadowed" the line officers: every corps had a staff officer assigned who could supervise the execution of the given plan or effect necessary changes.

The staff's daily bread was physics, mechanics, mathematics and statistics, but some room was given to the human factors, too - an early exercise in what would one day be called "psychology". There had, of course, been half-hearted predecessors to the Kriegsakademie; essentially schools for military clerks, in which prospective artillery officers were taught elementary geometry and future quartermasters Accounting 101. Not only had these been mostly shabby affairs, they lacked reputation, which in turn reflected negatively on their graduates' promotion opportunities and able officer candidates avoided these career traps.

The spirit of the modern scientific approach evidenced itself early in the characteristic bifurcation of the studies: one part of the curriculum was detailed geographically - horizontally, so to say - the students were to evaluate scenarios or devise plans for attacking France or defending East Prussia; the other track ran vertically, as to ways and means: intelligence, logistics and supplies, ammunition, hospitals, food etc., and every candidate had to show proficiency in both inventories.

The curriculum was modelled after the university syllabus of the time: first the classics, then modern works, first menial tasks then intellectual analysis - per aspera ad astra. Twice a year the whole academy went on "staff rides" - on outings to old battlefields strategies were evaluated on the very ground where they had worked or failed; new concepts, deployments and strategies were devised and solutions approximated. Studies were written incorporating the results and became mandatory test material. Models were built of the locations and strategies tested by simulation; in the next summer the results of these indoor games were translated to the manoeuvre areas and evaluated - in short, "War Games" were born and developed. Some of the conventions created in these games have endured into modern times and the age of computer wars - the enemy is red, one's own forces blue.

The names of four officers are indissolubly bound to the history of the Prussian, later the German Great General Staff before 1914: the aforementioned Carl von Clausewitz, Helmuth Graf (Count) von Moltke [the "Elder", ¶], Chief of Staff and author of the plans that succeeded in 1864, 1866 and 1870/71, Alfred Graf von Schlieffen, Chief of Staff around the turn of the century and author of the famous but elusive plan named for him, and Helmuth von Moltke [the "Younger", not a count, ¶], nephew of the Count and Chief of Staff until 1914.

To appreciate the significance of Clausewitz, who laid the groundwork of war as a scientific undertaking, we must digress for a moment and inspect the beginnings of modern state - and war craft in Renaissance Italy.

The art or pastime of war had seen little change from the siege of Troy to that time in the Middle Ages, the early fifteenth century, when weapons were developed that were efficient over longer distances than spears or arrows. An observer familiar with battles fought by, say, Alexander, would have had little difficulty following campaigns contended

during the crusades. To a degree, the stagnation was part of the Catholic Church's anti-intellectualism: under the aegis of the sacred institution, human knowledge in the fields of physics, mathematics, geometry or astronomy in the fourteenth century was barely at par with that of the second century - in some respects knowledge had actually decreased, in physiology and medicine, for example. Much knowledge was lost forever on account of Christian enthusiasm in burning books and libraries - the greatest loss, no doubt, occurring in Alexandria. Many classic works of Greek authors only survived in Persia, where Muslim scholars preserved what Christian zealots had extinguished.

Church doctrine asserted that any relief man might conceivably be in need of was contained in the Bible - the theological purity of this approach later evidenced itself in the 'Christian Science' movement of Mary Eddy Baker, which sought to employ the healing powers of Christian prayer.⁶ The gain or use of medical knowledge was severely discouraged, often on pain of death, for medical treatment might interfere in the Lord's designs. Not only were the books of Aristotle, Ptolemy and Hippocrates declared anathema on account of their contradiction or ignorance of sacred Christian doctrine, many herbs and their extracts were prohibited,⁷ and their use might earn both patient and doctor a nightly visit by the Holy Inquisition and, perhaps, accusations of witchcraft, torture and a fiery death.

In the age before Gutenberg, the production of books - laboriously copied by hand in monasteries - was a monopoly of the church, and books that were not approved were simply not copied. Gutenberg's invention changed all that and only a good century later, man's picture of the universe had radically been transformed. Yet the significance of Galilei's observation of the Jupiter moons and his discovery of the multitude of stars that form the Milky Way resulted not so much from their being new findings *per se* but from the fact that Galilei could show, and everybody who dared had to agree, that as far as knowledge of the universe was concerned, *the Bible was either ignorant or dead wrong* - or both. It became clear that planets orbited the sun, not vice versa, and obvious that more than a single moon existed in the Solar System. Even worse for the church's view of man as the crown of God's creation was the discovery of the true size of the creation - given the innumerable multitude of stars in the Galaxy, the importance of Sun and Earth at once seemed much diminished.

Christian dogma held that the sky is immutable, created by God in perfection, but the more people looked up the sky with ever stronger telescopes, the more change was detected. In the year AD 1054, a star in the constellation Taurus exploded in a supernova, one of only six supernovae observable from earth with the naked eye in the last millennium. Its remnants form M1, the stunning Crab Nebula, of which we all have seen majestic photographs. The new star in the sky shone for weeks and months, brighter than the full moon at night and was easily visible in daytime: astronomers in Egypt, China, India and Mesoamerica recorded the phenomenon, described it and painted it. But *not a single source* in Christian Europe mentions the heavenly spectacle. If the skies are immutably fixed by divine power, as the church maintained, alterations must be the work of the devil, and the people of Europe who - naturally - *did* see the light, were so scared that *none* of them, *ever*, not even in the privacy of a diary, dared to acknowledge the great fireworks in the sky.

This is a rather impressive feat of mind control and could only be achieved by scaring the bejesus out of the flock, ad maiorem dei gloria. Five hundred years later, Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam remarked mildly that an age is dark not because the light fails to shine but because people refuse to see it. This awful authority the church exercised on the spiritual life of the people was mirrored by the authority of the princes in worldly matters, which is where we return to our contemplations of modern military practice.

The first author since antiquity to address the interdependencies of politics and war was the Florentine Niccolò Machiavelli (AD 1469-1527), a contemporary of Erasmus. In his treatise *IL PRINCIPE* ["The Prince", 1513, publ. 1532, ¶], he invented what we call today *REALPOLITIK* - politics as the art of necessity, which essentially argued that a ruler, to achieve the best for the state and its people, may justifiably resort to dishonest means. The bloody conflicts between the various Italian city states within the next two hundred years testified to the size of his readership and number of disciples. But while *IL PRINCIPE* did address issues of war, sieges, and so forth, its author was not truly a military man, neither strategist nor technocrat, and by the early nineteenth century - when Prussia established the *Kriegsakademie* - much had changed

⁶ Ironically enough, the Younger Moltke was a follower of Christian Science.

⁷ E.g. *Crocus Autumnalis* (Liliaceae), containing Colchicine, a mitosis-inhibitor, which might be used to relieve gout pain but was outlawed by the church for its abortive effect on human foetuses.

and a new syllabus on war was needed. The task of describing, analysing, classifying and interpreting the changes modernity had imposed on the battlefield fell to an unassuming Prussian officer, Carl Philipp Gottlieb von Clausewitz, who was made the first director of the War Academy.

He had learned his trade under Scharnhorst, the great military reformer. When Napoleon forced Prussia to partake in the ill-starred Russian campaign of 1812/13, Clausewitz resigned his commission, as did many of his fellow officers, and entered the service of the Tsar. A year later, he was one of the main conspirators in the "Convention of Tauroggen", in which Prussia suddenly switched sides, against Napoleon. He fought the Corsican at Leipzig and at Waterloo.

From his promotion to general in 1818 until his death in 1831, he worked in leisure hours on his book ON WAR, which was never truly finished and not published in his lifetime. Yet it contains useful contemplations in particular on the twilight zone between war and politics, and remains one of the classics on modern military strategy. Clausewitz introduced the scientific approach and statistical methods to the question how to achieve victory in war: he taught how to classify and analyse the geographical, economical, statistical and psychological factors that determine success or failure on the battlefield and how to combine them in the judgement of the "situation", a sober and clear picture of what was going on and what lay ahead.

He warned of expecting too much from a battle plan and showed that no rigid strategy can cope with the abundance of ever-changing imponderabilities that occur on the battlefield; his is the winged word that no battle plan survives the first contact with the enemy. But careful preparation improves the chances of success, and thus the curriculum of the Kriegsakademie heavily reflected technical subjects. In teaching them, Clausewitz came up, perhaps accidentally, with a technique that would henceforth become a standard of procedure in military academies: students were to be confronted with a "situation", given the opportunity to analyse it, and asked to devise strategies and/or counter-strategies. The "solutions" they would subsequently come up with would be tested in simulation and their effectiveness compared. In the ideal case, each student would come up with the identical "solution".

Clausewitz realized early that the proper execution of war is not restricted to the battlefield -- it must aim, if possible simultaneously, at three different objectives: the enemy's forces, his resources, and his will to fight. Since an army can deal directly with the first issue only, Clausewitz concluded that the highest authority of the state must not reside with the military command but has to be vested in a political body. This principle is known as the PRIMAT DER POLITIK, the "Primacy of Politics" over the military leadership.

He proved by the classic examples of Darius, Hannibal and Alexander that war cannot be an end in itself, for transience is the very characteristic of military conquest. His perhaps best known dictum is derived from this fact: that war is the continuation of politics with the admixture of different, i.e., military means, not its *replacement*. War is properly waged only to make the enemy something to which he would not consent to under normal circumstances - but, and this is a big but, this must be something the enemy *must actually be able to do*. It is pointless, frustrating and absurd to try to make an enemy do something which is beyond his ability.

It were futile endeavours, for example, to compel the South Vietnamese to renounce the Viet Minh, or to force the "Afghan" government in Kabul to drive out the Taliban, Al Qaeda or other unbecoming figures from the country - there has never been an efficient national government with the power to effect or enforce such a pledge, for there has never been a single "Afghan" nation. The Taliban are Afghani - whoever else may support them - and hence part of the picture. They cannot be separated or divided out and thus "nation-building", like in Germany post-1945, is not a viable option. The only solution would be to occupy and pacify the whole of the country, which, in toil, cost and loss would be so unfeasible that, existed there a comparative to "impossible", it would have to be called "impossibler".

Naturally, many of Clausewitz's observations derived from the battle scenarios that he was familiar with, i.e. those of the Napoleonic era, in which men still fought with muskets and small-calibre, horse-drawn artillery; where movement was limited to a marching man's pace, perhaps with some cavalry in the vanguard. Invention and industrialization changed all that, and it became the General Staff's duty to keep its fingers at the pulse of technical innovation. The curriculum had to be adapted regularly to reflect the technical progress in weaponry, transportation and communication. Despite the

innate conservatism of the military it dawned on the generals that military academies and their graduates could be useful. But quick it happened not, as John Keegan observed, for...

... as late as 1854, fifty-five years after Britain had founded a staff college, the commanders of the British army going to the Crimea chose their executives by the immemorial method of nominating friends and favourites.

By then Prussia, under the influence of the highly intellectual Helmuth von Moltke, was about to transform its staff college into a real school of war. Its future graduates would be encouraged to think like generals, play realistic war games, study concrete military probabilities on the ground during "staff rides" and write "solutions" to national strategic problems.

After the spectacular Prussian victories over Austria in 1866 and France in 1870, existing institutions in those countries and others were hastily modernized or new, "higher" ones founded; the French ÉCOLE DE GUERRE in 1880, a Centre for Higher Military Studies in Paris, the "School for Marshals", in 1908.

Methods of training, through war games and staff rides were made to imitate the Prussians; German texts were translated, recent military history was analysed; the best graduates, when appointed to the general staff of their armies after competitive selection, were set to arranging mobilisation schedules, writing railway deployment timetables and designing plans for every eventuality in national security, often highly offensive in character.

In the diplomatic world, there was ironically no equivalence; the professorship of Modern History at Oxford had been established in the eighteenth century to educate future diplomats, but the British Foreign Office in 1914 was still choosing many of its entrants from the rank of honorary attaches, young men whose fathers were friends of ambassadors, the equivalent of the favourites who had gone with Lord Raglan to the Crimea.
(12)

Yet the relative speed at which modernization was allowed to permeate the force was initially restrained by the nobility's stranglehold on military commissions. But within two generations the percentage of officers from the nobility had fallen by half and the influence of the Junkers was receding. The new Chief of Staff, who entered office in 1858, represented both the qualities of the Protestant work ethic and a flexible mind, as introduced here by Max Boot:

Curiously enough, some of the greatest conquerors of modern times were not natives of the countries they led. Napoleon hailed from Corsica, Hitler from Austria, Stalin from Georgia, and Moltke from Denmark. His parents were German - his mother the daughter of a Lübeck merchant, his father a former Prussian officer turned unsuccessful farmer - who settled in the Duchy of Holstein, which was under Danish rule.

Helmuth, who was born in 1800, was educated at a military academy in Copenhagen, which he found "strict, even harsh", and then commissioned a lieutenant in the Danish army. Seeing scant opportunities in this tiny force, he applied to join the Prussian army, and after passing an officer's exam, he was accepted as a second lieutenant in 1822.

A decade later, after having graduated from the War Academy and served an apprenticeship as an army surveyor, Moltke joined the General Staff. He would serve in its ranks for the rest of his life. He never led so much as a company before becoming commander of the entire Prussian army, and he never served with troops in the field after his time as a lieutenant. His only experience of war prior to the 1860's occurred in 1836-39 when he served as an advisor to the Ottoman sultan who was fighting an Egyptian army in Mesopotamia. He was an intellectual whose abilities to apply his theories in practice would be revealed only when he was well into his sixties.

Moltke hardly fit the image of a Prussian militarist. He loved music, poetry, art, archaeology, and theatre. He knew seven languages (German, Danish, English, French, Italian, Spanish, and Turkish). He was a prolific artist who filled sketchbooks with landscapes and portraits, as well as a popular author. His German

translation of Edward Gibbon's HISTORY OF THE DECLINE AND FALL OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE was never published, and a novella he penned in the 1820s was not well received, but his account of his travels in Turkey, released after his return to Berlin in 1840 and illustrated with his own drawings, turned him into a literary celebrity, a role he embraced by donning a Turkish fez and giving public lectures. ...

For all his catholicity of interests, Moltke was no closet liberal. He was a nationalist and a monarchist to the core, who was appalled by the liberal revolutions that swept Europe in 1848. He placed his faith in the king and the forces of the old regime. Eventually the king returned his trust.

In the 1840s and 1850s, while serving as a personal aide to several princes, Moltke made a favourable impression on the Hohenzollern court and got to know the future king Wilhelm, himself a professional officer who was known as the Soldier Prince.⁸ In 1857, Wilhelm's brother, the king, was incapacitated by illness, and Wilhelm was made regent. One of his first acts was to appoint Moltke chief of the General Staff after the death of the previous chief. ...

The chief of staff's outstanding characteristic was his taciturnity. He became known as "The Great Mute" (der große Schweiger), or "the man who could be silent in seven languages." According to one of his relatives, "This silence was a mixture of reflection and shyness, as he himself had sometimes confessed. He did not feel that he possessed the talent of expressing himself easily on the idea of the moment, much less of making, as one says, 'Fine speeches,' and so his silence was often interpreted as pride."

Moltke preferred to express himself not in public flights of oratory, but in top-secret war plans. (13)

By the end of the century all important countries had opened their own academies and set up powerful General Staffs, with the exception of Great Britain.⁹ They all took Prussia as their inspiration and began to design plans for likely scenarios. Most, however, were in a less precarious strategic situation.

The geostrategic position of Prussia had not much improved after 1815. While she was technically one of the beneficiaries of the post-Napoleonic order and had gained territories, chiefly in the west, these acquisitions only served to make the country harder to defend. Nowhere did the new frontiers coincide with natural borders - and most of the new territories were in the Rhineland and Westphalia, far from her eastern heartlands. No one had any inkling then as to how big an industrial powerhouse the Ruhr area, one of the new provinces, was to become. For the moment, Prussian generals were next to clueless how to defend possessions in whose middle, blocking the ways to and from Berlin, lay two other independent German states, Hannover and Hesse-Kassel. "It was as if Prussia were made of two giant icebergs floating in treacherous, shark-infested waters," Max Boot observed, "for all around were potential foes - France, Russia, Austria, Denmark, and the other German states." (14)

In the days of the Congress of Vienna, Austria-Hungary had held a tentative claim to the position of the continent's dominating power, as long as France had not recovered and Russia - before the railway age - was far away. The Danube Monarchy had then been governed by the famous reactionary Chancellor Klemens Prince Metternich, who was also the titular head of the "German Confederation", the successor to Napoleon's short-lived "Confederation of the Rhine" and continued to play the old game of setting against each other the competing German and Italian states. But with Prussia there now existed a second German state big enough to challenge Austria's axiomatic claim of representing German interests and it was generally assumed that one day the two would fight it out. Yet for the time being Prussia played the game low-key, by sponsoring a seemingly innocent campaign to form custom treaties between the German states. Of course, such custom unions were likely first steps to eventual political domination, but the southern German states believed they could successfully balance themselves on the tightrope between Vienna and Berlin.

⁸ He had another nickname, "KARTÄTSCHEN-PRINZ", 'Cannon Prince', for during the 1848/49 uprisings he had soldiers fire field-guns at protesters - killing hundreds.

⁹ "The status of the [British] general staff within the army," Hew Strachan remarks, "given its novelty as an institution (it was formed in 1906), deprived it of the commanding influence it enjoyed in Germany." (15)

Sooner or later, however, the benefits of customs unions convinced a number of German principalities to seek economic cooperation with Prussia. One example of such collaboration was the development of the German railway net, in which the Chief of Staff had a professional interest.

Railroads came to Germany a decade later than they did in Britain: the first steam-driven railway, covering less than four miles, was not opened until 1835, when Britain already had 340 miles of track. Railroad promoters had trouble raising enough capital and getting rights of way, so they turned to the government for help.

Initially the Prussian army was not too impressed by the possibilities of railways whose carrying capacity, in the early days, was severely limited. One of the exceptions was Moltke, who as a major in 1841 joined the board of the Berlin Hamburg Railway and sank most of his savings into its stock.

Moltke was fascinated by the possibilities of steam power once he discovered that railroads could transport troops ten times faster than Napoleonic armies had marched and that a single train could carry as much as one thousand horse-drawn carts. He produced a steady stream of memoranda and reports to the military uses of this new form of transportation.

As the size of the German railway system expanded to 3,638 miles by 1850, the rest of the Prussian army awakened to its possibilities. The Prussians made use of the railroads in 1848 to rush troops from city to city to squelch the liberal uprisings. Further confirmation of railways' usefulness came from other conflicts that were carefully studied by the General Staff, such as the Italian War of 1859 (pitting Austria against France and her Italian allies) and the American Civil War of 1861-65.

With railways proving their worth, the state got more involved. Laws and conventions were signed to ensure the uniformity of rail lines in Prussia and other German states. A Prussian Railway Fund was set up to subsidize the construction and operation of some lines that were militarily valuable but not commercially profitable. By 1860 about half of Prussia's railway lines were state-owned or -administered. And all Prussian freight cars were required to have fittings that would allow them to be used in wartime to transport soldiers and horses.

A special Railway Section was set up within the General Staff to synchronize rail movements in wartime, and Field Railway Detachments were created within the army to repair damaged tracks and build new ones. The General Staff even pressed successfully for the adoption of standard time for the entire country to facilitate planning and execution. (16)

While the telegraph, the second factor in speeding up operations, was born half a century later, it was far quicker adopted by the military.

If hundreds of thousands of soldiers had to be mobilized within a matter of weeks, there was no time to send orders by horse courier. Luckily, the development of the electric telegraph allowed nearly instantaneous communications between headquarters and various divisions. In theory, that link could be maintained even in the field if soldiers strung copper wires as they advanced: in practice, armies usually outran their tether to headquarters.

Nevertheless, improvements in communications allowed effective command and control to extend over a much wider area than in the past, and hence made possible another leap in army size. Napoleon had been able to control an army only as far as he could see with the aid of a telescope; Moltke hoped to control troops spread over hundreds, even thousands of miles. (17)

The telegraph increased the speed of military communications by two orders of magnitude, and the invention of the wireless telegraph by Guglielmo Marconi delivered the troops from schlepping wire drums over the battlefield. All armies bought radios and set up units to operate them, but a human factor quickly asserted itself - the tendency of commanding generals to micromanage the battles.

The chief of staff realized that while he could send general orders over long distances he could not manage a battle in detail from afar. He insisted that his subordinates digest the general principles of the war plan and then exercise their own initiatives in carrying them out. "No plan of operations can look with any certainty beyond the first meeting with the major forces of the enemy," Moltke famously wrote [citing Clausewitz, ¶]. "All consecutive acts of war are, therefore, not executions of a premeditated plan, but spontaneous actions, directed by military tact."

To avoid the temptation to micromanage, Moltke instructed that "an order shall contain everything a commander cannot do by himself, but nothing else." These spare AUFTRAGSTAKTIK, or "mission-type orders,"¹⁰ became a hallmark of the Prussian, and later the German army. So ingrained did this system of delegation become that in 1864, when the Prussian commanding general ordered an invasion of the Danish duchy of Schleswig, his order simply stated: "On February 1st, I want to sleep in Schleswig." (18)

Taken together - ten times as many soldiers, five times the number of guns, to be moved over distances five to ten times farther, and kept supplied with victuals and ammunition - these factors complicated the planning of a war considerably, and one might estimate that, in terms of raw-data management, a war in 1914 was easily one hundred times as complex as in 1814. Troops inadequately supplied or improperly lined up could not be expected to win battles, and the General Staff's primary attention turned to the computation of the most effective deployment algorithms.

Long-distance campaigners had made their arrangements in the past; the idea that the armies of antiquity or the Middle Ages spurred off into the blue is a romantic illusion. Alexander the Great either marched coastwise within seventy-five miles of the ships that carried his support or sent agents ahead to bribe Persian officials into selling provender.

Charlemagne required the counts of his kingdom to set aside as much as two-thirds of their grazing for his army if he needed to campaign in their territories. The resupply of the Third Crusade, after a disastrous start, was assured by Richard the Lionheart choosing a route that kept him in constant touch with his supporting fleet.

Nevertheless, pre-railway logistics had always been hit and miss; equally, they allowed flexibility, for livestock and draught animals could always be parked off the road when not needed, and live animals might be bought or looted to replace those eaten or killed by overwork.

None of this was true of railways. Locomotives could not be picked up in farmyards, while the mismanagement of rolling stock during the Franco-Prussian War, when a tangle of empty wagons in the unloading yard blocked the arrival of full ones for miles up the line, taught the French army a lesson never to be forgotten.

Railways needed to be timetabled quite as strictly in war as in peace: indeed more strictly, nineteenth century soldiers learned, for mobilisation required lines designated to carry thousands of passengers monthly to move millions in days. The writing of railway movement tables therefore became a vital peacetime task. (20)

¹⁰ "More so than any of their opponents," Laurence Rees summarized, "the German army practised delegation. Battlefield commanders were given objectives to fulfill but thereafter permitted a level of independent decision-making that was unheard of in the British or French armies. Rommel's own actions during the invasion of France in 1940 were a perfect example of the German method of making war. Units of Rommel's 7th Panzer were amongst the first to cross the River Meuse at Houx on 12 May - much to the astonishment of the Allies, since around the hamlet of Houx the Meuse runs through a deep gorge which makes this ideal defence territory. Soldiers of the French Ninth Army had dug in on the opposite bank ready to fight.

But a series of decisions Rommel and his men made on the spot - from setting fire to several houses to create a smokescreen, to organizing a rope and pulley system over the river - helped make the crossing of the Meuse a possibility. Above all, Rommel was following the Prussian doctrine of acting swiftly and with surprise. The French commanders had anticipated that they would have several days to prepare their defences, having blown up all the bridges over the Meuse. Thanks to Rommel's speed of movement they had only hours." (19)

The integration of railroads and telegraphs into military practice could be tested in manoeuvres and was. The element not so easily accessible to peacetime simulation was gunnery training, because soldiers refused to be shot at for practice.

Until the middle of the nineteenth century, the standard gun type for armies had been the smoothbore. The advantage of rifled barrels had been recognized swiftly, but the native conservatism of ordnance bureaus obstructed their general introduction for decades. This changed when the French army captain Claude-Etienne Minié presented a very sophisticated gun of his own design. His piece used a rifled barrel and cone-shaped bullets, which were mated to a copper percussion cap that delivered the actual ignition spark. His rifle was reasonably accurate up to five hundred yards, less prone to misfire, and, despite their still being front loaders, easier to use than the traditional musket. In the United States Union War of 1861-65, both sides, initially using smoothbores, switched to Minié rifles by 1863, in the process much augmenting the death count which reached a number of over 600,000 by war's end.

This was, however, as far as muzzle-loaders were to go. In the early 1820s, the German artisan and tinkerer Johannes von Dreyse had begun to work on a new gun type. His mechanism to expedite firing was a small needle which was mechanically driven through the casing of a cartridge, where it would ignite a primer that in turn fired the main load. This idea would not necessarily work much better than, say, Minié's percussion cap, for the needle might break - hence the men had to carry spares - and malfunctions occurred for a number of other small mechanical problems.

But Dreyse's gun had one glorious advantage: it could be loaded in the breach. No more did the soldier have to stand up to load his gun, in the process giving up cover. The cartridge containing the bullet was locked into place by shoving downward a knoblike contraption resembling the turn-bolt of a door; in the same movement the bolt cocked the firing pin of the needle. Dreyse had thus invented the first bolt-action, breech-loaded rifle; a type of gun still in production today.

Max Boot describes a few teething problems that had to be overcome:

The disadvantages of the needle gun were many. The novel breech mechanism leaked gas, dissipating the force of the explosion. The needle gun's effective range was a bit less than the Minié rifle's (though still much greater than that of a smoothbore like the Brown Bess). The gun was also prone to malfunction. Jams caused by overheating were common, and soldiers were sometimes forced to use a rock to hammer the bolt open. ...

But, flawed as it was, the needle gun represented a quantum advance over the Minié rifle. For one thing, it could be reloaded lying down or crouching, much to the relief of infantrymen who were exposed to enemy fire when they had to stand erect to load a traditional musket. Even more important, it could be reloaded much faster than any muzzle-loader - more than three times as fast as the Minié. This meant, as one historian notes, that "a ten-thousand man unit armed with breechloaders was the equivalent of thirty or forty thousand muzzleloaders or more."

The potential of breech-loading small arms first became apparent during the American Civil War. A regiment of Union "sharpshooters" armed with the Sharps single-shot breech-loading rifle (roughly comparable to the needle gun) shredded larger Confederate forces armed with muzzle-loaders at battles ranging from Antietam to Gettysburg. The U.S. 1st Mounted Rifles, popularly known as Wilder's Lightning Brigade, had similar success in the Western theatre of operating with their Spencer repeating rifles. ...

But the inflexible conservatism of the Union army and in particular of its mulish ordnance chief, General James W. Ripley, prevented these revolutionary rifles from becoming standard issue for all soldiers, in spite of the importuning of President Abraham Lincoln, who had personally fired, and been impressed by, the Spencer and Sharps guns. Ripley was convinced that these easy-to-fire rifles would simply waste ammunition, and he wanted nothing to do with them. Seldom has there been a more egregious example of an army failing to take advantage of readily available technology that might have shortened a war.

The Prussian military, despite its reputation as the den of reactionary aristocrats, showed itself more willing to innovate even without the spur of a major conflict. The Prussians had seen the possibilities in Dreyse's work

early on and had been subsidizing him since 1833, though it took several years for him to improve his design sufficiently to win a large order. After extensive field trials and his personal test firing, King Friedrich Wilhelm IV ordered sixty thousand needle guns in 1840. By 1866 all Prussian infantrymen finally had the needle gun.
(21)

The capacity of the bolt-action, breech-loaded rifle to destroy human lives was, alas, easily outperformed by the bane of the modern battlefield, the machine gun.

Attempts to mechanize the firing of a gun can be traced to the late Middle Age, as can be seen in drawings of Leonardo da Vinci. Later machines were based on the principle of the church organ, replacing pipes with gun barrels. A sequential firing could be achieved by the bundling of barrels, but the problem remained that no time could be saved in their loading, which disqualified the apparatus.

The man who built the first working prototype of a mechanized gun was the American dentist Richard Gatling, who constructed in the early 1860s the prototype of a six-barrelled weapon in which the firing mechanism was operated sequentially by a crank wheel. He ventured to sell his machine to the U.S. government but ran into that very icon of dedicated opposition to progress, General Ripley. Gatling got nowhere as long as the war lasted, for the ordnance bureau did not grant him an audience until 1866.

Meanwhile in London, the entrepreneur Hiram Maxim attempted to circumvent what he thought were the two obvious flaws in Gatling's design - which he seemed to know well - one, the fact that the gun needed a second operator to turn the handle which rotated the barrels, and two, that a solution had yet to be found how to reload the barrels quickly enough. At length he realized that the recoil, the backward push generated by the charge's explosion, could be employed to eject the spent cartridge and simultaneously pull in a new cartridge that was fixed on a belt. This movement could be upheld until the belt ran out. But there was no way to fit such a tricky mechanism into a bunch of barrels; each one would be in the other's way - there was no space. It would work with a single barrel, as opposed to Gatling's six, but it would be prone to overheating by the successive explosions. Eventually Maxim designed a water-filled jacket around the barrel to provide cooling.

A prototype turned out to weigh less than thirty kilograms, which meant that a single man could transport it, and it could be effectively used by a crew of three, a gunner and two feeders. The firepower of a single machine gun equalled that of a hundred men, which meant that the average density of bullets on the battlefield had made another leap by a whole order of magnitude.

The third and fourth milestones in inflicting ever increasing losses were related to the artillery - the development of new high-explosive and/or shrapnel-filled shells, far more effective than the stone and metal balls of yore, and the delayed action fuse, which allowed a projectile to penetrate armour before exploding.

The invention of the General Staff was, of course, not a panacea - it had been founded to enlarge destruction, not to minimize it. Shit still happened, as Paul Kennedy points out:

The Prussian army was not perfect and was to suffer from many teething troubles in actual battle even after the reforms of the early to middle 1860s. Many of the field commanders ignored Moltke's advice and crashed blindly ahead in premature attacks or in the wrong direction -- the Austrian campaign of 1866 was full of such blunders. At the tactical level, too, the frontal assault (and heavy losses) of the Prussian Guards at Gravelotte-St. Privat in 1870 demonstrated a crass stupidity. ...

The real point about the Prussian system was not that it was free of errors, but that the general staff carefully studied its past mistakes and readjusted training, organization, and weapons accordingly. When the weaknesses of its artillery were demonstrated in 1866, the Prussian army swiftly turned to the new Krupp breechloader which was going to be so impressive in 1870. When delays occurred in the railway supply arrangements, a new organization was established to improve matters.

Finally, Moltke's emphasis upon the deployment of several full armies which could operate independently yet also come to one another's aid meant that even if one such force was badly mauled in detail - as actually occurred in both the Austro-Prussian and Franco-Prussian wars - the overall campaign was not ruined. (22)

Because this chapter is the beginning of quite a stretch in which military lingo will thoroughly permeate the discussion of events, we may first of all get familiar with a few modern military concepts. First of all we may address the mystery of what exactly, um, a "division" is, or a "corps".

The partitioning of armies into "divisions" came into practice in the two French Coalition Wars (against counter-revolutionary Austria, Russia and Prussia) in the 1790s and the subsequent Napoleonic era, in which armies had to be split up to defend against or attack more than one enemy at a given time or to fulfill tactical assignments, such as outflanking or enveloping manoeuvres. The definition of a "division" is that it is the smallest sub-unit of an army that can fulfill independent assignments, i.e., the smallest unit that has everything to fight its own small war.

Thus said, it follows that a division must have more than soldiers, guns and ammunition: it must have a staff, engineers, signal troops, supply troops, a medical corps, a hospital, kitchen, laundry, map bureau and so forth. In the First World War, a fully equipped German infantry division would contain the following troops:

4 Infantry Regiments of 3,000 men each; each Regiment composed of 3 Battalions of 1,000 men; each Battalion composed of 4 Companies of 250 men; altogether 12,000 infantrymen;

1 Artillery Regiment consisting of 12 Field Batteries of 6 135 mm guns each and 2 Heavy Batteries of 4 155 mm guns; some divisions had an additional Heavy Howitzer Battalion with 16 150 mm howitzers;

2 Brigades of Cavalry, 680 sabres each, sometimes supported by 2 Field Gun Batteries of their own and a 6 Machine-Gun Company;

1 Squadron of reconnaissance aircraft, 6 machines, pilots, mechanics;

1 Special Artillery Brigade for the discretionary use of the division commander, 54 light 77 mm guns and 18 135 mm guns;

1 Special Machine Gun Company with 6 guns, and

1 Special Artillery Battalion with 18 105 mm howitzers.

Divisional troops, staff and support:

1 Battalion Combat Engineers (Sappers, in German called "Pioniere", 'Pioneers');

1 Signal and Communications Detachment with 2 Companies;

1 Quartermaster Train with 2 Companies;

1 Administrative Company;

2 Kitchen Companies (Butchers, Bakers, Cooks);

1 Mail Platoon and Field Post Office;

1 Medical Corps, consisting of 2 Hospital Companies and 4 Transport and Supplies Companies;

1 Veterinary Company;

1 Divisional Staff Company with 4 Detachments: Commanding Officer, Operations Officer (*Ia*), Supply Officer (*Ib*) and Intelligence Officer (*Ic*);

1 Map Room;

1 Music Corps, and

1 Company Field Police (MP).

A complete infantry division employed therefore approximately 20,000 men, 7,000 horses and a train of 1,200 supply wagons. Yet a division that had all these troops present and correct would have to be called lucky indeed - for after the first battle most divisions had to do with half of these numbers - or less. In practice - after the huge losses of the first weeks - general staffs often commissioned whole corps take over the independent tactical roles that divisions had been assigned to before the melee had begun.

In terms of vertical composition, two divisions formed a corps, and two corps an army. In practice, as the war dragged on and many units had to make do with smaller numbers, corps tended to get larger, sometimes as big as four divisions. When whole divisions were not available or had to be broken up, infantry brigades were used, half of a division - two infantry regiments plus whatever artillery was available.

Each country deviated from the scheme in characteristic ways. French divisions were equipped with a brigade of pre-established reserves, and while their field artillery, the 75 mm gun, was excellent and outperformed the German 77 mm model, they were usually weaker in the larger artillery calibres.

British divisions were of somewhat larger size and compensated for an initial dearth of machine-guns with excellent marksmanship. Russian divisions - at least in the early campaigns - were huge, on account of their having not only three but four infantry regiments per division, i.e. sixteen battalions as opposed to twelve. American divisions were truly monstrous, roughly twice as big as German divisions.

The "Table of Symbols" reproduced on the next page explains the symbols for military units and movements as used by the U.S. Military Academy, West Point, NY. These icons have been adopted widely.

The unleashing of dozens of such divisions was the business of the war plans drawn up at academies and general staff offices, and some of these plans envisioned an integrated sequence of events - once the sovereign declared mobilization, the machine of war was to begin and to continue, on a predetermined track, steadily and impervious to correction, to the execution of what the plan prescribed. John Keegan explains:

What determined their [the leaders'] outlook was the syllabus of the Staff College and what in turn determined that were the imperatives of mobilization, concentration and deployment of troops dictated by the capacities of the railways. Timetabling having so demonstrably contributed to Prussia's victory of 1870 over France, timetables invariably came to dominate thereafter the European military mind.

M—Tag (Mobilization Day), as the Germans called it, became a neurotic fixed point. From it, inflexible calculation prescribed how many troops could be carried at what speed to any chosen border zone, what quantity of supplies could follow and how broad would be the front on which armies could be deployed on a subsequent date against the enemy. Simultaneous equations revealed the enemy's reciprocal capability. Initial war plans thus took on mathematical rigidities, with which staff officers confronted statesmen. (23)

TABLE OF SYMBOLS			
BASIC SYMBOLS			
Regiment	III	Infantry	
Brigade	X	Cavalry	
Division	XX	Cavalry Covering Force	• • • • •
Corps	XXX	Artillery	
Army	XXXX	Artillery In Position	
Army Group	XXXXX	(Does not indicate type or quantity)	
		Trains	
EXAMPLES OF COMBINATIONS OF BASIC SYMBOLS			
Small infantry detachment		Fifth Cavalry Corps with other Units attached	XXX V (+)
Third Reserve Division	XX 3R	Debeney's French First Army	FR. XXXX FIRST DEBENEY
Canadian Corps	XXX CAN.		
OTHER SYMBOLS			
Troops on the march	Actual location	Prior location	Troops displacing and direction
Troops in position			Troops in position under attack
Troops in bivouac or reserve			Route of march
			Strong prepared defenses
			Battle sites

In the musings of military laity, the famous example of such a rigid schedule was the so-called German "Schlieffen Plan",¹¹ that envisioned a fixed sequence of events - declaration of mobilization, concentration, deployment and subsequent operation by plan, offensive against France (via Belgium) and defensive against Russia in East Prussia. But it was not the only plan by far which anticipated to avoid the expensive holding of troops at deployment stations. As we may remind ourselves here, General Dobrorolski, chief of the Russian mobilization office, had written that, while the choice when to begin mobilization is "influenced by a complex of political factors of all kinds," once "the moment has been fixed, everything is settled, and there is no turning back. The beginning of war is automatically regulated in advance." (24) Indeed, until November 1912, a standing order of the Russian General Staff to the commanding general of the Warsaw military district stipulated that "the telegram relative to mobilization is to be regarded at the same time as the Imperial command for the opening of hostilities against Austria and Germany." (25) While this order was subsequently mooted, it well illustrated the automatism of mobilization.

The discussion of the "Schlieffen Plan" and the events that took place on the western front in the first eight weeks of the war became a matter of historic controversy for two reasons: one, because the victors used Germany's aggressive

¹¹ Since - as this chapter will discuss - the real German war plan in 1914 was quite different from what became the historical cliché called the "Schlieffen Plan", this book will distinguish between the "Schlieffen Plan" (in quotation marks, as the appellation for the platitude) and the Schlieffen Plan (without quotation marks) for the studies prepared by Schlieffen when he was Chief of the German General Staff, which were, however, *not identical with* the plan exercised in 1914.

designs (which the "Schlieffen Plan" allegedly exemplified) to build the case for German war guilt as per the Treaty of Versailles and the judgement of posterity; two, because a number of German generals ex posteriori asserted that not only had the "Schlieffen Plan" neither been more nor less aggressive than the French and Russian plans (correct), but that they had had the perfect war plan, which would have saved the world four years of incessant slaughter had the younger Moltke properly understood and executed it. It was his failure to bring the war to a quick conclusion in September 1914, and, of course, the continuing, irresponsible defence of the Entente Powers that were truly responsible for the protracted horrors of war.

They also claimed that, in the long run, the war would have been won at a later time, say, in late 1918, had not liberal and social democrat politicians, aided, of course, by Jews and Bolsheviks, "stabbed" the unbeaten German army "in the back" by arranging an armistice in November 1918. It was these "November criminals", as Hitler was to call them later, which were truly responsible for Germany's defeat, not the generals.

Before discussing the plans of Schlieffen, the "Schlieffen Plan", and the real German war plan of 1914 in any detail, we must first familiarize ourselves with the geography of the battlefield. A common border between France and Germany exists only in the south, between Switzerland and Luxembourg, along the Vosges Mountains west of Mulhouse and Strasbourg, and the high terrain of the Lorraine between Donon and Thionville, through the upper half of which flows the Moselle River via Metz to the Rhine. These stretches of mountains respectively highlands are in general territory where the lay of the land favours the defender and hence were fortified by both sides. France built four principal modern fortresses in a north-westerly oriented line, from Belfort near the Swiss border, to Epinal, Toul/Nancy and Verdun at the Meuse River, which forms the main defence line in the north-western quadrant of the region.

The principal defences on the German side of this stretch ran along the ridgeline of the Vosges opposite the Upper Rhine and were strengthened by a fortified fallback position at Strasbourg. The highlands stretching out between Donon, Sarrebourg, Morhange and Metz had been fortified only weakly, for it was thought that a flexible defence in this area offered a good chance of mounting a counterattack. Along the Moselle river, from Metz to Thionville (Diedenhofen) near the border to Luxembourg, ran the "Moselstellung", the 'Moselle Position', the main fortified German area, which was considered impenetrable. The good defensive perimeters on either side ensured that, once French attacks during the opening Battle of the Frontiers in the first weeks of August had been repulsed, and the Germans blooded their noses in attacking at the Grand Couronne de Nancy, the whole Franco-German border saw little action until late in 1918.

The middle part of the western theatre consisted of the independent Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and the Ardennes Forest, a high plateau that stretches from northern Luxembourg about thirty miles on each side of the German-Belgian border into the respective countries, almost to Aachen (Aix-La-Chapelle) and Liège (Lüttich). The strategic pièce de résistance on this part of the front is Verdun, for an outflanking of Verdun from the northwest along the Meuse in south-eastern direction would outflank the whole French fortress belt.

But it was the northernmost part of the Franco-Belgian-German borderlands that received the most attention of military strategists, for the plains of Flanders and in particular a path following the northern bank of the Meuse and Sambre rivers, along Liège and Namur in Belgium to Maubeuge at the Franco-Belgian border, offered a convenient route for an army crossing from northern France into western Germany or vice versa, presenting a good opportunity to outflank the enemy. It could thus not surprise anyone that Belgium fortified the areas of Liège and Namur, and France did the same with Maubeuge. Still, the opportunity provided by the plains loomed large in the minds of continental generals, and, as Gerhard Ritter explains, it was taken more or less for granted that the roads would be used. By whom, remained a topic of discussion.

We know that the idea of forcibly raising the Belgian frontier barriers played a great part at the height of the French struggle for hegemony under Napoleon III. After his fall there could be no thought of a French offensive for many decades. But when French chauvinism flared up again under Boulanger in 1887 and there seemed to be an immediate threat of a Franco-German war, European public opinion was not at all certain that Belgian neutrality would be respected by either belligerent, since both had secured their positions on the Lorraine front by strong fortresses.

In England there were uneasy memories of the obligation assumed in 1839, and renewed in 1870 by treaties with France and the North German Bund, to guarantee Belgian neutrality. British diplomacy at first assured Brussels that the obligation would be honoured; but soon it was advising the Belgians not to count on effective British help, for which there were too few military resources, but to try to defend their border on their own.

At the same time there appeared in the semi-official press some very strange articles, obviously inspired by the Foreign Office, which can only be regarded as "kites" to sound public opinion on the question of neutrality. They discussed whether, in the event of a German march through Belgium into northern France, England could not accept the situation provided Bismarck gave his word not to infringe Belgian sovereignty and only to use a "right of way" through the country. The question was answered in the affirmative.

Other newspapers, too, gave warnings against going beyond paper protests - an indication of how much the Liberal England of that day disliked being drawn into Continental quarrels. Furthermore it was clearly noticeable that Lord Salisbury regarded France, not Germany, as the country threatening European peace, and that his sympathies were far more on the German side. ...

This was the time, in 1887, when the German General Staff, too, was discussing the possibility of the French Army being able to outflank the German position in Lorraine through Belgium. But Count Moltke was not in the least disturbed by this, as one sees from his great strategic plan of 1887:

"On the right our position could only be outflanked at any distance by a violation of neutral countries, Luxembourg or Belgium. This would result in an entirely changed military situation which we need not discuss here, but which would obviously develop unfavourably for the French. However poorly one may estimate the military resistance of these countries, the invasion would be weakened by the need to keep watch on their troops and hold their populations in check.

The whole operation would come to a standstill on the Rhine, while we ourselves would advance in mass from the south. If, incidentally, anything could spur England into action, it would be the occupation of Belgium by the French Army. For all these reasons, the whole enterprise seems highly unlikely."

This fitted in with the declaration Bismarck had caused to be published in the semi-official Post; the British reflections were not only premature but also groundless. Germany would never open a war with the violation of a European treaty. If one supposed that the German General Staff was bound to contemplate a breakthrough via Belgium, it had to be pointed out that this far from exhausted the ingenuity of the German General Staff. It was furthermore an error to suppose that the conduct of German policy was subject to the views of the General Staff. (26)

As long as Bismarck was responsible for Germany's policies, nobody doubted that he exercised control, not the generals. But after his retirement in 1890, German foreign policy quickly acquired a vacillating quality - the subsequent chancellors Caprivi and Hohenlohe were not only ignorant of foreign relations but made no efforts to improve their expertise. Soon the situation Bismarck had toiled all his life to avoid came to pass - détente between France and Russia. The spectre of a two-front war first raised its head.

This was not necessarily a scenario the German General Staff was unfamiliar with: the elder Moltke himself had reasoned, in view of the prolonged holding out of France in 1871 despite the catastrophe at Sedan, that if the eastern and western fronts were threatened simultaneously enough, even "a victorious campaign in the west could not be settled sufficiently quickly to allow the possibility of dealing with one opponent and then the other." (27) The acquisition of Alsace-Lorraine after 1871 was deemed a simple strategic necessity, for on the heights of the Lorraine and along the Moselle river valley fortifications could be built that allowed a strategic defensive in the west, while the main body of the German army would be employed against the expected Russian offensive into East Prussia. Count Moltke, as well as General Waldersee, his successor, was not enticed by the idea of acquiring Russian territory; to follow the Tsar's troops by a "pursuit into the Russian interior," Moltke wrote in 1879 in remembrance of Napoleon's disaster of 1812, "would be of

no interest for us." (28) Yet quickly after the senior German decision-makers, Bismarck and Count Moltke, had retired, the perception of the Belgian expedient changed, as Gerhard Ritter observed:

Bismarck, then, resolutely refused to open a war with a violation of international law, even if British public opinion were prepared to reconcile itself to this. Moltke thought a French enveloping march through Belgium was as unlikely as it was harmless, and never even considered the possibility of a German advance in the opposite direction.

This in spite of the fact that European military literature had long been discussing it; that in 1882 the French General Sere de Rivieres had declared an invasion through Belgium to be the natural line of advance from the German standpoint; and that the French General Staff had since ordered certain countermeasures such as fortifications on their northern front from Hirson to Dunkirk.

Nor was there in the nineties any lack of French military authors who made light of Belgian neutrality, saying it should not be regarded as a serious obstacle to the great Franco-German duel. Gradually it became a commonplace of European military literature that Belgium offered the natural means of passage for such a duel, and the British General Staff seems to have taken the most matter-of-fact view of all.

General Robertson records that he discussed with his Government as early as 1902 what was to happen in the event of the Germans feeling obliged to march through Belgium in their attack on France. Salisbury refused, as he had done in 1887, to commit to the British attitude in advance.

Three years later a conference of the British General Staff at Camberley discussed the problems of a Franco-German war. A war game was ordered which presupposed a German march through Belgium (on a very large scale). This happened in January 1905, i.e. before the outbreak of the Morocco crisis and long before the working out of the great Schlieffen Plan, doubtless without detailed knowledge of the German plans in the event of war, and simply on the basis of general strategic considerations.

The war game was held in March-April. General Robertson (later to be Chief of the General Staff in the war) commanded the "German" side. He, too, advanced his forces north of the Meuse and Sambre, and came to the shattering conclusion that France by herself would be incapable of holding off such an advance.

This technical conclusion became the cast-iron basis for all future plans of the British General Staff, which had in fact become very anti-German since the Boer war. All agreements between the British and French military from 1905 to 1914 about the dispatch of a British expeditionary force to the Continent were based on the firm conviction that France would be lost if Britain did not come to her aid. (29)

There were gradual changes in the German view of the Belgian strategy - when Alfred von Waldersee succeeded Moltke, he allowed for tactical offenses on either front if conditions were favourable. The analysis of the 1870 war had precipitated a conviction of German military superiority over France, and together with the advantage of the inner lines that the dense German railway net was able to provide in the west might afford the German army excellent possibilities to counterattack a French thrust into Lorraine.

"Thus," Hew Strachan remarks, "when Schlieffen, who had been Waldersee's deputy, succeeded him as chief of the general staff in 1891 a reorientation in planning assumptions was already under way." (30) We shall turn now to discuss the product of this reorientation, the "Great Memorandum of December 1905", a plan for war with France (not France and Russia), which Schlieffen composed during his tenure of office and which was found in his papers by Gerhard Ritter in the National Archives in Washington 1953.¹² It exists in two typewritten and one handwritten copies of about twenty pages each, plus six leftovers of drafts and one fragment. In addition, Ritter found a three-page fragment of a Schlieffen memorandum dated February 1906 (i.e., after his retirement), three pages of notes by Moltke to the 1905 plan, a ten-page fragment of a plan for War with France and Russia dated December 28, 1912 and three pages worth of notes on

¹² If not denoted otherwise, all quotes relevant to the Great Memorandum are from Gerhard Ritter's "The Schlieffen Plan -- Critique of a Myth", Oswald Wolff, London, 1958

this plan by his aide and amanuensis, Major von Hahnke. The following is the beginning of the Great Memorandum of 1905 in the handwritten copy:

"Berlin, December 1905

War against France

In a war against Germany, France will probably at first restrict herself to defence, particularly as long as she cannot count on effective Russian support.¹³ With this in view she has long prepared a position which is for the greater part permanent, of which the great fortresses of Belfort, Epinal, Toul and Verdun are the main strongpoints. This position can be adequately occupied by the large French army and presents great difficulties to the attacker.

The attack will not be directed on the great fortresses, whose conquest requires a great siege apparatus, much time and large forces, especially as encirclement is impossible and the siege can only be conducted from one side. The attacker will prefer to advance on the intervening gaps. Two of them (Belfort-Epinal and Toul-Verdun) are filled with barrier forts, but these are of no considerable importance.

It matters more that the gaps are already strong natural positions in which sector lies behind sector, and which, by the great fortresses on their wings, impede their envelopment by the enemy, while threatening him with the same fate himself. The greatest promise of success is offered by an attack on the right wing of the Moselle forts (Fort Ballon de Servance). But we are not sufficiently prepared to overcome the difficult terrain there. ...

Another promise of success is offered by an attack of Nancy, which is protected by field-works and is open to easy envelopment and bombardment. But after the town and the heights beyond are taken (Foret de Haye) we are faced with the fortifications of Toul. Therefore a frontal attack on the position Belfort-Verdun offers little promise of success. An envelopment from the south would have to be preceded by a victorious campaign against Switzerland and by the capture of the Jura forts - time consuming enterprises during which the French would not remain idle." (31)

The straightway was blocked - what other options did exist? The textbook solution against an opponent whose mobility is hampered by the need to hold important places - towns, fortresses, the capital, perhaps - is to outflank him, attacking at the weak side.

"More promising than the frontal attack with an envelopment by the left wing seems to be an attack from the north-west, directed on the flanks at Mézières, Rethel, La Fère, and across the Oise on the rear of the position.

To make this possible, the Franco-Belgian frontier left [i.e., west, ¶] of the Meuse must be taken, together with the fortified towns of Mézières, Hirson and Maubeuge, three small barrier forts, Lille and Dunkirk; and to reach thus far the neutrality of Luxembourg, Belgium and the Netherlands must be violated. The violation of Luxembourg neutrality will have no important consequences other than protests. The Netherlands regard

¹³ "Marginal note by General von Moltke: 'France's offensive or defensive attitude will essentially depend on the casus belli. If Germany causes the war, France will probably be on the defensive. If, however, the war is desired and caused by France, she is most likely to conduct it offensively. If France wants to reconquer the lost provinces, she has to invade them, i.e. take the offensive. I do not consider it altogether certain that France will remain on the defensive under all circumstances. However, the frontier fortresses built soon after the war of '70-'71 stress the defensive idea. But this does not accord with the offensive spirit ever inherent in the nation, nor with the doctrines and views now prevalent in the French Army.'"

England, allied to France, no less as an enemy than does Germany. It will be possible to come to an agreement with them.¹⁴

[Belgium will probably offer resistance] In face of the German advance north of the Meuse, her army, according to plan, will retreat to Antwerp and must be contained there; this might be effected in the north by means of a blockade of the Scheldt which would cut communications with England and the sea. For Liège and Namur, which are intended to have only a weak garrison, observation will suffice. It will be possible to take the citadel of Huy, or to neutralize it.

Making a covered advance against Antwerp, Liège and Namur, the Germans will find a fortified frontier, but not a frontier as thoroughly and extensively fortified as that opposite Germany. If the French wish to defend it, they will be obliged to move corps and armies from the original front [at the Franco-German border] and replace them by reserves from the rear, for instance by the corps on the Alpine frontier. ...

Therefore they may perhaps give up the attempt to man such an overextended line and instead take the offensive against the threatening invasion with all the troops they can scrape together. Whether they attack or defend, it is not unlikely that battle will be joined near the frontier Mézières-Dunkirk; and the Germans' task is to muster the greatest possible strength for this battle. Even if it should not take place and the French remain behind the Aisne, a strong German right wing will still be of the greatest value for the operations to come. ...

If possible, the German Army will win its battle by an envelopment with the right wing. This will therefore be made as strong as possible. For this purpose eight army corps and five cavalry divisions will cross the Meuse [westward] by five routes below Liège and advance in the direction of Brussels-Namur; a ninth army corps (XVIIIth) will join them after crossing the Meuse above Liège. The last must also neutralise the citadel of Huy, within whose range it is obliged to cross the Meuse.

The nine army corps will be followed by seven Reserve corps, whose main part is intended for the investment of Antwerp while the remainder initially give further cover to the right flank. Apart from this, there is a further possible reinforcement in the form of two of the army corps remaining on the left bank of the Moselle. They can be brought up by railway (German and Belgian) as soon as the lines are cleared and put into service. These could bring the decision." (32)

The memorandum continues to lay out in detail the employment of the whole German army in defeating France, including forces that did not exist and never came into being. Before the military issues get truly complicated, it is perhaps best to have the expert, Terence Zuber, explain why the whole "Schlieffen Plan" issue became the subject of a debate in the first place - what was the Big Deal, anyway?

From 1920 until 1999 very little was known concerning German war planning prior to the Great War. It was, however, "common knowledge" that in 1914 the Germans had been following the "Schlieffen Plan", which was presented in a DENKSCHRIFT (study) written by the German chief of the general staff, Count Alfred von Schlieffen, and dated December 1905.

Beginning in 1920, semi-official histories, written by retired First World War German army officers such as Lieutenant-Colonel Wolfgang Förster,¹⁵ General Hermann von Kuhl and General Wilhelm Gröner,¹⁶ as well as the first volume of the official history of the war produced by the Reichsarchiv in 1925, first revealed the Schlieffen Plan, not as a complete document but as a very general paraphrase.

¹⁴ Moltke was sceptical. He noted: "If our diplomacy manages this, it will be a great advantage. We need the Dutch railways. The value of Holland as an ally would be incalculable." (33)

¹⁵ It speaks for itself that even a scholar like Luigi Albertini had to resort to Förster's publications in THE ORIGINS OF THE WAR OF 1914 - neither he nor any other historian saw the Great Memorandum of 1905 before it was found by Gerhard Ritter in Washington 1953 and published three years later. Then it took another forty or so years until it dawned on some authorities that the real German war plan of 1914 could not have been identical with the campaign described in the Great Memorandum.

¹⁶ Gröner was Chief of the German General Staff's Railway Department in 1914 and later served the Weimar Republic as Minister of War.

The intent of the Schlieffen Plan was to annihilate the French army in one quick enormous battle (Vernichtungsschlacht). The concept was to deploy seven-eighths of the German army between Metz and Aachen, on the right wing of the German front, leaving one-eighth of the army to guard the left flank in Lorraine against a French attack. No forces would be sent to protect East Prussia against the Russians. The right wing would sweep through Belgium and northern France, if necessary swinging to the west of Paris, continually turning the French left flank, and eventually pushing the French army into Switzerland.

If the French attacked the German left, in Lorraine, they would be doing the Germans a favour, for the attack would accomplish nothing and the French forces in the north would be that much weaker. Gröner et al. (the "Schlieffen School") maintained that this Denkschrift represented the culmination of Schlieffen's military thought and provided Germany with a nearly infallible war plan; all that Schlieffen's successor, Helmuth von Moltke, needed to do was to execute the Schlieffen plan, and Germany would have been practically assured of victory in August 1914. They contended that Moltke did not understand the concept of the Schlieffen Plan and modified it - "watered it down" - by strengthening the forces on the left wing at the expense of the main attack on the right. For this reason, the German army failed to destroy the French army in the initial campaign in the west in 1914.

The original war plans of both Schlieffen and Moltke were kept under tight control in the Reichsarchiv on the Brauhausberg in Potsdam and treated as secret documents, made available only to reliable officer-historians and then strictly on a "need-to-know" basis. The details of Schlieffen's planning were never revealed. Moreover, nothing was known of the war planning from 1906 to 1914 of Schlieffen's successor, the younger Moltke, aside from the fact [or rather contention, ¶] that he had "watered down" the Schlieffen Plan. The German army archive was then destroyed by British bombers on the night of 14 April 1945.

It seemed that only the original text of the famous Schlieffen Plan Denkschrift had survived the bombings because it had been transferred out of Potsdam. It had been seized by the American army and in the early 1950s was stored in the American National Archives, where Gerhard Ritter found it. He published the text in German in 1956 (in English in 1958). In preparing the plan for publication, Ritter learned from Förster that the Denkschrift had actually been written in January and February 1906, after Schlieffen had retired (and no longer had any authority to write war plans), and backdated to make it appear that it was written while he was still chief of the general staff.

Ritter did not submit the Denkschrift to a thorough analysis, nor did he explain the many inconsistencies it contained. Instead, he concluded that the Denkschrift confirmed that the Schlieffen plan was the template for the German war plan in 1914. Ritter further deduced that the Germans had an aggressive war plan, which was the proximate cause of the Great War. Ritter's opinions became "common knowledge", so much that the Schlieffen plan is a question in British A-level school-leaving examinations and the topic of commercially available term papers. (34)

One of the inconsistencies Ritter might have noticed, one that made it clear that the Great Memorandum - which in its first line all too clearly states "War against France", not "War against Russia, France and England" - was not, nay, could not be the plan executed in 1914 was that it anticipated, and indeed relied on, the services of a number of nonexistent German "ghost" divisions.

During the tenure of both Schlieffen and Moltke, the German army conscripted only 55 per cent of each year group. Both Schlieffen and Moltke argued that this was insufficient and that Germany needed to implement genuine universal conscription. This was never accomplished in peacetime for two reasons: the expense of the High Seas Fleet and the fundamental opposition of the German Socialist Party (SPD) to the German army.

The SPD was doctrinaire Marxist, opposed to "militarism" and convinced that the European proletariat would make war impossible by paralysing mobilisation with a general strike. The SPD's motto was "not one man, not one penny" for the army, and any attempt by the German government to increase the size of the army would bring on a domestic political crisis that was best avoided.

The Reichsarchiv history freely acknowledged that Schlieffen did not have enough divisions to execute the plan outlined in the Denkschrift: "a number of the reserve corps which were employed [in the Schlieffen plan] as complete [two-division] corps, did not have the second division. The mobilisation plan [also] did not provide for the immediate creation of the [eight] ersatz corps."

The Schlieffen plan also included the 43rd Infantry Division, which never existed. It employed ninety-six divisions, including twenty-four imaginary divisions. Ludendorff said outright that even in a one-front war against France alone, Schlieffen was twenty-four divisions short of the total force required. The Denkschrift also expressly said that in a one-front war even ninety-six divisions were not adequate and more -- non-existent -- manoeuvre units needed to be raised. (35)

It is not always appreciated that the Great Memorandum's sweeping move around Paris was, in theory, only Plan B - the strategic target of the offensive being to roll up the French fortress belt Verdun-Belfort from behind - and Plan A was, in Schlieffen's own words, an envelopment of the French left wing by the German right:

"France must be regarded as a great fortress. Of the outer enceinte the sector Belfort-Verdun is almost impregnable, but the sector Mézières-Maubeuge-Lille-Dunkirk is only fortified in parts and at the moment almost unoccupied. Here we must try to break into the fortress. When we have succeeded, a second enceinte, or at least part of it, will become apparent, i.e. that adjoining Verdun: the position behind the Aisne to Rheims and La Fère. This section of enceinte can be outflanked from the north, however.

The architect of the fortress counted on a German attack from the south of the Meuse-Sambre [i.e., through Luxembourg and the Ardennes, ¶], but not from north of this river line. Now it will probably be too late to make good this deficiency by extending the fortified line Rheims-La Fère via Peronne along the Somme. The defender can counter the threatened outflanking by an offensive round the left wing of the position at La Fère. It is to be hoped that this counterattack, which may be accompanied by an advance from the whole front Verdun-La Fère, will fail.

The defeated defender can then try to hold the Oise between La Fère and Paris. The defensibility of this river line is open to doubt. If the doubt is well founded, or the French refrain from defending the Oise and allow the Germans to cross the river in strength, the second enceinte Verdun-La Fère can no longer be held. La Fère, Laon and Rheims, which is open to the west, the whole hill position designed against an attack from the north-east, will be taken, and the Aisne position will have to be evacuated.

With this, the Meuse forts between Verdun and Toul, which can offer only insignificant resistance to an attack from the west, will be exposed. Verdun and Toul will become isolated fortresses. The whole French fortress system directed against Germany will threaten to collapse.

It is therefore not impossible that in spite of all the shortcomings of the position, the French may try to hold the Oise and that they may be able to offer successful resistance. In this event we must march round the south of Paris. The same is true if the French give up the Oise and Aisne and retreat behind the Marne, Seine, etc. If they are allowed to go on in this direction, the war will be endless." (36)

In this event only? The French

...will probably prefer to form a defensive flank behind the Oise between La Fère and Paris rather than surrender a great, rich territory, their fine fortresses, and the northern front of Paris. ... Since the main position Belfort-Verdun need only remain weakly occupied, the available forces will be enough to defend the Aisne and the Oise. Unless the French do us the favour of attacking, we shall be obliged to advance against the Aisne, the Rheims-La Fère position and the Oise, and we shall be forced, no matter whether our enemies hold the Aisne-Oise position or retreat behind the Marne or the Seine, etc., to follow them with part of our army, and with another part to envelop Paris on the south and invest the fortress." (37)

It is here that we ask ourselves - why? If the Germans break in south-eastern direction through a line, say, La Fère-Mézières, the Meuse is outflanked, the forts can be taken from the rear, and the war is won. Why even bother with Paris, the "gigantic fortress"? (38) We may become suspicious: perhaps Schlieffen had another, hidden purpose in the inclusion of Paris? For if we continue to read the memorandum, Schlieffen suddenly digresses into a debate of future German military policy that would provide the surplus forces required for the investment of Paris:

"The Active corps must be kept intact for the battle and not used for duties in the lines of communication areas, siege-work, or the investing of fortresses But the railways necessary to supply the army must also be guarded; the great cities and the populous industrial provinces of Belgium and north-western France must be occupied. The whole area must offer the army a secure base.

For this the Landsturm must be used, the thirty-nine to forty-five-year-old men of the third reserve, ¶]. Should there be legal obstacles, the law must be changed immediately on the commencement of mobilisation. Still greater forces must be raised. We have as many Reserve battalions as infantry regiments. From these and the available reservists, and if need be from the Landwehr as well, fourth battalions must be formed as in 1866; and from these and Ersatz batteries, again as in 1866, divisions and army corps must be formed. Eight army corps can be created in this way. We shall not wait until the need becomes painfully obvious, until operations are forced to a standstill, before undertaking these re-formations, but to do it immediately after the mobilisation of the other troops.

Therefore we must make the Landsturm mobile so that it may occupy the whole lines of communication area from Belfort to Maastricht etc., [we must pull out the Landwehr remaining in the fortresses] and in addition to this we must form at least eight army corps. That is the very least we are bound to do. We have invented conscription and the Volk in Waffen ["Peoples in Arms"] and proved to other nations the necessity of introducing these institutions. But having brought our sworn enemies to the point of increasing their armies out of all measure, we have relaxed our own efforts.

We continue to boast of the density of our population, of the great manpower at our disposal; but these masses are not trained or armed to the full number of able-bodied men they could yield. [The fact that France with a population of 39 million provides 995 battalions for the field army, while Germany with 56 million produces only 971, speaks for itself.]

The eight army corps are most needed on or behind the right wing. How many can be transported there depends on the capacity, of the railways. Those which cannot be brought up on the left of the Meuse and Sambre through Belgium and Northern France must be brought south of Liège-Namur to the Meuse between Verdun and Mézières. If this is not entirely possible either, the rest can be used as required at Metz and right of the Moselle.

One must be able to count on there being available for the advance on the position Aisne-Oise-Paris etc. Army corps ... 25 Reserve corps ... 2 newly formed corps 6, [i.e.] 33 corps.

Of these, more than one-third are needed for the envelopment of Paris: seven army corps for the envelopment proper, and six new corps for the investing of Paris on the [western and] southern front. How the advance and the attack on the position are planned is shown on Map 3." (39)

Six of the eight yet-to-be-built corps, whose deployment was not even secure ["...depends on the capacity of the railways ..."] were to appear suddenly in the siege ring around Paris - but how? John Keegan explains the problem:

[Schlieffen's] midnight pettifoggery had as its object an exact adjustment not of German numbers to those that the French could deploy, but to what the Belgian and French road network could carry. Such calculations were the groundwork of staff-college training: students, transferring from prepared tables the length of a marching column - twenty-nine kilometres for a corps, for example - to a road map, could determine how many troops could be pushed through a given sector at what speed.

Since thirty-two kilometres was the limit of a forced march, that would be the advance of a corps on a single road; but the tail of a column twenty-nine kilometres long would remain near or at the marching-off point at the day's end. If there were twin parallel roads, the tails would advance half the distance, if four three-quarters, and so on. Ideally, the units of a corps would advance not in column but in line abreast, allowing all of it to arrive at the day's end thirty-two kilometres further on; in practice, as Schlieffen admitted in one of his amendments, parallel roads were at best to be found one to two kilometres apart.

As his great wheeling movement was to sweep forward on a front of three hundred kilometres with about thirty corps, however, each would have only ten kilometres of front on which to make its advance, in which there might be at best seven parallel roads. That was not enough to allow the tails of the columns to catch up with the heads by the day's end. The drawback was serious in itself; more seriously, it absolutely forbade any attempt to crowd more troops into the radius of the wheeling movement. They would not fit, there simply was not room. (40)

Yet if there was no room, how were the six new corps to get to Paris at all?

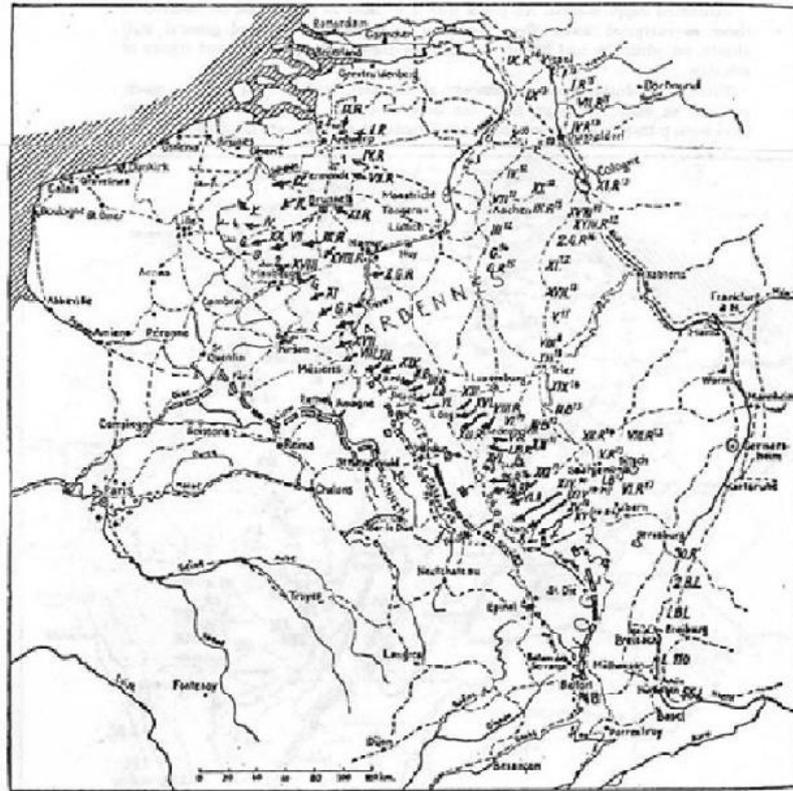
It is at this point that a careful reader of the Great Memorandum recognises a plan falling apart: Map 3 in no way shows how the new corps are to advance or to invest Paris, the central strongpoint of the "great fortress" that was Schlieffen's France. The corps simply appear, with no indication of how they have reached Paris and its outskirts. The "capacity of the railways" is irrelevant; railways, in Schlieffen's plan, were to carry the attackers no further than the German frontier with Belgium and France. Thereafter it was the road network that led forward, and the plodding boots of the infantry that would measure out the speed of advance.

Schlieffen himself reckoned that to be only twelve miles [just under twenty kilometres, ¶] a day. In the crisis of August and September 1914, German, French and British units would all exceed that, sometimes day after day - the 1st Battalion of the Gloucestershire Regiment averaged sixteen and a half miles during the great retreat from Mons to the Marne, 24 August - 5 September, and covered twenty-three and twenty-one miles on 27 and 28 August respectively - but Schlieffen's mean was not far short of the mark. Von Kluck's army on the outer wing of the great wheel achieved a little over thirteen miles a day between 18 August and 5 September, 1914, over a distance of 260 miles.

For the "eight new corps," needed by Schlieffen as his plan's clinching device, to arrive at the decisive place of action, they would have actually needed to march not only further and faster, which defied probabilities, but to do so along the same roads as those occupied by the corps already existing, a simple impossibility.

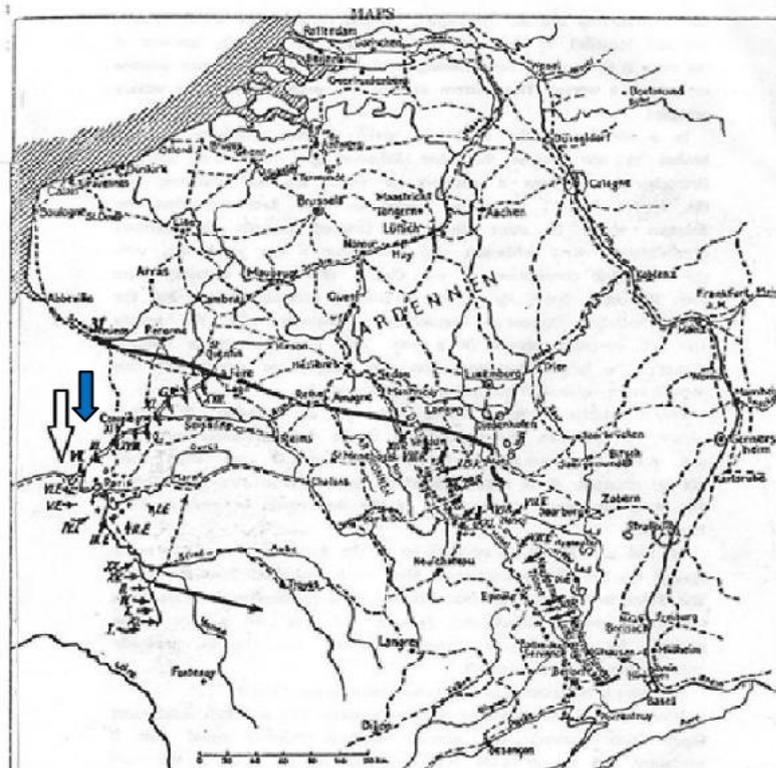
It is not surprising therefore, to find buried in the text of the Great Memorandum its author's admission that "we are too weak" to bring the plan to a conclusion and, in a later admission, "on such an extended line we shall still need greater forces than we have so far estimated." He had run into a logistical impasse. Railways would position the troops for his great wheel; the Belgian and French roads would allow them to reach the outskirts of Paris in the sixth week from mobilisation day; but they would not arrive in the strength necessary to win a decisive battle unless they were accompanied by eight corps - 200,000 men - for which there was no room. His plan for a lightning victory was flawed at its heart. It was pigeonholed for use nonetheless. (41)

That it was not, but the error is hardly Keegan's - it was ushered in by Gerhard Ritter, who, not being a military man, was not the best candidate for a thorough initial analysis of the strategic implications, and, in particular, limitations of the Denkschrift. That the initial misperceptions were allowed to remain largely unchallenged resulted more from the indolence of some experts who did not realise in forty years that Schlieffen's Great Memorandum could not have been the plan for 1914. It simply fitted into the arguments of the historian-turned officers of the "Schlieffen School" to claim that the plan was perfect but its execution flawed - for which they were not responsible. Everything was Moltke's fault.



(2) Map 2
Advance to the French frontier (22nd day)

FROM THE SCHLIEFFEN PLAN DENKSCHRIFT - MAP XXXIV ABOVE SHOWS THE DEVELOPMENT PLANNED FOR THE 22ND DAY OF THE CAMPAIGN - THE SIX ERSATZ CORPS (E) ARE NOWHERE TO BE SEEN. YET IN MAP XXXV, BELOW, ONLY NINE DAYS LATER, THEY APPEAR MAGICALLY AROUND PARIS (SEE ARROWS LEFT)



(3) Map 3
Further advance (31st day)

These historical incongruities were somewhat enlarged by the fact that, beginning in 1956, some historians began to rest their professional reputations on the existence and importance of the "Schlieffen Plan", which, as the fruit of the poisoned tree of German militarism, was too attractive a scenario to be needlessly jeopardized by detailed analysis. This changed in the early 1990s, and Terence Zuber, in his book "The Real German War Plan, 1904-14", reports how recently discovered documents knocked out the wind of the "Schlieffen Plan" myth:

Unknown to all but a few East German and Soviet archivists, several documents had survived the Potsdam bombing because they were in a nearby undamaged office building. They had been seized by the Red Army and returned to the East German military archive, but not made available to historians.

*With the fall of the Wall these documents came into the possession of the unified German military archives at Freiburg, and therefore were accessible for historical research. Foremost among these documents were two Reichsarchiv studies: Wilhelm Dieckmann's *Der Schlieffenplan*, a summary of Schlieffen's planning until 1904, and Hellmuth Greiner's analysis of the German west front intelligence estimate from 1885 to 1914.*

[I utilized these documents] ... and pointed out that the Schlieffen plan was for a one-front war against France only, which was unlikely in 1906 and impossible in 1914. Even in this one-front war, the plan required twenty-four divisions that existed neither in 1906 nor in 1914. Schlieffen's purpose was not to write a war plan using "ghost divisions" but as one more proposal to realise full conscription. He wanted to show that even in a one-front war against France, and even with twenty-four non-existent "ghost divisions", the German army was going to have its hands full.

Incongruously, in August 1914 the original text of the great plan was the property of Schlieffen's daughters and was being stored with the family photos. None of Schlieffen's surviving war games tested the Schlieffen plan. In fact, Schlieffen's actual war plans and war games were based on using Germany's interior position and rail mobility to counter-attack against the expected French and Russian offensives, and was not a desperate attempt to invade France.

My conclusion, that there never was a Schlieffen plan, met with considerable hostility. The existence of a Schlieffen plan had become dogma. An enormous body of historical explanation, including German war guilt, was based on the Schlieffen plan. Many in the historical establishment were on the record confirming the importance of the Schlieffen plan and were outraged that their sacred cow had been slaughtered. (42)

More documents previously believed lost were discovered between 1996 and 2002 in the Potsdam archive papers, among them a summary of the actual German deployment plans under both Schlieffen and Moltke from 1904 to 1914, and a summary of Schlieffen's *Generalstabsreise West* ("West Front General Staff Ride") war game of 1905, which had become the basis for the "Schlieffen School" writers to assert that, in this exercise, Schlieffen had actually "tested" his plan successfully, and what had worked in 1905 could not fail in 1914 unless Moltke blew it. (43)

The problem was that, as we will see, this summary and evaluation does nothing of the things ascribed to it: it evaluates three different scenarios in a one-front war Germany against France (all three of them using twenty or so "ghost divisions") - none of which bear any similarity to the two-front situation of August 1914. Because it failed to confirm its premise that the "Schlieffen Plan" worked, the evaluation of *Generalstabsreise West* was first kept secret and then happily presumed lost - good riddance to a potentially embarrassing discovery. We shall now follow the development of German war planning along the lines of these documents, under the guidance of Terence Zuber.

Schlieffen's pre-1903 war plans logically assumed that the most likely scenario would be synchronized attacks by Russia into East Prussia and France into Alsace-Lorraine (as it actually happened in 1914), and that this would mean that Germany could not use the advantage of the inner line and her excellent railway system to defeat the enemy in detail, i.e., first one, and then the other, for the simultaneity of the attacks would preclude the achievement of a local and temporary superiority in numbers that would be the prerequisite for a successful attack. The suitable options were all of defensive nature, and a plan by General von Beseler to break the French lines by half of the German army attacking from northwest - i.e., crossing the Meuse north of Verdun and attacking the rear of the French fortresses - while the other half "fixed" the

French army by attacking simultaneously in the Lorraine, was deemed unworkable, for the advantage of the inner lines would then lie with the French: "they would probably hold off the German forces in the Lorraine with the aid of their border fortifications and mass against the German right wing." (44)

From 1900 to 1902 Schlieffen abandoned western strategies and designed a project called the GROSSE OSTAUFMARSCH ("Great Eastern Deployment"), in which the greater part of the troops, forty-four divisions, would, by defeating Russia, force France to attack in the Lorraine to aid her ally, where the rest of the German army could then successfully counterattack. The East Prussia scenario was played several times.

All of Schlieffen's GENERALSTABSREISEN OST, his general staff rides in the east, played a Russian offensive, with the Germans using rail mobility to counterattack. The 1894 GENERALSTABSREISE OST was the template for the Battle of Tannenberg in August 1914: the Germans exploited the fact that the Russians would be forced to deploy two armies, one attacking from Lithuania to the west, one from Warsaw to the northwest, which were divided by the Masurian Lakes. The Germans used rail mobility and interior lines to mass against the southern (Warsaw) army and destroy it.

The 1902 GENERALSTABSREISE OST played an OSTAUFMARSCH in which Schlieffen deployed nearly half the German army in the east, consistent with his deployment plans at that time. Nevertheless, the exercise still played a German counter-attack. In 1903 Schlieffen played a massive Russian attack down the Vistula, which was met by an equally massive German transfer of eleven corps by rail from the west to the east for a counter-attack. (45)

Although the plans for the east were all of defensive nature - the fate of Napoleon's Grande Armée had taught everybody the futility of trying to conquer the vastness of Russia - the weak showing of the Russian forces against Japan in 1904/05 seemed to indicate that, perhaps, very small forces would suffice to defend East Prussia while the rest might be concentrated against France in an effort to seek a quick victory that, once achieved, would put Germany in the position to dictate terms to St. Petersburg. The idea was, however, almost immediately complicated by the conclusion of the Anglo-French Entente, which made the dispatch of a British Expeditionary Force in a war with France a distinct possibility.

It is with these conditions in mind that we turn to the contemplation of the German war plan summaries discovered in Potsdam. The document in question (RH 61/v.06) gives the deployment plans - not the operational orders - for each season from 1893/94 to 1914/15, which allows us to view Schlieffen's last designs, until 1906/07, and how they compare with Moltke's subsequent plans for 1907/08 until 1913/14, which show "that Moltke did not slavishly follow the Schlieffen plan but developed his own plans in order to meet the changes in the European military and diplomatic situation." (46)

The deployment plans essentially describe what in music is called theme and variation: there were a few plans regarding single-front war in the east or west, but the quest to find solutions for a two-front war began to dominate the General Staff's thinking. The 1904/05 plans mirrored this duality: Aufmarsch I deployed all available forces lined up in the west - except of four reserve divisions in East Prussia - for a single-theatre campaign against France, while Aufmarsch II left an additional three corps (I, XVII and XX, just as in Tannenberg 1914) between Königsberg and Allenstein just in case that the Russians showed up.

Unlike these two plans, the actual two Generalstabsreisen West of 1904 toyed with the idea of an attack through Belgium: one of them, which included the "ghost divisions", ended with a win by the "Germans", the other one, simulated with existing units only, was won by the "French". In the final exercise critique, Schlieffen "said that the possibility of a German attack through Belgium was no secret: everybody in Europe (and even in America) foresaw such a German operation."

The problem, he maintained, was "that an attack through the Ardennes crossed the Meuse and divided the German army: the French would mass against the German right wing and defeat it in detail." If however, the Germans "extended their right to march through the Belgian plain north of the Meuse, the approach march would take so long that the French could break through in Lorraine." (47)

The next year, 1905, brought the aforementioned Generalstabsreise West in which Schlieffen, as his supporters insist, "tested" the plan. This theory was advocated in a 1938 special edition of the most important German military magazine¹⁷ by Lieutenant General Eugen Zoellner. In this essay...

... Zoellner says that Schlieffen, who was also the exercise director, played the German side against three French scenarios. The French were told that the Germans had deployed all along the Rhine. In his discussion of the German deployment, Schlieffen went to great lengths to describe the disadvantages of the German attack through Belgium.

The approach march was long, the fortresses of Liège, Namur and Antwerp would have to be bypassed, and the French could fall back on successive defence lines along the rivers and fortresses of northern France. This was anything but a ringing endorsement of the right-wing attack. In all three cases [of the exercise] the French response to the German advance through Belgium was to attack.

In the first scenario, the French, played by Hugo Freiherr von Freytag-Loringhoven, attacked into Belgium. Schlieffen counter-attacked from Metz against the French right and pushed in the French reserve divisions defending the French left. The French were defeated in Belgium.

In the second scenario, the French, played by Colonel Steuben, attacked in Lorraine between Metz and Strasbourg. Schlieffen shifted forces by rail from the right wing to the left and swung the remainder of the right wing due south, to counter-attack from Metz and Strasbourg against the French flanks and defeat this advance too.

In the third scenario, Hermann von Kuhl attacked on both sides of Metz. The French attack in Lorraine was stopped and Schlieffen counter-attacked against the French right from Strasbourg. (48)

Yet now that we have discovered (at least some) of the summaries and evaluations of these map exercises and are at liberty to doubt Zoellner's gospel, the differences between these three missions and the situation of 1914 become conspicuous. In all three GRW 1905 scenarios the French are attacking, while the 1914 plan assumed them remaining at the defence. In the GRW 1905 games, the Germans win by counterattacking, either in Lorraine or in southern Belgium, while in 1914 they will have to march all the way almost to the Channel, then swing inwards in south-easterly direction and press the French troops against the Swiss border - an operation of truly enormous size.¹⁸ All the GRW 1905 scenarios play single-front wars, and, in addition, all of them use twenty "ghost divisions" to achieve success, while in 1914 a two-front war was a certainty and "ghost divisions" of little help against real attackers. "Aside from the fact," Zuber dryly comments, "that in both the 1905 GENERALSTABSREISE WEST and the Schlieffen plan [i.e., the Great Memorandum, ¶] the German right wing extends to Belgium, the two have nothing in common." (49)

Perhaps of even greater relevance for this discussion is the fact that the complete exercise critique for the great KRIEGSSPIEL ("War Game") of November-December 1905, which followed the annual GENERALSTABSREISE WEST, has survived. This was by far the biggest exercise of Schlieffen's era, and he played a two-front scenario with simultaneous French and Russian attacks to the forty-second day of mobilization. Alas, as Terence Zuber points out, "for advocates of the Schlieffen plan, as well as for those such as Ritter who saw in Schlieffen only aggressive militarism, this war game is a bitter disappointment, for in this, Schlieffen's last, greatest exercise, he played a radically different concept for the German army: strategic defence on both the east and west fronts." (50)

In the east, a variant of the aforementioned solution - first massing against the one and then the other Russian army, and defeating both in detail - was retained, with some improvements that explored different avenues for the decisive attack yet steadily refused a pursuit into Russia. While this was happening, the western forces would deliver a

¹⁷ The "Militärwissenschaftliche Rundschau" Extra Edition of 1938. (51)

¹⁸ In 1914, as Zuber notes, far from sufficient forces were available: "The Germans began the 1914 campaign in the west not with ninety- two divisions [including, as in the Great Memorandum, twenty-four "ghost divisions", ¶], but sixty-eight divisions. The Germans thought they would be opposed by seventy-five French, Belgian and British divisions. In 1914 it was the Germans that were outnumbered." (52)

flexible defence and counterattack as soon as the troops from Russia were to arrive. It was a movement exactly 180° opposed to that of 1914 - the troops would be moved east to west, not vice versa. It was in this game that the BEF first appeared on the Allied order of battle - in Belgium. Schlieffen's last war game, and in this respect, his legacy, was of an entirely different strategic nature than the one portrayed in the "Great Memorandum". (53)

The deployment plan that would most resemble the Great Memorandum was AUFMARSCH I, which he drew up for the 1906/07 season. This plan, however, still anticipates a one-front war against France, but it was the first instance in which a whole three German armies appeared north of the Meuse, poised to march through Belgium. That such a scenario, after more than a decade had passed since the beginning of the Franco-Russian détente, was of little probability Schlieffen was much aware of, for in the same year, his last in office, he drew up another plan - AUFMARSCH II EAST AND WEST - which accounted for the two-front challenge.

This plan displayed some relation to the situation of 1914 in that it deployed thirteen divisions to East Prussia, tasked to perform essentially the classic defence as exercised in earlier years. That left about fifty-eight (existing) divisions for the western theatre, a number insufficient for any operation on the scale of the Great Memorandum. Nevertheless, since the "Schlieffen School" had done a great job in the conjuring up of a connection, nay, a presumed equality between the DENKSCHRIFT of 1905 and the plan executed in 1914, it came to pass that the legend was born that Schlieffen had bequeathed to his successor an infallible plan - and this legend took on, like the Man Who Shot Liberty Vallance, a life of its own and became gospel for two generations of historians. (54)

It is the legend whose representations in the form of maps are ubiquitous in WW I literature, and we'll ask Terence Zuber to explain the differences between the actual map as printed in the Great Memorandum and the graphic distortions that have entertained "armchair strategists" since 1956:

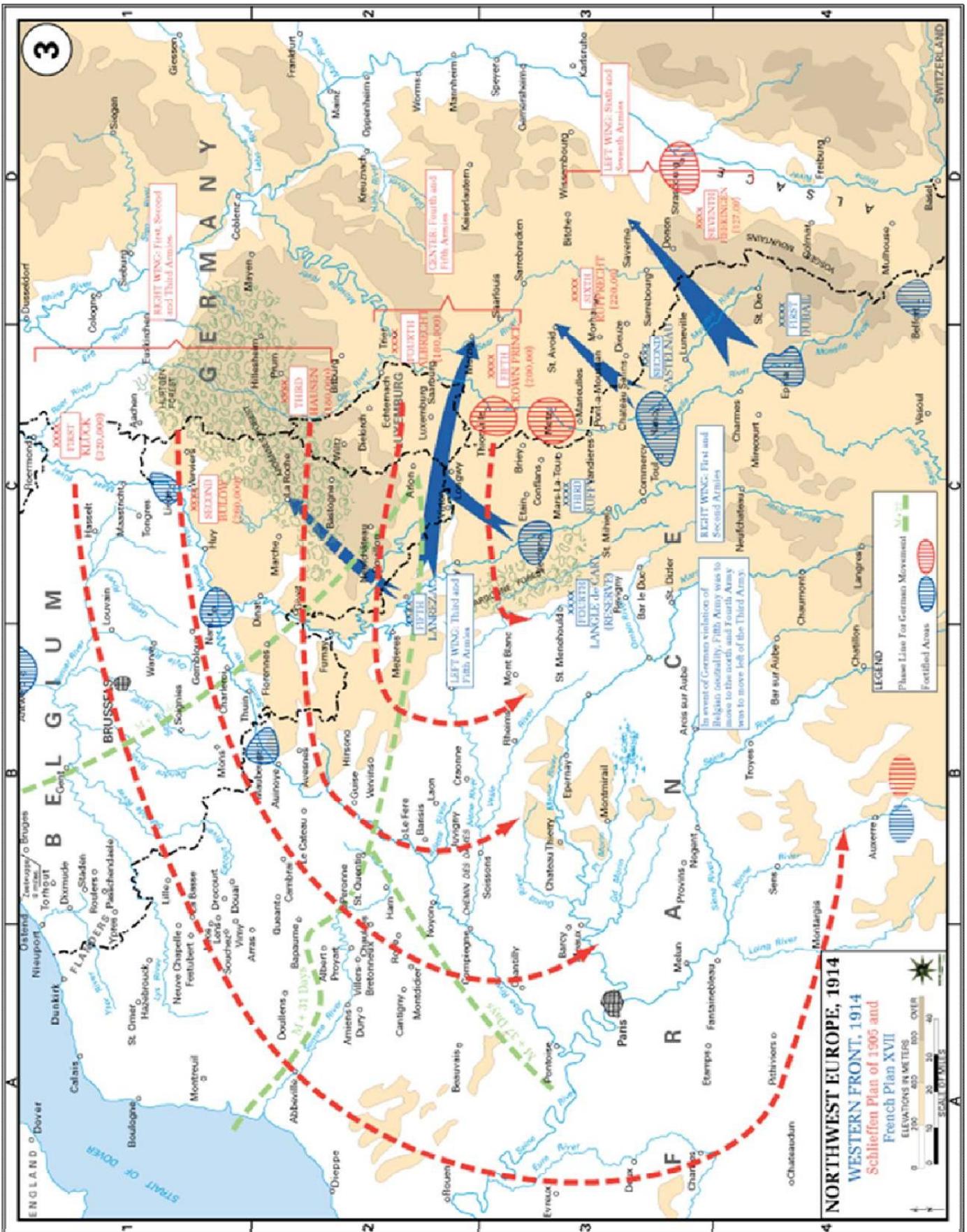
The most commonly used "evidence" for the Schlieffen plan is the standard Schlieffen plan map, particularly Map 2 in the second volume of THE WEST POINT ATLAS OF AMERICAN WARS, which is found on Wikipedia and just about everywhere else. The title of the WEST POINT ATLAS map is "Western Front 1914 - Schlieffen Plan of 1905 - French Plan XVII", which obviously implies that in 1914 the Germans attempted to implement the Schlieffen plan.

The WEST POINT ATLAS map is a mishmash of the actual Schlieffen plan map, the German 1914 plan and the 1914 campaign. This results in a map that does not accurately depict the Schlieffen plan or the German war plan in 1914 or the conduct of the Marne campaign. It is an attempt to substitute "little map, big arrows" for the systematic study of all three.

On the actual Schlieffen plan map, the centre armies stop on the Aisne and the Oise, which is where the Schlieffen plan DENKSCHRIFT said that the French might succeed at halting the German right wing. In the WEST POINT ATLAS map, the arrows depicting the German centre, the 2nd through to the 5th Armies, point south towards the Seine. The mapmaker apparently thought that if the Germans were going to push the French into Switzerland, then this was the way the Schlieffen plan map would look. He was wrong. Neither is the West Point Atlas map an accurate depiction of the German 1914 war plan. It would have us believe that the German plan in 1914 ordered the 1st Army to march around Paris. In fact, the 1914 German war plan did no such thing. The real, principal mission for the 1st Army was to act as flank guard. Due to a lack of troops in 1914, marching the 1st Army around Paris was a physical impossibility. In fact, the German plan in 1914 said nothing about the right-wing advance after they reached the French border. Nor, as we shall see, do the West Point Atlas arrows accurately depict German orders and actions in 1914. ...

The Schlieffen plan map is the armchair strategist's dream. Based on this map the armchair strategist feels justified in making sweeping generalizations about German war planning, militarism, foreign policy and war guilt, which confirm his preconceived ideas, all without the need to actually read and understand the German plans, orders and actions. (55)¹⁹

¹⁹ Zuber analyses the "armchair strategy" of one expert in REAL WAR PLAN, pp. 58-59.



MAP XXXVI - THE INCORRECT WEST POINT ATLAS MAP OF THE "SCHLIEFFEN PLAN"

The younger Moltke took over from Schlieffen in 1906 and quickly realized that the current diplomatic situation made a single-front war against France, as in the "Great Memorandum", a thing of near impossibility, and already in his first study, the Generalstabsreise West of 1906, he played a two-front scenario. Six active corps and nine reserve divisions, twenty-one divisions in all, were sent to cover East Prussia, while twenty-seven corps remained in the west. The Schwerpunkt, the deployment's centre of gravity, was on the right wing: fifteen corps were lined up from Diedenhofen to Aachen. The left wing consisted of eight corps along Metz and the Moselstellung, the position along the Moselle, and four corps, two each at Strasbourg and Colmar, secured the Upper Rhine and Alsace.

In the exercise, Moltke gave Schlieffen's idea a chance and let the right wing proceed into Belgium. But it soon turned out that four corps in Alsace were far too few to stop French designs on the Rhine, and already on the eighteenth day of the manoeuvre, when the right wing could not have finished even half of its long journey through Belgium and northern France, it was forced to give up troops to the left wing to support its defence between Metz and Saarbrücken. This line, the so-called Niedstellung, was in danger of being turned by strong French forces that had broken through in Alsace and were moving north on the left bank of the Rhine. "On the twenty-first day," Zuber observes, "the last three corps of the German 3rd Army had to be sent from the right wing to Metz." (56)

In the exercise critique it was determined that the German army had to meet a French attack in Lorraine with at least equal force, i.e. about fifteen corps, which consequently could not be employed on the right wing in Belgium. "The decisive battle," writes Zuber, would be "fought in Lorraine long before the right wing, marching through the Ardennes and northern France, could make itself felt. The course of action advocated in this situation by the Schlieffen plan DENKSCHRIFT - to continue the right flank attack through France - was shown to be ineffective." (57)

Experiences of that first study, however, did not (yet) show up much in Moltke's first deployment plans for the season 1907/08, but they gained in importance in next year's version of AUFMARSCH WEST I, for the 1908/09 season, in which the timing problem is - for the first time - addressed particularly in regards to Moltke's intention to respect Dutch neutrality - which in turn necessitated a quick seizure of the Belgian fortress of Liège, which blocked the way through Belgium and hence was the bottleneck of the whole operation.

In this plan, the German 2nd Army had the task of seizing Liège "at once", Zuber remarks, to "open the roads blocked by Liège and Huy." (58) Moltke began to experiment now with the relative strengths of the wings. Five armies, 1st to 5th, with 19 active and 10 reserve corps were massed on the right between Liège and Longwy, while Metz, the Moselle and Nied positions as well as Alsace were entrusted to 6th and 7th Armies, which counted only seven active and two reserve corps between themselves. The east remained unchanged, with 3 active and 3 reserve corps plus 3rd Reserve Division, and Moltke refrained from using "ghost divisions".

The problem remained, of course, what the French intentions were. Moltke knew enough of the resurgent spirit of the offensive in the French general staff to take French attacks into account on his Generalstabsreise West of 1908. If the French attacked, they could do so either in the Lorraine, which Moltke thought most likely, or, if they were supported by British and Belgian troops, along the middle Meuse - from a line, say, Verdun-Maubeuge to a line Diedenhofen-Liège, while defending the Upper Meuse south of Verdun along the fortress line.

A French attack in the south, the Lorraine between Strasbourg and Metz, would allow the Germans to concentrate 3rd to 6th Armies along the Moselle between Coblenz and Metz and strike down south-westward with great numeric superiority, while 1st and 2nd Armies covered everything north of Metz and 7th Army, executing a flexible defence, would be allowed to fall slowly back on the Rhine. Were the French to attack with their left wing, Third and Fourth Armies, north of Verdun, the Germans would have the choice between an outflanking manoeuvre of 1st and 2nd Army, crossing the Meuse somewhere around Mézières or Sedan and attacking the French fortified position from the rear, or having 4th and 5th Armies counterattack from around Diedenhofen in the direction of Longwy and Montmedy.

In the simulation itself, the "French" attacked in the Lorraine on both sides of Metz and the outcome was a general melee stretching from the Ardennes north of Luxembourg, where 1st and 2nd Armies crashed into the French Fourth Army, to the Diedenhofen area, north of Metz, where 3rd and 4th Armies ran headlong into the French Third, and

1908/09

75



1908/09 West I

MAP XXXVII - MOLTKE'S AUFMARSCH WEST I, 1908-09

the Lorraine, where 5th, 6th and 7th Armies defended an extended *Niedstellung* from Metz eastward to Pirmasens against the French First and Second Armies. The umpires decided that, while the French frontal attacks had failed, the Germans "were unable to prevent the defeated French forces from successfully withdrawing to their fortress line," and therefore, Moltke said, "the Germans were now faced with a difficult second campaign." (59)

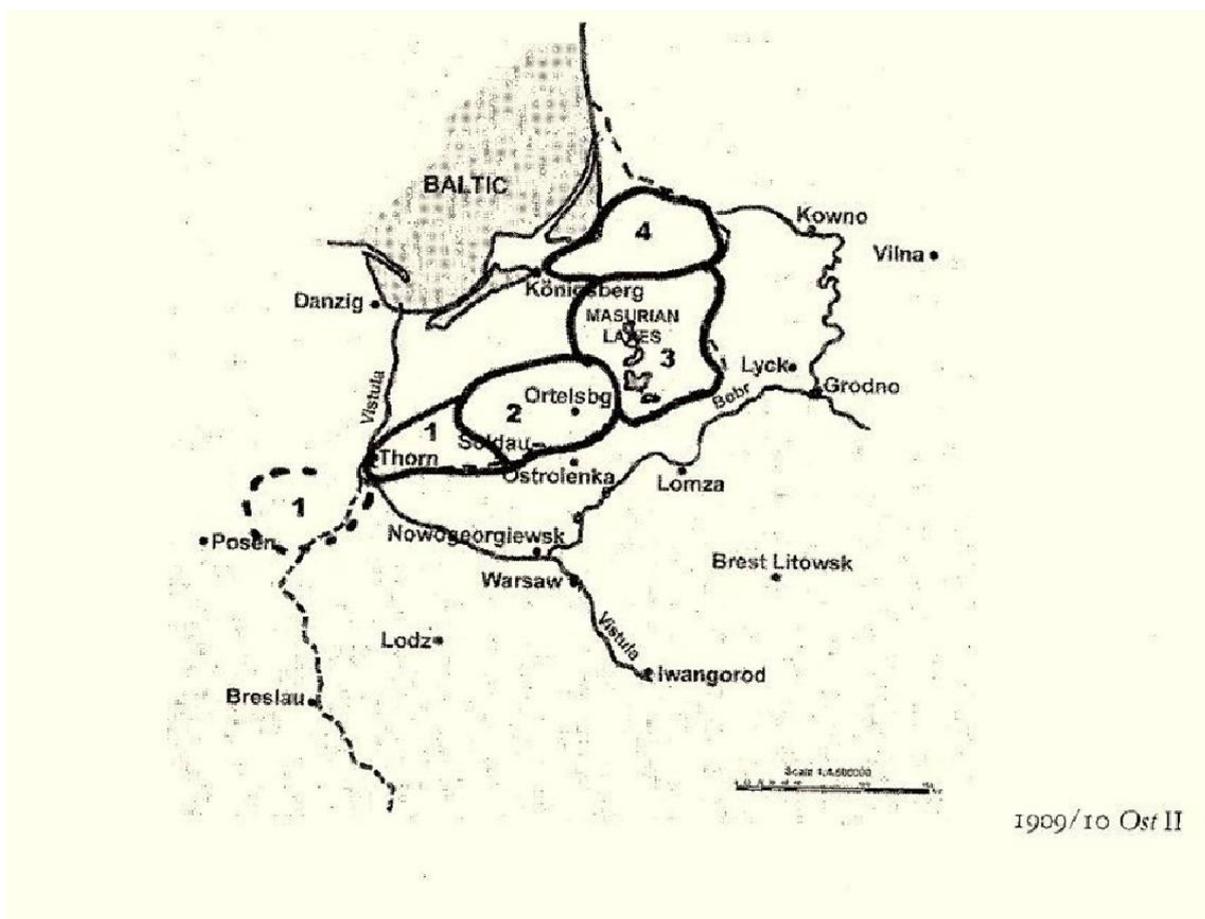
The crisis over the Austrian annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1908/09 prompted a re-evaluation of the threat map, which produced the sombre judgement that "Germany must now be prepared for a war with France or Russia as well as a war against both, which Britain can also join" - a war she would face with feeble Austria as her sole ally, for the Italian obligations under the Triplice were silently relegated to the realm of theoretical considerations." (60) Since the Balkan was everybody's favourite whence the war-causing crisis would approach, plans had to contemplate escalation starting in the

west as well as the east - for the former case a new AUFMARSCH WEST I 1909/10 was prepared, for the latter eventuality AUFMARSCH OST II, also called GROSSER OSTAUFMARSCH (Great Eastern Deployment) 1909/10.

These are the first plans anticipating that the mobilization order would mean full and general mobilization; "due to the interconnected nature of mobilisation," in particular as far as the railway schedules and supply movements were concerned, "a partial mobilisation was impossible." (61) AUFMARSCH WEST I contemplated the war to begin there against France and England, in the expectation of the latter's eventual decision to invade the German coast, IX Reserve Corps was taken out of the western front and dispatched north to protect the harbours Wilhelmshaven, Hamburg and Bremen as well as the Nord-Ostsee Channel. Russia was deemed neutral or yet uncommitted, and Moltke felt free to employ all he had - seventy-three divisions - in the west. Aside from a few cosmetic changes in the relative strength of the armies, however, the only real difference to the plan of 1908/09 was a repositioning of 7th Army further back from the border to Strasbourg, and to allow for more flexibility in its mission: if necessary, it could be sent northwest to the Lorraine to support 6th Army, or even transported to a whole different operational theatre, Russia, for example.

More dramatic were the changes in the new AUFMARSCH OST II for East Prussia, which assumed that yet another Balkan crisis had resulted in a war between Austria and Russia, in which France, initially, remained neutral. (62)

MAP XXXVIII: AUFMARSCH OST II, 1909-10



It employs no less than forty-two divisions, a number not only sufficient for Schlieffen's previous counterattack strategy but also allowing independent offensive operations. The crux was that only two double-tracked railway lines were available in the east with a third under construction, and 1st Army, for example, would have to march 100 kilometres in five days, from its detraining station at Thorn on the Vistula to its position near Soldau. Worse, "deploying the 3rd and 4th Armies, with a total of thirteen corps, would have taken weeks", (63) i.e., longer than the slowest imaginable Russian deployment would take (in this respect, AUFMARSCH OST II must be regarded as only an intermediate step in the planning for the eastern

theatre). The twenty-nine divisions remaining in the west would be mobilized but not deployed until France declared her own mobilization, in which case they would attack with speed to exploit their greater state of readiness.²⁰

Very interesting turned out the SCHLUSSAUFGABE of 1909, the essay prospective graduates of the KRIEGSAKADEMIE had to compose in their final examination, in which Moltke posited a case in which an OSTAUFMARSCH had been executed when France unexpectedly attacked in the Lorraine with forces far superior to the remaining twenty-three German divisions. The French attack was three-pronged, with the SCHWERPUNKT directed right at Metz and the Moselle, but supported by flank attacks of one army north of Diedenhofen and another one, a massive force of six corps, in Alsace.

Any solution, Moltke said, had to take into account that the important issue was to prevent the linking up of the French forces in the Lorraine, which could only be achieved by counterattacking despite the numerical inferiority. Which of the three prongs was to be attacked? No suitable force could be assembled quick enough in Alsace, but while a counterattack against the northern prong might succeed, it might, given the distances involved, turn out too time-consuming in execution to prevent the French from breaking through, meanwhile, in the Lorraine. The correct choice would be to attack the French left wing southeast of Metz, near the junction of the two French armies centred at Verdun and Toul.

It would be a frontal attack against strong, perhaps superior French forces, but it had, as Zuber paraphrases Moltke here, "the advantage that it would be directed against the strategic flank of the enemy army, and that was the most important thing. The area to the south-east of Metz was the most sensitive point in the entire French operation. A victory here must have decisive results." (64) The attack should be launched from the fortress of Metz and should ideally comprise the whole 3rd Army plus all garrison troops and gear. "The French could not fall back," Moltke explained, "but would have to stand and fight to defend their flank, and it would be likely that the Germans would push in the French flank." He noted that the "operation was risky, but that it was impossible to defeat an enemy that was twice the German army's strength without taking risks," (65) and this simulated defence of the Lorraine against superior French forces had much influence on Moltke's strategy there in 1914.

Now, as we are approaching the ominous year 1914, we find that the respective ideas the opponents had of each other evidenced a strange mixture of the uncannily prescient and the entirely out of kilter. The new French Chief of Staff Joffre introduced a new deployment plan, # XVI, which strengthened his left wing exactly when Moltke's new AUFMARSCH WEST I did the same on the opposite side, the German right. Still, the rest of the 1919/11 deployment exhibited only cosmetic changes, except that the military intelligence service warned of the danger of Russia conducting secret partial mobilizations (the first of which promptly happened during the Balkan Wars). The whole German intelligence estimate of 1911 painted a bleak picture of recent developments disfavouring the Central Powers, in which the General Staff mostly concurred. Terence Zuber summarizes the situation before the Balkan Wars:

The general staff traced the cause of the current tension in European politics back to the Morocco crisis of 1905. Prior to that time a reduction in the military spirit and interest in defence was discernible in France. The Morocco crisis caused a complete reversal in French defence policy, as well as revived and strengthened French chauvinism. The second Morocco crisis of 1911 only reinforced these tendencies. Franco-German tensions then led to a European arms race. All the powers in Europe were now preparing for a great war, which they believed would be inevitable sooner or later.

Only Germany and her Austrian ally had not taken part in the European military build-up. Austria had done nothing for years to strengthen her army.²¹ The build-up of the German army had been blocked by financial

²⁰ Moltke also devised two plans for the most likely two-front war scenarios, an AUFMARSCH IA for a simultaneous two-front war with the Schwerpunkt in the west, and an AUFMARSCH IIA for the identical situation but with the Schwerpunkt in the east.

²¹ In this context, Hew Strachan remarks:

"The reputation of the Austro-Hungarian army was honourable but ambiguous. 'Although, of course, the Austrians had been victorious in all the wars in their history,' wrote Robert Musil, himself a former officer of the Habsburg army, 'after most of these wars they had to surrender something.' Distinguished conduct on the battlefield had been accompanied by narrow defeats. In 1866 victory over Italy had been negated by Königgrätz. And in the subsequent half-century the imperial army had not seen action. ...

considerations. In particular, there was a glaring failure to completely utilise Germany's manpower. The general staff did not say so outright, but the implication was clear - Germany had devoted all of her resources to the fleet and that was dangerous. ...

The general staff was pessimistic: since 1905 tensions had been increasing and would probably lead to war. The general staff saw the attack coming most likely from France, but perhaps from Great Britain with the Entente acting in concert. The Italians, on the other hand, would probably desert the Triple Alliance. The Entente was ready for war and the Austro-Germans were not. Neither the Austrian nor the German armies had kept pace with the Entente build-up and they were losing the arms race.

For Germany this would be a three-front war. Britain was impregnable and had absolute control of the seas: the German colonies were lost and her overseas trade would be destroyed. An invasion of Russia was pointless. The Germans could only hope to defeat the French and then rescue the Austrians. German victory might be possible, but the difficulties were very great.

In the west, the Germans were increasingly faced with the possibility of an early French offensive into Lorraine. As of 1909 the Russian army had fully recovered from the effects of the Japanese War and was once again a formidable opponent. AUFMARSCH I, a Schlieffen plan one-front war, was now an academic exercise, a fond hope.

In 1911/12 it was feared that the Russians would stage massive "bolt from the blue" cavalry raids even before the declaration of war. The Russians could conduct a partial secret mobilization in peacetime which would reduce the time lag between the French and Russian offensives. In 1910 there is even a warning that, in the case of AUFMARSCH I OST, the Russians might overrun German territory up to the Vistula.

If war came, the French might well initiate it, and the Germans were going to be massively outnumbered on one front at least. Germany should attempt to defeat the French first. "Defeat" meant just that: it did not necessarily mean "annihilate" and by no means meant "attack". The French might well be the ones who were doing the attacking.²²

This intelligence estimate, which was approved by Moltke and which was still in force in 1914, makes it clear that the German army did not advocate war "now rather than later", as historians of the German "war guilt school" contend. At no point does it state that a German attack in the west would have any certain prospect of quickly winning a decisive victory. In the east the condition of the Austrian army made the situation positively grim. (66)

The outbreak of the First Balkan War in October 1912 soon proved the accuracy of the intelligence report, for, as it was clear by November 21, "the Russians were conducting a gradual undeclared mobilisation." (67) They retained the draftee group that would have normally been discharged by then, whereby they increased their peacetime strength by 400,000 men without calling to the colours a single reservist. Railway exercises were held, military provisions purchased and the Russian war minister cited in French newspapers with the statement that the Russian army was ready for war, "more so than ever before, a statement that the German intelligence section agreed with." (68)

Like many peacetime armies, appearances seemed to outweigh substance. And yet bands and uniforms, the impression of military strength, constituted their own substance. A major role of the army since the late eighteenth century had been domestic. Its high profile constituted a source of unity in the polyglot empire. Conrad shared with his mentor, Franz Ferdinand, a firm conviction that a solution to Austria-Hungary's internal problems should precede any attempts to deal with those that were external, and that the army should lead the way in this process.

Hungary's prolonged resistance, from 1903 to 1912, to the new army law made the inconveniences of the dual monarchy a threat to military efficiency as well as to imperial unity. Magyar intransigence jeopardized the integrity of the army in ethnic terms and its size in manpower terms. .. Particularly worrying for the army were the concessions made to Magyar military identity. Hungarian insistence on an independent military status and on the use of Magyar as the language of command in Hungarian units threatened to replace unity through a German-dominated federalism with duality." (69)

²² As indeed was the case in 1914.

More than the exercise itself, the fact that its clandestineness could not be relied on proved that the Russian government was out to send a message, of the nature that it did not care about concerns other than its own. This in turn founded the strong suspicion in Germany that a secret mobilization was already Russian standard procedure, that is, in the case of a crisis, the Russian government's announcement of mobilization would in fact signify a state of already having mobilized, which would allow her to open hostilities at any time. "Pre-mobilisation measures," Terence Zuber concludes, "offered the Russians a means to significantly speed up their actual mobilisation and deployment, reducing the disparity between the completion of French and Russian deployments. The Germans were faced not only with the prospect of a war on two fronts, but of near-simultaneous attacks on both fronts." (70)

In May 1912 Abteilung III, the military intelligence section of the German army, had produced the original - a memorandum titled "French deployment and operational intentions in a future Franco-German War" - i.e. a report for the western front, (71) and while it was updated three times between November 1912 and April 1914, it remained in use until summer 1914 and hence is of importance.

The dossier noted that "everyone in France, Belgium and England expected the Germans to attack through Belgium (*anderslautende Meinungen kommen überhaupt nicht mehr auf* - *there are absolutely no dissenting opinions*)." (72) The main thing French authors did disagree about was what the German left flank would do in Lorraine, maintain a defensive posture or strike there all the same, hoping that the extension of the French left wing to Belgium had fatally denuded the fortified line of defenders? More important, however, was the change in France's generals' outlook on the proper strategy to be employed. Until 1910 or so, the French plans envisioned a strategic defence, but "the prospect of English support in a war with Germany and of Italian neutrality," changed her perspective. (73)

The French General Staff's collective transformation from a defensive to a more offensive state of mind could be traced not only in military publications but evidenced itself openly in newspapers as well as in discussions at the cafés along the Seine. Yet "the real question for the French" was reviewed in debates between "the 'old school', which expected a German attack on the front Verdun-Toul, and the 'new school', which expected the Germans to stay on the defensive in Lorraine." (74) The appointment of Joffre as Chief of the French General Staff, replacing Michel in 1911, moved, as intended, the scales to the emphasis of the offense. Terence Zuber explains:

Joffre had moved the French leftmost army nearer to Hirson-Maubeuge. This army would march "under all circumstances" into Belgium. It could be supported by a second army of three corps located between Stenay and Montmedy. French military literature mentioned sending forces towards Namur to secure the French left flank and assist the Belgians and English, who would operate against the German right. However, the French mass of manoeuvre would still assemble on a line Epinal-Toul-Verdun, and the main French counterattack would come either from Verdun to the north of Metz or into Lorraine. (75)

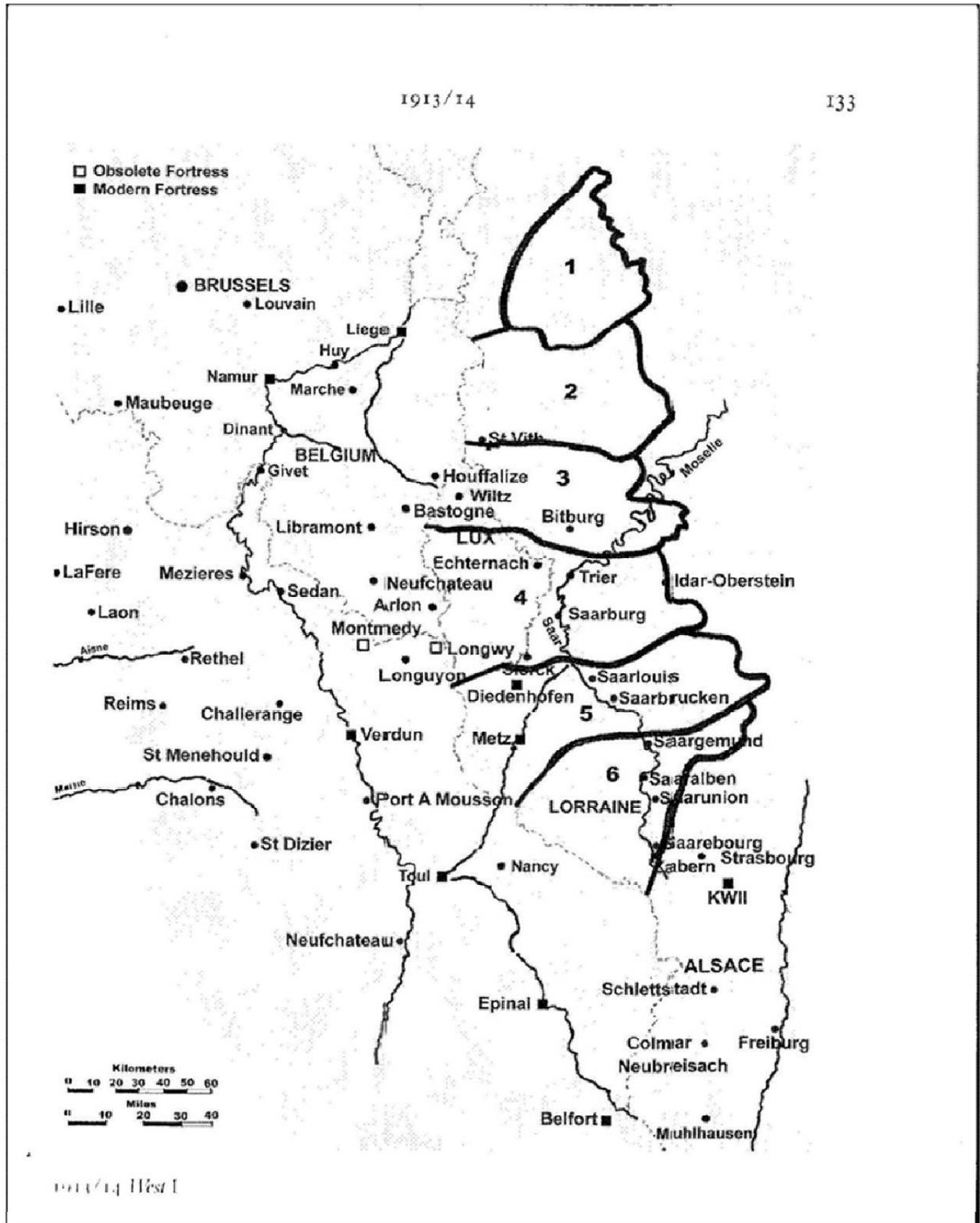
While the memorandum read the spirit of the French General Staff quite accurately, its deployment predictions were rather off the mark yet do not really need to be addressed here, for while they proved false they also proved of little relevance in the war itself.

What crystallized out between the meagre information, nay, speculation on French strategic intentions provided by the report and its discussion in the offices of the General Staff was that no side could expect quick victory: even if defeated either in Belgium or along the border of Alsace-Lorraine, the French had the option to fall back - to the Loire, if necessary - and trade space for time until Russian pressure in the east brought relief. If Germany lost Lorraine or Alsace or both, the Rhine provided a formidable second defence line. (76)

In 1913 Moltke jettisoned the obsolete plans for single-front wars in the east or west and concentrated on preparing a single AUFMARSCH I WEST AND OST ("Deployment I West and East"), which mirrored the diplomatic realities. The plan itself was little changed from the 1911/12 season, and provided for sixty-eight divisions on the western front, nine in East Prussia, and two, IX Reserve Corps, for coastal defence in northern Germany. What did change was that Schlieffen's "ersatz" units were resurrected - a six-division "Ersatz Army" was to be formed. (77)

MAP XXXIX: AUFMARSCH WEST I, 1913-14

(7TH ARMY IS ON THE RIGHT BANK OF THE RHINE AND THUS NOT VISIBLE ON THIS MAP)



Although the forces dispatched to the eastern theatre remained the same, in the spring of 1914 Intelligence Department I (Russia) produced two memoranda, on Russian training and her readiness for war. In the first respect, it was held that while Russian training, and hence the suspected efficiency of her forces, had improved, it remained far below German standards, but, unfortunately for the Central Powers, "bad as the Russians were, the Austrians were probably worse. Whatever masterpieces the Germans could contrive from their superior manoeuvrability and combat power, they would at best balance out Austrian defeats." (78)

As far as Russian preparations for war were concerned, the second dossier reported that the possible acceleration her mobilization could experience by the introduction of the "Period Preparatory to War", together with the effects of improved rail management, practice mobilizations and exercises, might shave off entire weeks from earlier projections. The conclusions of the intelligence department, warning "in ever more emphatic terms that the Russians were getting stronger and their mobilisation and deployment were getting faster," were confirmed in the event of 1914, when the Russian First Army showed up on the border of East Prussia on August 15, just a bit over two weeks after the Russian M-Day, July 26. (79) The idea that the Germans (i.e. Schlieffen) believed that Russian indolence and sloth would allow the western army to beat France in six weeks or so and then travel to East Prussia to take care of the Russians is a fairytale for armchair strategists, and therefore, not accidentally, an integral part of the "Schlieffen Plan" myth.

We now turn to the actual war plan implemented on August 2, 1914, from which only fragments have survived, but since these fragments evidence practically no changes from the 1913/14 Aufmarsch, we can put some trust in that August 1914 followed reasonably similar lines. The executor, however, was different, and Holger Herwig gives us an introduction to the "younger" Moltke.

Helmuth Johannes Ludwig von Moltke was all things to all people. To his friends, he was decent, honest, earnest, and cultured. To his detractors, he was dour, pessimistic, insecure, and an "occultist". For he had learned what one German prince called "wretched faith-healing"²³ from his wife, Eliza, and her spiritual mentor, the Austrian theosophist Rudolf Steiner. Friends and foes alike agreed that Moltke was a complex figure, and one without the sharp Napoleonic eye for the main prize (coup d'oeil) or the necessary ambition and drive (feu sacré).

Born on 25 May 1848, Moltke saw action during the Franco-Prussian War in the Vosges, at Sedan, and during the siege of Paris. He rose quickly in rank to become Wilhelm II's personal adjutant. He dabbled in music and painting. He was a tall, corpulent man. He aspired to command an army corps, but his famous name eventually placed him at the head of the General Staff.²⁴

He neither sought nor desired the position, fearing not only the Kaiser's well-known penchant for meddling in military affairs but also the "difficult inheritance" of becoming Schlieffen's successor. He was appointed to the post on January 1, 1906, just before turning fifty-eight. While senior army commanders were shocked by the appointment, Wilhelm II crowed that Moltke was just the right man because he, the Kaiser, did "not require a General Staff." (80)

Before he began to tinker with his own deployment schedules, he made a far-reaching adjustment to the concept he had inherited in the "Great Memorandum"; he decided that respecting the neutrality of the Netherlands would provide Germany with safe access to international trade - a "breathing pipe" - even if the Royal Navy successfully blockaded the German coast (which, in the event, she did), and this was of greater use than the few roads she provided to the Belgian frontier. Consequently, he nixed Schlieffen's idea to march through the Maastricht Appendix, the south-eastern tip of the country, but that in turn meant that now a good portion of the German right wing (in most scenarios 1st and 2nd Armies, up to half a million men, plus their trains, horses and supplies), had to be squeezed through a gap of only twelve miles width - the German-Belgian border between the Dutch border near Maastricht in the north, and the border to Luxembourg in the Ardennes Forest, to the south. Worse, in the midst of the narrow path lurked a formidable fortress - Liège.

²³ "Christian Science"

²⁴ In reference to his famous uncle, he was reported to have asked Wilhelm whether the Kaiser "expected to win the grand prize twice in the same lottery."

To tackle this problem, Moltke sent his aide Colonel Erich Ludendorff, Chief of the Mobilization and Deployment Section, to Liège in the guise of a tourist, to study the situation at hand and come back with ideas for a coup de main, a bold strike at the fort. Ludendorff did as told and came back with the required ideas, whose eventual outcome we will monitor below. It also helped that the new chief of the railway department, General Gröner, was able to shave off a day here and there by fine-tuning the schedules, and so the western Aufmarsch 1914/15 slowly took on the following shape, as delineated by Terence Zuber:

The Germans thought they would be opposed by a field force of sixty-three French, six British and six Belgian divisions - seventy-five in all. The French and Belgians could also count on the support of their elaborate systems of fortifications.

The Germans deployed seven armies (sixty-eight divisions) in the west.²⁵ IX RK (Reservekorps - reserve corps) with two divisions would watch the North Sea against a British landing. The Germans could calculate that the higher tactical quality of their troops would make up for their numerical inferiority. Nevertheless, the Germans could not count on an overall superiority in combat power.

In the east, the Germans would have nine divisions, the Austrians forty-nine - fifty-eight divisions in total. The Germans estimated that the Russians had fifty-nine active divisions, twelve light infantry brigades (the equivalent of six divisions) and thirty-five reserve divisions (not counting fifteen divisions in Siberia and Turkistan) - 100 divisions in total. The Austrians estimated that the Serbs had twelve divisions, for 112 divisions in total. The Russians would probably deploy two armies against East Prussia, each numerically stronger than the German army there. While the German troops in East Prussia might well be able to hold their own against twice as many Russian divisions, this would still leave forty-nine low quality Austrian divisions opposed to some ninety-four Russian and Serb divisions.

Germany's forces in East Prussia, as well as those of its Austro-Hungarian ally, would be massively outnumbered by the Russians. The Austrians would be constantly looking over their shoulders in anticipation of an Italian attack.²⁶ A crisis in the east was likely, and soon. It was therefore necessary for the Germans to inflict a defeat on the French serious enough to force them on the defensive and allow the transfer of forces to the east as soon as possible. Forcing the French completely out of the war would be a long process; there is no evidence that the Germans thought they could annihilate the French army in forty days, as proponents of the Schlieffen plan contend.

The concept of the German operation was for the main body to advance through Belgium and Luxembourg to France. The 5th Army would act as a pivot for the German movement by maintaining contact with Metz-Diedenhofen. The speed of the movement of the main body would be determined by the movement of the right flank. Rolling stock had been assembled behind the left, centre and right to permit the immediate rail movement of seven corps.²⁷ This was the entire concept as stated in the Aufmarschanweisungen.²⁸ In addition, each army received its own mission statement.

There was no attempt in the deployment instructions to prescribe the complete operation; neither did they say that the objective was the annihilation of the French army. The German war plan in August 1914 was not the Schlieffen plan.

The 7th Army, with 2 AK (Armeekorps - active corps) and 2 RK (Reservekorps - reserve corps), and the 6th Army (4AK, 1RK) in Alsace and Lorraine under the 6th Army commander Crown Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria, had a complex set of missions. The first was to hold Lorraine (and, if possible, Alsace too) to protect the

²⁵ A far cry from the ninety-six divisions Schlieffen had employed in the "Great Memorandum", and that, we recall, had been for a war against France alone.

²⁶ Italy did attack Austria on May 24, 1915.

²⁷ This was Gröner's contribution to the deployment plan: a stand-by ability to move one or several corps gave Germany unparalleled tactical flexibility.

²⁸ Deployment Instructions

German left flank. Metz was to be expanded into a fortified zone: seven Landwehr brigades reinforced with artillery would dig in along the Nied River (Niedstellung). If it appeared that the French were withdrawing forces from their right to reinforce their left, Rupprecht was to attack to fix them in place. How Rupprecht was to divine French strength and intentions with the necessary degree of accuracy was an interesting question.

There was also a third mission for the 6th Army - probably a follow-on from the other two - to attack west from Metz to break through the French fortress line. There was only one reason for such an operation: Moltke was trying to implement General von Beseler's 1900 plan for the German right wing to drive deep into France behind the French fortress line, which would be attacked front and rear and broken, linking up the German left and right wings and surrounding Verdun. Moltke had first broached the idea of an advance deep into France in the 1911 intelligence estimate, which had nothing to do with the Schlieffen plan.

The 5th Army (3AK, 2RK) was deployed on a narrow front and in depth behind Metz for a specific purpose: if the French attacked early and in strength into Lorraine, this formation would allow the 5th Army to swing through Metz to the south-east to counter-attack against the French left flank [of Second Army, deployed around Toul and Nancy, ¶]. Such a French attack was the theme of most of Schlieffen's west-front war games, as well as Moltke's two surviving war games. This would have changed the entire character of the campaign. The 4th Army (3AK, 2RK) would have had to cover the 5th Army rear and the operation would have looked exactly like one of the Generalstabsreisen West. Moltke clearly felt that there was a strong possibility that the French could launch their main attack into Lorraine.²⁹

If the French main attack did not come in Lorraine, then the 5th and 4th Armies would first move north-west, then west towards the Meuse [between Mézières and Verdun, ¶]. The 3rd Army (3AK, 1 RK) would advance straight west towards the Meuse.

Liège would be taken by a coup de main on the night of the fourth day of mobilisation. The 1st Army (4AK, 2 RK) would then cross the Meuse north of Liège, the 2nd Army south of it. If Liège was not silenced, the 1st Army (4AK, 2RK) would have to transit Dutch territory, an eventuality the Germans wanted to avoid. It was important for the 1st and 2nd Armies to reach the bottleneck at Brussels before the French.

The mission of the 1st Army on the right flank, commanded by Kluck, with Kuhl as his chief of staff, was not, as the Schlieffen plan would have it, to deliver the decisive attack but to march on Brussels, "to protect the right flank of the army (die rechte Flanke des Heeres zu decken)". The 1st Army's mission throughout the campaign, from the initial Aufmarschanweisung to the end of the battle of the Marne, was always principally to act as flank guard.

Moltke clearly intended the 2nd Army to conduct the main attack. The army was led by Germany's senior active general officer, Karl von Bülow.³⁰ Moltke would give Bülow operational control over the 1st Army on his right and the 3rd Army on his left. Rail assets were to be assembled behind the left, centre and right in order to be able to simultaneously transport seven corps.

As the elder Moltke had said, "no plan survives contact with the enemy". The Aufmarschanweisungen did not prescribe actions beyond the deployment and initial movements. The one exception was the instructions for the German 6th and 7th Armies in Lorraine. After the initial advance, German actions would have to consider French movements. (81)

²⁹ In the exegeses of the "Schlieffen School", 5th Army does nothing special, except to act as a pivot and perhaps attack the one or other lonely Frenchman. Why one eighth of the army (a quarter actually, if 4th Army is figured in) should be wasted thus is not explained. Yet, as war games had shown, a successful French attack in the Lorraine would render all theoretical progress in Belgium null and void, for the war would be lost in the south before it could be won in the northwest. Deploying 4th and 5th Army around Metz-Diedenhofen was a *CONDITIO SINE QUA NON* - Moltke's life insurance policy, should the French attack from Toul and Nancy eastward in force.

³⁰ The former German chancellor Bernhard von Bülow was his brother.

Hence the overall...

... German war plan in 1914 was relatively simple. It followed Schlieffen's counter-attack doctrine. In the west, the German army would deploy on a broad front to make maximum utilisation of the rail net and the available space for manoeuvre. It would then find the French main body, move against it, and defeat it as quickly as possible. The French army would withdraw to the next defensive position. The Germans would probably use this pause in the west to transfer up to seven corps to the east for a counter-attack there.

In the east, the German would be outnumbered 2:1, but would use their interior position to mass against one of the two attacking Russian armies. If necessary, the Germans would fall back to the Vistula fortifications. The Central Powers' Achilles heel was the Austrian army, which was weak and outnumbered 2:1.

The German advantage lay in its interior position and rail mobility - the ability to mass on one front, win, and then mass on the other. This would make optimal use of German tactical and operational superiority over all of its opponents. This mobility is known today as a "force multiplier" and was the sole means the Germans had of offsetting their numerical inferiority. Such a strategy would not produce strategic victory, but successive defeats of French and Russian armies would destroy their capacity for offensive action.

A German strategic offensive [as recommended by the "Schlieffen School", ¶] deep into the interior of either enemy territory negated the German advantages of interior position and rail mobility; indeed, the rail mobility advantage would pass over to Germany's opponent. (82)

Germany's situation resembled that of a boxer who faces two opponents at the same time - one, who is agile but weak, and another who is strong but slow.³¹ Only if the swift attack of the first opponent could be defeated, countered, and the adversary thus neutralized, would it become possible to subsequently, methodically, disarm the second, less nimble enemy. Much would, necessarily, depend on an accurate anticipation of the enemies' intentions through Clausewitz's "fog of war", and this is where we turn to investigate the French and Russian plans in the matter at hand.

Until the last decade of the nineteenth century, the French General Staff had been very considerate of the country's smaller population and lower birth rate compared to Germany, and had essentially embraced a cautious attitude - the shock of 1870 was by no means weathered. The standard deployment of the French forces until 1903 or so, Plan XIV, arranged four active and one reserve army in a formation resembling a rhombus or diamond, between the Upper Marne and the Franco-German border, roughly between St. Dizier, Toul/Nancy, Belfort, and Chaumont-en-Bassigny. It was a wary, all-purpose deployment, without remarkable defensive or offensive characteristics.

This changed somewhat in 1906 and 1907 with the successive introductions of Plans XV and XVbis, the latter of which created an active-duty Fifth Army that included the Colonial Corps and was moved to the left wing, between Mézières and Verdun. (83) The military law of 1905, which set the initial term of service at two years but allowed to

³¹ As we have seen in the preceding chapter, a prevalent allegation and core part of the "Schlieffen Plan" myth was (a theory Albertini subscribed to, unaware of the provisions of the Franco-Russian Military Convention) that, other than, say, in France or Russia, the German war plan did not allow to mobilize and then do nothing - the proclamation of mobilization was at the same time the tocsin to open hostilities, and because of this design feature, the guilt for the war rests on Germany - the Allies simply had to defend themselves against the German aggression. While we know today that this theory holds no water, the keen eye of John Keegan reminds us that the tactical situation of Germany was also different than that of France or Russia; unlike "'sea-girt' Britain, Germany's borders were open to invasion at any time and nothing but the strength of her arms guaranteed her security. But that threw her ... into a harsh ... predicament. It resembled that which would bind the nuclear superpowers sixty years later. 'Use them or lose them,' became the imperative of missile strategy; for missiles not used in a crisis might become the debris of an opponent's first strike: an army which did not strike as soon as time permitted might be destroyed in mid-mobilisation; even if it completed its mobilisation but then failed to attack, it would have shown its hand and lost the advantage the war plan had been so painstakingly devised to deliver.

That danger most acutely threatened Germany; if it failed to move to the offensive as soon as the troop trains disgorged their passengers at the unloading points, the unequal division of force between east and west would be pointlessly revealed and so, worse, would be the concentration against Belgium.

The Schlieffen Plan would have been betrayed, France given the time to recoil from the peril of Plan XVII, Russia the incentive to invade East Prussia in overwhelming force, and Austria the unsought and probably undischageable burden of guaranteeing the security of Central Europe." (84)

conscript nearly ninety per cent of the male population (versus fifty-five per cent in Germany), along with the prospect of England joining, in addition to Russia, the anti-German crusade, transformed the general staff's outlook and led to the promotion of Colonel Grandmaison's new strategy of the *OFFENSIVE À OULTRANCE*, which emphasized methodical preparation and the importance of artillery support. It revived the spirit of the offensive and "led to the adoption of a much more confident Plan XVI in 1909." (85) The number of active corps was raised to twenty-two, each with a stand-by reserve brigade, and twelve reserve divisions were added. The deployment itself did not change much: the forces spread out along the Meuse from Sedan southward, following the fortress line to Belfort, with the reserves concentrated along the Upper Aisne in the north and around St. Dizier and Chalons, i.e., west of Verdun, in the centre.

As a result of continuing staff conferences, Article III of the Franco-Russian Military Convention was amended in 1911 to direct that, in the case of war against Germany, Russia would launch an assault into East Prussia with no less than 800,000 troops by M-Day plus sixteen, of which fine-combing the schedules shaved off another day in 1913, when the attack was slated to begin at M+15. In September 1911, the new French Chief of Staff, Joseph Joffre, effected significant changes in the order of battle. Being an adherent of the offensive, Joffre proceeded to strengthen the left wing facing Luxembourg and Belgium - the Fifth Army found itself moved north to Sedan, and the Sixth, the new reserve army, turned up at Rheims. (86)

After Joffre had paid a visit to St. Petersburg in 1913, he began to work on a fundamentally new deployment scheme for the German War, Plan XVII. Just as Moltke's post-1911 deployments, Plan XVII never contemplated an isolated, one-front war, but envisioned a two-front war from the get-go - France and Russia, plus, hopefully, Belgium and Britain, versus Germany and Austria-Hungary (again, Luigi Albertini was not aware of the true nature of Plan XVII and hence did not take it into consideration when discussing the "war guilt" issue).

The main idea of Plan XVII was indeed to attack into Lorraine at both sides of Metz. While "Joffre claimed that he did not have a preconceived scheme of manoeuvre," Zuber remarks, "... the concept of the operation was purely offensive." The plan provided that "in all cases, the intent of the commanding general [i.e., Joffre] is, once the armies are deployed, to attack the German army." (87) The right wing was to strike at Alsace between the Vogesen (Vosges) Mountains and Toul, while the left attacked north of a line Verdun-Metz. (88)³² France would deploy five active armies plus Sordet's Cavalry Corps: First Army, with five corps at Epinal, on the north-western side of the Vogesen, was tasked to attack into Alsace, in the direction of Saarburg and Donon; Second Army, with five corps around Toul and Nancy, was to strike toward Saarbrücken, i.e., east of Metz; Third Army, three corps strong, was deployed between St. Mihiel and Verdun in a sort of "middle" position between the left and right wings, poised to attack west of Metz and to begin the subsequent investment of this German stronghold, while Fifth Army, forming the left wing with five corps between Mézières and Sedan, had the task of striking either eastward upon Diedenhofen, i.e., north of Metz, or north-eastward towards Neufchâteau in Belgium. The Fourth Army, with three corps, was the strategic reserve and deployed behind, i.e., west of Third Army around Revigny and St. Meneshould, and could attack either south of Metz, left of Second Army, or north of it, then on the left of Third Army. (89)

There was, apparently, a "variant" of Plan XVII, in which the Fourth Army was to move between Third and Fifth Armies, between Verdun and Sedan, thereby forming an unbroken French line of five armies between Belfort and Hirson, where Fifth Army's leftmost units would now be located. It was this version that was enacted in 1914, and Terence Zuber explains its under-appreciated consequences:

At 1400 on 2 August 1914 the French government gave Joffre "complete freedom of movement" and Joffre implemented the "variant" at 1930 the same day, which was the first day of mobilisation for both the French and German armies. The justification for doing so was that the Germans had entered Luxembourg and German violation of Belgium seemed "more and more likely".

The Germans did not enter Belgium until the late afternoon of 3 August. On 2 August the Germans had just begun to mobilise, and aside from security forces no German troops would move toward the border until

³² VIIth Corps, on First Army's right flank at Belfort, had the special mission to attack Mühlhausen (Mulhouse) on the fourth day of mobilization and "liberate" it, so that the war started with a proper propaganda coup.

around August 6. The French could therefore have had no indicators whatsoever of the German deployment. Neither would the French begin their deployment for several days. Therefore, the "Plan XVII" deployment as depicted in the West Point Atlas map is wrong. The real French deployment provided for five armies on line, with three of those armies, the French mass of manoeuvre, to the north of Verdun.

Given a deployment that placed three of the five French armies on the Belgian border,³³ a war plan which called for an immediate French attack and an alliance that specified an offensive against Germany by the fifteenth day of mobilisation, the French were going to enter Belgium, irrespective of whether the Germans did or not. It will surely be argued that the French political leadership would never have allowed Joffre to invade Belgium. In fact, the French government approved of the war plan and was fully aware of its significance. (90)

In retrospect, what was perhaps of greater importance in the opening days of the war than the initial direction of an attack was that Germans and French had arrived at very different philosophies regarding their reserves. As Hew Strachan pointed out, the "failure to appreciate the extent to which German planning rested on the use of reserves was the single biggest mistake in French calculations. Because the French had a low opinion of the quality of their own reserves, they were reluctant to accept that the Germans could form a better estimate of theirs." (91)

To a degree, the French inclination to discount their reserves lay in the fact that their lower population forced them to subscript nearly everyone while the Germans could afford to be picky, and the quality of the French reserves thus tended to be naturally lower than of their German counterparts. As Hew Strachan relates, budgetary constraints as well as internal politics played other, significant roles.

The 1905 law, which had established two-year service in France, had reduced the size of the active army but had created a larger French reserve. However, the training areas and the money required to make the reservists efficient were not forthcoming. In 1907 36 per cent of reservists, excluding those excused because of the needs of agriculture, had failed to report for service.

Even more serious was the lack of officers. The impact of the Dreyfus affair, the efforts by Andre positively to republicanise the officer corps through the management of promotions, and the use of the army to suppress domestic disorder had all contributed to declining morale. Applications to the military academy at St Cyr had fallen from 1,895 in 1900 to 871 in 1911, and re-enlistment of NCO's from 72,000 to 41,000. (92)

The situation was somewhat remedied by the three-year service law of 1913, which set the bars at three years primary active service, eleven in the reserve, and fourteen in the "Territorials", the equivalent of the German Landsturm. (93) Since no consensus could be reached between intelligence and operations departments regarding the German intentions, Joffre designed Plan XVII for increased "flexibility and manoeuvrability" while retaining its offensive spirit. (94) Conspicuously absent were references to the BEF, which - most unofficially - was to deploy left, i.e. northwest of Fifth Army, along the Franco-Belgian border, around Maubeuge, Le Cateau and Cambrai. The Morocco crisis, which happened later in 1905, aided the aforementioned revival of French patriotism, or, perhaps, chauvinism, so that, not unlike a delayed-action fuse, the augmentation of the offensive spirit after 1911 should not have come entirely as a surprise. It was testified to in Joffre's General Instruction # 1 of August 8, 1914, which stated that "the offensive will begin as soon as the army has assembled." (95)

It was very much the same in Russia. While the catastrophic performance of the Tsar's forces against Japan at least argued in support of a complete reorganization, and monies began to flow more freely, the social structure of Imperial Russia tended to hamper many efforts to strengthen the army's efficiency, which laboured not the least of a disastrous rate of illiteracy. This in turn had a detrimental influence on the relative complexity of tasks the infantry could

³³The approximate deployment areas of the opponents can be divined from WEST POINT MAP 5, although they are, of course, not where the troops actually were on August 2, 1914; it shows their position after mobilization and deployment, i.e. fifteen to eighteen days later.

be trained in, and in fact, as far as German intelligence established, the Russians "seemed to have introduced a standard infantry attack procedure (Normalangriff) which did not give any consideration to the terrain and situation," while it...

"... prescribed early deployment from column into a line and what the Germans felt was excessive dispersion, and displayed too much concern with utilising cover, with the advance by small groups and individuals being too slow and inadequately supported by fire.

Cavalry battlefield reconnaissance was insufficient. Russian artillery took up covered positions at long ranges and stayed there for the course of the engagement. Because of the poor horse teams and heavy guns, the Russian artillery was not very mobile in any case. In each particular, the Russian stereotyped offensive tactical doctrine was the antithesis of flexible German doctrine."(96)

Yet, of course, quantity has a quality of its own, and from 1909 on the Russians began to introduce sweeping reform. The defeat of 1905, as Norman Stone points out, "though humiliating, was salutary: it showed even the most convinced conservatives that the system must be changed." (97) This change was made financially more bearable by the country's enjoying "a period of unexampled economic growth," which almost doubled the government's revenues between 1900 and 1914. (98) On the budgetary side, that is, as far as armaments, salaries and pensions were concerned, the country hence was able to rebound more quickly from the military and economic nadir of 1906 than pessimists had feared. Norman Stone summarizes the numbers:

Russia's armed forces profited from this [increase in state spending], since a regular third of government revenue was devoted to defence; and by 1914, her recovery from the disaster of 1906 was, as the German General Staff noted with alarm, complete.

The army contained 114 infantry divisions to Germany's 96,³⁴ and contained 6,720 mobile guns to the Germans' 6,004. Strategic railway-building was such that by 1917 Russia would be able to send nearly a hundred divisions for war with the Central Powers within eighteen days of mobilisation - only three days behind Germany in overall readiness.

Similarly, Russia became, once more, an important naval Power. In 1907-8 she had spent £ 9,000,000 on her navy, to the Germans' £ 14,000,000; but by 1913-14 she was spending £ 24,000,000 to the Germans' £ 23,000,000. Plans were going ahead for seizure by naval coup of Constantinople and the Straits, and a naval convention with Great Britain allowed for co-operation in the Baltic against Germany. It was small wonder that Germans took fright in 1914 at the size of Russian power to come. (99)

The all-pervasive strategic feature of western Russia was the Polish Salient, upon which all war plans were hinged; it "conferred on Russia the option of attacking either Germany or Austria-Hungary: it outflanked Austria-Hungary in Galicia and Germany in East Prussia." (100) Yet likewise the salient lay exposed to being enveloped by the Central Powers: a German attack from East Prussia southeast, and a simultaneous assault by Austria-Hungary from Galicia in north-eastern direction would sever the whole of Poland and the western parts of Belorussia from the Tsar's empire.

To secure the possession of these provinces, a system of fortresses had been created in the second half of the nineteenth century "to offset the likelihood of speedier German mobilisation," and "the war-plan developed around these fortresses, the one conditioning the other." (101) Upon the invention of the delayed-action fuse it had dawned on some generals that the age of fortresses might be over, but Russia, in which the artillery was of paramount importance - not the least because little faith was extended to the infantry - clung to these fortifications to a degree that not only assigned them a strategic importance in the war plans they could not fulfill, but threatened to bankrupt her military finances. The new Russian Minister of War, V.A. Sukhomlinov, appointed in 1909, was no friend of these fortresses³⁵ and suggested to scrap them.

³⁴ In August 1914 Germany actually deployed seventy-seven divisions, sixty-eight in the west and nine in the east. Stone's number seems to include "ghost divisions" and may have been drawn from the Great Memorandum.

³⁵ "The forts were usually of brick, not concrete," as Norman Stone remarks. (102)

But Sukhomlinov's opponents were aghast, and said that the fortresses should be built up, not razed. They presented huge bills for this - in 1908, 800 million roubles, or roughly what the Black Sea Fleet was to get six years later; and the artillerists indulged their mania for fortress artillery at the expense of heavy field artillery, since they demanded nearly 5,000 modern heavy guns for the fortresses, while leaving the field army with less than 500. Sukhomlinov's proposal to raze fortresses encountered heavy, and in the end successful, resistance. ...

The retention of these fortresses gave a decisive, and fatal, twist to the development of Russian artillery. Its resources were swallowed, partly by the navy, but particularly by the demands of fortresses, in which investment was a largely self-generating affair since, once the first step had been taken, the rest had to follow.

Russia's lack of heavy field guns was later read as a sign of economic backwardness. In reality, it only showed that Russia lacked artillerists prepared to cater for infantry needs, and a General Staff capable of dictating to technique-proud specialists. Slavering at the mouth, the Artillery Department chased after larger and larger calibres for their fortresses, and subjected all the rest to this insatiable "manie du grandiose".

In the plans for extra expenditure in 1908, they were prepared to spend over 700 million roubles on fortress artillery, 112 million on the rest. In 1910, they planned for 620 extra fortress-guns, 240 heavy field guns; with the "Great Programme" of 1913-14, fortresses were supposed to have a further 516 heavy howitzers, while the heavy field artillery took only 228 more guns. In 1914, the fortresses contained 2,813 modern guns, and were due to have, by 1920, 4,998 to supplement the 3,000 older ones; but the field army had only 240 heavy howitzers and cannon.

When the time came for these fortress-guns to prove their worth - in the summer of 1915 - Sukhomlinov, who had been laughed at for his ignorance, was proved overwhelmingly right. Warsaw, Novogeorgievsk, Kovno, Grodno, Osowiec, Brest-Litovsk collapsed in a matter of days, or were voluntarily evacuated. In most of them, the Germans captured thousands of guns and millions of shell. On the other hand, the field army, suffering from lack of mobile heavy field artillery, could only retreat. (103)

Despite the promises the Tsar's generals had extended to their French counterparts since the conclusion of the military alliance in 1894, Russian planning remained essentially defensive and chiefly directed against Austria as the presumptive enemy. Until early 1910, variations of Plan 18 called for the deployment of two armies against Germany but four against Austria, while a reserve army would be formed in Warsaw, which then could be employed as necessary. In 1910 a new schedule, Plan 19, was to come into effect but ran into opposition from the get-go.

Its original orientation reversed the Schwerpunkt: fifty-three divisions would be deployed against Germany but only nineteen versus Austria-Hungary. (104) What alarmed the French, however, was that Plan 19 moved mobilization and concentration further to the east,³⁶ a change which, they feared, was to delay unacceptably the onset of the Russian offensive against Germany." At the 1911 staff talks," Hew Strachan relates, "the French, already anxious because of what they knew of plan 19, told I.G. Zhilinsky, the newly appointed chief of the general staff, that they would attack the Germans by the twelfth day of mobilization.³⁷ They demanded that the Russians do the same by the fifteenth," and when Russia bowed to the pressure, it was "as much to suit its own needs as to assuage French anxieties." (105)

Yet the more the fundamentals of Plan 19 were discussed in the Russian generalship, the more critique emerged. It was believed that military success against Austria was much easier forthcoming than against Germany, in particular because the French failed to appreciate, as it was complained, the difficulty of invading East Prussia given the lay of the

³⁶ A concentration further back in the east simplified the transport of men to where their units were: in 1909 87% of Russian soldiers had to travel out-of-district to join up, while, after 1910, 97 % could enter the troops in their home district. (106)

³⁷ This was, of course, not exactly the truth.

land, bisected by the Masurian lakes. A compromise was sought, and eventually found in the 1912 revision of Plan 19, which created two options, A and G.

Case A like Austria provided for the deployment of two armies, First and Second, to East Prussia while it sent three armies, Third, Fourth and Fifth, to Galicia, to face Austria-Hungary, and held Sixth and Seventh Armies in abeyance as reserves. Variant G like Germany moved Fourth Army to the north to aid in attacking East Prussia, while a defensive stand would be maintained in Galicia. The default was Case A - unless it was changed, until the seventh day of mobilization, to G. (107) Yet unity of opinion in the Russian general staff remained elusive: the commanders of the Western military districts warned that the relocation of Schedule 19's initial concentration areas far to the east implied a tactical if, hopefully, temporary cessation of most of western Poland and opinions clashed as to whether it would not be much better to begin with a great concentration at Warsaw and strike directly at the Vistula in the direction of Berlin.

Then the Balkan Wars brought everything so far agreed on back into flux. The savageness of the Balkan mixture of peoples and religions had become a mainstay of diplomatic ennui and popular drama - even Adolf Hitler's most cherished novelist, Karl May, had dedicated several volumes to the adventures of Kara Ben Nemsi in the lands of the Skipetars. Murder and mayhem seemed the pastimes of choice and tradition, and, as if to make up for lost time, the violent minorities of the subcontinent seemed to engage in a condition closely resembling civil war at all times when no overlord was present or able to suppress the bloody business. Dame Rebecca West observed, in *BLACK LAMB AND GREY FALCON*:

"Were I to ... take a peasant by the shoulders and whisper to him, 'In your lifetime, have you known peace?', wait for his answer, shake his shoulders and transform him into his father, and ask him the same question, and transform him in turn into his father, I would never hear the word 'yes' if I carried my questioning of the dead back for a thousand years." (108)

Both Austria-Hungary and Russia regarded the Balkans as an area of expansion - if not necessarily in territorial terms then for economic and political purposes, except that, of course, St. Petersburg dreamt of the conquest of "Tsargrad", Constantinople, and control over the Straits. But the smaller states and almost-states of the region, many of them having escaped Turkish suzerainty only recently, also longed to profit from the continuing erosion of the Ottoman Empire. For Russia, the removal of Germany as the sole power able to block her designs on Constantinople - we remember the Liman von Sanders affair - would be the true boon of the war to come, and thus many in the war ministry clamoured to make Germany the target of priority.

The July crisis of 1914 was characterized by an initial shock, an extended lull, and, after the 23rd, incessant urgency: the perceived necessity of speed and prioritization, in communion with the snowball character of mobilization, furthered disunion between the civil and military parts of the European governments: diplomats who did try to deflect the self-fulfilling character of the impending catastrophe - and there were a few in each country - had no systems of crisis-management and were easily outfoxed by the generals' dire warnings of the horrible consequences that were to arise should the attack on the enemy not be ordered at once. Even more paralysed, indeed, rendered impotent found themselves the crowned heads of state, the Saxe-Coburg among them,³⁸ as Niall Ferguson observed:

What suddenly became clear in the crisis of that summer was that the Kaiser, like his Saxe-Coburg relatives, lacked the power to override the military and political professionals if they were resolved to go to war. This was the reality of constitutional monarchy: that dynastic family ties could no longer transcend the imperatives of a war between whole people in arms.

Still, no one could be entirely sure of that until the monarchs had been overruled. Until they were, there remained the possibility of some kind of royal compromise. The British ambassador in St. Petersburg wanted

³⁸ Some royals evidenced a surprising ability to adaptation: the British royal family, acutely aware of their being a German, i.e., "Hunnish", family on both sides (not only had Queen Victoria's husband been a Saxe-Coburg, but she herself was a Hanoverian), hurried to replace Teutonic toponyms like Saxony, Coburg or Hanover with "Windsor", the name of an estate they owned - no such family name had existed before the war. Likewise, the Battenbergs, line of the future Prince Philip, Royal Consort to Queen Elizabeth II, became, by reverse translation, the "MOUNTBATTENS": the German "Berg" meaning "mountain" provided the "mount", to which the south-German toponym Batten was appended, so that the Teutonic BATTENBERG became a very British "MOUNTBATTEN".

to know if it would "be possible in the last resort for Emperor Nicholas to address [a] personal appeal to the Emperor of Austria to restrict Austria's action within limits which Russia could accept."

The Germans sent the Kaiser's brother, Prince Henry, to London, to see if George V could be won over to neutrality. The monarchs themselves acted as if it really was in their power to stop the war. "I spoke to Nicky," the Tsar's sister Olga recalled, "and he replied that Willy was a bore and an exhibitionist, but he would never start a war." "Willy" and "Nicky" each endeavoured to localise the war, the Kaiser by urging the Austrians to "halt in Belgrade", the Tsar by delaying Russian mobilization. ...

"Both you and I did everything in our power to prevent war," George V wrote to Nicholas II on July 31st, "but alas we were frustrated and this terrible war which we all have dreaded for so many years has come upon us." (109)

Uncannily, the war turned out to be exactly what German war planning had anticipated since the conclusion of the Franco-Russian alliance in 1894 - a two-front war against a superior enemy coalition. Quite contrary to reality, pre-war propaganda in the major Entente newspapers had been successful in painting a picture of the German army as a menacing "war machine of unconquerable strength," although, as Norman Stone remarked, it had "fewer battalions than the French army (1,191 to 1,210), and in 1914 fewer guns than the Russian army (6,004 to 6,700), to the 1,876 battalions of which it was also, of course, inferior." (110) These figures, of course, do not count in British and Belgian troops nor the inexhaustible supply of Russian manpower.

Yet the Allied general staffs were "fully aware of the advantages that the German interior position and rail mobility afforded. By seizing the initiative, attacking simultaneously and as soon as possible, they intended to make it impossible for the Germans to utilize either advantage." (111)

The invocation of the Russian "Period Preparatory to War" at 03:26 in the morning of July 26 had been verified by the German military intelligence service on the afternoon of the same day, (112) and the alert of the four military districts vis-avis Austrian Galicia reported on the 28th. That would give Russia's mobilization just under twenty days until August 14, the day on which simultaneous attacks on Germany were scheduled to begin. The French more or less expected that Russian deployment and concentration was to hit snags here and there, but since their own mobilization had not been ordered before 3:30 pm on August 1,³⁹ it was suddenly questionable whether their own attack of First and Second Armies into Lorraine could be launched on time.

In the event, they were, and the opening round thus underway. War it was - the hands dealt favoured the Entente, and the peoples of Europe stood ready to demolish the proud tower of reason, liberty and civilization they had built during the last century.

³⁹ There has been much confusion regarding the sequence of official declarations on the afternoon of August 1. French mobilization was ordered at 3:30 p.m. Paris time, i.e. 4:30 pm Berlin time, thirty minutes before Berlin declared mobilization and war on Russia, which in turn was reported in Paris not before 7 pm local time.

RAPTURE

*"If we are engaged in war,
we shall suffer but little more
than we shall suffer
even if we stand aside."*

Sir Edward Grey,

In the House of Commons, August 1914

All delays are dangerous in war.

John Dryden "Tyrannic Love", Act 1, Sc. 1

One of the enduring legends of the Great War is that its outbreak was hailed, on either side, by a wave of popular support. This perception is largely a result of propaganda - contrived chiefly *a posteriori* - by the rosy memory of those who had survived what they saw as a well-earned victory over the German menace, and others who suggested that so great a patriotic endeavour could only be lost to treason.

It is true that some protagonists of these days greeted the dawn of war with enthusiasm. In London, Winston Churchill wrote his wife - "My darling One & beautiful" - on July 28 that while "everything tends towards catastrophe, & collapse," he was "interested, geared-up & happy". (1) In Munich, a protagonist of temporarily lesser prominence, the unemployed freelance painter Adolf Hitler, agreed wholeheartedly. He had learned of the German declaration of war on Russia on the evening of August 1, and on the next day, a Sunday, walked the two miles from his room at Schleissheimer Strasse 34 to the Odeonsplatz Square, where, in front of the Feldherrnhalle, the Hall of Generals, a crowd of pro-war enthusiasts had congregated. Adolf's mood was jubilant.

"Even today," he wrote in MEIN KAMPF (1924), "I am not ashamed to say that, overcome with rapturous enthusiasm, I fell to my knees and thanked Heaven from an overflowing heart for granting me the good fortune of being allowed to live at this time." (2)

A photograph - subsequently acquiring fame - taken by Heinrich Hoffmann, who was soon to become Hitler's court photographer, shows twenty-five year old Adolf Hitler in front of the square's fountain, in the eighth row or so of the assembly, ecstatically applauding patriotic speeches delivered by ad-hoc orators from the steps of the great hall. How he successfully exploited in his later days this fortunate accident is a good early example of Hitler's knack for framing and arranging realities. Thomas Weber relates the story behind the legendary photograph:

It is true that in the days prior to the outbreak of war, brass bands had played patriotic songs in the streets and cafés of Munich. Students and a rowdy crowd had smashed up a cafe that was perceived as insufficiently patriotic. Yet it is difficult to ascertain the degree to which these cases of patriotic outbursts were representative of the general population, as the loudest and most visible responses to the outbreak of war do not necessarily equate to the most widespread responses to war.

In fact, only a minority of Germans were initially genuinely enthusiastic about the war. Anxiety, fear, and grief were the initial responses. A young Heinrich Himmler, who experienced the outbreak of the First World War in Landshut in Lower Bavaria, complained on 27 August of the lack of popular enthusiasm for the war in Lower Bavaria. He noted with disdain in his diary that Landshut had been full of sobbing and weeping people.

There is, in fact, a vast discrepancy between immediate responses to the war as the one described by Himmler and accounts that were published later on in an attempt to give the war meaning retrospectively. This is why we need to treat post-war recollections of August 1914 with a huge grain of salt. The same is true of the photograph of Hitler amidst crowds in Odeonsplatz from 2 August.

The photograph, in actuality, does not in any way support Hitler's claim that he was representative of the population of Munich, or of the would-be members of the List Regiment, or of the German population at large. The photo tells us more about why its photographer, Heinrich Hoffmann, would later become Hitler's personal photographer¹ than anything about the mindset of the German people at the outbreak of war. During the Third Reich, it would be his masterful photographs and Leni Riefenstahl's magnificent propaganda movies that would create the public image of Hitler and of a young, energetic, and forward-looking Germany.

On 2 August, only a tiny fraction of Munich's near 600,000 residents attended the patriotic assembly Hoffmann depicted. On Hoffmann's photo, the entire square appears filled with cheering people. However, a film clip that has survived of the scene and that, unlike Hoffmann's photo, did not zoom in onto the crowd immediately in front of the Feldherrnhalle gives us a very different impression.

Parts of the square are not filled with people. There is even enough space for a tram to move at normal speed across the square. When the film camera started filming the crowd, we see restless people. Only when they become aware that the camera is filming do they start to cheer and to raise their hats. At that very moment, Heinrich Hoffmann, standing close to the camera crew, took his photo. And thus the myth of central Munich overflowing with cheering and warmongering crowds was born.

There is even some indication that Hoffmann might have "doctored" his photograph to place Hitler in a more prominent position, for in the film clip Hitler stands in a less central position than in the photo. And where there are crowds of people in front of Theatiner Church in the background of the photo, there are far fewer people at the same spot in the film clip. (3)

Just as the photograph aided subsequent Nazi propaganda, Hitler was busy creating his own legend in MEIN KAMPF. Nobody then knew about the embarrassing affair with the Austrian consulate and military commission that had taken place earlier in the year, and we shall now investigate how it happened that Hitler, whose intense dislike of the Austrian army we have encountered above, made it, as a foreigner, into the ranks of the Royal Bavarian Army. In MEIN KAMPF, he wrote:

"I presented myself on August 4, 1914, through an immediate petition to His Majesty the King of Bavaria, for consideration and voluntary entry into the 1st Bavarian Infantry Regiment, thus to join the Bavarian, i.e. German army. The petition was granted the next day, August 5, and a few days later I was transferred to the 2nd Regiment. I then joined, on August 16, the 16th Bavarian Reserve Infantry Regiment, which was in completion at that time." (4)

Reality was more prosaic. Not only has no trace of Hitler's petition to King Ludwig III or its sanction ever materialized, Hitler's army rolls do not mention anything taking place before August 16, 1914. They report:

KrStR.Nr. 166/148:

"Am 16.8.1914 eingetreten als Kriegsfreiwilliger b. R.D.VI, 2.I.R. u. a. 1.9.14 anher versetzt." (5)

¹ In the autumn of 1929, Hoffmann employed a seventeen year old apprentice in his photo shop at Schellingstraße 50 - Eva Braun. (6)

[Roll # 166/148:] ['Entered on August 16, 1914, as war volunteer at Recruiting Depot VI, 2nd Infantry Regiment and transferred here September 1, 1914'] [Recorded by the Replacement Battalion of the 2nd Infantry Regiment]

KrStR.Nr. 1062:

"16.8.14 beim Ers. Batl. 2 Inf. Reg. Dep. VI eingetreten. 1.9.14 z. 1.Komp. Res. Inf. Reg. Nr. 16 vers." (7)

[Roll II 1062:] ['16.8.14 entered Replacement Battalion, 2nd Infantry Regiment (Recruiting) Depot VI. 1.9.14 transferred to 1st Company, Reserve Infantry Regiment 16'] [Recorded by Reserve Infantry Regiment 16]

Hitler's claims of petitioning the King and immediately being awarded a place in the prestigious 1st, the King's Own Regiment, are hereby revealed as bogus - his military career began on Sunday, August 16, when he reported to the School on Elisabeth Square, which was used, as many schools were, as temporary barracks. The first two weeks he spent learning basic infantry skills at the exercise areas Oberwiesenfeld and Freimann. It was an arduous business for the not very athletic Hitler, and Frau Popp remembered that "he frequently came by, happy to rest from the exertions of the drill." (8) On September 1, 1914, he was transferred as Private # 148 to 1st Company, Bavarian Reserve Infantry Regiment 16, called, after its commander Colonel Julius von List, the "List Regiment".

The question remains how it came that he - being a foreigner - was accepted in the first place. Only the War Ministry, not some company or regimental officer, had the legal authority, under certain conditions, to accept foreign volunteers. During the Beer Hall Putsch Trial of 1924, the Bavarian Ministry of the Interior directed an inquiry at the War Ministry regarding the circumstances of Hitler's enlistment. Yet it would seem that the venerable archivists were unable to find a satisfactory explanation, for their answer was of highly speculative nature:

"At the breakout of war, Hitler lived at Schleissheimerstraße 34 in Munich. Apparently he went, in August 1914, to the closest troop's office, which was that of the 2nd Infantry Regiment and offered himself there. ... In the general war fever, he has probably acted on an instinct by applying at the nearest office. The more so as Germany, of course, had according to her treaty obligations announced her support for Austria. ...

It cannot surprise anyone that an enthusiastic young man forgets the borders of the Inn and Salzach [which form the Bavarian-Austrian frontier] and only joins the forces to help in the common defence of the endangered homeland. ... It is quite possible that Hitler, as many others did, presented himself in the earliest days of mobilization. Since he could not be processed right away, he was probably told to wait and come back later - as so many others." (9)

It would seem that no one checked Hitler's nationality: not a single document in the very extensive and thorough files of the Bavarian War Ministry mentions the fact of Hitler's Austrian citizenship. That the creation of the reserve regiments - - incongruous mixtures of young volunteers and Landsturm seniors - occurred under somewhat haphazard circumstances had its main reason in the horrendous losses that were incurred from the very beginning of this first mechanized European war. By mid-August, OHL ["Oberste Heeresleitung", Army High Command] demanded the immediate creation of one complete ersatz army of four corps respectively eight divisions, for the normal reservists had already been called up at mobilization. Bavaria had to supply one division of this new army, the 6th Bavarian Reserve Division, which was composed of the 12th and 14th Reserve Infantry Brigades. The 12th Reserve Brigade itself, commanded by Major General Kiefhaber, was formed by Reserve Infantry Regiment 16 (München, Colonel List) and 17 (Augsburg, Colonel Grossmann). About the former, Anton Joachimsthaler reports:

The mustering of Reserve Infantry Regiment 16 ["RIR 16", ¶] was finished by September 1, 1914; it was composed of three battalions, each one about 1,000 men strong, and each battalion was divided into four companies (thus 1st to 12th Company). The RIR 16, which had been composed from the Recruiting Depots of the 1st and 2nd Infantry Regiments, was quite a chequered collection; mostly volunteers and persons without prior service experience, a mixture of the young and the elderly. The majority of RIR 16's soldiers were students, artists, engineers and artisans from Munich and many rural men from Upper and Lower Bavaria. ...

The volunteers which had been collected in the various Recruitment Depots (I-VIII), among them Hitler, had all been transferred to the new RIR 16 on September 1, 1914. Hitler ended up in 1st Company, I. Battalion (under Battalion Commander Major of the Reserve Count Zech auf Neuhofen and Company Commander of 1st Company, Captain Pflaumer).

It was only with the greatest of labour that weapons, uniforms and other necessary equipment could be provided. Supplies of the Pickel helmets, for example, were insufficiently low, and the regiment was equipped with the same black caps worn by the Landsturm, draped over with green cloth. Yet this came at the expense of a fatal misunderstanding at the front, where Bavarian volunteers were mistaken for Englishmen [some of whom wore similar green caps, ¶], and hundreds of RIR 16's men were killed by friendly fire. (10)

Because OHL expected to use the 6th Bavarian Reserve Division at the Franco-Belgian border by the end of October, less than two months remained for the regiment's initial training and subsequent transport. The first five weeks of their military life Hitler and his new comrades spent in Munich's boot camps, being taught essential skills like digging holes while being yelled at by sergeants. Since RIR 16 was not composed of normal reservists, who could be trusted to remember much of their former service after a bit of a refresher, instruction was passed out rather summarily and could in no way prepare the men for the reality of the trenches.

Adolf Hitler - and subsequent Nazi propaganda, creating another myth of the Great War - asserted post-1918 that the List Regiment was a volunteer unit, which was, at its best, an intentional misrepresentation of the truth. It is correct that there were some volunteers, like Hitler, but overall about eighty-five per cent or so of the men were "not volunteers at all," but "had been members of the Ersatzreserve or supplementary reserve. ... Recruits assigned to the supplementary reserve were generally men who were deemed insufficiently fit to serve in the army at peacetime but still sufficiently fit to be called up in the event of war." (11)

On October 8 the regiment was sworn in, in the presence of King Ludwig III, and greeted by its commanding officer, Colonel Julius von List, with the following words:

"Comrades! I welcome with all my heart and full of confidence all officers, doctors, and officials, all Offiziersstellvertreter,² NCOs, and troops. The Regiment, whose men for the most part are untrained, is expected to be ready for mobile deployment within a few weeks. This is a difficult task, but with the admirable spirit which animates all members of this regiment, not an impossible one. ... With God's blessing, let's begin our work for Kaiser, King, and Fatherland." (12)

RIR 16 was scheduled to be sent, on October 10, on a march of seventy miles to the Lechfeld training ground in Swabia. On the day before, Hitler visited the Popps to say goodbye. Frau Anna later recalled:

"He took my husband's hand and said, 'If I were to die, please let my sister know, perhaps she wants to take care of my few possessions; if not, please do keep them. I am sorry if I should cause you any trouble.' He then shook my hand, too, while I stood there and wept. We all liked him so very much. He embraced Peppi and Liesl, whom he loved, turned around, and vanished." (13)

We must, however, be aware that Frau Popp told her recollections to a Nazi reporter in the Third Reich, so we should not be surprised about her devotion to the former lodger. Yet, be that as it may, on Saturday, October 10, RIR 16 marched off to Lechfeld. Due to the urgency of the situation at the front, the regiment was allowed only about ten days of manoeuvre, from October 10 to 21, at the exercise area, in which it was to train not only its own deployment but also to practice, as much as possible in the short time, coordination with other units. On Sunday October 18, i.e., a week later, an exercise of the complete 12th Brigade was scheduled, both regiments, artillery and all, including a field mass and consecration of the regimental standards. (14) Opinions on the quality of the training were divided: while Hitler wrote Frau Popp that "the first 5 days in the Lech valley were the most tiring of my whole life," an officer of the List Regiment, Count Bassenheim, complained that "discipline has grown very bad due to [the] marches and over-exertion." (15) On October 20, Hitler

² Warrant Officers

informed the Popp that, this very evening, the regiment was to embark on a railway journey - to Belgium or England, he hoped, and expressed his exultation that the great game was about to begin.

He had to wait a few more hours. Everywhere in Europe, trains had begun in the first week of August to devour young men, their gear and rifles, and spit them out on the railway heads of their destinations, as per the schedules developed and pigeonholed years earlier. The Railway Department of the German General Staff coordinated the movements of over 11,000 trains during mobilization, each one of them consisting of 54 wagons. The Hohenzollern Bridge over the Rhine at Cologne, for example, was crossed by 2148 trains between August 2 and 18; about 134 trains a day, respectively, one every eleven minutes, day or night. The French Railway Department scheduled over 7,000 trains, on a slightly smaller network.

It was about 3 am on October 21, that the men of RIR 16 and their gear were loaded upon three trains and sent off westward. The first stop was Ulm, birthplace of Albert Einstein, whence Hitler sent a postcard to the Popp. (16) On the next day, the train reached the Rhine, and Hitler saw the great German stream for the first time, as well as the Niederwald-Denkmal, the gigantic statue of Germania protecting the river and the country. He never forgot the day - as late as 1944 he recalled that:

"I saw the Rhine for the first time when I travelled to the Western Front with my regiment in 1914. I will never forget the feelings that abounded in me when I saw, for the first time, this river of German destiny. Just as moving were the sympathy and the hearty encouragement of the people living there, who surprised us with a completely unanticipated welcome. We were supplied with everything we could imagine. When we came to Aachen in the evening, I promised myself never to forget this day as long as I lived." (17)

In the night to Thursday, October 22, the trains crossed the Belgian border, and arrived, via Liège and Brussels, at Lille in France by October 24. Private Hitler narrated the events of the last part of this journey and his first days at war in a letter to an acquaintance of his, Munich law student Erich Hepp, in so typical a frame of mind that it may appear here unabridged:

"Dear Herr Assessor Hepp,

I am glad that my last postcard reached you. Also, many warm thanks for your welcome letter. I should have written at greater length before, but shall now try to make up for it.

First of all, let me tell you at once, Herr Assessor, that on December 2nd I had the opportunity to acquire, thank God, more than enough experience. Our regiment was not, as we expected, held back in the reserve, but early in the morning of October 29 was thrown into battle, and ever since we have been in those fellows' hair with some interruptions, first as attackers and then as defenders.

After a really lovely journey down the Rhine we reached Lille on October 23. We could already see the effects of the war as we travelled through Belgium. We saw the conflagrations of war and heard its ferocious winds. As far as Douai our journey was reasonably safe and quiet. Then came shock after shock.

In some places the base artillery had been destroyed in spite of the strongest defence. We were now frequently coming upon blown up bridges and wrecked locomotives. Although the train kept going at a snail's pace, we encountered more and more horrors -- graves. Then in the distance we heard our heavy guns.

Towards evening we arrived at Lille, which was knocked about rather a lot in the suburbs. We got off the train and hung about around our stacked rifles, and shortly before midnight we were on the march, and at last we entered the town. It was an endless monotonous road left and right with miserable workmens' dwellings and the countryside blackened with smoke. The pavements were poor and bad and dirty. There were no signs of any inhabitants, and there was no one in the streets after 9 pm except the military. We were

almost in danger of our lives because the place was so full of guns and ammunition carts, and through them we eventually reached the Citadel, and this part of Lille is a bit better.

We spent the night in the courtyard of the stock exchange building. This pretentious building was not yet completed. We had to lie down with full packs, and were kept at the ready. It was very cold on the stone pavement and we could not sleep. The next day we changed our quarters, and this time we were in a very large glass building. There was no lack of fresh air, the iron framework was still standing, and the panes of glass had been smashed into millions of fragments in the German bombardment.

During the day something more was attempted. We inspected the town and most of all we admired the tremendous military equipment, and all of Lille lay open, the gigantic shapes of the town rolling before our astonished eyes. At night, there was singing, and for me it was the last time. On the third night, about 2 am, there was a sudden alarm, and about 3 am we marched away in full marching order from the assembly point.

No one knew for certain why we were marching, but in any case we regarded it as an exercise. It was rather a dark night, and we had hardly been marching for twenty minutes when we turned left and met two columns of cavalry and other troops, and the road was so blocked there was no room for us.

Then morning came. We were now a long way from Lille. The thunder of gunfire had grown a bit stronger. Our column moved forward like a giant snake. At 9 am we halted in the park of a country house. We had two hours' rest and then moved on again, marching until 8 pm. We no longer moved as a regiment, but split up in companies, each man taking cover against enemy airplanes. At 9 pm we pitched camp, I couldn't sleep. Four paces from my bundle of straw lay a dead horse. The animal was already half decayed.

Finally, a German howitzer battery immediately behind us kept sending two shells flying over our heads into the darkness of the night every quarter of an hour. They came whistling and hissing through the air, and then far in the distance there came two dull thuds. We all listened. None of us had ever heard that sound before.

While we were huddled close together, whispering softly and looking up at the stars in the heavens, a terrible racket broke out in the distance. At first it was a long way off and then the crackling came closer and closer, and the sound of single shells grew to a multitude, finally becoming a continuous roar. All of us felt the blood quickening in our veins. The English were making one of their night attacks. We waited a long time, uncertain what was happening. Then it grew quieter and at last the sound ceased altogether, except for our own batteries, which sent out their iron greetings to the night every quarter of an hour. In the morning we found a big shell hole.

We had to brush ourselves up a bit, and about 10 am there was another alarm, and a quarter of an hour later we were on the march. After a long period of wandering about we reached a farm that had been shot to pieces and we camped there. I was on watch duty that night, and at about one o'clock we suddenly had another alarm, and we marched off at three o'clock in the morning.

We had just taken a bit of food, and we were waiting for our marching orders, when Major Count Zech rode up: "Tomorrow we are attacking the English!" he said. So it had come at last! We were all overjoyed, and after making the announcement, the Major went on foot to the head of the column.

Early, around 6 am, we came to an inn. We were with another company and it was not till 7 am that we went to join the dance. We followed the road into a wood, and then we came out in correct marching order on a large meadow. In front of us were guns in partially dug trenches and behind these we took up our positions in big hollows scooped out of the earth and waited.

Soon the first lots of shrapnel came over, bursting in the woods and smashing up the trees as though they were brushwood. We looked on interestedly, without any real idea of danger. No one was afraid. Every man waited impatiently for the command: "Forward!" The whole thing was getting hotter and hotter. We heard that some of us had been wounded. Five or six men brown as clay were being led along from the left, and we

all broke into a cheer: six Englishmen with a machine—gun! We shouted to our men marching proudly behind their prisoners. The rest of us just waited. We could scarcely see into the streaming, seething witches' cauldron, which lay in front of us. At last there came the ringing command: "Forward!"

We swarmed out of our positions and raced across the fields to a small farm. Shrapnel was bursting left and right of us, and the English bullets came whistling through the shrapnel, but we paid no attention to them. For ten minutes we lay there, and then once again we were ordered to advance. I was right out in front, ahead of everyone in my platoon. Platoon leader Stöver was hit. Good God, I had barely any time to think, the fighting was beginning in earnest!

Because we were out in the open, we had to advance quickly. The captain was at the head. The first of our men had begun to fall. The English had set up machine guns. We threw ourselves down and crawled slowly along a ditch. From time to time someone was hit, we could not go on, and the whole company was stuck there. We had to lift the men out of the ditch. We kept on crawling until the ditch came to an end, and then we were out in the open field again. We ran fifteen or twenty yards, and then we found a big pool of water. One after another we splashed through it, took cover, and caught our breath. But it was no place for lying low. We dashed out again at full speed into a forest that lay about a hundred yards ahead of us. There, after a while, we all found each other. But the forest was beginning to look terribly thin.

At this time there was only a second sergeant in command, a big tall splendid fellow called Schmidt. We crawled on our bellies to the edge of the forest, while the shells came whistling and whining above us, tearing tree trunks and branches to shreds. Then the shells came down again on the edge of the forest, flinging up clouds of earth, stones, and roots, and enveloping everything in a disgusting, sickening yellow-green vapour.

We can't possibly lie here forever, we thought, and if we are going to be killed, it is better to die in the open. Then the Major came up. Once more we advanced. I jumped up and ran as fast as I could across meadows and beet fields, jumping over trenches, hedgerows, and barbed-wire entanglements, and then I heard someone shouting ahead of me: "In here! Everyone in here!" There was a long trench in front of me, and in an instant I had jumped into it, and there were others in front of me, behind me, and left and right of me. Next to me were Württembergers, and under me were dead and wounded Englishmen. The Württembergers had stormed the trench before us. Now I knew why I had landed so softly when I jumped in.

About 250 yards to the left there were more English trenches; to the right, the road to Leceloire was still in our possession. An unending storm of iron came screaming over our trench. At last, at ten o'clock, our artillery opened up in this sector. One - two - three - five - and so it went on. Time and again a shell burst in the English trenches in front of us, and after bloody hand-to-hand fighting in some places; we threw them out of one trench after another. Most of them raised their hands above their heads. Anyone who refused to surrender was mown down. In this way we cleared trench after trench.

At last we reached the main highway. To the right and left of us there was a small forest, and we drove right into it. We threw them all out of this forest, and then we reached the place where the forest came to an end and the open road continued. On the left lay several farms, all occupied, and there was withering fire. Right in front of us men were falling. Our Major came up, quite fearless and smoking calmly, with his adjutant, Lieutenant Piloty.

The Major saw the situation at a glance and ordered us to assemble on both sides of the highway for an assault. We had lost our officers, and there were hardly any non-commissioned officers. So all of us, everyone who was still walking, went running back to get reinforcements. When I returned the second time with a handful of stray Württembergers, the Major was lying on the ground with his chest torn open, and there was a heap of corpses around him.

By this time the only remaining officer was his adjutant. We were absolutely furious. "Herr Leutnant, lead us against them!" we all shouted. So we advanced straight into the forest, fanning out to the left, because there

was no way of advancing along the road. Four times we went forward and each time we were forced to retreat. In my company only one other man was left besides myself, and then he also fell. A shot tore off the entire left sleeve of my tunic, but by a miracle I remained unharmed. Finally at 2 pm we advanced for the fifth time, and this time we were able to occupy the farm and the edge of the forest. At 5 pm we assembled and dug in a hundred yards from the road.

So we went fighting for three days in the same way, and on the third day the British were finally defeated. On the fourth evening we marched back to Werwick. Only then did we know how many men we had lost. In four days our regiment consisting of thirty-five hundred men was reduced to six hundred. In the entire regiment there remained only thirty officers. Four companies had to be disbanded. But we were all so proud of having defeated the British! Since that time we have been continually in the front line. I was proposed for the Iron Cross, the first time in Messines, then again at Wytschaete by Lieutenant Colonel Engelhardt, who was our regimental commander.³ Four other soldiers were proposed for the Iron Cross at the same time. Finally, on December 2, I received the medal.

My job now is to carry dispatches for the staff. As for the mud, things are a bit better here, but also more dangerous. In Wytschaete during the first day of attack three of us eight dispatch riders were killed, and one was badly wounded. The four survivors and the man who was wounded were cited for their distinguished conduct. While they were deciding which of us should be awarded the Iron Cross, four company commanders came to the dugout. That means that the four of us had to step out. We were standing some distance away about five minutes later when a shell slammed into the dugout, wounding Lieutenant Colonel Engelhardt and killing or wounding the rest of his staff. This was the most terrible moment of my life. We worshiped Lieutenant Colonel Engelhardt.

I am sorry; I will have to close now. The really important thing for me is to keep thinking about Germany. From eight in the morning to five in the afternoon, day after day, we are under heavy artillery fire. In time even the strongest nerves are shattered by it. I kept thinking about Munich, and there is not one man here who isn't hoping that we shall soon finish off this rabble once and for all, make mincemeat of them, at whatever the cost.

The hope is that those of us who have the good fortune to see our homeland again will find it purer and less corrupted by foreign influence. The sacrifices and misery extracted daily from hundreds of thousands of peoples, the rivers of blood flowing every day against an international world of enemies will, we hope, result in smashing Germany's external enemies and bring the destruction of our internal internationalism. That would be better than any territorial gains. As for Austria, the matter will come about as I already told you.

Once more I express my heartfelt gratitude and remain your devoted and grateful

ADOLF HITLER (18)

Given that Hitler's war record and decorations played a huge part in later Nazi propaganda - giving the Austrian a sort of supernatural German identity - we should be looking at the matter right away. There was little literature available that specifically and critically examined the history of RIR 16 and Hitler's role in it, which results to a degree from the paucity of the record, and the fact that post-1933 it was purged of everything that disagreed with the gospel of war hero Adolf Hitler.

Most of the attention, pre-1933 and now, centred around Hitler's decoration with the far more prestigious Iron Cross First Class, which he was awarded on August 4, 1918. The properness of the Second Class decoration that he earned in December 1914 is not generally doubted, for it was awarded in the aftermath of the great battle of First Ypres, during which Hitler and his company were in the forward trenches. Likewise, neither is much cognizance allotted nor critique directed at his other citations - the Bavarian Military Cross 3rd Class with Swords, awarded on September 17, 1917, the

³ Colonel List was killed on October 31st at Gheluvelt Castle. (19) Lieutenant Colonel Philip Engelhardt took over the regiment on November 12, for five days, before being wounded on November 17 in the accident narrated by Hitler above. (20)

Regimental Diploma for bravery, May 9, 1918, the Medal for the Wounded, May 18, 1918 and the Military Service Medal 3rd Class of August 25, 1918. (21) What did cause much ado about Hitler's Iron Cross First Class in the early 1930s was not only that it figured prominently in the Nazi apotheoses of the Führer as war hero, which of course awarded his critics opportunities for counterclaims, but that the decoration seemed to have been proposed and effected by the highest-ranking Jewish officer of the regiment, adjutant Lieutenant Hugo Gutmann, and, in the light of Hitler's post-1919 anti-Semitism, that was of course most embarrassing.

We shall address the merits issue first. In the German presidential election campaign of 1932, in which Hitler challenged the incumbent Hindenburg - and lost - a direct advantage for Hindenburg was that his war record could not be doubted - except for the fact, naturally, that Germany had lost, but, as both Nazis and reactionaries agreed, this defeat had not been the aged field marshal's fault nor of anyone else in the army but that of socialist and liberal politicians, the "November Criminals". Since the Hindenburg campaign was in this enviable position, they started to direct their artillery, so to say, on the challenger's military merits.⁴

Josef Stettner, a veteran of RIR 16, wrote in a 1932 article in the VOLKSFREUND (the "People's Friend"), a Social Democratic newspaper in Braunschweig, that...

... Hitler had worked out for himself how to get out of the line of fire on time. He had already managed to get a small post as regimental dispatch runner behind the front at the end of 1914. At first he lay with the regimental staff in the underground vaults and basements of Fromelles.

For months, the infantry companies that lay in reserve behind the front and pioneers⁵ that had specially deployed for this task had to make the shelters of the regimental staff bomb-proof. While we had to lie in the wet trenches at the front line for seven or ten days without a break or while we stood up to our stomachs in the mud, Hitler lay on a warm, lice-free stretcher and had several metres of protective stone above his hero's body.

But it did not take very long before the entire regimental staff set itself up even more comfortably in Fournes, approximately 10 kilometres behind the first line. There for more than a year the dispatch runners had a room of their own in a former Estaminet (small pub or café). Every one of us in the trench would have given his eye teeth to swap with the hero Hitler even just for eight days. ...

The front experience of Private Hitler consisted more in the consumption of artificial honey and tea than of the participation in any combat. He was separated from the actual combat zone by a zone some 10 kilometres deep. Thousands of family fathers would have filled Hitler's post behind the front just as well as him: however, at the time Hitler did not display any sign that he felt driven towards military front-line action, as he is trying to tell the blinded German youth today. He did, as we front-line soldiers used to say at the time, 'keep his position.'" (22)

The essence of Stettner's argument was that Hitler was a dispatch runner at the regimental level, as opposed to the battalion or company level, and his duties rarely brought him face to face with actual enemy fire.

"Some worshippers of Hitler have pointed out now that the job of a dispatch runner was more dangerous than that of a soldier in the trenches. While the troops in the first line could calmly lie under cover, it is said in Hitler's defence, the dispatch runners would have been much more exposed to enemy fire while on duty.

However, I can accept that only for dispatch runners of companies or maybe also of battalions. In the worst-case scenario, the regimental dispatch runner had to go to the dugout of a battalion which still lay far behind the first line.

⁴ And not only on the military merits but on Hitler's family too: it was around this time that the stories of his "Jewish grandfather" flourished.

⁵ Pioneer" was German terminology for engineers respectively sappers.

And even in those cases, it was for the most part the dispatch runners of the battalion themselves who had to pick up the messages at the regimental headquarters, particularly when things were getting dangerous. All the duties of a regimental dispatch runner lay outside the dangerous zone of machine-gun fire." (23)

A bigger dent into the gospel of front-line hero Adolf Hitler than that caused by the relatively obscure Braunschweig newspaper might have ensued from an article in the weekend edition of the Hamburg Social Democratic newspaper ECHO DER WOCHE ("The Weekly Echo") of March 1932, which resulted in Hitler's bringing of a libel action against the paper. At court, the "great obstacle for the defence team of the ECHO DER WOCHE was that the paper had decided that in order to protect his safety it would not disclose the identity of the veteran who was the author of the bitter attack on Hitler's war record." (24) The article in question essentially argued, like Stettner had, that a regimental dispatch runner's duty was not particularly hazardous, and that Hitler had received his Iron Cross First Class for other reasons than bravery.

Since the newspaper could not produce the writer, Hitler won the lawsuit by default and set out to establish the identity of the author. His thugs had no problem in identifying the writer as the former RIR 16 member Korbinian Rutz. Herr Rutz had entered the ranks of RIR 16 as a battalion dispatch runner with the 2nd Company on November 12, 1914, where he soon made the acquaintance of Hitler. Unlike Hitler, Rutz was steadily promoted and became a Lieutenant and commander of 1st Company on April 23, 1916. (25) In an open letter to the press on April 8, 1932, Rutz wrote:

"I entered the RIR 16 (List) as a private on November 12, 1914 with the 1st Reserve Detachment, and eventually became an officer and company leader. At that time Hitler was already an attendant with the regimental staff, and remained one until the end of the war.

Regimental orderlies had to fetch orders at the brigade post and return with the replies of the regimental staff. To transfer the regimental orders down to the battalion post was the job of the battalion attendants. The job of a regimental orderly demanded an apt and proper person, but particular courage was not required. ...

The regimental staff always lived behind the front. In our position at Fromelles, for instance, our foremost lines were about 20 or 30 minutes west of the village, while the regimental staff resided at Fournes, a good hour east of it. They lived thus at least 11 hours distant from the front line. The regimental staff always resided in the best buildings, which had concrete basements and coverings. While the front line soldiers and officers had to hold out in the trenches under the most primitive of conditions, without even straw to lie on, the regimental orderlies slept on mattresses, had pillows and woollen blankets, and sleep galore. ...

Attendants had an easier time to earn decorations than trench troops, for the officers were familiar with their faces, while the name or face of a simple front line fighter, who stoically endured toil and danger, was, at best, known to the company commander, but not the higher-ups. And while attendants and orderlies had a regular life and three square meals a day, the John Does of the front lines got warm food perhaps at midnight, or even later, if at all, amidst utter filth, live fire and the such. We often received our midday meals an hour or so past midnight.

Then Hitler was seriously wounded. I can tell you the truth about this. He lay in the palatial gardens of Fromelles, where the regimental staff was at that time. With a few comrades, he was taking a sun bath when a grenade exploded close by and wounded him. Not in action, mind, not on his post, he was hit, but on his having a siesta. ...

So Hitler has the Iron Cross, First Class. At the end, every regimental attendant received one. But a brave company comrade of mine, a simple man who spent four years at the front and was wounded twice, did not get it." (26)

But Rutz did not do himself a favour with the inaccuracies of his report - the sunbathing story, for example, was easily proved false, as was the promotion of the public notary's simple house in Fournes to a concrete citadel - and the Nazis had

easy revenge by retiring him from teaching after 1933. Rutz' and Stettner's criticism was later shared by the medical scribe Alexander Frey,⁶ who argued that Hitler remained a dispatch runner and avoided promotion for reasons of safety:

"Without a doubt Hitler could have re-enlisted with a company and done trench duty with the goal of promotion. But he did not seem to have wanted that; there were certain positions, so treasured that if troops got hold of them, they would not want to give them up, as they had certain automatic advantages. In this case, there were better quarters and better food than infantrymen in the trenches had.

I had to resist the urging of my company commander that I leave my post in the medical service (since I was not a doctor, I couldn't go much farther in this particular field) and take part in an officer training course. I did not want to leave my field of work - probably for the same reasons that Hitler did not want to leave his. Measured against the dreadful hardship of trench duty, our posting was a small alleviation, combined with small comforts." (27)

Yet there were other opinions, and since several of them came from officers, history has - everything else being equal - tended to reflect their views of Adolf Hitler as a soldier. At the Beer Hall Putsch Trial of 1924, the last commander of RIR 16, Lieutenant Colonel Maximilian von Baligand, testified as follows:

"It is not true that Hitler's post with the regimental staff was a safe job. If all the purveyors of safe jobs in the army had evidenced Hitler's courage, the trenches would not have developed a disliking of their superiors." (28)

First Lieutenant Friedrich Wiedemann, between January 1, 1916 and August 16, 1917, staff adjutant of RIR 16, wrote in his memoirs, published in 1964:

"One of the dispatch runners attached to the regimental staff was Adolf Hitler. I cannot remember the exact time I first noticed him, a private first class, which he was at that time, but he came under my direct command and hence I thought a good deal about him when attempting to determine on whom one could truly rely on.

Between Hitler and me, organization-wise, was only the regimental scribe and First Sergeant Max Amann, who later became General Manager of the NSDAP and Director of the Franz-Eher Publishing House.⁷ ... When I was dispatched to RIR 16 [on January 1, 1916] as the new regimental adjutant, the war of movement, in whose final phase the regiment had partaken in late 1914, had already been replaced by trench warfare. The regiment had its trenches south of Lille while the regimental staff resided in Fournes, in the house of the local notary public.

When the army communiqués reported "All Quiet on the Western Front", our dispatch runners, together with the whole staff, had a relatively placid life. They were used for petty jobs or accompanied the commander or me on the regular inspections of the rampart. I well remembered Hitler from such occasions as a quiet man of somewhat unmilitary appearance, who, at first sight, was not different than his comrades. Only slowly did we get the impression that his interests were somewhat deeper than those of his comrades, most of whom came from Bavaria south of the Danube.⁸ But that by itself was not exceptional in our regiment. ...

While our attendants had a quiet life in quiet times, this changed rapidly as soon as combat resumed. The telephone lines to the battalion posts and company leaders were usually shot up quickly, and the regimental commander's orders could then only be transmitted via messenger. There was no choice - the enemy's fire might be heavy or light - the runners had to leave the bunker and make it, through the fire, to the front line. Losses, and thus the rate of replacements among the runners, were therefore high.

⁶ Frey did not necessarily scorn safety himself - he went into exile and did not publish his observations until 1946. (29)

⁷ The publishing empire of the Nazi Party.

⁸ i.e., the districts of Upper and Lower Bavaria.

On the other side, one found out quickly whom one could rely on. ... Thus we kept three or four of the most dependable men at the regimental post, whom we saved for the important jobs, under difficult circumstances. One of the men we could depend on was Hitler.

His later enemies have accused him of avoiding - shirking - front duty by being a dispatch runner and never having received the EK 1.⁹ Both charges are incorrect. As long as he was with the staff - that is, from the beginning until the end of the war -- he has proven himself brave and reliable, and fully earned his EK I. I recall quite well how we discussed, in the aftermath of a bigger action, together with regimental scribe Max Amann whom to propose for the EK I. I opined that Hitler had earned this decoration since a long time already, and thus we put him on the list, albeit not in the top spot but at the bottom. This we did because the companies complained that we always put people on the regimental staff up front.

At this occasion Hitler did not receive the EK I. We had proposed ten soldiers, but were allowed only five medals. When I was transferred to another post, my successor as regimental adjutant, First Lieutenant (Reserve) Hugo Gutmann renewed the proposal, and this time Hitler received the Iron Cross First Class." (30)

The circumstances of the decoration are relatively clear. Eugen Tannhäuser, who had spoken with Gutmann about the matter, testified on August 4, 1961:

"Herr Gutmann was regimental adjutant of the List Regiment, wore the Iron Cross First Class himself, as well as the Bavarian Order of Military Merit, and I have seen with my own eyes the promotion diplomas, on account of exemplary courage, to Master Sergeant and later to Lieutenant, when he was especially mentioned in the army's order of the day.

He told me that Hitler was a soldier like any other soldier and rewarded himself neither through particular exploits nor attracted any negative attention. One time there was an important message to be forwarded to the front. The telephone lines had been shot up, and, to be on the safe side, Gutmann called upon two runners and gave them the message, hoping that at least one would make it to the trenches. He promised both the Iron Cross First Class as the reward of success.

They both came through, but, as Gutmann told me, keeping the promise proved harder than making it. It took him two months to convince the division commander of the properness of decorating these two messengers, for it had been a deed that happened daily in battle." (31)

Lieutenant Colonel Emmerich von Godin, first Deputy and later Commander of RIR 16, wrote to the Commander of the 12th Brigade on July 31, 1918:

"Hitler is with the regiment since its inception and has made the best of impressions in all battles. As dispatch runner he was a paragon of composure and courage in static as well as mobile warfare and was always willing to transport messages no matter the difficulties or the danger to his life.

After a complete blackout of communications in a difficult situation it was Hitler's untiring and selfless dedication to duty that ensured the delivery of important messages despite all adversities. Hitler has received the EK II for bravery in the Battle of Wyttschaete on December 2, 1914. I consider Hitler completely deserving of the decoration of the EK I." (32)

Johann Raab, assigned to the regimental staff since December 1915 as a telephone operator, reported:

"I was with the regimental staff of RIR 16 (List) at the same time when Hitler was a dispatch runner there. I well remember that he very often volunteered for missions that, except for him, would have gone to colleagues who were married. I can also remember how he got the EK I, since I received the EK II at the same

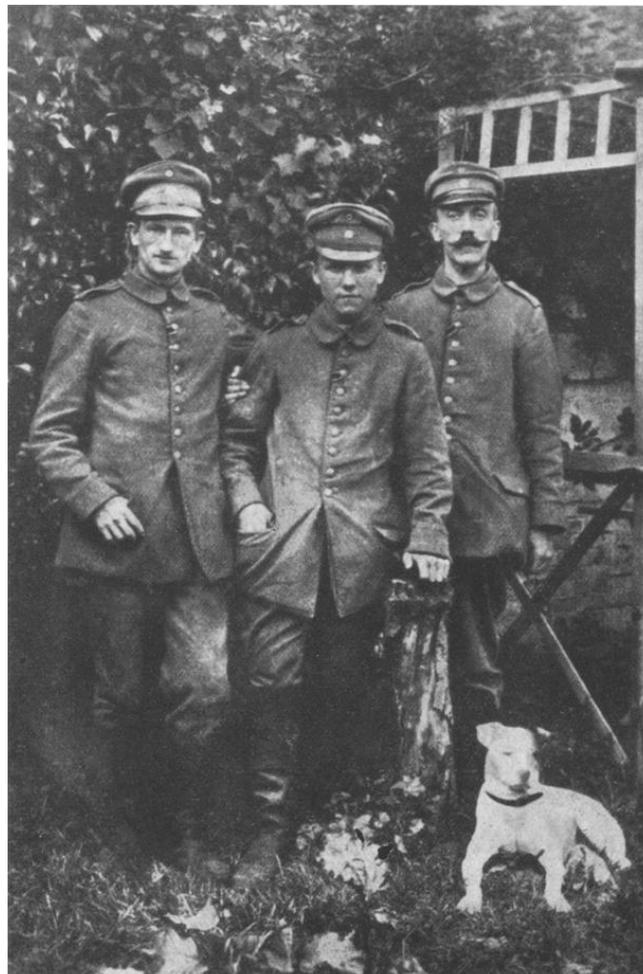
⁹ EK I, EISERNES KREUZ, (IRON CROSS) 1ST CLASS. In the original, this paragraph seems to describe accusations that Hitler never received the EK I. This was not the case - the insinuations alleged that he had not earned it.

time. Hitler delivered a message to the front when all other connections were broken or extinguished by enemy fire. His deed was particularly mentioned in a Regimental Order." (33)

In general, the discussion of Hitler's soldierly merits follows the political point of view the observer represented. The written record is more or less positive, and many later accusations were made in the heat of the political battle. The present author has discussed the subject with military men, and in the context of the Great War, they tend to regard dispatch runners as frontline soldiers.

We shall leave the fate of the List Regiment for a moment and investigate the early developments of the war on the Eastern and Western fronts. Most importantly, what had happened to the Schlieffen or, rather, Moltke Plan?

THE DISPATCH RUNNERS ERNST SCHMIDT, ANTON BACHMANN AND ADOLF HITLER
APRIL 1915, ON R & R IN FOURNES



THE FEAST OF THE MAGGOTS

*Allons, enfants de la patrie,
la jour de gloire est arrivé.*

The Marseillaise

*The condition of man
is a condition of war
of everyone against everyone.*

Thomas Hobbes "Leviathan"

Various people greeted the portents of war with ardour, but none more so than the ranks of the European bourgeoisie. It is true, the continent's generals had promised to everyone, rich man and poor man alike, that the war would be short and painless. Genuine enthusiasm, however, was chiefly relegated to the urban bourgeoisie, the class which would so fatally confuse nationalism with political emancipation. The industrial proletariat had reasons to be sceptical, none the least that they saw war as an instrument of capitalism and patriotism as a corruption of the international solidarity on which their economic hopes were based. Farmers were apprehensive, too, unsure of how to get harvest helpers if everybody went off to war.

The enthusiasm came slowly. At first, the crowds that gathered at the Quai d'Orsay in Paris and the Wilhelmstrasse in Berlin numbered only in the hundreds, rarely in the thousands. Even at the height of the putative euphoria, the crowd in Berlin reached only thirty thousand, less than 1% of the capital's population. Beyond Berlin, the crowds in cities such as Cologne, Frankfurt, Hamburg, Leipzig, Munich, and Nürnberg were perhaps a thousand each. ...

Not all crowds marched for war. Antiwar demonstrations, in fact, outnumbered those demanding war. On the day Vienna declared war on Belgrade, the Social Democratic Party (SPD) in Berlin turned out a hundred thousand antiwar protesters. By 31 July, there had taken place 288 antiwar demonstrations throughout Germany, involving some 750,000 people in 183 cities and villages.

In Paris, Socialists and Syndicalists mounted seventy-nine demonstrations against the war. But in the end, all 110 SPD Reichstag deputies voted for war credits, as did all 98 Socialist deputies in Paris. (1)

The 120,000 officers, 2.1 million enlisted men and 600,000 horses that were called up by the "Deployment Plan 1914/15" had - naturally - no choice and were speedily loaded upon their trains. Approximately 1.6 of the 2.1 million men, 315 Infantry Regiments and 500 Cavalry Squadrons, were sent to the West. Most of the letters composed in the early days of the Western front were optimistic, if perhaps less bloodthirsty than the epistle Corporal Hitler wrote to Assessor Hepp.

Both parties' plans centred on the offensive. As we have seen in Chapter XVIII, "Germany's situation resembled that of a boxer who faces two opponents at the same time - one who is agile but weak, and another who is strong but slow. Only if the swift attack of the first opponent could be defeated, countered, and the adversary thus neutralized,

would it become possible to subsequently, methodically, disarm the second, less nimble enemy." Moltke did not have the means to follow Schlieffen's proposal and certainly not enough troops to carry out the sweep up to the Channel coast - but he had the advantage of the inner lines and superior railway capacity.

As we can see in Map XXXVII below, Moltke essentially partitioned his troops due to strategic and geographic necessities. The attack in Belgium with the aim to turn the flank of General Lanrezac's French Fifth Army's along the Meuse-Sambre axis - which was expected to be fortified by the BEF and Belgian troops - was entrusted to Germany's 1st to 3rd Armies. 1st Army (Kluck) was the flank guard while the task of dealing with Lanrezac was given Germany's senior officer, Karl von Bülow, brother of the former chancellor. He commanded 2nd Army and had discretionary strategic authority over 1st and 3rd Armies (Hausen).

After the conquest of the Meuse-Sambre line, 1st to 3rd Armies would press on to the next two French defence lines along the Aisne and then the Marne, an attack in which 4th and 5th Army were to take part. If the Aisne could be crossed at Rethel, 4th Army would find itself west of the Argennes Forest and the main French fortified zone and cut it off - which would mean victory. Meanwhile 5th Army would press directly on Verdun.

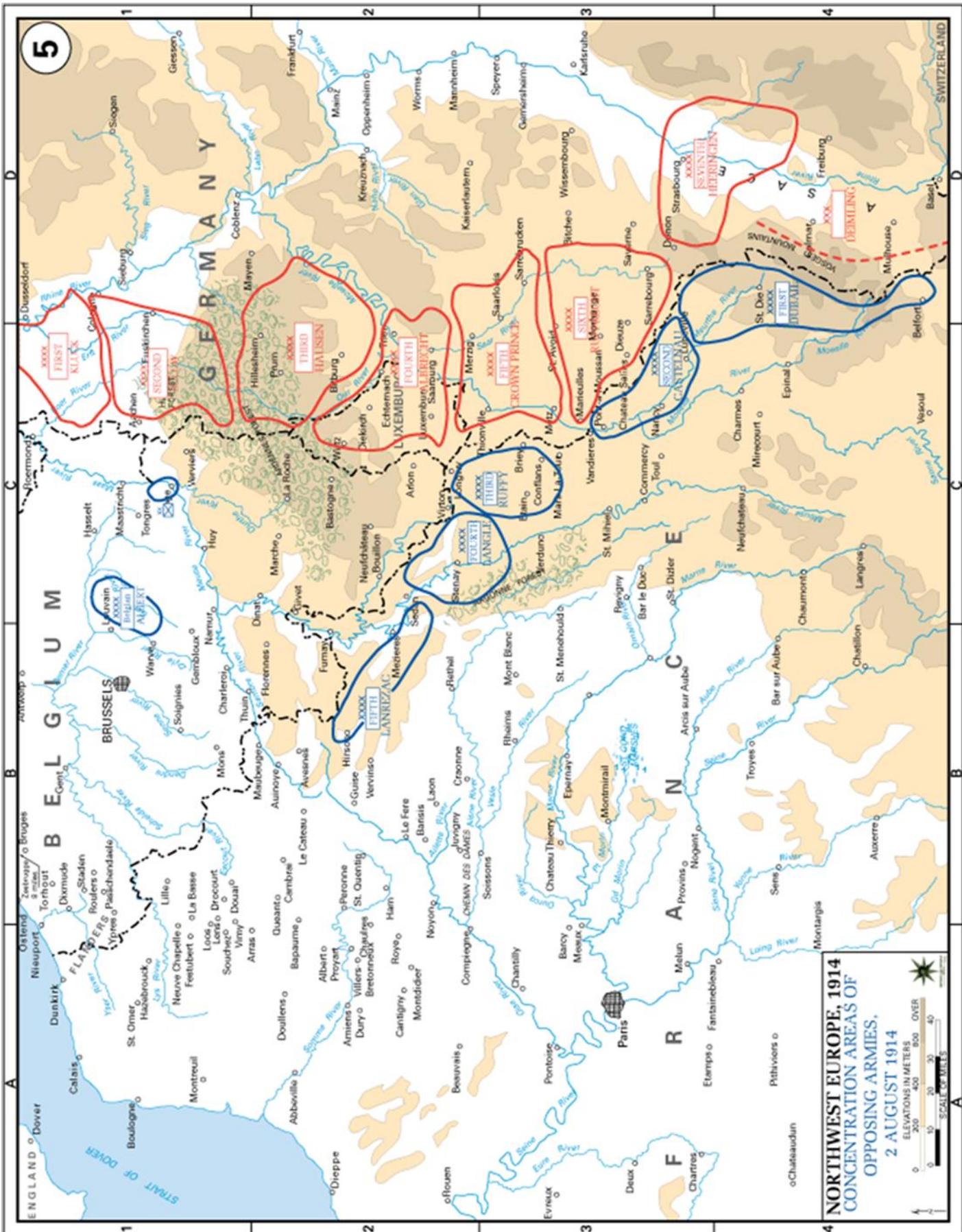
4th (Albrecht), 5th (The Crown Prince) and 6th Army (the Bavarian Army, Rupprecht) were to protect the Moselle River valley against the expected French attack and counter-attack if the situation allowed. 7th Army was to protect the Upper Alsace - it was relatively weak for it could always fall back behind the Rhine should anything go wrong. One corps (Deimling) was sent to the south in the direction of Mulhouse, where Moltke expected a local attack - which promptly happened.

The five French armies were lined up along the Meurthe, Moselle and Meuse Rivers from Belfort in the south to Hirson at the border to Belgium. Joffre and his "offensive à outrance" concept had made it clear that the principal French attack would be performed along the fortress line, between Belfort and the Ardennes Forest. The BEF - which is not depicted in Map XXXIX for it had not yet arrived - was to deploy on Lanrezac's left flank - around Maubeuge. The Belgian army was expected to try and block the German attack on Liège and the Meuse valley and/or retreat into their fortified zone at Antwerp.

As we have seen, the concepts were clear on both sides and the French and British General Staffs had their own plans ready in regards to Belgium - for reasons of propaganda however they preferred that the Germans invade Belgium first.

It is not readily comprehensible why Moltke believed that sparing the Netherlands' neutrality might keep Great Britain out of the war. As a landlubber, he probably did not understand that the British concern were the Belgian and French Channel ports, Oostende, Nieuport, Dunkirk, Calais and Boulogne, from where Channel traffic, so essential for Great Britain, could be blocked. The Dutch ports were too far away. Indeed, every junior diplomat on Wilhelmstrasse could have told Moltke that it was Belgian neutrality that counted for Great Britain, not Dutch. To violate Belgium's neutrality was a *casus belli*. Not only had her neutrality been proposed at the occasion of her birth in 1831, and secured in perpetuity by international treaties with England, Prussia, France and Russia, the very existence of the small country was only possible under the condition of her eternal neutrality; neither France nor Germany had been willing to let the new entity join the camp of the respective enemy.

The Belgian army, while not expected to stand up to the German army in open battle, was presumed to do well in their four main fortified positions at Brussels, Antwerp, Liège and Namur. Especially Liège and Namur not only guarded the Meuse river, without whose crossing the Germans could not proceed to France, but also lay squarely in the path of the German advance through the plain of Flanders. If Liège and Namur could not be taken in a few days, a week at the maximum, the way for the right wing into France could not be unblocked, the plan would die in its cradle, and the war would be lost.



MAP XXXX: DEPLOYMENT ON THE WESTERN FRONT AUGUST 1914

The key to the German war plan was Liège.

Liège was founded in 558 when Saint Monulph, bishop of Tomgres, built a chapel at the confluence of the Meuse and Legia Rivers. It saw its share of Europe's violent past. In 1467 and again in 1468, when the Liègois foolishly declared war on the Duchy of Burgundy, Charles the Bold razed the walls of the city. In 1703, the Duke of Marlborough stormed Liège's two forts, the Citadel and La Chartreuse, preparatory to his invasion of the German states the next year. In 1794, French Revolutionary armies sacked the city and destroyed the great cathedral of Saint-Lambert. Napoleon I occupied Liège for the duration of his rule.

But Liège survived - and prospered. The high-grade coal of the Meuse Valley between Seraing and Herstal fuelled Liège's factories, and the city quickly developed into Belgium's chief manufacturing centre - the fabled "Birmingham of Belgium." The faubourg of Herstal became world-renowned as a producer of fine arms - to the point that Ludwig Loewe of Berlin, manufacturer of the famous Hauser small arms, in 1896 seized a controlling interest in the giant FABRIQUE NATIONALE D'ARMES DE GUERRE. The railway brought further wealth and prominence, and Liège became a major hub on the main rail line leading from Berlin to Brussels -- and on to Paris. All this strategic wealth demanded protection. (2)

The German staff was fully aware of the problem and had sought a solution since 1905. The specifications of the two Belgian forts were awe-inspiring.

The forts at Liège and Namur, guarding the crossings of the Meuse, were the most modern in Europe. Built between 1888 and 1892 to the design of General Henri Brialmont, they were constructed to resist attack by the heaviest guns then existing, the 210 mm (8.4 inch).

Each consisted of a circle, twenty-five miles in circumference, of independent forts, arranged at sufficient distance to protect the city itself from attack and to lend each other the protection of their own guns. At Liège there were 400, of 6-inch calibre [150 mm, H. Herwig mentions 210 mm guns as well, p.108, ¶] or less, disposed in the twelve forts of the complex, all protected by reinforced concrete and armour plate.

The garrison of 40,000 provided the gun crews but also "interval troops" who were supposed, at the threat of invasion, to dig trenches between the forts and hold at bay enemy infantry attempting to infiltrate through the gaps. (3)

As early as 1905, the German General Staff had asked the great gun factories of Krupp in Essen, Germany, and Skoda in Pilsen, Bohemia [then Austria, ¶], to develop guns that were able to penetrate the Belgian fortifications. At length, however, they realized that the availability of guns was not enough; there was no time for a classic siege, since the urgency of the plan forbade delays.

By the early summer of 1914 good news was received from the manufacturers: Krupp was able to deliver five experimental 16.8-inch guns (420 millimetres), but they came at a serious disadvantage: they were far too heavy to be transported on anything but their own custom built railway track and taken to a specifically designed and fabricated concrete firing platform, the building of which would take several days, as would targeting and aiming procedures. The whole, unmovable contraption would also be an open invitation for Belgian counterattacks.

In the meantime, Skoda had come up with the first two specimens of their new howitzer which, at 12.2 inches (305 mm), was smaller than the Krupp monster but had the advantage that it could be transported conventionally (if barely). While the engineers were confident that these behemoths could crack the skin of the Belgian fortresses, the timing problem persisted. If the forts could delay the German advance for as little as ten days, nay, a week only, the war plan's timing was unachievable.

No alternative existed. The requirements of the plan had directed the German advance to pass through Belgium irrespectively whether she was an ally, neutral, or hostile. The latter assumption was the operative one for the German General Staff. Since her inception, the small country's military situation had been determined by her location between the jaws of the Franco-German vise.

At the time of the Battle of Fontenoy in AD 843, what is today Belgium had simply been one more part of Charlemagne's Franconian Empire. The name "Belgium" derived from the "Belgae", the name of these Celtic tribes who lived, two thousand years ago, on both sides of the English Channel, between Dover and Oostende. Julius Caesar had fought battles with these fierce tribes during his conquest of Gallia, and, three centuries later, the town of Augusta Treverorum, today's Trier in western Germany, had become the seat of the "Caesar" of the West.

When the Empire of the Franks fell apart, the continental domains of the Belgae were divided between the more Germanic, northern people of Holland and Flanders, known as the Flemish, Flemings or Dutch, and the Romanized, Latin-tongued population of the west and south who became known as the Walloons. They settled chiefly around the Duchy of Brabant.

During the next five hundred years, these lands, which were collectively known for their most conspicuous geographic characteristic as the Low Countries or Netherlands, resisted frequent attempts of conquest by the Valois and Bourbons of France and the Habsburgs of Austria and Spain, and continued to exist in mostly independent duchies and Imperial free towns.

From Roman times on, the area was famous for her textiles, but the wealth thus generated had the inauspicious effect that it only increased the land's attractiveness in the eyes of conquerors-to-be. In 1477 the Low Countries fell victim to the avarice of the Habsburgs: conquered by Austrian troops, the provinces were donated to the Spanish crown. Mindful of their forefathers' liberty, the population engaged in frequent insurrections and, in 1566, undertook a general rebellion against the yoke of the Habsburgs. In the Peace of Westphalia of 1648 which concluded the Thirty-Years War, the northern part of the Low Countries gained independence from the Holy Roman Empire: first as a kingdom, then as a republic. The southern part, however, remained under Spanish dominion. The north proved, perhaps due to its liberty, more attractive, and soon the greater part of the commercial activity had moved to the republic, which, for a century, became a global naval power owning colonies all over the oceans, from the Caribbean Sea to the West Indies. In 1713, the "Belgian" territory reverted to the Austrian Habsburg line who governed it, not too efficiently, until 1790, when the Belgians declared independence.

This declaration secured the attention of the Austrians, who returned within the year, with military force. To its misfortune, the Austrian army was defeated by a French army, which came to the support of the Belgians, desirous of exporting the delights of the revolution.

Thus France conquered and kept Belgium until the chapter Napoleon was over, and the Congress of Vienna established a "united" Kingdom of the Netherlands: cramming all of Holland, Belgium and Luxembourg into a single new monarchy. That did not work, and Belgian-Dutch conflicts over language, education, religion [Belgian Catholics vs. Dutch Calvinists, ¶], economic and political representation led to the Second Declaration of Independence on October 4, 1830. In January 1831, a conference representing Austria, Great Britain, Russia, France and Prussia recognized Belgian independence and established her neutrality. The country chose Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha as their king and adopted a liberal constitution.

The country's geostrategic position suffered from the fact that her north-western plain was ideally suited for an enemy passing from Germany to France or vice versa. At the southern Franco-German border, the obstacles of the Rhine and the Vosges mountains limit military activities, and in the middle, Luxembourg and the Ardennes Forest shape a second row of impediments. But northwest of Luxembourg lay a great plain, open to invading armies. Once the river Meuse was crossed, an army could advance without encountering further major natural barricades all the way to the North Sea Coast, as Rommel's and Guderian's panzer divisions were to demonstrate in 1940.

In one of his exultations of royal charm and diplomatic delicacy, Wilhelm II had bullied the aged Belgian King Leopold II in 1904: "You will be obliged to choose. You will be with us or against us." Had Leopold, at that time, still harboured illusions about the German plans, the Kaiser had removed them. Given her pledge of neutrality, a future war with Germany seemed a certainty, and measures needed to be taken.

To give the new kingdom a chance to defend itself (at least initially) in case of hostile incursion by any of its neighbours, the great powers had insisted that Belgium "uphold" its territorial integrity. Thus, between 1878 and 1906 Brussels set about creating a system of ten fortresses -- the major ones being at Antwerp, Namur, and Liège. By 1914, LA POSITION FORTIFIÉE DE LIÈGE had received an additional eleven forts and twelve field works, equally divided along both banks of the Maas [Meuse, ¶], making it one of Europe's most formidable fortresses. The regular army consisted of 117,000 men, divided into six light infantry divisions and one cavalry division.

Under the leadership of Prime Minister Charles de Brocqueville, Brussels in May 1913 introduced universal male conscription and increased the annual intake of recruits from 13,300 to 33,000. The grand design was to stand up an army of roughly 340,000 soldiers by 1918. The regular field army was to consist of 180,000 men, organized into six army corps, each of three or four light infantry divisions. The new king, Albert, the last of the European warrior-kings, was prepared to use these assets against any and all potential invaders; he regarded no power as a potential ally.

Belgium's precarious position of "perpetual" neutrality suffered a rude shock in 1913. In his last peacetime "Deployment Plan 1913/14," Moltke demanded that on the first day of mobilization, the Belgian government be handed an "ultimatum of short duration" in which it openly declared itself "to be Germany's ally or adversary," and that it "open" the fortresses of Liège, Namur, and Huy to a German advance across its territory [such an ultimatum was sent August 2, 1914]. ... On 3 August, King Albert rejected Berlin's ultimatum of the previous evening calling on Brussels to grant German armies free passage with the terse comment, "It is war." (4)

The overture to the invasion was played pianissimo, very hush-hush.

During the night of 1-2 August, advance elements of German 29th and 69th regiments, 16th ID, crossed into the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg on bicycles, in armoured cars and automobiles, and by train. They met no resistance and no sabotage. They secured the duchy's bridges, railways and roads, and occupied its capital on the morning of 2 August. The next day, Germany declared war on France and Belgium. (5)

The question whether or not the Belgian fortresses could be neutralized fast enough as not to jeopardize the German plan was not yet solved to the satisfaction of the German staff at the day of the attack. The conviction Ludendorff had acquired in his visit of Liège in 1911 was that a rapid deployment force needed to be set up. Hence a special command was established between Aachen and Eupen, under General Otto von Emmich, consisting of the six best infantry brigades of so many army corps, three cavalry divisions for screening and two batteries of 8.4-inch guns for artillery support. This party was to head straight for Liège regardless of rain or shine and was to try to secure a foothold on the far side of the Meuse, preferably over a bridge or two captured intact.

The actual distance between Aachen and Liège is just over twenty miles or thirty-odd kilometres, but Emmich's command had been spotted early on August 4 by Belgian airplanes, and the commander of Liège, General Gerard Leman, was warned. His defensive position was excellent, for the great river Meuse flowed around the town in a narrow gorge over one hundred meters deep. The defenders have the advantage of the high ground; to cross the river in the face of their artillery is close to impossible.

Emmich's cavalry had reconnoitred ahead, and, on the afternoon of August 4, the initial German attack by 53rd IR [Infantry Regiment, ¶] was directed against the town's north-eastern stronghold, Fort de Barchon [see Map XXXVIII, Liège, ¶]. This one and similar attacks on other forts on August 5 and 6 were repulsed, and the attackers incurred over 5,000 casualties. When German storm troopers arrived at the river gorge itself, they found all but two bridges blown up, and the two remaining ones covered by Belgian artillery fire, impervious to capture. When the 34th Brigade attempted to cross the river by boat, the defenders' artillery found a plethora of targets, and whoever was left standing was zeroed in by Belgian interval troops. The German advance was stopped, and, for the moment, the offensive subsided.

Headlines in Brussels papers screamed out the news: "GRANDE VICTOIRE BELGE!" Those in London and Paris spoke of a major "rout" of no fewer than 125,000 German troops, and of at least 20,000 enemy casualties. The French republic bestowed the Grand Cross of the Legion of Honour on Liège and the Military Medal on King Albert. ...

What had happened to the German assault? Carl von Clausewitz's proverbial "fog of uncertainty" ruled the battlefield. Already during the advance, units lost their way in the dark. Officers were separated from their horses. Maps could not be located. Field kitchens were left behind. Soldiers panicked and shot at one another. ...

Moreover, war in its primordial form, as Clausewitz stated, was "slaughter" (Schlacht). German infantry assaults in close formation were a target-rich environment even for Leman's half-trained soldiers. ... A letter by an anonymous Belgian officer told the story well:

"As line after line of German infantry advanced, we simply mowed them down. ... They made no attempt at deploying, but came on, line after line, almost shoulder to shoulder, until, as we shot them down, the fallen were heaped one on top of the other, in an awful barricade of dead and wounded men that threatened to mask our guns and cause us trouble." (6)

Just when the German designs on Liège threatened to derail, and the *mitrailleuses* [French machine-guns bought by Belgium, ¶] wrought havoc among the German infantry, Fortuna smiled upon the Germans. General Erich Ludendorff, ex-tourist and at the moment deputy chief of Bülow's 2nd Army, was not supposed to have an active part in the assault he had helped to plan. However, when Emmich set out to a personal visit of the front, Ludendorff decided to follow him.

On his way into the melee, between Fort d'Evegnée and Fort de Fléron, at the village of Retinne, he bumped into Infantry Brigade 14, whose commanding officer, General Friedrich von Wussow, had just been killed. Ludendorff seemed to spot an opportunity; he immediately took over command and ordered to advance westwards, in the direction of Liège. The unit reached the next village, Queue-de-Bois, which was defended by parts of the garrison, who had to be thrown out in protracted close-contact fighting. Dusk threatened, but the brigade proceeded on the road to Liège. After about five miles, Ludendorff found himself and his brigade on the hilly terrain of an old monastery close to La Chartreuse, one of the two old forts of the town. The place provided an excellent perspective of Liège and the fortifications. Ludendorff could overlook the Meuse and had a clear view of the town and the two remaining bridges. The brigade pitched camp.

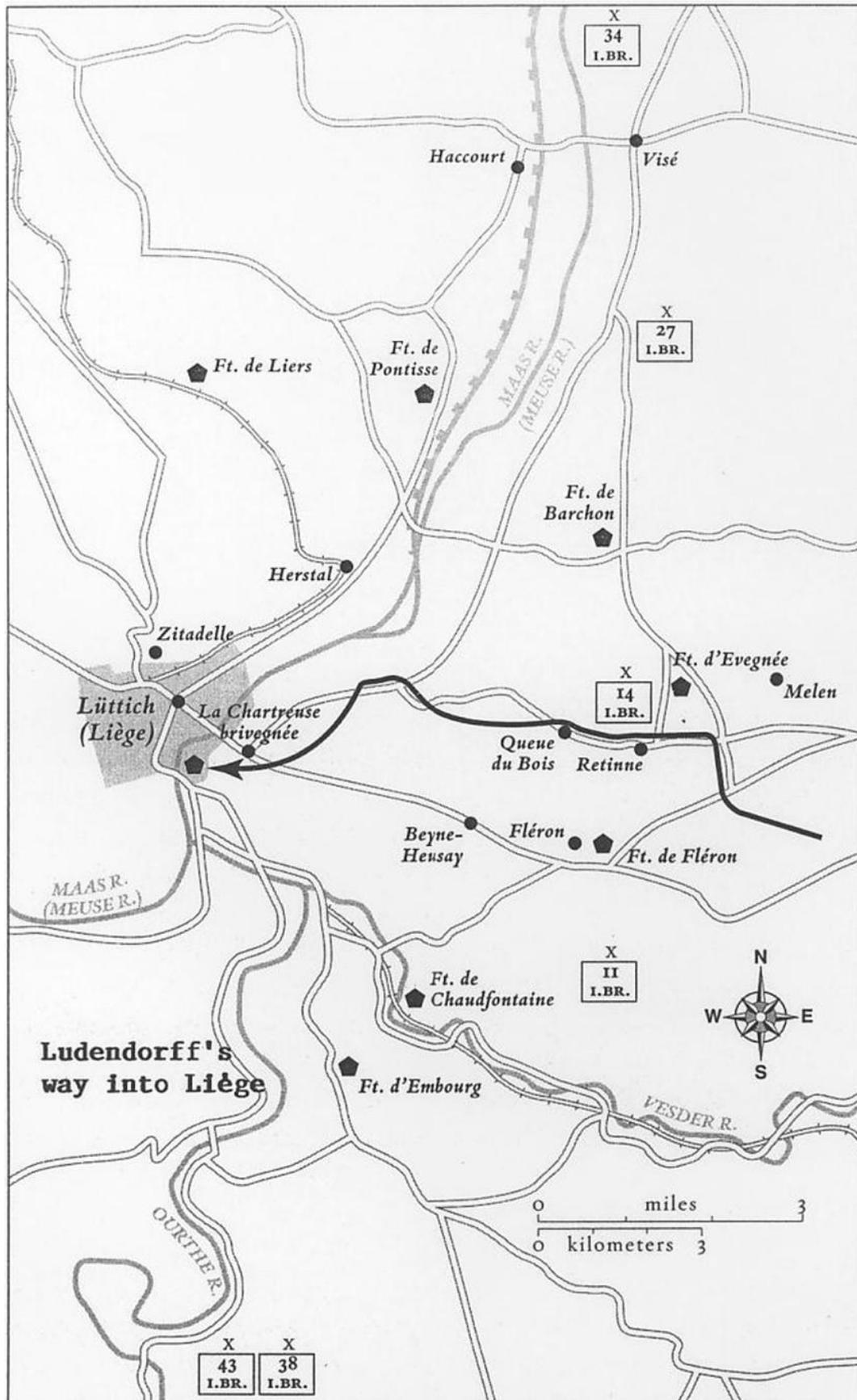
The next morning, August 7, they found themselves in a strange position. They were low on food and ammunition, fettered with the responsibility for one thousand Belgian prisoners-of-war they had taken in Queue-de-Bois, but they were inside the ring of the fortresses and were not attacked. Apparently, neither the Germans nor the Belgians knew of their presence. Ludendorff pushed on.

From his vantage point, Ludendorff ordered forward a party under a flag of truce to demand Leman's surrender, which was again refused; a raiding force that followed was shot down at the door of Leman's headquarters. Ludendorff's bold sally nevertheless prompted Leman to leave the city and take refuge in Fort Loncin on the west side of the outer ring.

Leman also decided to send the infantry, the 3rd Division and its supporting 15th Brigade, back to join the field army on the river Gette outside Brussels, believing that they would be overwhelmed in a battle with what he calculated were five German corps. There he miscalculated. The German brigades merely represented the five different corps to which they belonged. ...

A moment of equilibrium ensued. Ludendorff was inside the ring, but without force to compel surrender. Most of Emmich's command was outside the ring. Leman was determined to continue resistance as long as the forts remained intact, as all still did. The French government, to which Albert appealed for help, promised only to send Sordet's cavalry corps and then just to reconnoitre. The British, who had been expected to deploy their Expeditionary Force of six divisions into Belgium, now decided to retain two at home. Joffre refused to

MAP XXXXI: LIÈGE, AUGUST 6, 1914



extend the mass of his army [i.e. de Langle's Fourth and Lanrezac's Fifth Armies, ¶] northwards, since to do so would detract from his planned offensive towards the Rhine; he actually wanted Albert to bring the Belgian army down from Brussels, away from Antwerp, to join his left wing. The situation map showed a French army aligned towards Lorraine, a German army whose weight had not yet crossed either the Belgian or French frontier, a British army still mobilising to embark, a Belgian army concentrated in the centre of its homeland and, at Liège, a small German striking force immobilised by a handful of Belgian fortress troops guarding the crossings on the possession of which the future of military events in the west turned.

The equilibrium was upset by Ludendorff. (7)

All descriptions of Ludendorff's character agree that, in his icy solipsism, he knew neither fear nor flexibility. On the early morning of August 7, he sent his troops into Liège, in full awareness of their vulnerability to Belgian artillery fire. Unbelievably, however, the brigade crossed the Meuse, in full daylight, on the two remaining bridges without provoking any reaction of the enemy. After dispatching a vanguard to take, if possible, the Citadel, the second of the old forts of the town, Ludendorff contemplated the situation.

Something seemed to be wrong, because no battle noise emanated from the Citadel, where the advance force was supposed to fight.

Then he [Ludendorff] commandeered an automobile and with his adjutant drove up to the Citadel. There was not a German sentry to be seen, only Belgian soldiers. In a piece of audacious cheek, Ludendorff straightened himself up, dusted off his uniform, clenched the monocle into his right eye socket, strode up to the Citadel's gates, and rapped on them with the pommel of his sword. The gates opened.

The courtyard was filled with startled Belgian troops. One of the truly great "what if?" scenarios of modern history were at hand. What if a Belgian soldier had shot the General? What if he had been arrested and turned over to the French? Modern German history may well have taken a different course. "The few hundred Belgians [inside the Citadel]," Ludendorff later triumphantly recorded, "surrendered at my summons." (8)

It turned out later that the leader of the vanguard, Colonel von Oven, had, for some obscure reason, "opted to bypass the Citadel and to head for Fort Loncin." (9) But what mattered was that the bridges were in German hand, and after two days of communication confusion, 2nd Army sent a siege detachment of two corps to invest the as of yet undamaged forts, and prepared the logistics of marching 1st and 2nd Army, almost 600,000 soldiers and 250,000 horses, through the narrow corridor between Aachen and Liège. To move the troops through the cramped medieval streets of Aachen alone was to take five days. General von Einem, commander of the siege corps, immediately stopped the pointless and costly attacks of Emmich's brigades and waited for the heavy artillery to arrive. Ludendorff's brigade remained stuck inside the town and hence the ring of fortification until, on August 8, they managed to break out by taking Fort de Barchon.

On the afternoon of August 12 the special artillery arrived, Skoda 305 mm howitzers and four Krupp 420 mm guns. Within three days, they dutifully reduced the forts to rubble, expending approximately thirty heavy shells on each target. The cannons were then swiftly packed up and sent to follow 2nd Army to Namur.

1st Army, as planned, passed Liège on the north and turned northwest, into the direction of Brussels and Antwerp. The first Belgian position they encountered was in the form of a half circle along the river Gette, but King Albert, mindful of a possible German outflanking move along the Demor River that might cut off the Belgian army from the redoubt of Antwerp, ordered a retreat behind the Dilje River, in the direction of Antwerp's fortified zone. But then a horrible incident occurred six days after 1st Army had occupied the undefended, "open" town of Louvain, the small town with the famous little university, called the "Oxford of the Continent".

The roots of the episode lay in the past. In the initial phase of hostilities during the Franco-Prussian war of 1870, a few occurrences had involved French irregulars, out-of-uniform combatants, self-styled freedom fighters. These patriots had, for the most part, targeted the rear-echelon of the troops, cooks, chaplains or medical staff. They were called "Francs-

tireurs" or "Freebooters" and were, by ancient custom of war but also according to the Hague Convention of 1905, subject to summary execution.

A few such attacks had indeed happened in 1870, but the Prussian reaction to these unimportant skirmishes was excessively hysterical, and led to the execution of many innocent people among a few malevolent. What had, it seems, unnecessarily heightened the German army's apprehensions in early August 1914 was that a few German newspapers had already published bloodcurdling stories of Belgian irregulars before the hostilities had actually begun; pre-emptively, so to say. That, this time, the presence of irregulars was even less apparent than it had been in France was not noticed until it was too late. The Belgian army and civil population behaved properly under trying circumstances, and the rashness of a few malcontents should not have been blamed upon the inhabitants in general.

Unfortunately, it was. In the first days of the war a few horrible massacres took place. The cry "sniper" induced wholesale terror in innocent villages and towns, where not only single men or small groups were caught and fusilladed but sometimes hundreds. In the village of Andenne, 211 people were summarily executed, at Tamines 384, and in Dinant 612. But Louvain's fate turned out worse.

Louvain is situated about two thirds of the way from Liège to Brussels, and Kluck established headquarters for 1st Army there on August 20. When four days later, 1st Army resumed its march to the French border, an attack of Belgium's 2nd Infantry Division and its cavalry threatened to cut from the north into Kluck's open and vulnerable communication and supply lines. OHL was concerned, and, in the tension, on the afternoon of August 25 approximately ten thousand German troops of various units, many of them fresh from the siege of Liège, pitched camp in Louvain.

For reasons unknown, an alarm sounded in the late afternoon. One variation of the story holds that two German units held the respective other one for either saboteurs or Belgian regulars and started to burn down the houses where they assumed the enemy to hide. The other version has it that partisans, existing or not, had shot at the troops, provoking another hysterical reaction. Dusk was setting in, and it seems possible that the German soldiers panicked - exhausted from the march, hungry, thirsty, and afraid - and fired, in the twilight, at entirely imaginary enemies. At any rate, after three days of shooting, burning and general confusion, the damage amounted to two thousand buildings destroyed, among them the university's precious library, two hundred and forty-eight civilians shot to death, and the rest left homeless. Some civilians were deported to Germany.

That was, of course, a story to the liking of the Allied press, which - somewhat arbitrarily - forgot to mention the 119 German casualties of the episode. Within days the world was informed about the German "Schrecklichkeit" ['Dreadfulness', ¶]:

For the Allies, Louvain became synonymous with German "barbarism". Hundreds of lurid posters showing the German as modern-day "Huns" and Wilhelm II as "the modern Attila" or as "King of the Vandals" circulated almost immediately. Undoubtedly, the most famous was produced in the United States. It showed a giant gorilla, wearing a German spiked helmet with the word MILITARISM inscribed on it and sporting a Kaiser Wilhelm-like upturned moustache, emerging from the sea against the background of a burned-out European city. In his right hand he held a bloody club labelled KULTUR; in the other, a bare-bosomed damsel obviously in distress.

American journalists from Collier's Weekly, The Saturday Evening Post, and the Chicago Tribune, among others, fed their readers a steady diet of despondent Belgian refugees, burned-out cities, rotting animal and human corpses, and taunting "Huns". (10)

The true cause of the alarm and the subsequent massacre were never established, but it was confirmed later that the worst conduct was apparently displayed by reserve units, who had as of yet not even fought in the actual battle: on August 25 and 26 the perpetrators seem to have been the Reserve Regiment of the Prussian Guards and parts of the 17th and 18th Reserve Divisions from Schleswig-Holstein. On August 27 and 28 German records identify the 27th Landwehr Brigade, another reserve unit, bivouacking around Louvain. These units had been exposed much longer to the influence of the

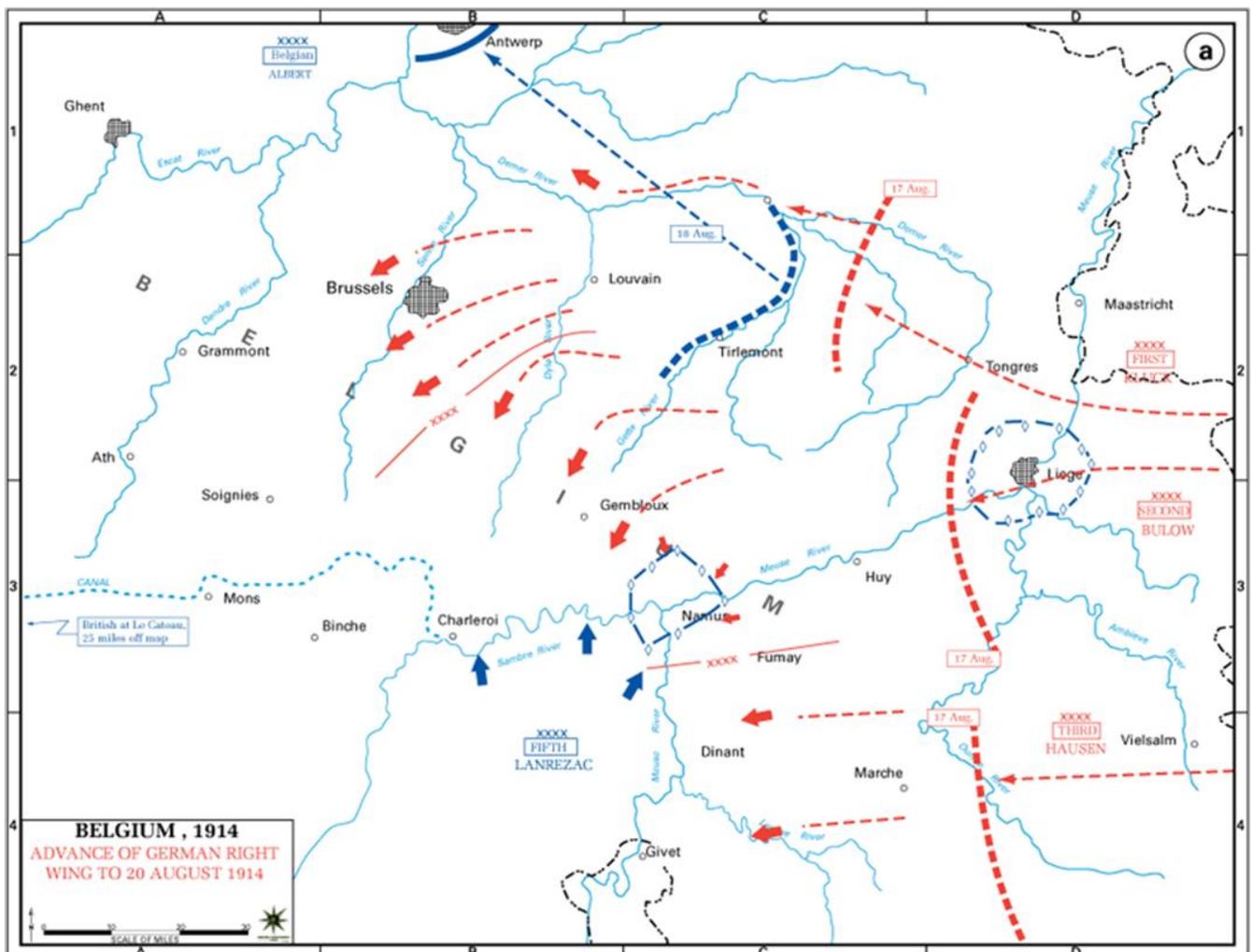
fictitious partisan stories of the German press than the fighting units, which may have reduced their critical abilities. After the war, university and city were rebuilt with German reparation funds.

Ludendorff's audacity enabled the German right wing to pass through the bottleneck of Liège, on the northern part of the great battlefield. 1st Army next proceeded in the direction of Brussels and Mons and 2nd Army to Namur, to demolish this second great obstacle blocking the Meuse.

In the meantime, what had happened to Plan XVII, Joffre's attack into the Lorraine and subsequent drive to the Rhine? The French High Command, GQG, had initially earmarked First and Second Armies, with a total of nineteen divisions, for the role of the southern pincer of Plan XVII. For flank protection another, smaller, French force was formed in early August, the "Armée Alsacée", commanded by General Paul-Marie Pau, a veteran of 1870, at Belfort, south of Dubail's First Army.

Actual fighting in the south started on August 7, when Joffre, apparently to "arouse the nation's passion for war by an early coup de theatre in Alsace," (11) ordered VII Corps [Louis Bonneau], stationed in Belfort, to advance to and conquer Mulhouse, which it did on August 8 without meeting initial opposition. The town was, however, given up just as quick on August 10 in the face of German counterattacks.

MAP XXXXII: ADVANCE OF THE GERMAN RIGHT WING UNTIL AUGUST 20



The grand ambition of Joffre's Plan XVII, however, had not changed. Its design was still the encirclement of the fortified German positions at Metz and Thionville with two pincers, Dubail's First and Castelnau's Second Armies from the south, and Ruffey's Third and Langle de Cary's Fourth Army from the north. They were to meet, eventually, near the Saar and Moselle rivers; the German defenders would be trapped; and the way to the Rhine would be free.

An unintentional effect of Bonneau's visit to Mulhouse and retour was that the German deployment in the south was upended: Heeringen had sent far too much of 7th Army after the single French corps, and the arriving Bavarians of Rupprecht's 6th Army found it hard to establish contact and flank protection with Heeringen's troops.

Worse: since the expected Italian reinforcements had to be written off, the Bavarians found themselves fairly extended. They had only about 3,000 men per kilometre of front line available compared with, say, 1st Army's 11,000 men per kilometre. Slowly, the Bavarians occupied their quarters in the Lorraine between Metz and Dieuze and amused themselves with liberating the local wine cellars. Duty, however, called soon.

Joffre detailed the Armée Alsacée to provide defence the French border from the Swiss frontier up to Mulhouse, and to cover Dubail's flank. The latter task meant that it had to move north-eastwards and contradicted the first assignment. At any rate, Dubail's and Castelnau's forces were to break out just south of the German forts of Metz and Thionville, attacking from the Trouée de Charmes between Toul and Epinal. Dubail's general direction would be to proceed to and conquer Sarrebourg, followed by moving to Donon (slightly north eastward) and Strasbourg (slightly south-eastward); Castelnau was to aim for Morhange, making sure to cover Dubail's left flank against an eventual German sortie from Metz.

They would thus avoid to meet German strongpoints or known troop concentrations, but "the farther French forces advanced ... the broader their fronts became: eventually, eighty kilometres for First Army and seventy for Second Army. Dubail's dual objectives of Sarrebourg and Donon necessitated splitting his forces and thus exposing his flanks to German counterattack." (12)

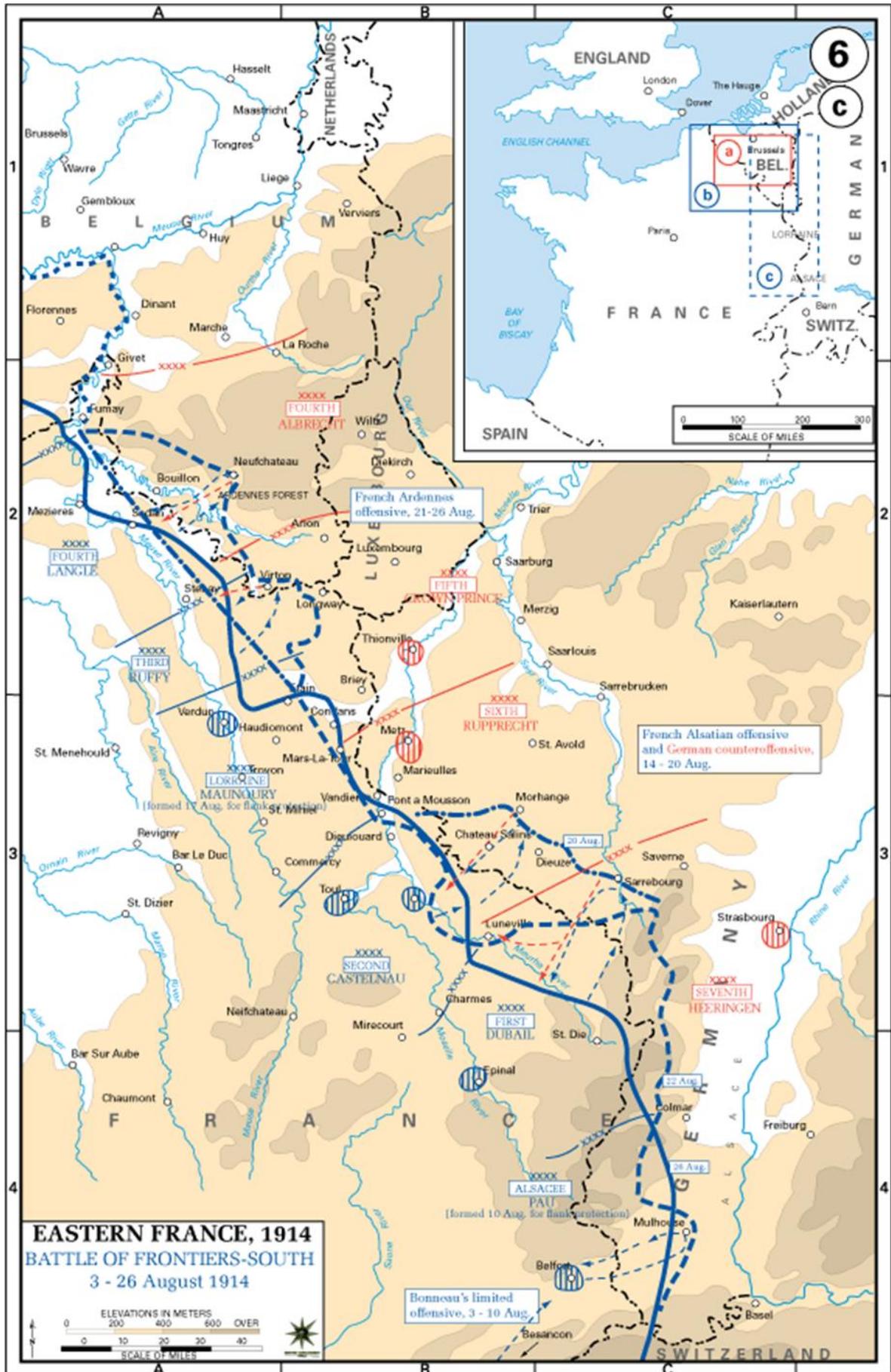
Joffre discounted intelligence reports that indicated that the Schwerpunkt, the main concentration, of the German deployment was directed against Belgium. In addition, he expected no more than six German corps defending Alsace-Lorraine, and so advised a sceptical Castelnau, while, in reality, 6th and 7th Armies were composed of eight corps. In Joffre's opinion, the mass of the German troops was in the Moselstellung, the fortified position between Metz and Thionville along the Moselle River, on the defensive, and the rest in East Prussia facing the Russians, who would, as the news from St. Petersburg informed him, begin their attack on August 14.

Dubail's and Castelnau's German opponents, Rupprecht and Heeringen were as unhappy as was Castelnau, but for the opposite reason: their role was far too defensive for their taste, and they began to stir at Moltke's reins. Their more offensive plans were rejected, but when Krafft von Delmensingen, Rupprecht's chief of staff, devised an option to "sack" any French forces that would be bold enough to follow if 6th Army pretended to retreat, the plan won preliminary approval, and 6th Army was withdrawn behind the Saar, as a lure.

On the morning of the fourteenth, he [Joffre, ¶] sent the armies of the right wing - roughly four hundred battalions and sixteen hundred guns, almost one-third of the chief of staff's entire strength -- into Germany. ... Overall, the French force formed a gigantic wedge aimed straight at Sarrebourg and the left wing of Rupprecht's Sixth Army. Progress was good. (13)

Joffre was aware of the danger of encirclement and took precautions. He demanded that Dubail and Castelnau's units always maintained close contact, for mutual flank protection. That they did, until after Dieuze and Sarrebourg had been occupied without resistance, Joffre ordered Castelnau north-eastwards to Morhange, into the Saar valley. Consequently, First and Second Army lost touch, since Dubail was still progressing eastward to Strasbourg.

MAP XXXXIII: BATTLE OF THE FRONTIERS - SOUTH



For four days the Germans fell back, contesting but not firmly opposing the French advance, which in places reached twenty-five miles into Reich territory. A German regimental colour was captured and sent for presentation to Joffre at Vitry-le-François, where he had established General Headquarters (GQG).

Chateau-Salins was taken, then Dieuze, finally on 18 August, Sarrebourg, all places that had been French since Louis XIV's war against the Habsburgs in the seventeenth century. [They had been German, however, the many centuries before Louis XIV, ¶] Then the front lost its sponginess. The French infantry found German resistance stiffening. The small Army of Alsace, advancing continuously on the First's right, recaptured Mulhouse next day, but its success lent no support, for a wide gap yawned between it and Dubail's positions. It was not the only gap.

First Army was not firmly in contact with Second; west of the Saar Valley, Dubail and Castelnau were not in operational touch at all. Dubail was conscious of the weakness and intended on 20 August to mend it by launching an attack that would both restore contact and open a way through for Bonneau's Cavalry Corps (2nd, 6th and 10th Divisions) to debouch into the enemy's rear and roll up his flank; but even as he set the attack in motion on the night of 19/20 August, the Germans were preparing to unleash their planned counter-offensive.

Rupprecht's and Heeringen's Armies had been temporarily subordinated to a single staff, headed by General Krafft von Delmensingen. Thus, while the French Second and First Armies co-ordinated their actions only as well as sporadic telephoning could arrange, the German Sixth and Seventh fought as a single entity. Here was the anticipation of a new trend in command, which would bring into being formations as large as existing communication systems could control.

On 20 August its worth was swiftly demonstrated. Dubail's night attack was checked as soon as begun. The setback was followed by a simultaneous offensive along the whole line of battle by the eight German corps against the French six. The French VIII Corps, which had reached the Saar at Sarrebourg, was overwhelmed; its artillery was out-metalled by the heavier German guns, under the fire of which the German infantry drove the French from one position after another.

Heavy artillery did even worse damage to Second Army, which was struck by a concentrated bombardment along its whole front as day broke on August 20. The XV and XVI Corps abandoned their positions under the infantry attacks that followed. Only the XX, on the extreme left, held firm. It was fighting on home ground and was commanded by General Ferdinand Foch, of exceptional talent and determination.

While his soldiers clung on, the rest of the Army was ordered by Castelnau to break contact and retreat behind the River Meurthe, the line from which it had begun its advance six days earlier. It had very nearly been enveloped on both flanks, which would have resulted in irretrievable disaster to the whole French army, and had completely lost touch with the First Army, which Dubail was therefore obliged to disengage from battle also. (14)

The French attack, necessarily, showed Joffre's hand: his Schwerpunkt was in the south; consequently, the German right wing in Belgium would be opposed by less French troops than initially presumed. While Schlieffen had not really believed that the French would do him this favour, he had provided for such an eventuality: in the case of a French attack against Alsace-Lorraine, resident German forces were to check the initial momentum and delay the enemy's advance, but not counterattack until M-Tag+30.

These troops, south of the hub of the German wheel, were to wait until the strong right wing had forced the French between Paris and the Champagne into an enclosure with reversed fronts: the French would have to defend themselves in westerly direction, and thus would be crucially vulnerable were 6th and 7th Armies suddenly to strike into their backs.

Curiously, the successful defence of the Saar created a problem for the Germans, one not caused by the enemy but their own hubris. The glory-hungry commanders of 6th and 7th Armies, Bavarian Crown Prince Rupprecht and former Prussian War Minister Josias von Heeringen, pleaded with Moltke incessantly until they were allowed what von Schlieffen had categorically forbidden: an early counterattack in the south.

It came just as Schlieffen had assumed: the counterattack, begun on August 25, petered out after initial gains on a previously unknown strong defence position the French had established along the Meurthe by September 7. Moltke had to turn six reserve divisions, which had been earmarked for the right wing, around and forward them to the south, to refill the thinned-out German lines. Much of the credit for the French defence went to Ferdinand Foch, who was soon recognized as the rising star among the younger French generals and trusted with more important tasks. Worse than the German offensive's failure per se was that its ebbing off in the first September days freed French reserves, which allowed Joffre, in the most critical phase of the campaign in the West, between September 3 and 10, to send four corps to the new army he was building northwest of Paris to break the German momentum and save his country. But we're not there yet.

While Foch's defence had saved the battered First and Second Armies, north of them disaster struck. One option in Plan XVII had called to counter an eventual German attack on the Meuse, somewhere on the line Liège - Dinant - Sedan - Verdun, with a double pincer movement in the French version of the enveloping game. The right (southern) pincer would, of course, be formed by Ruffey and Langle de Cary's Third and Fourth Armies between Sedan and Verdun, which would move northeast; the second (northern) one by Lanrezac's Fifth Army and the BEF, attacking south-eastward between Liège and Namur. The idea was to trap the German 4th and 5th Armies south of Liège, between the Meuse River and the Ardennes Forest.

Next above the First and Second Armies stood the Third and Fourth, given by Joffre the mission of penetrating the forest zone of the Ardennes and striking towards the towns of Arlon and Neufchateau in southern Belgium. Their front of attack was twenty-five miles, the depth of forest to be penetrated about eight. Two considerations argued against Joffre's offensive instructions.

The first was that the terrain of the Ardennes - tangled woods, steep hillsides, wet valleys - impedes military movements, confining marching troops to the infrequent roads. The second was that the German armies, Fourth, commanded by the Duke of Wuerttemberg, and Fifth, commanded by the German Crown Prince, were deployed to attack to the east on a collision course with the approaching French, and in exactly equal strength, eight corps against eight.

Of this equality Joffre's headquarters were quite unaware. The main French reconnaissance force, Sordet's Cavalry Corps, had criss-crossed the Ardennes between 6 and 15 August without detecting the enemy's presence. The troopers had ridden bare their horses' backs - French cavalry had the bad habit of not dismounting on the march - but seen neither hide nor hair of the enemy.

As a result, GQG had assured both de Langle, Fourth Army, and Ruffey, Third Army, on 22 August that "no serious opposition need be anticipated." Reports from French aviators had confirmed this wholly false judgement throughout the previous week. (15)

By alerting their HQ that approximately six French corps were approaching, the German aviators had delivered better results. Surprise, the greatest tactical advantage, was thus on the German side.

An army attacking on a broad front, as the French would, faces the common problem that different elements on the advance tend to proceed at different speeds; either due to their intrinsic velocity, which makes cavalry move faster than infantry, or due to discrepancies in the resistance they encounter. The flanks of disconnected units thus become vulnerable to counterattacks. This is what happened to the French attack into the Ardennes on August 22, and the spatial orientation of Third and Fourth Armies made it worse.

Their formations were disposed "en echelon", like a flight of steps descending in a shallow easterly direction from north to south, so that the flank of each corps was exposed to the left. Were the Germans to push hard

against the top of the French front, there was a danger that the steps of the French line would separate in sequence, leading to the wholesale collapse of Fourth and Third Armies. That, on 22 August, was exactly what happened.

In practice, it was Third Army which collapsed first. Advancing at daybreak, its vanguard ran into unexpected German resistance and, when a sudden bombardment overwhelmed its supporting artillery, the infantry were panicked into flight. The rest of the Army, with a gap yawning in its centre, was stopped in its tracks and had to fight hard to hold its position. Fourth Army, thus unsupported to its south, also failed to advance, except in the centre, a position held by the Colonial Corps. ... Its soldiers were hardened and experienced veterans. That was to be their undoing.

Pressing forward with a determination the unblooded conscripts of the metropolitan army could not match, it rapidly became embedded in a far larger mass of Germans. Five of its battalions, advancing one behind the other on a front only 600 yards wide, launched repeated bayonet attacks through dense woodland, only to be thrown back by concentrated rifle and machine-gun fire. The harder the Colonials pressed, the higher their casualties mounted. By the evening of 22 August, the 3rd Colonial Division had lost 11,000 men killed or wounded, out of strength of 15,000, the worst casualties to be suffered by any French formation in the Battle of the Frontiers. Its effective destruction spelt an end to Fourth Army's efforts to take ground forward, just as V Corps's collapse had halted Third Army's offensive farther to the south. (16)

The failure of the Ardennes plan, coming so soon after the breakdown of the offensive in Alsace-Lorraine, should have given Joffre cause for contemplation: if the main concentration of the enemy could not be identified in the south or in the Ardennes, it must be threatening somewhere else.

But Joffre still clung to his offensive concept. The same night he ordered Third and Fourth Armies to proceed into the Ardennes he directed Lanrezac to attack the Germans along the Sambre, between Namur and Charleroi. The BEF was instructed to provide cover on Lanrezac's left flank, moving into the direction of Mons and Soignies. What Joffre did not know, or was unwilling to perceive was that Fifth Army and BEF, with their combined seventeen divisions, were opposed by the complete right German wing, 1st, 2nd and 3rd Armies, with approximately thirty divisions, under Bülow's tactical command.

It did not help much that 1st Army soon diverted to Louvain and Brussels. Joffre left it to Lanrezac to choose the suitable time for his offense: "I leave it entirely to you to judge the opportune moment for you to decide when to commence offensive operations." (17) But then, even when the BEF informed GQG that they could not follow Lanrezac's flank for two days due to organizational delays, Fifth Army was ordered to proceed alone.

GQG's strategy, however, overlooked an assumption made before the war in Plan XVII, whose validity had expired: the initial plan of operations, should any be necessary, along the Franco-Belgian border, had counted heavily on the assistance of the Belgian field army against (as Joffre thought) relatively small German forces and on the blockage of the Meuse by the forts of Liège and Namur. By now, however, the Belgian army was in retreat to the "National Redoubt", their extensive entrenched position around Antwerp and the Schelde estuary, Liège had fallen, and, considering the new German heavy artillery, things did not look good for Namur. While the Redoubt was secure - the Belgian army would spend most of the war in it - they were out of the German way and thus neutralized.

The Germans, on the other side, could not afford any delays: on August 15, the first Russian troops appeared in East Prussia. On August 21, the vanguard of von Bülow's 2nd Army arrived at the River Sambre, which, for the moment, was defended by Lanrezac's III and X Corps.

Rivers, unless wide, are always difficult to defend. Meanders create pockets that soak up troops and cause misunderstandings between neighbouring units as to where responsibilities start and end. Bridges are a particular problem: does a bridge which marks a boundary between units lie in one sector or another? Buildings and vegetation compound the problems, breaking lines of sight and impeding easy lateral movement along the river when local crises, requiring rapid reinforcement, arise.

Long experience has taught soldiers that it is easier to defend a river on the far, rather than the near, bank but, if the near bank is to be defended, then it is better done behind it than at the water's edge. All these truths were to be proved again in the battle that developed on the Sambre during 21 August.

Lanrezac, with perfect orthodoxy, had ordered the bridges to be held only by outposts, while the bulk of the Fifth Army waited on higher ground, whence it could advance to repel a German crossing or mount its own offensive across the bridges into Belgium. The outposts at the bridges, however, found themselves in a dilemma. At Auvélais, halfway between Namur and Charleroi, for example, they were overlooked from the far bank, and requested permission either to cross or to fall back. Their regimental commander, bound by Lanrezac's instructions, refused but sent more troops to support them. The reinforcements discovered more bridges than their orders indicated had to be defended.

While they were making their dispositions, German patrols of Second Army appeared opposite, sensed an opportunity and requested permission to chance a crossing from corps headquarters. It was that of the Imperial Guard, which, fortuitously, Ludendorff happened to be visiting when the message arrived. Showing the same initiative as he had done fifteen days earlier at Liège, he took personal responsibility for approving the venture.

The 2nd Guard Division attacked, found an undefended bridge - there were eight in a sector where the French troops thought there was but one - and established a foothold. To the west of Auvélais, at Tergné, a patrol of the German 19th Division found another unguarded bridge, and crossed without asking for orders. Responding to opportunity, the divisional commander sent a whole regiment to follow and drove the French defenders away. By the afternoon of 21 August, therefore, two large meanders of the Sambre were in German hands and a gap four miles wide had been opened across the river front. (18)

The gap ought not to have turned out too significant by itself, had not Lanrezac's subordinates, the commanders of III and IV Corps, launched an open attack into the meanders. Their troops, approaching coverless over open fields, ran into the machine-gun positions the Germans had meanwhile had the time to set up. The results were predictable, the losses enormous, and Fifth Army lost contact to their left flank neighbour, the BEF. To make hay when its harvest, Sordet's Cavalry Corps, which had reconnoitred again, and again failed to detect the Germans until it was too late, retreated in a hurry, straight through the line of their attacking infantry comrades. The tactical situation got completely out of hand and Lanrezac's left flank simply melted away. The tally of the day counted nine French divisions defeated by three German ones, and the Sambre line was as good as lost.

The collapse of Third and Fourth Army on August 22, south of Lanrezac, compounded his problem. Fifth Army had now lost cover on the right flank as well, and might well be in danger of being enveloped between 3rd Army, who had crossed the Meuse at Dinant from the south, and 2nd Army from the north. If Kluck moved 1st Army down from Brussels as reinforcement, the whole left sector of the French front could be lost.

Strategic misconceptions played a great role in the defeat at the Sambre. Joffre still believed the bulk of the German forces around Metz and the south and had not realized that Lanrezac's Fifth Army and the BEF were to face the German Schwerpunkt. He even ordered Lanrezac to advance. William O'Neil comments:

But Lanrezac held back behind the Sambre and Meuse Rivers. Reports from the Belgians and his own reconnaissance suggested that the German strength before him was much greater than Joffre had assessed. Lanrezac was reluctant to push on north-eastward as Joffre wished without a clearer and more reassuring picture of what lay ahead.

The Sambre Valley was too narrow, shallow and crowded with industry to make a strong defensive line but the rising and hilly ground to the south of it was generally defence-friendly. To the east excellent defensive positions could be found along the bluffs commanding the deep, steep-sided valley of the Meuse River.

The BEF was small (six divisions, ¶) and not overly capable but it rejoiced in a grandly-titled commander, Field Marshall Sir John French (1852-1925). Ironically, French spoke little French and got on quite badly with his eponymous allies; he and Lanrezac came to loath one another virtually on sight. Naturally the BEF and Fifth Army never cooperated closely, imperilling both. To ease confusion, we'll refer to the BEF commander as "Sir John" rather than "French".

The BEF had initially stood south of the Sambre between the Fifth Army on its right and extending beyond the fortress of Maubeuge on its left. There it had guarded the left flank of the French-British line stretching from Maubeuge to Belfort, 225 miles to the southeast, occupying a reasonably defensible position not directly exposed to the German axis of advance. Since only light screening forces stood in the path of an enemy further west this was a prudent disposition of Sir John's meagre forces.

On the evening of the 20th however, he issued orders to the BEF to march north, acting in response to the urgings of Joffre, who was not well informed about the situation in Belgium, and without consulting Lanrezac. Reconnaissance was spotty and limited and no provision was made for advance guards. By nightfall on the 21st the leading forces had reached the village of Mons and the narrow industrial canal that ran through it, east to west. This was approximately six miles or half a day's march north of Lanrezac's front lines and there was a gap of more than that between the right of the BEF's lines and the left of Fifth Army's, bridged only by a thinly-stretched screen of cavalry.

Unknowingly, the Fifth Army and BEF lay in the path of three German armies whose total strength greatly outweighed theirs. The 1st Army formed the very right of the German line and thus came opposite the BEF, on the left of the Allied line. The 2nd Army, next in line, opposed Lanrezac's Fifth Army. Then, separated by the Belgian fortress of Namur (which would hold out until August 24), came the German 3rd Army. (19)

Yet this time, Fortuna emerged on the side of the Allies. Due to their contrasting personalities, and against the whole design of the Schlieffen Plan that laid a premium upon close collaboration of the right wing armies, Kluck and Bülow did not communicate. Instead of proceeding west southwest, to Lille, which was his axis of advance as per the Schlieffen Plan, Kluck marched southwest south, from Brussels, to face off with the BEF. Neither Bülow's pleas nor his final, direct order to 1st Army to turn south and assist in the envelopment and destruction of Fifth Army, were acknowledged. Kluck later said that it had been his intention to simply "cut the English off" (20) from regaining contact with Lanrezac's left flank. At any rate, 1st Army's vanguard, the Brandenburg Grenadiers, ran into the British I and II Corps, commanded by Douglas Haig, on Sunday morning, August 23. The Prussians began the day with daring but ill-advised attacks against a well-entrenched British line behind the Mons-Conde Canal. Captain Blöm of the 12th Brandenburg Grenadiers reported:

"No sooner had we left the edge of the wood than a volley of bullets whistled past our noses and cracked into the trees behind. Five or six cries near me, five or six of my grey lads collapsed in the grass. ... The firing seemed at long range and half-left ... Here we were as if advancing on a parade ground ... away in front a sharp, hammering sound, then a pause, then a more rapid hammering -- machine guns!" (21)

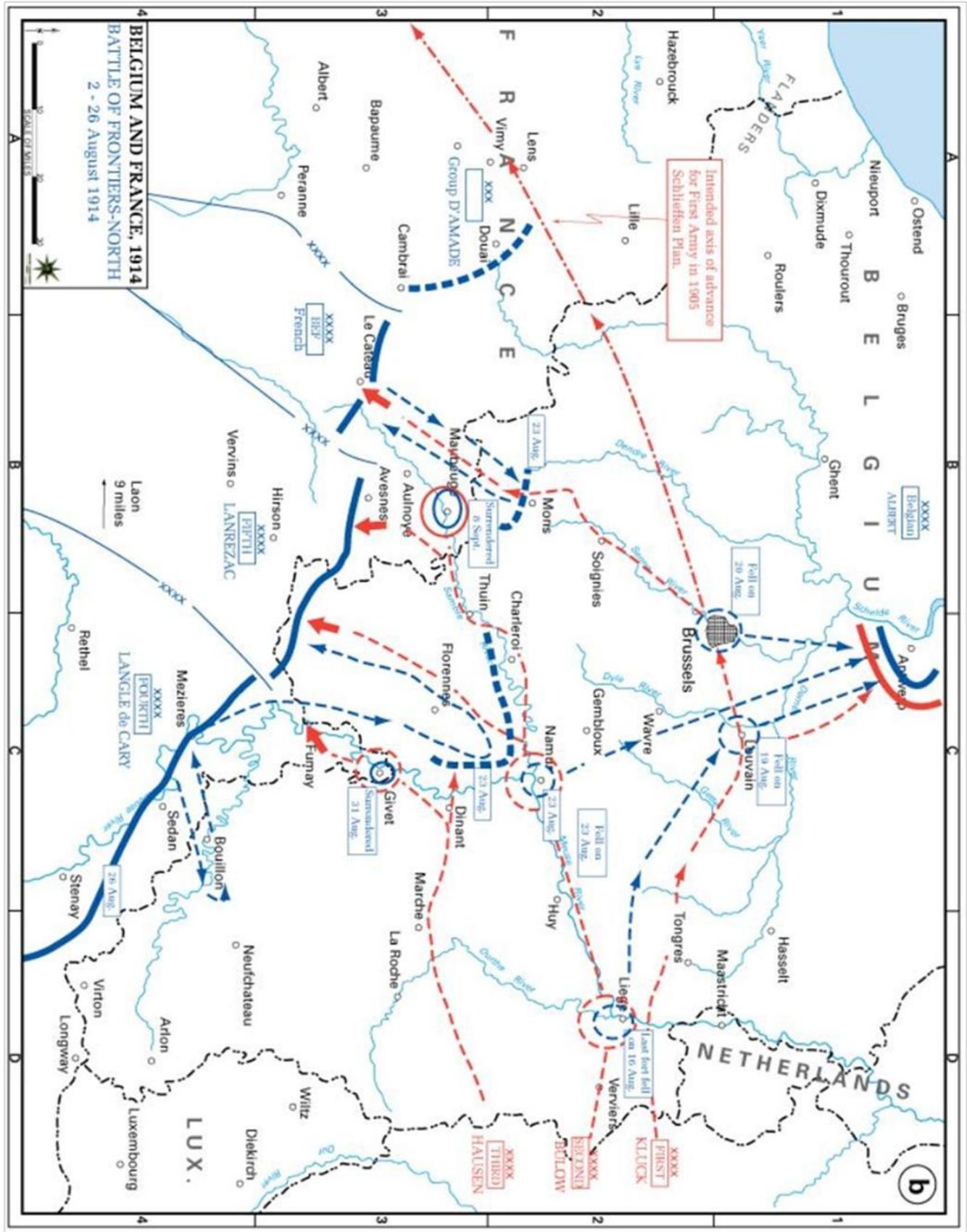
Corporal John Lucy of the Second Royal Irish Rifles observed:

"A great roar of musketry rent the air. ... For us the battle took the form of well ordered, rapid rifle-fire at close range as the field of grey human targets appeared, or were struck down, to be replaced by further waves of German infantry who shared the same fate. ... Such tactics amazed us, and after the first shock of seeing men slowly and helplessly falling down as they were hit [it] gave us a great sense of power and pleasure." (22)

This time the BEF applied the lesson they had learned at the Modder and Tugela rivers in South Africa against the Boers to the German attack. As the perhaps five thousand German casualties, compared to the sixteen hundred on the British side proved, it was nigh suicide to advance, without cover, against well-entrenched positions behind a water line. But while Mons was a clear tactical success for the British army, the fact that their right flank, i.e. Fifth Army, had collapsed,

MAP XXXV: BATTLE OF THE FRONTIERS - NORTH

THE STRONG RIGHT GERMAN WING TAKES THE SAMBRE AND MONS AND FORCES LANREZAC'S FIFTH ARMY AND THE BEF TO RETIRE IN THE DIRECTION OF PARIS.



necessitated a general retreat along the whole left wing of the Allied forces. Lanrezac informed the Brits on the evening of August 23 that, due to the German advance over the Sambre, he was retracting Fifth Army southward; a decision which compelled the BEF to do likewise, in south-westerly direction. Joffre informed Paris that ...

"In the north, our Army operating between the Sambre, the Meuse and the British Army, appears to have suffered checks of which I still do not know the full extent, but which have forced it to retire. ... We are therefore compelled to resort to the defensive, using our fortresses and great topographical obstacles to enable us to yield as little ground as possible. Our objective must be to last out, trying to wear the enemy down, and to resume the offensive when the time comes." (23)

Indeed, "... to last out ..." was, whether or not Joffre knew it at the time, the correct idea, for time was the essence of the German plan, the key that determined failure or success. Time worked for the Allies and against the Germans. It was herein, for example, that the unnecessary counterattack of 6th and 7th Armies in Alsace-Lorraine cost Moltke more than he had, for it caused timing problems in the flow of reserves to the front. The limited space set margins that could not be exceeded. Six reserve divisions which had been earmarked to reinforce the all-important right wing had instead been sent southward to the Lorraine, to save Crown Prince Rupprecht's royal posterior. They were lost for the right wing, where they were sorely missed in a week or two.

But this was not the only weakening of the Western theatre. The Guard Reserve Corps and XI Corps were hurriedly taken out of the line and sent to East Prussia, where the Russians had appeared far earlier than expected. Ludendorff, who, after his second successful Belgian encounter had been promoted and appointed Chief of Staff for the 8th Army defending East Prussia, informed OHL that he neither needed nor wanted these two corps; they were far more important in the West. Moltke sent them anyway. In the event, these two corps came too late to help 8th Army in the East, but their absence crucially weakened the Western front.

The fragmentation of the German lines in the Western theatre had, however, not yet ended: III Reserve Corps was deployed to Antwerp, to guard the Belgian army in the 'Redoubt', IV Reserve Corps went to garrison Brussels, and VII Reserve Corps was sent to besiege Maubeuge, the French border fortress at the Sambre. All in all the Western front lost eight corps, or sixteen divisions, a full fifth of its nominal strength: three to Lorraine, two to the East, and the last three as enumerated above.

For the next ten days 5th Army and BEF retreated, fighting delaying actions whenever possible. It is one of the more difficult military manoeuvres to retreat in good order and keep the enemy from too hot a pursuit, and its proper execution meant that Fifth Army and BEF survived to fight another day.

This other day would come if it were possible to not only preserve the cohesion of Fifth Army and BEF, to prevent a German breakthrough, but to win time to set up a new force with which to strike a counterblow against the German right wing and thus, incidentally, save Paris. Tactically, for every mile the Germans marched deeper into France, they moved away farther from their supply bases, and the French army came closer to their own; this is what strategists call the "advantage of the inner lines". In his general instruction of August 25, Joffre ordered: "Future operations will have as their object to reform on our left a mass capable of resuming the offensive. This will consist of the Fourth, Fifth and British Armies, together with new forces drawn from the Eastern front, while the other armies contain the enemy for as long as possible." (24)

Before this plan could be executed, some line of resistance had to be established; else a German breakthrough might lead to the wholesale collapse of the Eastern Allied front. Since the Sambre was lost, the next available position was a line roughly along the Oise, which ran northeast, the Aisne, which ran east, and the Somme, which ran westward, whither Joffre ordered his troops to proceed and entrench [see Map XLII, from east to west]: the remnants of Third and Fourth Army, to cover the Argonne Forest, west of fortified Verdun; left of Fourth Army, at Rehel, a detachment in the process of formation, commanded by Ferdinand Foch [it would later become the Ninth Army, ¶1]; along the Upper Oise, at Guise, Lanrezac; southwest of him, between the Oise and the Aisne, the BEF; at Montdidier a second army freshly in the

making, the Sixth, commanded by Michel-Joseph Manoury; and, between Sixth Army and the Atlantic coast, a group of territorial divisions led by Albert d'Amade. The drawback was that the defensive line, for the moment, only existed on paper.

After the unceremonial funeral of Plan XII, Joffre began to collect units and form them into new corps and armies, cannibalizing the whole French army. The "mass capable of resuming the offensive" or "mass of manoeuvre" was gathered northwest of Paris, around Amiens and Montdidier. This is where Manoury new Sixth Army was established, consisting of IV and VII Corps and four reserve divisions; a reinforcement consisting of a ninth division was on the way. The defence of Paris was augmented by adding to the usual garrison the 45th Division from Algeria, five territorial, i.e. reserve, divisions and a few independent brigades and auxiliaries. The whole shebang was constituted as the "Armée de Paris" and commanded by General Gallieni, an old war horse recalled from retirement.

Meanwhile, the German right wing and the Allied left wing, in retreat, delivered amalgamates of marching and fighting. Lanrezac and Sir John, whose cooperation was very sceptical after the French fiasco at the Sambre and had to be restored by Joffre's personal intervention, were very much aware that every day helped their own cause and hampered the Germans. On August 26, a battle developed at Le Cateau, where two tired British corps were discovered and subsequently attacked by three German infantry and three cavalry divisions, which were, during the day, reinforced by a further two infantry divisions. It was an uneven battle, and by evening, the English found themselves in danger of encirclement.

As evening approached, II Corps [of the BEF, ¶] stared dismemberment in the face. It was saved partly by German mistakes but, as much as anything, by the intervention of Sordet's Cavalry Corps, which at Le Cateau retrieved much of the reputation it had lost by its failure to find the Germans in their advance through Belgium, and by one of the despised French territorial divisions, whose over-age reservists fought valiantly outside Cambrai to delay the arrival of the German II Corps.

As dusk fell, II Corps [BEF, ¶], which had lost 8,000 killed, wounded and missing during the battle - more than Wellington's army at Waterloo - summoned its reserves of strength to slip away and resume the retreat. (25)

The setback at Le Cateau endangered the building up of Joffre's planned defence line along the Oise and Aisne. To give the bedraggled British time to regroup and retreat in good order, a counterattack seemed necessary, and Fifth Army was ordered to launch it immediately. But Lanrezac dithered, again, and decided to withdraw fifteen miles to the south, from the vicinity of Hirson and Guise to La Fère and Laon[see Tactical Map 7, Square B2,1], before opening his offensive. At that time, however, the BEF had already left Saint-Quentin on their way south, and Lanrezac's left flank was exposed again.

The situation seemed to necessitate a word from above, and in the morning of August 28, Joffre materialized at Lanrezac's HQ and ordered him to attack 2nd Army tout suite (rumour had it that he threatened Lanrezac with instant execution should he fail to obey). Hence the next day Fifth and 2nd Army squared off for the third time. The French attack aimed for von Bülow's flanks at Vervines in the north and Saint-Quentin in the west, and on the first day, August 29, almost succeeded at Vervines to drive 2nd Army's Guard Corps off its position. The German elite unit barely held the ground it covered but clung on until darkness fell.

Again, luck was on the German side. Documents captured from the chief of staff of Lanrezac's III Corps, Colonel Geismar, revealed that the main French object for the following day was Saint-Quentin, not Vervines, and thus 2nd Army could take the proper alignment. On the morning of August 30, Bülow hurled Guard Corps, X Corps and X Reserve Corps against the northern position of Fifth Army, between Saint-Quentin and Vervines. The attack proceeded, great losses though it cost, to a point where Lanrezac had to fear encirclement.

Lanrezac, fearing that German Third and First armies might join the battle in a pincer move against Fifth Army's flanks, at 5 pm on 31 August ordered his "fatigued" corps commanders to retreat south behind the Aisne River. Three hours later, Joffre approved Lanrezac's request to break contact (lest his army be "captured," as Lanrezac put it to GQG) and to withdraw forty kilometres to a new line running from Compiègne through Soissons to Reims. (26)

Indeed, why did von Bülow fail to drive 1st and 3rd Armies into Lanrezac's open flanks, destroy Fifth Army and the BEF, and, perhaps, win the war early? We do not know. Apparently he was happy enough to have won the day.

As great as Lanrezac's failings were, they paled compared with those of Bülow. For a second time (since Charleroi) [the Sambre crossing, ¶] he had blunted an attack by French Fifth Army. For a second time, he had driven that force back with heavy losses. And for a second time, he had an opportunity to pursue and perhaps finish off Fifth Army. As commander of both First and Second armies and with Third Army at his beck and call, he was well positioned to close the vise on Lanrezac: Kluck to drive against Fifth Army's left flank from the west, Hausen against its right flank from the east, and his Second Army against its rear from the north.

Bülow did nothing of this kind. Instead, he spent the afternoon of 30 August spreading the news of his victory. Kluck was first on the list. "Today 2 Army has decisively defeated the enemy. Large formations fell back on La Fère." Moltke was next: "Today, the second day of the Battle of St. Quentin, complete victory. French [forces] comprising four army corps and three divisions in full retreat." Hausen was last: "Major French forces decisively defeated in two-day Battle of St. Quentin and hurled back on La Fère and east [of there]."

More, instead of immediately ordering a potentially fatal pursuit of the "decisively defeated" French Fifth Army, Bülow let his troops rest the next day, 31 August, as well. Field kitchens arrived to serve the half-starved troops from steaming vats of soup with meat, potatoes, cabbage or beans, and roots or rice. Nearly six thousand soldiers needed medical attention or burial.

Almost as an afterthought, Bülow nonchalantly suggested that First Army change direction and advance along the line La Fère - Laon and "fully exploit" Second Army's tactical victory. (27)

Worse than the missed opportunity to pursue Fifth Army was that Bülow's decisions revealed that cohesion and cooperation between the armies of the right wing, so indispensable to the German Plan, had for the most part ceased to exist.

Moltke did not, as Joffre did, direct the war personally; he thought it proper to keep the commanding generals informed about the opinions of High Command through the occasional visits of liaison officers. The German forces thus lacked a High Command that held the war plan together, and, not surprisingly, it fell to pieces. The actions of the right wing armies, although fairly successful, took place in disjointed theatres, in which each army fought a separate war for tactic, not strategic success.

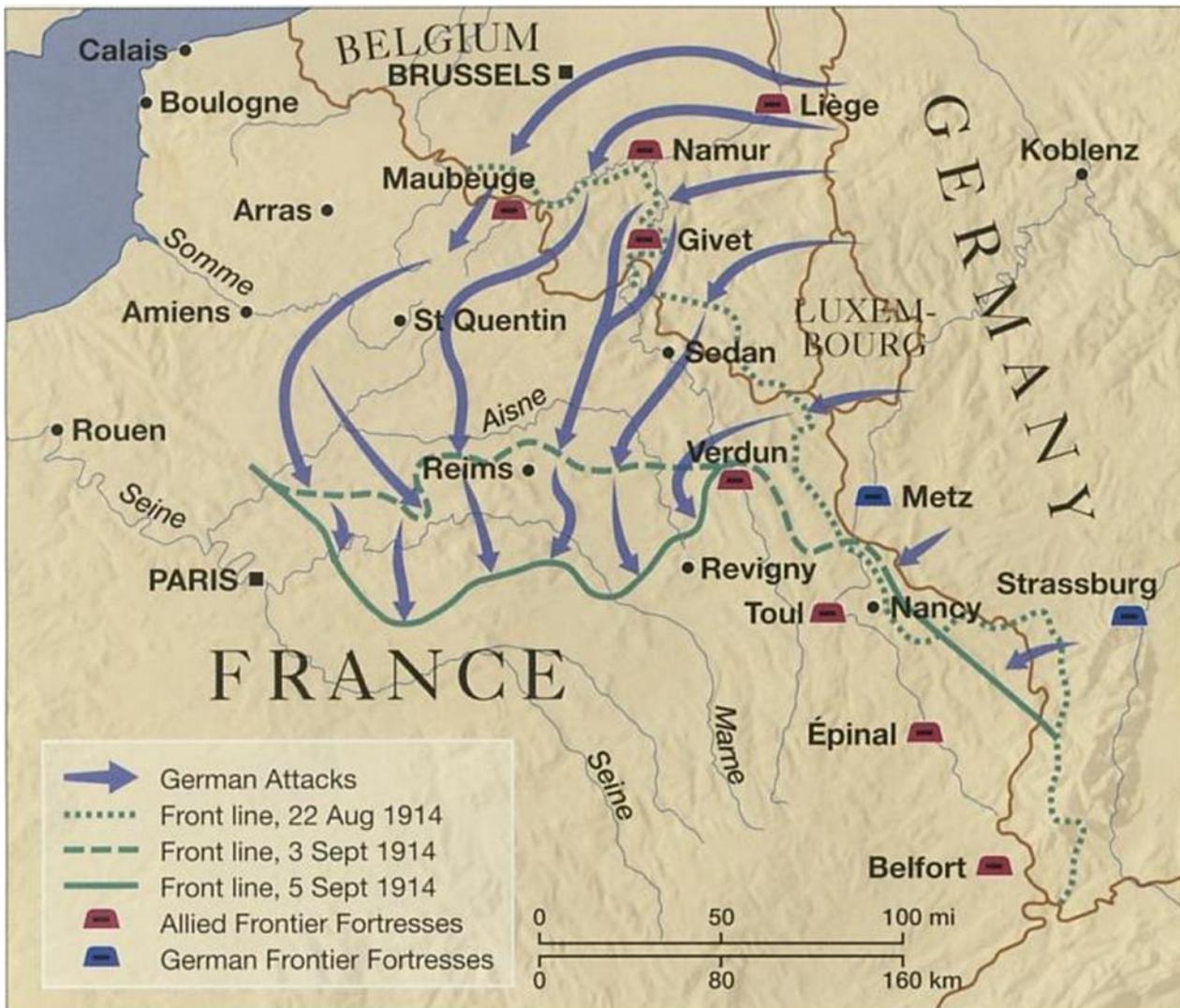
And it was in not insisting on cohesion, communication and cooperation on the right wing that OHL, i.e. Moltke, had essentially abandoned any possibility to encircle Paris by the end of August. OHL's General Directive of August 27 set the following aims and axes of advance for the German armies: 1st Army was to proceed, west of the Oise river, to the Lower Seine; 2nd Army, via La Fère and Laon to Paris; 3rd Army to Chateau-Thierry at the Marne; 4th Army to Reims and Epernay, also on the Marne; and 5th Army, west of Verdun, over the Argennes to the Upper Marne. 6th and 7th Armies were to stay on the defensive for the moment, unless a French retreat would give them a shot at the Moselle and Upper Meuse, say, to Charmes and Neufchateau.

We have already seen how 1st Army deviated from the old Schlieffen Plan line: instead of moving from Brussels southwest to Lille, Arras and Amiens, a line that would bring them eventually to the west of Paris, Kluck turned southwest south to attack the BEF at Mons. Map XLIII below shows the consequences of Moltke's new strategic alignment.

The front line of August 22, as indicated by the dotted green line, has 1st Army northwest of Maubeuge, still more or less on the prescribed course, and 2nd and 3rd Armies between Namur and shows the dramatic change of direction in the German advance, in particular that of the right wing: 1st Army is now east of Paris, and east of the Oise, and 2nd Army's arrow of advance does not point to Paris anymore but to the Aisne River west of Reims. Why?

One day after Moltke's order, August 28, Kluck decided to draw 1st Army south-eastward, without asking for permission. For reasons he later advanced the apparent "disappearance" of the BEF on his left wing and the opportunity to

MAP XXXXVI: THE GERMANS ARMY TURNS SOUTHEAST



catch Fifth Army, finally, by enveloping it from the west. For reasons not easily understood, Moltke did not only not protest Kluck's overstepping his authority, but acquiesced; nay, on September 2 he invalidated the order of August 27 and "in a message to First and Second Armies ... he announced that it was 'the intention of the High Command to drive the French back in a south-easterly direction, cutting them off from Paris. The First Army will follow the Second in echelon and will also cover the right flank of the armies.'" (28)

Two reasons can be identified, perhaps, for Moltke's change of mind, if not entirely sound ones. The tactical reason for the change may have been that Moltke spotted a chance for a definitive strike when, on September 1, French Third and Fourth Armies, plus Foch's new detachment, executed a concerted counterattack into the positions of 5th Army, near Stenay, south of Sedan. The excellent French counterattack much battered the Crown Prince's forces, but the necessary northward movement also made the attackers vulnerable on their open left, i.e. western flank. This gave 3rd and the left wing of 2nd Army the chance to attack south-eastward, roughly in the direction of Mont Blanc and sack the complete French centre. This was what Moltke ordered, but the French smelled a rat and quickly drew their heads out of the noose by withdrawing southward, to Verdun. While the operation turned out another tactical German success, another chance for a decisive battle had been squandered.

The strategic reason for Moltke's change of plan was the effect of a problem inherent in the design of the war plan. By the end of August, what would transpire next depended upon the direction the German advance would take. Joffre was not yet able to react offensively in the west; his "mass of manoeuvre" was still in assembly, located northwest of Paris, between Amiens and Montpellier. For the moment he could only react to the German moves. If the Germans were

to pass southwest of Paris, as it had seemed until the end of August, his new force would be caught on the wrong foot, facing east northeast, 90° in the wrong direction. Instead of fronting the Germans, they would have to run after them. If, however, the Germans decided to wheel in the northeast of Paris, in the direction of the Marne river, they...

... would be doing the French what Schlieffen, in another context, had called a "willing favour." Schlieffen had, as his Great Memorandum reveals, come to fear that whichever decision was taken, it would favour the French.

To aim to pass Paris to the right [i.e. east, at the Marne River, ¶] would expose the German outer wing to a thrust launched from the Paris fortified zone by its strong garrison; to pass Paris to the left would open a gap between the outer German force and those with which they should keep station, for Paris, like a breakwater, would then divide the tide of the German onset, open a gap in the line and expose the force the wrong side of it to an alternative thrust from Paris in the opposite direction. (29)

Whatever the direction of the German army enveloping Paris, its flanks would be exposed to a possibly lethal counterattack. Facing this problem, Moltke changed orders again, on August 27, in its indecisiveness the second change read like a case of avoiding a clear decision.

The loss of five corps from the fighting line - one-seventh of the western army - actually eased Moltke's logistical difficulties, which grew as the armies drew further away from Germany but closer together as they approached Paris on the overcrowded road network.

Nevertheless, preponderance of force at the decisive point [= the SCHWERPUNKT, ¶] is a key to victory and Moltke's dispersions made preponderance less rather than more likely of achievement. On 27 August, moreover, he further diminished his chance to secure a concentration of superior force by ordering the outer armies, von Kluck's 1st, and von Bülow's 2nd, to fan out. 1st Army was to pass west of Paris, 2nd to aim directly for the fortified city, while 3rd was to pass to the east and 4th and 5th, still battling with the French armies defending the lower Meuse [Third (now Sarrail) and Fourth (Langle de Cary), ¶], to press westward to join them. (30)

Moltke wanted the cake, and eat it, too. Apparently he thought it possible to achieve, with a seriously weakened army, after the loss of eight corps to various nonessential tasks, everything Schlieffen had deemed problematical even for an undiminished force. Probably more disruptive, however, was Moltke's complete toppling of his August 27 order with the one of September 2, which essentially created an offensive line pointed to the south between Paris and Verdun [see Map XLIII, the solid green line, ¶].

Now the vectors of both sides' forces pointed to an area east of Paris, between the Seine and Marne rivers and the Marne's tributaries Ourcq, Grande Morin and Petit Morin. Hence the battle which eventually developed in this basin became known as the Battle of the Marne.

The exact strengths of the German right wing respectively French left wing which undertook this action seem to be a matter of discussion. John Keegan delivers the following account:

Meanwhile the French railway system was hurrying to the front the forces with which Joffre planned to deliver his counterstroke. Since it centred on Paris, its network brought troops rapidly from the increasingly stabilised eastern sector to the critical points.

By 5 September the Sixth Army [Michel-Joseph Manoury, ¶] consisted, besides Sordet's Cavalry Corps and the 45th (Algerian) Division, of the VII Corps, brought from Alsace, and the 55th and 56th Reserve Divisions from Lorraine; the IV Corps was en route from Fourth Army.

The Ninth Army, originally constituted as the Foch Detachment, comprised the IX and XI Corps transferred from Fourth Army, together with the 52nd and 60th Reserve Divisions and 9th Cavalry Division, the 42nd from Third Army and the 18th Division from Third Army.

Between the Paris Entrenched Camp and the Marne, Joffre therefore disposed, at the opening of the great battle named after the river, of thirty-six divisions, including the BEF, strengthened by the arrival of four fresh brigades from England, while the German 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th Armies opposing totalled just under thirty. Schlieffen's "strong right wing" was now outnumbered ... (31)

More significant than the simple number of divisions was the internal balance of the German deployment at the beginning of September: no more was the right wing the strongest German troop concentration:

Alfred von Schlieffen had demanded a ratio of 7:1 between the German right and left wings, and Moltke still one of 3:1. The reality at the end of August 1914 was that while the left flank in Alsace-Lorraine (6th and 7th armies) had strength of 331,597 men, the right flank in northern France (1st and 2nd armies) had just 372,240, or about one corps more. What was now the German centre in the Ardennes and the Argonne (3rd, 4th, and 5th armies) was greatest at 474,050 soldiers.

With specific reference to the critical pivot wing, during the initial battles of the war the Schwenkungsflügel (1st, 2nd, and 3rd armies) had enjoyed an advantage of 100 infantry battalions and 175 artillery batteries over French Fifth Army and the BEF; by the time it reached the Marne, that ratio had been reversed, with the French left wing (Ninth, Fifth, and Sixth armies) superior to the German right wing (1st and 2nd armies, and half of 3rd Army) by 200 battalions of infantry and 190 batteries of artillery. (32)

Other reckonings have subtracted a few corps from the German side, since many units of 4th and especially 5th Army never ever beheld the Marne. In counting the troops which actually faced off, Niall Ferguson concluded that "on August 23 the three German armies on Moltke's right wing constituted twenty-four divisions, facing just seventeen and a half Entente [Allied, ¶] divisions; by September 6 they were up against forty-one." (33)

In the week between Kluck's change of direction, August 28, and September 5, the Germans progress had resumed on most parts of the front. Many of the soldiers of 1914, on both sides, never forgot as long as they lived the sultry heat and the endless marches of those weeks; manoeuvring from dawn to dusk, sparsely interrupted by action or meals. Sleep became a luxury item. For the Allies, at least, hope lay in the knowledge that each step brought them closer to their supply depots; for the Germans the situation was reversed. They often had to march without food, though "like the British, their need was for rest rather than rations. A French witness noticed on 3 September, when a unit of the invaders reached their billets for the night, "they fell down exhausted, muttering in a dazed way, 'Forty kilometres! Forty kilometres!' That was all they could say." (34)

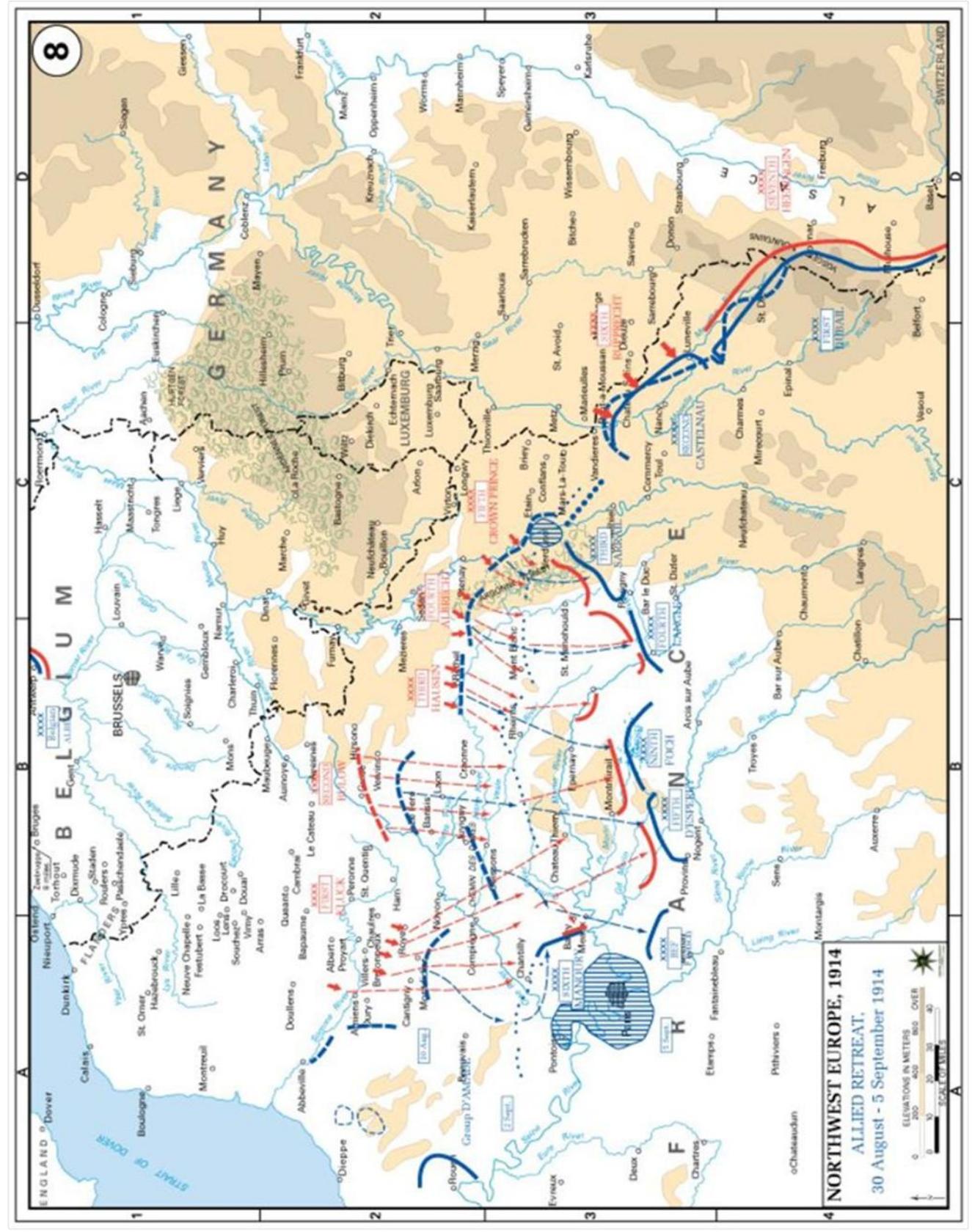
Von Kluck interpreted Moltke's order of September 2 ["to drive the French back in a south-easterly direction, cutting them off from Paris", ¶] as permission to steer even further to the southeast in his pursuit of Fifth Army, now commanded by Louis D'Espèrey, whom Kluck hoped to catch behind the Marne. As per orders, 1st Army followed 2nd "en echelon", and by September 5, the German advance had reached the positions marked in continuous lines on Map XXXVII, overleaf, from west to east:

Kluck's 1st Army advanced almost directly southward from Le Cateau to the Somme River which they crossed east of Amiens, and then further south via Compiègne on the Oise in the direction of Mieux on the Ourcq, and the Marne, thirty-five miles east of Paris. His vanguard had crossed the Morins and the Marne and pushed in the direction of the Seine at Nogent. This was Kluck's position on the evening of September 4.

Von Bülow's 2nd Army had descended almost exactly southward from the position of its costly victory at St. Quentin to Laon, Chateau Thierry and Epernay; its vanguard stood at Montmirail, in the neighbourhood of the headwaters of the Petit Morin, the Marshes of the St. Gond. Hausen's 3rd was, momentarily without contact with the enemy, on the Upper Marne south of Rheims. Duke Albrecht and 4th Army had descended down the western outreaches of the Argonne Forest, passed Mont Blanc, and had designs on Vitry-le-François on the confluence of Marne and Ornain, until August 21 the location of GQG. The Crown Prince's 5th Army had wheeled around Verdun in southwestern direction, unable though to take any of the forts.

MAP XXXVII: ALLIED RETREAT AND DEPLOYMENT BEFORE THE BATTLE OF THE MARNE

THE ALLIED POSITIONS STRETCH ALONG A SLIGHT ARC FROM NORTH OF PARIS (SIXTH ARMY, MANOURY), THE BEF EAST OF PARIS, FOLLOWED BY FIFTH, NINTH, FOURTH AND THIRD ARMIES TO VERDUN AND THE ARGONNES FOREST.



The French positions, shown from right to left, i.e. east to west, were: Sarrail's Third Army at both sides south of Verdun and the Argonnes, facing at its left flank the less than impressive attempts of the Crown Prince to take Verdun. The remains of Fourth Army, whose best corps had been sent to join Joffre's "mass de manoeuvre" between Somme and Oise, defended the Upper Marne against Duke Albrecht.

Langle de Cary's left flank was now in contact with Foch's new Ninth Army, which was preparing to deploy against the Germans at the Marshes of the St.Gond. To Foch's left stood D'Espèrey, at the springs of the Grande Morin. There was a bit of a hole, at the moment, at Fifth Army's left flank because the BEF was regrouping east of Paris, at the Seine, north of Melun.

To the left of the BEF began the Fortified Zone of Paris. Its regular garrison of four territorial divisions and a territorial brigade had been augmented by 61st and 62nd Reserve Divisions, 84th Territorial Division and a marine artillery brigade. Even Manoury's freshly assembled Sixth Army and IV Corps from Third Army were dispatched to the protection of the capital and placed under the command of General Gallieni.

Gallieni did not disappoint. In his first public proclamation, on 3 September, he promised to defend Paris "to the last extremity." That morning, he called out military engineers and civilian labourers armed with axes and saws to cut down the undergrowth of brush and hedges that obscured the line of fire of the capital's 2,924 guns - ranging from massive 155mm siege guns to rapid-fire 75s. They likewise demolished houses and sheds that Gallieni deemed to obstruct his artillery. Munitions depots were stocked with a thousand shells per heavy gun.

Hospitals and penitentiaries were evacuated and readied for the anticipated flood of wounded men. Fire departments were put on alert. Grocery stores were filled for the expected siege with bread wheat for forty-three days, salt for twenty, and meat for twelve. Gas to produce electricity for three months was requisitioned from the countryside.

Pigeons were placed under state control in case telegraph and radio communications broke down. For three days, thousands of tons of concrete were poured and millions of meters of barbed wire strung for new defensive lines. Gallieni, who had fought at Sedan in 1870 and thereafter been interned in Germany, was determined that the enemy, should it take Paris, would find little of value: The bridges over the Seine River were to be blown up, and even the Eiffel Tower was to be reduced to scrap metal. Former Captain (now Lieutenant Colonel) Alfred Dreyfus joined the artillery. (35)

Kluck's change of direction, for a moment, confused the French preparations. Gallieni demanded more troops from the government, which Messimy could, unfortunately, not provide since Joffre ignored him. Joffre declined to release more troops to Paris and Messimy resigned; with him resigned the whole staff of the Ministry of War.

Manoury and Sixth Army, who had been placed under Gallieni, were now ordered northeast, in the direction of Chantilly, to position themselves into Kluck's open right flank should he continue on his south-easterly course. Kluck did continue and passed Sixth Army without realizing their presence west of a line Chantilly - Meaux.

Map XXXXVII shows that, as far as the positions were on September 4, it was the German army that now seemed to head into a gigantic trap. The French army held a - more or less - continuous line between Verdun and Chantilly, and were they to attack at the enemy's flanks, Kluck's right respectively Hausen's left; they might well encircle the complete German right wing in the great basin east of Paris.

On September 5, Moltke issued a new General Order, in which he admitted the failure of his strategy since August 27: "The enemy has eluded the enveloping attack of First and Second Armies and has succeeded, with part of his forces, in gaining contact with Paris." (36)

Now he upended the Schlieffen Plan ideas completely. Instead of encircling the French and British forces in the west, around Paris, he improvised a manoeuvre in which 4th and 5th Army would assume the role of a western pincer, driving southeast, into the back of Dubail's First and Castelnau's Second Army. 6th and 7th Army would form the eastern pincer, attack westward, gain the Moselle, and close the trap in which the French First, Second and parts of Third Army would find themselves; enveloped between the Moselle river and the southern reaches of the Argonne Forest [viz. the arrows on Map XLIII]. 1st and 2nd Armies were to hold their lines east of Paris and defend against a possible thrust from the capital and 3rd was to advance southward, to the Upper Seine.

To consider such a risky manoeuvre, Moltke must have been unaware, as Kluck was, of the accumulation of enemy troops on Kluck's right flank, around Meaux. Joffre realized the chance: "It is desirable to take advantage of the exposed position of the German First Army to concentrate against it the strength of the Allied armies on their opposite."
(37)

We will never know whether Moltke's curious plan would have worked, because GQG swiftly directed Manoury's Sixth Army to cross the Ourcq and exploit the possibly unguarded right flank of 1st Army, whose main forces had already crossed the Marne, the Ourcq and the Grand Morin and were at the moment southeast of Manoury, north of Provins and Nogent on the Seine. At the same time, the forces east of Kluck's left flank, between the Grand Morin and the Marshes of the St. Gond, D'Espèrey Fifth, Foch's Ninth Army and the BEF were to "fix" 1st Army's left wing in the east, and Kluck would be cut off from 2nd Army, enveloped and wiped out.

At dawn of September 5, the vanguard of Sixth Army reconnoitred at von Kluck's right flank, around Meaux, to find the best attack positions for an infantry assault scheduled for the following day. Since Kluck's foremost troops were already twenty-five miles further south, a well-executed strike would seal 1st Army's fate. German cavalry, however, spotted French movements where none had been expected and warned the commander of IV Reserve Corps, Kluck's right flank unit, General von Gronau.

Gronau realized that the French were aiming to roll up 1st Army's flank and decided to attack. This was a risk, without doubt: behind him was a whole lot of nothing, and if the French broke through, 1st Army might be lost. He attacked nonetheless, and a largely balanced battle filled the remainder of the day. At dusk, Gronau believed that he had gained time enough for Kluck to recall his army and IV Reserve Corps quietly left the line which, unbeknownst to them, the French had planned to attack the next day. Kluck was now warned: he took his army back twenty miles and at the same time turned it around 90° to the west, from south of the Marne to the west of the Ourcq, a few miles east of Meaux and Barcy. He began to build a line opposite Sixth Army whither he transferred II Corps on September 6, IV Corps on the 7th, III Corps on the 8th and IX Corps, the last one, on September 9.

The problem Kluck now faced was having to be in two places and doing two things at the same time. He was to attack at the Marne and defend at the Ourcq, and, of course, keep flank contact with 2nd Army. This was impossible, and the German army was to suffer the consequences of Moltke's unnecessary assignments of strategic reserves to non-essential tasks.

Joffre's transfers [of units to Foch's and Manoury's forces, ¶] had not altered the strategic situation on the Eastern Front, which had stabilised as soon as the French ceased to attack and found strong defensive positions behind the Meuse and Moselle. Kluck's withdrawals, by contrast, weakened his principal front at the point where his mission was still to deliver a decisive, war-winning blow and at a moment, in the very last of the forty days which were expected to bring victory, when the French were gathering to deliver their counter-offensive over the same ground.

Indeed, by 9 September, the fortieth day itself, the German First Army, instrument and hope of Schlieffen's vision, was not at the Marne at all, but had been withdrawn in its entirety to the Ourcq ... Between the German First Army and Second an enormous gap had opened, thirty-five miles wide, which the Germans could disregard only because they believed that the enemy troops opposite, the British Expeditionary Force, lacked the strength and had demonstrated the disinclination to penetrate. The high command of the BEF, though not its brave soldiers, had given von Moltke, Kluck and Bülow reason for so believing. (38)

Map XXXXVIII, p. 579, reveals the situation on September 9, the most decisive day of the campaign. The blue arrows point into the gap between 1st Army, which opposes Manoury northeast of Paris at the Ourcq, and 2nd Army, around Montmirail and the Marshes of the St. Gond. Blocked by Manoury, Kluck cannot move much hither or yon, and Bülow's right flank at Montmirail is almost forty miles away. Bülow cannot move west, either, because he is simultaneously attacked by Foch's Ninth Army at the Marshes of the St. Gond. Thus the fortieth day becomes indeed the decisive day of the campaign, though in an entirely different shape than Schlieffen had imagined.

While the Allied armies lined up for the counterattack, 1st Army, practically all of it, except some cavalry, on the Ourcq vis-a-vis Manoury, entered into another battle. Its opponents, Sixth Army, were improvised units and not completely able to resist the attack of Kluck's tired but experienced infantry. But they delayed the advance well enough; 1st Army made only slow progress. The problem was that it was progress into the wrong direction, westward, away from 2nd Army and the gap consequently widened.

The German right wing was now spread all over the landscape. Kluck at the Ourcq, Bülow on the Marne, between Epernay and Montmirail, attempting to cover the west, and Hausen to the left of 2nd Army, between the Marshes of the St. Gond and Vitry-le-François.

The whole region "is a country of great open spaces; highly cultivated, dotted with woods and villages, but with no great forests, except [those to the south]. It is cut from east to west by the deep valleys, almost ravines, of the Grand Morin, Petit Morin, the Marne, the upper course of the Ourcq, the Vesle, the Aisne and the Ailette."

The Marshes of the St. Gond are a topographical exception, "a broad belt of swamp land ... [extending] from east to west nineteen kilometres, with an average width of three kilometres ... five lesser roads and three foot-paths cross [the marshes] from north to south, but they are otherwise impassable, forming a military obstacle of the first importance."

Von Bülow's left, and the right of von Hausen's Third Army were, on 6 September, firmly embedded on the northern edge of the marshes, with Foch's new Ninth Army positioned on the other side. The mission given him by Joffre was to protect the flank of Fifth Army, battling to drive von Bülow beyond the Marne. It was in character that he chose to interpret it offensively. While his centre and right stood fast, he ordered his left, the 42nd Division, to advance, supported by the Moroccan Division and part of IX Corps. During 6 and 7 September they battled valiantly to work their way round the western end of the marshes, while the rest of Ninth Army and the Germans opposite conducted artillery duels over the sodden ground of the marshes themselves.

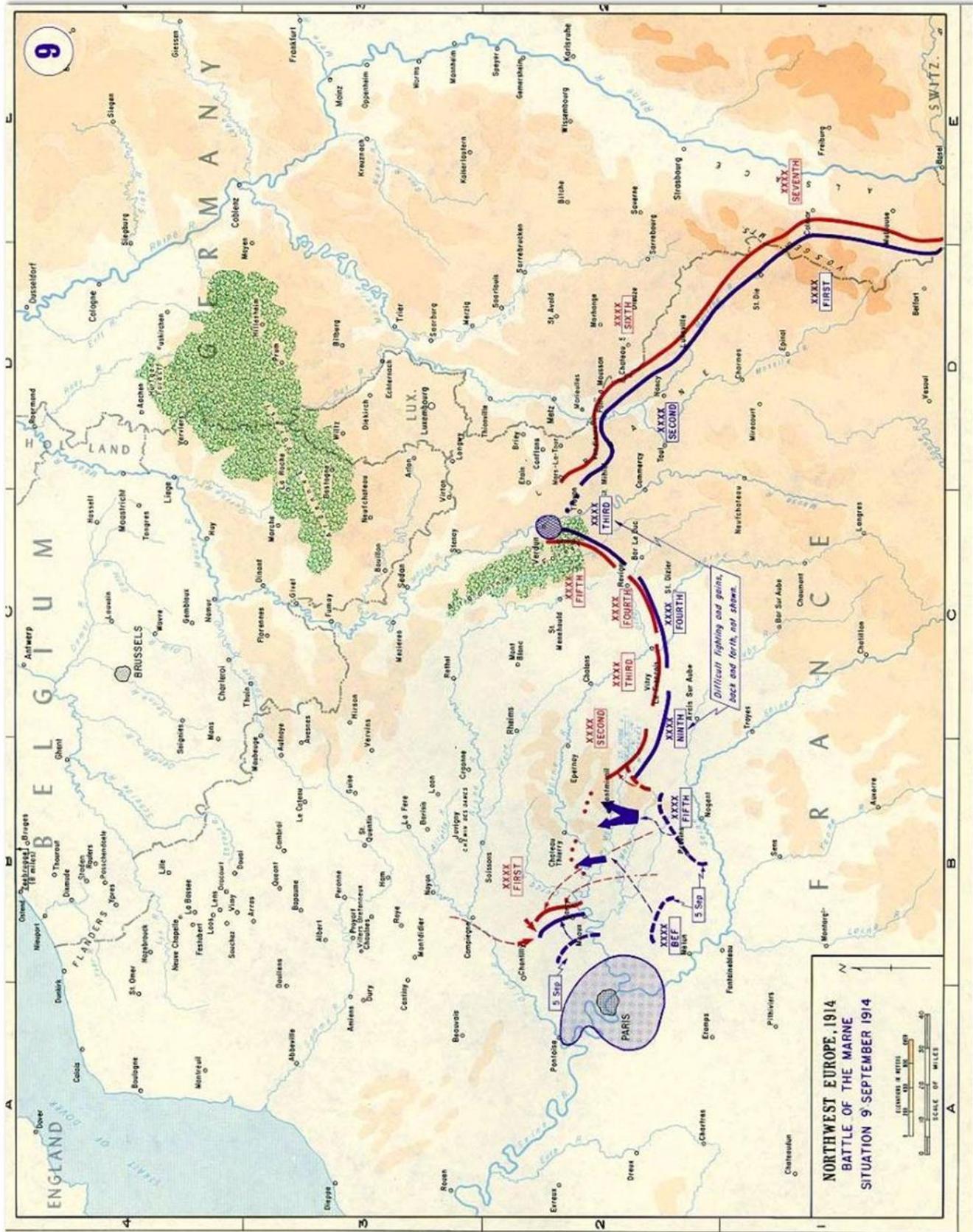
The battle of the marshes threatened to descend into a stalemate, as that on the eastern frontier had become. Then it was transformed by the uncharacteristic boldness of von Hausen. This Saxon general has been described as too deferential to the wishes of the Prussians Kluck and Bülow on his right, too overawed by the German Crown Prince who commanded on his left, to take forthright decisions in the handling of his own army. On 7 September he displayed an independence that contradicted both judgements.

Persuading himself that the ferocity of the two previous days' fighting had blunted the enemy's alertness, he decided to launch a surprise night attack. In the moonlit early morning of 8 September, the Saxon 32nd and 23rd Reserve Divisions and the 1st and 2nd Guard Divisions advanced through the marshes and across the dry ground further east, fell on the French with the bayonet and drove them back three miles. This was a local victory that shook the confidence of Foch's Ninth Army, which lost further ground on its right during the day and merely held its own on the left.

The events of 8 September prompted Foch to draft the later legendary signal: "My centre is giving way; my right is in retreat, situation excellent. I attack." It was probably never sent. Nevertheless, the general's actions bore out the spirit of those words. During 9 September, using reinforcements lent by Franchet D'Espèrey, and

in expectation of the arrival of XXI Corps from Lorraine, Foch succeeded in plugging every gap in the line opened by Hausen's continuing offensive and did, at the day's end, actually manage to organise a counter-

MAP XXXVIII: BATTLE OF THE MARNE - SITUATION SEPTEMBER 9



attack at the right-hand extremity of his army's position. Merely by holding his front, Foch achieved a sort of victory. (39)

The possible consequences of Foch's boldness were, unbeknownst to the Germans, more hazardous than anybody assumed. The repositioning of Ninth Army to the marshes had moved it westward, and this move resulted in the loss of contact of Foch's right wing with their neighbours of Fourth Army. Had Hausen been aware of it, he could have exploited "a twenty-five-kilometre gap that had developed between Foch's Ninth Army and Langle de Cary's Fourth Army ... The entire region of Sommesous - Sompuis - Vitry-le-François was devoid of major French formations." (40) But Hausen had, unbelievably, decided to give 3rd Army the - decisive - day off, and nobody discovered the hole.

Meanwhile, Foch's manoeuvres around the Marshes of the St. Gond could not prevent the battle degenerating into just another stalemate, but one that handed the tactical advantage to the French. For it fixed 2nd and 3rd Armies at the marshes, kept Bülow's right flank open and prevented him from re-establishing contact with Kluck.

Who was succeeding against the weakening Sixth Army, and his III and IX Corps eventually managed to overcome the entrenchments of the French 61st Reserve Division, breaking through Sixth Army's last line of defence before the capital itself. On the early afternoon of 9 September, the road to Paris was open, the modified Schlieffen Plan had succeeded, and the war was won.

Or so von Kluck believed - for a moment. In the heat of battle, however, neither he nor von Bülow had paid much attention to the greater picture which was less than auspicious. On 6 September Joffre's counteroffensive had begun, employing almost 1.1 million Allied troops against the 750,000 Germans between Paris and Verdun. Despite Kluck's success at the Ourcq, the continued existence of the gap between 1st and 2nd Armies placed the whole right wing into a possibly lethal situation. But since, again, Kluck and Bülow did not communicate, no plan to plug the hole could be established. On the evening of 7 September, I Cavalry Corps reported the vanguard of the BEF crossing the Grand Morin, cutting right into the gap between Chateau Thierry and Montmirail [see Map XLV, ¶1]. The lack of communication between the armies of the right wing put Moltke at OHL - over 230 kilometres away as the crow flies - in the position that he did not really know where his armies were and whether they still retained contact. Thus he dispatched a plenipotentiary, to assess the tactical environment at the right wing in person and re-establish, if possible, cohesion between the scattered units. Most important was to find out what could be done about the gap.

The technician was a middle-ranking officer of the General Staff, Lieutenant-Colonel Richard Hentsch, the peacetime head of the Operations Section of the Great General Staff, since mobilisation the head of the Intelligence Section at Supreme Headquarters. ...

Even today the scope of the powers delegated to him seems remarkably wide, and all the more so, because Hentsch was a Saxon, not a Prussian officer in an army the Prussians dominated. Moreover, he was an intelligence, not an operations officer, on a general staff whose operations section treated the intelligence section as a handmaiden.

Nevertheless, Hentsch was a considerable figure. He had shone as a student at the War Academy, won the high opinion of his contemporaries and superiors and was on intimate terms with both Moltke and Bülow. He was therefore an obvious person to choose as an intermediary between Supreme Headquarters and the right wing, at a moment when the distance separating them had increased to 150 miles. Moltke felt unable to make what would be a time-consuming journey himself. He judged signal communications to be both unsatisfactory and insecure. His well-informed intelligence section chief was perfectly qualified to bridge the gap. It was unfortunate, and would continue to appear so, that Moltke wrote nothing down but despatched Hentsch on his mission with nothing more substantial to validate his plenipotentiary authority than a verbal instruction.

Hentsch set off by motor car from Luxembourg at eleven o'clock on the morning of 8 September. He was accompanied by two captains, Koeppen and Kochip, and visited in succession the headquarters of 5th, 4th and 3rd Armies. With each he discussed its situation and concluded that no withdrawal from its front was

necessary, with the possible exception of 3rd Army's right wing; he nevertheless radioed Luxembourg that the "situation and outlook entirely favourable at 3rd Army."

In the evening he arrived at 2nd Army's headquarters, from which Bülow was temporarily absent. When Bülow returned, he, his two principal staff officers and the Hentsch party settled to survey the situation. The result of their discussion was to be decisive for the outcome of the campaign in the west. Bülow dominated. He represented his army's predicament as one the enemy might exploit in two ways, either by turning the right wing of his own army [from the Allied view, into the gap and turn right, ¶] or by massing against the left wing of 1st Army [into the gap and then left, ¶]. Since the gap between the two was in the hands of the French and British, they enjoyed freedom of action and could use it with "catastrophic" results. Bülow proposed to avert disaster by a "voluntary concentric retreat." That meant a withdrawal from the positions from which the German offensive threatened Paris to safer but defensive lines beyond [= north of, ¶] the Marne. On that note, towards midnight, the meeting dispersed.

Next morning, 9 September, Hentsch conferred again with Bülow's staff officers, though not the General himself, and agreed that he would visit Kluck at 1st Army to advise a retirement, which would close the menacing gap. He left at once. While he was covering the fifty miles to 1st Army headquarters, Bülow decided to act on the conclusions arrived at by his juniors. He signalled Kluck and Hausen that "aviator reports four long columns marching towards the Marne" (the aviator was Lieutenant Berthold, the columns those of the BEF) and that consequently, "2nd Army is beginning retreat."

The retreat that followed was orderly but precipitate. Once 2nd moved, 1st and 3rd were obliged to conform, as by the working of interlocking parts. Mechanistically, 4th, 5th and 6th fell in with the retrogression. Along a front of nearly 250 miles, the German infantry faced about and began to retrace its steps over the ground won in bitter combat during the last two weeks. (41)

Five days later, Moltke suffered a nervous breakdown and was relieved of duty and replaced by General Erich von Falkenhayn, the Minister of War. Map XXXIX, overleaf, depicts the "voluntary concentric retreat" of the German army. The solid red line indicates the position the German decided to hold until, they hoped, the offensive could be resumed. The line ran eastward from Noyon at the Oise, following the Aisne and her tributary, the Vesle, to the north of Reims in the Champagne. From there it continued, via Mont Blanc, to the Argonne Forest, north of Verdun. It formed a semicircle around the fortified town and proceeded southeast, roughly following the Meurthe River to St. Dié and the Vosges Mountains, ending at the Swiss border at Basel. Nothing much happened in the southern part of the front for years on end.

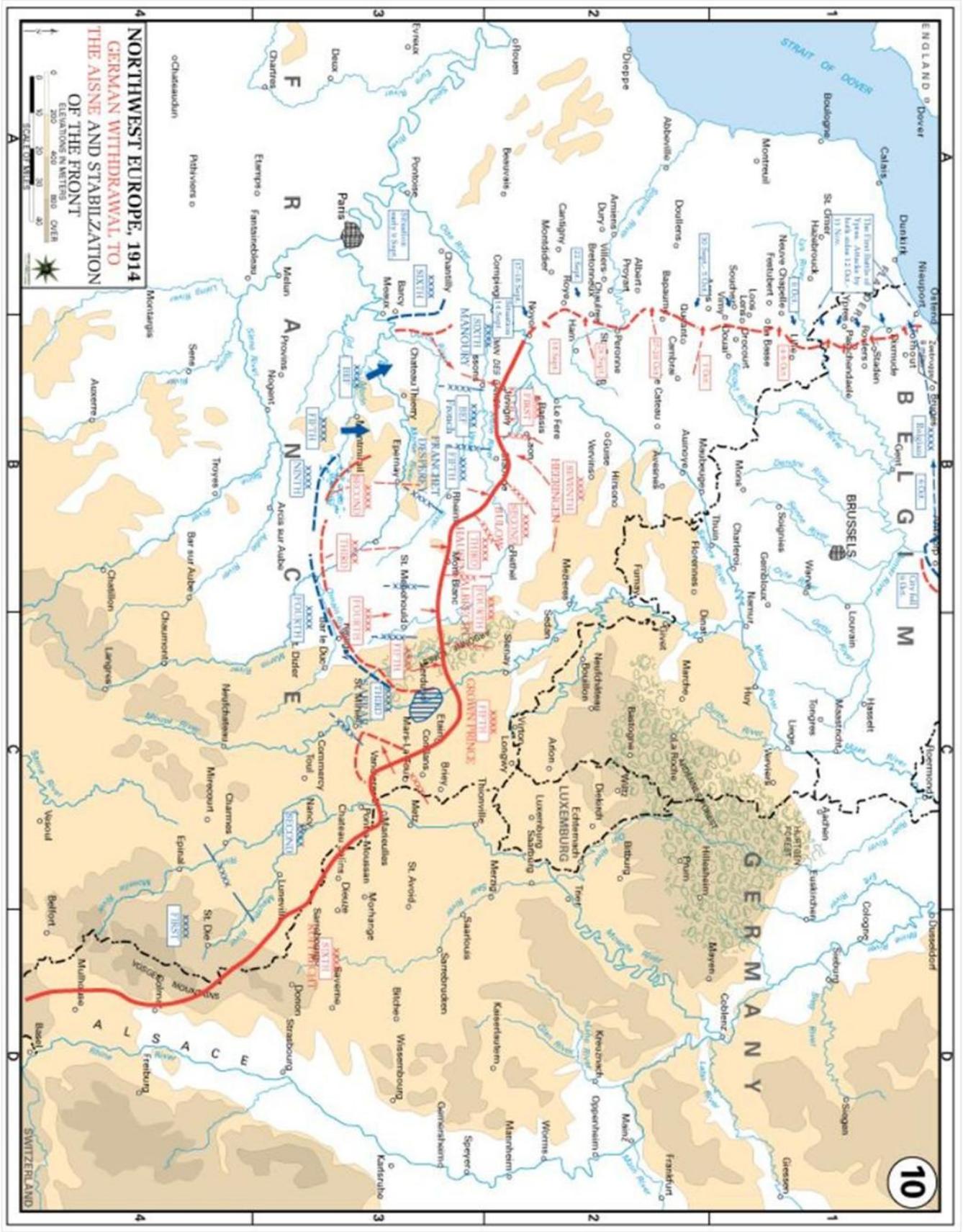
For the moment, the contested positions were the German on the Aisne, between Noyon and Mont Blanc, and the area north of Noyon, where a gap of a hundred miles lingered between the Oise and the Channel coast. Although the Schlieffen Plan had failed, OHL was already planning new offensives. The Aisne position was an excellent German choice. The river itself is too deep to be forded, and those bridges not yet destroyed lay all within comfortable reach of the German artillery. On the eastern, the German side of the river, the ground rises up to five hundred feet above the valley and forms a high plateau which supplied the Germans with excellent spots whence to observe the enemy below, and their artillery choice firing positions. The heights were crossed by a good road, the Chemin des Dames, built in the 18th Century for the daughters of Louis XV, and provided superior versatility of troop and supply movements and communication.

Allied actions to breach the line on 13 and 14 September failed but for the vanguard of D'Espèrey Fifth Army, which found a gap still existing between Kluck and Bülow at Berry-au-Bac, and in taking it reached the northern bank of the Aisne. The hole was, however, swiftly plugged by units of the newly established German 7th Army under von Heeringen, which was composed of parts of the old 7th Army, brought up from Alsace, and reserves, among them VII Reserve Corps which had meanwhile forced the surrender of Maubeuge. The new army was placed at the Aisne line between Kluck and Bülow, at Craonne, plugging the gap and stabilising the front.

This left space to be contested for along a line running north from Noyon, at the Oise River, to the Channel at Nieuport and Ostend in Flanders. Both Joffre and von Falkenhayn were aware that this was the last remaining line promising freedom of action; a "hundred-mile sweep of territory standing, denuded of troops, between the Aisne and the

sea. Whoever could find an army to operate there, without weakening his grip on the entrenched zone, might still outflank the enemy and so triumph." (42)

MAP XXXIX: GERMAN RETREAT TO THE AISNE



In the last days of August, the only force in the vicinity was the Belgian army in the redoubt around Antwerp. The Belgians had, of course, been made aware of how big a favour they could pay their allies by a timely sortie into the German rear, and their first attack, on 24 August, could be stopped by III Reserve Corps and the German Naval Division only with the greatest of effort. On 9 September King Albert and his men tried again, and again on 27 September. On both occasions they initially gained ground but their offensives could not be sustained long enough; they had to retreat without breaking the German blockage. The sole result of their struggle was that OHL sent more troops to reduce the redoubt and end the Belgian menace.

Both sides now frantically tried to find troops which could partake in what would come to be known as the "Race for the Coast": the major troop arrival dates were between 12 September and 5 October. Joffre formed a new Tenth Army, commanded by General Louis de Maud'huy. It comprised X and XVI Corps, who deployed as rapidly as possible in north-eastern direction. The Germans dispatched the freshly recomposed Sixth Army, formed of the Bavarian Guard Corps, IV Corps and the Bavarian I Reserve Corps. Guard and IV Corps had to march up all the way from the Lorraine, but the Reserve Corps was rushed in by train from Germany to the French town of Lille, whence they marched to the front near the small Belgian town of Ypres. One unit of I Bavarian Reserve was the 16th Bavarian Reserve Infantry Regiment, also called Regiment List, counting among their number Private Number 148, 1st Company, Adolf Hitler.

The hopes of the German nation thus rested on Sixth Army, commanded by Crown Prince Rupprecht, the glory-hungry executor of the completely unnecessary counterattack in the Lorraine in the third week of August. This new army and whichever units were close enough and available from Duke Albrecht's Fourth Army were thrown into what soon became known as the First Battle of Ypres.

By the end of the second week of October, the gap in the Western Front through which a decisive thrust might be launched by one side or the other had been reduced to a narrow corridor in Belgian Flanders.

There is one of the dreariest landscapes in Western Europe, a sodden plain of wide, unfenced fields, pasture and plough intermixed, overlying a water table that floods on excavation more than a few spadefuls deep. There are patches of woodland scattered between the villages and isolated farmsteads and a few points of high ground that loom in the distance behind the ancient walled city of Ypres. The pervading impression, however, is of long unimpeded fields of view, too mournful to be called vistas, interrupted only by the occasional church steeple and leading in all directions to distant, hazy horizons which promise nothing but the region's copious and frequent rainfall.

It was here, between 8 and 19 October, that the five corps now comprising the British Expeditionary Force arrived by train and road to sustain the Allied defence. To the BEF's north the remnants of the Belgian army, which had managed to escape from Antwerp, had made their way along the coast to Nieuport, the town at the mouth of the Yser river that there flows into the sea; most of the marines and sailors of the Royal Naval Division had already got away to Ostend, where the British 7th Division, landed earlier, held a bridgehead until it joined the main body of the BEF near Ypres on 14 October. (43)

Since both sides were hastening troops to the north, the intelligence sections had, for the most part, not much of an idea what troops were opposing them. At Ypres and vicinity, Sir John French, still in charge of the BEF, commanded six infantry and three cavalry divisions; the latter, however, quite unsuited to the open terrain. In reserve he only had 8th Division, although he had been notified that the vanguard of an Indian army of four infantry and two more cavalry divisions would soon augment his striking power.

The BEF was opposed chiefly by the reconditioned Sixth Army under Rupprecht, which had been brought up to its nominal strength of eleven infantry divisions, fortified not only by III Reserve Corps, which had, in the meantime, reduced the redoubt at Antwerp, but another eight reserve divisions. It were these divisions, among them Private Hitler, who were commanded to attack the BEF positions between Ypres and the small town of Langemarck. The baptism of fire for the List Regiment turned out inauspicious. It lost Colonel List and his deputy in the first hours of battle, and thus replacements had to be found and acquainted with the tactical situation.

The new commander, Lieutenant Colonel Engelhardt, accompanied by Hitler and another man ventured far into the front to observe the enemy lines. They were detected and the area was sprayed with machine-gun fire. The two enlisted men leaped in front of the commander, and pushed him into a ditch. Without comment, Engelhardt shook hands with the two recruits. He intended recommending them both for the Iron Cross but the next afternoon while he was discussing the citations an English shell smashed into the regimental headquarters tent, killing three men and seriously wounding Engelhardt and the other occupants. Moments earlier Hitler and the other three enlisted men had been forced to leave the tent to make way for four company commanders. It was the first of a series of narrow escapes verging on the miraculous for Adolf Hitler. (44)

The battle raged from the midst of October to the third week of November 1914 and the modern means of mass slaughter triumphed over the ghosts of tens of thousands of men, of both sides, who had been sent to die in open attacks over the flat fields of Flanders.

By the end of October the [first] wider German offensive had failed, at enormous cost, particularly to the German volunteer corps. At their cemetery at Langemarck today, beyond a gateway decorated with the insignia of every German university, the bodies of 25,000 student soldiers lie in a mass grave; others lie in threes and fours under headstones inscribed to Volunteer Schmidt and Musketeer Braun [i.e. generic names, ¶].

Dominating the hecatomb are sculptures by Käthe Kollwitz, herself a bereaved parent of 1914, of a mother and a father mourning their lost son. They represent tens of thousands of bourgeois Germans whom this phase of the battle, the "KINDERMORD BEI YPERN," the 'Massacre of the Innocents at Ypres', disabused of the belief that the war would be short or cheap or glorious, and introduced to the reality of attrition, of mass death and of receding hope of victory. (45)

In a way, those who were swiftly killed by bullets at least were spared the reality of the field hospitals. Only a few miles north of where Private Hitler served, near Nieupoort, the Leibgrenadier Regiment of Frankfurt at the Oder, a Prussian student volunteer unit, was attacking the British front one dreary day at the end of October. Out of a group of fifteen student volunteers, one of three who survived the attack was a young man called Gerhard Domagk. Since he had attended a basic course or two at medical school before volunteering, the German military hospital administration made him an instant nurse and put him into a hasty training program for medical assistants. A few weeks later he found himself at the Eastern front, in the woods of the Ukraine.

Flanders had been bad, but the Eastern Front was in many ways worse, especially when it came to medical care. The German casualties were just as heavy, but the hospitals were cruder, doctors fewer, supplies scarcer. The field hospital to which Domagk was assigned was stark, a farm in the middle of the woods roughly converted into a care facility with tents for wards and a barn for an operating room. Every day a miscellany of ambulances, cars, trucks, and farm carts arrived, disgorged their loads of quiet, white-faced wounded, and left for more. There was a constant, deep rumble from big guns a few miles away.

They were seeing wounds no one had ever seen before, thanks to the advance of military and industrial science. Newly deployed and unprecedentedly powerful weapons - artillery that could shoot shells 120 kilometres, high-explosive shells like the giant "Jack Johnsons" that geysered black earth a hundred feet in the air, airplanes and aerial bombs, tanks and poison gas - were slaughtering men at a rate and in ways unimaginable a few years earlier.

In previous wars men had been shot or stabbed. Now they were blown to bits. The new weapons changed both the manner of fighting - more trenches, fewer cavalry charges - and what happened after. Because of the new weapons, the number of dead and wounded on both sides was staggering. During the entire Franco-Prussian War in the 1870s, a total of a quarter of a million men were killed and wounded on both sides over ten months of battle - roughly the same total number of killed and wounded at the First Battle of Ypres alone. (46)

This was the time before antibiotics were part of the medical arsenal. Neither Sulphanilamide nor its derivatives, which Domagk would develop twenty years later as a researcher at the Bayer Company, nor Penicillin, discovered by Alexander Fleming and developed by Howard Florey and Ernst Chain in the late 1930's were available.

The most important thing that Domagk observed ... was that even the most heroic and seemingly successful surgeries could go completely wrong a few days later. A soldier could wake one morning to find his carefully closed incisions, which had been fine the day before, now swollen, red and painful. The edges, perhaps, had started to split open. Sometimes a foul-smelling, dark liquid oozed out. The skin around the wound began to take on "a curious half-jellified, half-mummified look," as one physician described it. These were signs of what military physicians feared most in their postoperative cases: Gasbrand, the Germans called it. Gas gangrene.

The doctors knew what caused Gasbrand - an infection by bacteria - and they knew how it progressed, the microscopic invaders eating away and essentially rotting the muscle tissue, releasing as they went both toxins that poisoned the patient and a gas that ballooned his wounds. ...

Gas gangrene was furiously contagious. Once loose in a postoperative ward, it could kill half the wounded patients in a few weeks. So, once diagnosed, gangrene patients were immediately isolated in their own wards, silent places where the air seemed close and greenish, packed with doomed men. Going into a Gasbrand ward was like walking into a swamp. The first reaction of new visitors was to hold their breath.

The smell of rot was overpowering; those nurses and attendants whose duty it was to work there found that after a few days they could no longer wash the smell out of their skin or clothes. Gas gangrene was the deadliest but not the only type of wound infection. Taken together, wound infections accounted for an army of German dead - between one hundred thousand and two hundred thousand soldier/victims - during World War I. (47)

The situation on the side of the Allies was in no way better. The harvest of death was appalling; so were the amputations and the losses of those who simply went missing, their bones never found. The number of fatalities in the French army alone, from August to November 1914, approximated 306,000; of the German army 241,000; of the BEF and Belgian army 30,000 each. Overall losses, including the wounded, missing and prisoners tripled these numbers.

The Allies succeeded in securing the Channel ports, but neither side could achieve a breakthrough. Exhaustion finally compelled an end of the attacks and both sides dug in as good as possible. An unbroken line of trenches soon connected the mountains at the Swiss borders with the North Sea coast at Nieuport, and for the next eighteen months trench warfare continued to dominate the Western theatre.

The headquarters of the 16th Bavarian Reserve Regiment were moved three miles away from the front, to the south of the small town of Messines, and the hectic pace of the first weeks was replaced by the quiet military lifestyle of units at rest. Hitler now served as a dispatch runner, but since the front fell quiet he found the time to return to painting. By the accounts of his comrades he was well liked, if sometimes strangely untouchable. For once, he was older than most of the recruits, by a considerable margin, and gave off the impression of a reserved and thoughtful person. First Lieutenant Friedrich Wiedemann recounted:

"As long as the front was quiet, our messengers had a quiet life as well, but that changed as soon as combat occurred. Generally, the telephone wires to the battalion and company commanders were ruptured very rapidly, and thus regimental orders could only be transmitted via dispatch runners. There was no choice - light fire or heavy -- the messengers had to leave the bunkers and run through the enemy fire all the way to the foremost lines. The losses, and thus the rate of replacements among the runners were high. On the other side, one could find out fast which men were reliable.

During major combat periods, we were only seldom able to send two messengers simultaneously with an order, the way we had learned to proceed in peacetime. If a runner came back reporting due to whatever reason he was unable to pass his message, we had no choice but to send a second man. Of the reliable men,

we always kept three or four at regimental HQ, who we did not use much for routine matters in order to have them alert and available in difficult circumstances. One of those dependables was Hitler" (48)

Sergeant Major Max Amann added:

"He was always at the ready. We were three days on, command post duty, and three days off, but when we were at duty stations, the tactical orders had to be expedited immediately. So if I, even at 3 o'clock in the night, went into the runners' room, there were always some around, sleeping.

When I yelled "Orderly!" nobody moved except Hitler. When I commented that it was always him, he said: "Let them sleep. I really do not mind." He still carried the entrenching gear, although the rest of us had it long since thrown away. He was a good and dutiful soldier and never went out of his place." (49)

On November 20, when the regiment had been pulled out of the line and made part of the divisional reserve, Lieutenant Wiedemann, adjutant of the regimental commander, and Sergeant Major Amann began to draw up a list of recommendations for decorations and promotions; the list included Hitler, partially for his role in saving Lieutenant Colonel Engelhardt and partially for his reliability, as a prospective recipient of the Iron Cross, First Class. For reasons unknown, he was turned down for the First Class award but received the Second Class, and a promotion to Corporal. The oversight may have been of clerical nature; his name was on the bottom of the First Class list.

The Iron Cross, Second Class, did not remain Corporal Hitler's sole decoration earned in the field: in September 1917 he received the Cross of Military Merit, in May 1918 a Regimental Diploma, in August 1918 the Iron Cross, First Class, a decoration very seldom awarded to enlisted men, and finally the Military Service Medal.

For the longest time something we might call today an "urban legend" enshrouded the exact circumstances of the First Class award in mystery. The scuttlebutt credited Hitler with the single-handed capture of ten, or fifteen, British, or French soldiers, and the heroic story grew with each retelling. Many different versions of the hypothetical event circulated in the decades to come, but the truth was rather prosaic. Alas, the truth had a Jewish angle, and Hitler was reluctant to admit it.

One fine day in July 1918, Hitler was at the frontal command post of his regiment, whose forward lines were being shelled by their own artillery. The regiment had inadvertently advanced a few hundred yards but since the communication lines were broken their artillery had no idea that they were firing on their own men. First Lieutenant Hugo Gutmann, who was Jewish, promised Hitler the Iron Cross, First Class, if he were to succeed in conveying to the artillery boys a polite request to please stop shelling their own comrades. The problem was that the ground between the lieutenant's command post and the base artillery lay under heavy British fire. Hitler accepted and accomplished the mission without a scratch. Subsequently, he was recommended for the award, and the citation, dated July 31, by Baron von Godin, the new regimental commander, read:

"As a dispatch runner, he [Hitler, ¶] has shown cold-blooded courage and exemplary boldness both in positional warfare and in the war of movement, and he had always volunteered to carry messages in the most difficult situations and at the risk of his life. Under conditions of great peril, when all the communication lines were cut, the untiring and fearless activity of Hitler made it possible for important messages to get through." (50)

The accounts of his comrades and superiors as well as Hitler's letters from the front agree in illustrating his entirely unflinching acceptance of the war's great slaughter. Not a single line he spoke or wrote hints at either the cynicism or the depression that befell most soldiers in the face of the unspeakable horrors. Hitler betrays neither fear nor discomfort in the face of the abattoir of nations. He appears utterly inhuman. Still, the surviving letters allow us to identify which thoughts did occupy his mind: his awakening to the uses of war propaganda, to the effects of the socialists' "internationalism" in the undermining of national solidarity and, of course, of the necessity of victory. Strangely unperturbed, his letters describe the harsh reality of trench warfare; more peculiar, perhaps, is the fact that he complains about the weather, but not the war.

"Because of the constant rain (we do not have winter), the closeness of the ocean, and the low-laying terrain, the meadows and fields are like bottomless morasses while the streets are covered with slimy mud and through these swamps run the trenches of our infantry, a mass of shelters and trenches with gun emplacements, communication ditches and barbed wire barricades, wolf lairs, land mines, in short, an almost impossible position." (51)

Characteristically, he quickly began to resent the relative quietness of the stalemate around Ypres during the spring and summer of 1915. In a letter to the Poppes, dated January 22, 1915, he decries inactivity. "Now we are still in our old position and harass the French and English," he wrote, "the weather is miserable. Often for days in water up to our knees under very heavy artillery fire. We are looking forward to a few days of relief. Hopefully there will soon come a general offensive along the whole front. It can't go on like this forever." [52]

It was during these periods of little action that the English began to drop propaganda leaflets over the German lines, and Hitler faced war propaganda for the first time. His friend and fellow dispatch runner Ignaz Westenkirchner, a farmhand from Eggenfelden in Lower Bavaria, later described Hitler's initial reaction to the unfamiliar lecture. According to his account, Hitler read the papers studiously, and while the British appeals to surrender failed to impress him much, he was forced to admit their effective design, sheer audacity and continuous repetition. "He seemed to think the English understood propaganda better than we did," wrote Westenkirchner. "He expected [the German] headquarters would contradict the leaflets, but they never did. Nothing was done to counteract the bad effects of these enemy leaflets." (53)

The German attempts at propaganda Hitler studied in detail yet judged them completely inadequate, boorish, and amateurish: cartoons representing the French and English as the most stupid creatures under the sun, contemptible, absurd; running away at the first signs of danger. Hitler and his comrades had fought the English and knew better. Westenkirchner reported that Hitler fumed over the stupidity of national stereotyping, arguing that the allegations were not only ridiculously false but actually dangerous in the silly misperceptions they created about a lethal enemy. He flew into rages over the dilettantes at the propaganda boards and wondered whether High Command possessed the necessary willpower and determination to bring the war to a successful conclusion.

He often remarked in later years that he had read and reread only a single book during the war and maintained that, time and again, he found in it solutions to the problems that perplexed him; and here and there a quantum of solace. The book was Arthur Schopenhauer's "THE WORLD AS WILL AND IDEAL", and while we may doubt that it was truly the only book he read in these six years, given his usually voracious appetite for reading matter, it seems a natural choice for the egocentric he had become.

The work celebrates the superiority of human will, over the obstacles of nature and society. It depicts, in romantic isolationism, will as a detached and inviolable phenomenon, the expression of mind over matter. Will alone rules, Schopenhauer argues, all else is illusion. Hitler's belief in his artistic calling, whose romantic superiority does not acknowledge the bounds of Kant's moral law, sought and found powerful justification in Schopenhauer's celebration of the human will. Hitler saw himself as an artist, beyond the misery of the trenches. One day he would form the world according to *his* will.

The regiment remained at Ypres for over a year, part of the Western Front that now had stabilized and changed little until the summer of 1916.

What, we must ask now, had meanwhile happened at the Eastern Front?

THE WOODEN TITAN¹

*Everything is very simple in war,
but the simplest thing becomes difficult.
These difficulties accumulate and produce
a friction which no man can imagine exactly
who has not seen war.*

Carl von Clausewitz "On War", Bk.1, Ch.7

*We're poor little lambs who've lost our way,
Baa! Baa! Baa!
We're little black sheep who've gone astray,
Baa-aa-aa!
Gentlemen-rankers out on the spree,
Damned from here to eternity,
God ha' mercy on such as we,
Baa! Yah! Bah!*

Rudyard Kipling "Gentlemen-Rankers" (1892)

The German General Staff's estimate of the speed of Russian mobilization limited the time available for a successful conclusion of the Western campaign. After six weeks, or forty-two days, it was believed, Russian troops might be encountered invading East Prussia. These computations were based on the reports the intelligence department had provided in regards to operations in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904/05. After the fiasco of this campaign, STAVKA, the Russian High Command had taken on a massive program of modernization and reorganization of its forces.

One of the changes implemented in the Russian mobilization procedures was to designate Warsaw the centre of military deployment in the western half of the country; from 1912 on, forty percent of the Russian peacetime army were stationed in the town's vicinity. These units - only a good hundred miles distant from their objectives in East Prussia - could move much faster than the Germans anticipated. In the event of August 1914, the Russian First Army, commanded by Paul von Rennenkampf, crossed into German territory on the fifteenth of the month, and Second Army, directed by Alexander Samsonov, only five days later.

Hence OHL, the German High Command ["Oberste Heeres-Leitung", ¶], was unable to determine any of the strategic factors of the looming battle, neither the timing of the Russian attack nor its strength or spatial arrangement; that is, how much of her force Russia was to direct against East Prussia or where exactly these troops would attack. Austro-German staff cooperation was much its infancy in this August 1914 and OHL could only guess at the time and location of the coming engagement. Not that there were too many defenders anyway - most of Moltke's Eastern Deployment Plans had assigned only 8th Army to the defence of the East. It was composed of four infantry corps, I, XVII, XX and I Reserve, employed 1st Cavalry Division as screening force and was commanded by General Max von Prittwitz and Gaffron, a scion of old Prussian nobility.

¹ Title of J. Wheeler-Bennett's Hindenburg biography, London 1936

The strategic deployment in the Eastern theatre is depicted in Map XLVII, overleaf. Russia was at once aided and hampered by her sheer vastness. While her size made the country close to impervious to the designs of would-be-conquerors, it much impedes the speed of troop and supply movements which are necessities of modern warfare. The borders between Russia, Germany and Austria-Hungary, as they were in 1914 and shown on Map L, seemed much to favour Russia: a huge salient protruded into the West - the former Kingdom of Poland - between the Carpathian Mountains on her southern border, facing Austria, and East Prussia in the north, almost at the Baltic Sea.

For strategic purposes, however, the salient might just as well constitute an enormous trap, for an enemy able to attack at both flanks simultaneously could hope to surround the complete Russian forces on this front in one gigantic pocket in central Poland. To complicate matters, the Carpathian Mountains, their heights and passes defended by the Austrian army, amount to a formidable barrier, which was strengthened in its hinterland by the two great fortresses of Lemberg and Przemyśl, the latter alone housing a garrison of 120,000 soldiers. Nor would an attack in the north, into East Prussia, necessarily prove smoother going. At first sight, the flat land seems a suitable ground for infantry operations, but it is bisected by the Masurian Lakeland, a marshy terrain of thousand-and-one lakes, creeks and rivulets; swamps and morasses which can swallow an army whole. Its narrow, sandy ways and roads which meander seemingly without end around the lakes easily frustrate a unit's marching order and communications and have been reported to give even local troops the fits.

As mentioned above, STAVKA had prepared two plans for the eventuality of war against the Central Powers, Plan G for Germany and A for Austria-Hungary. Although the mobilization of the troops stationed in Russia was somewhat delayed by G and A's colliding railway schedules, the rest of the Russian army eventually appeared in its deployment areas. STAVKA established two Army Group commands for her western forces, north respectively south of the Bug - Vistula line. Army Group "Northwest" was in charge of First and Second Armies, earmarked to deploy against Germany while Army Group "Southwest" commanded Third, Fifth and Eighth Armies, sharing the task of invading Galicia, the Austrian part of former Poland.

Fourth Army was the Russian version of a "swing option": much like Joffre had originally intended for Lanrezac's Fifth Army in France, Fourth Army could be sent into action either at the Austrian front south of Lublin, or back up, "en echelon", First and Second Armies on their way into Germany.

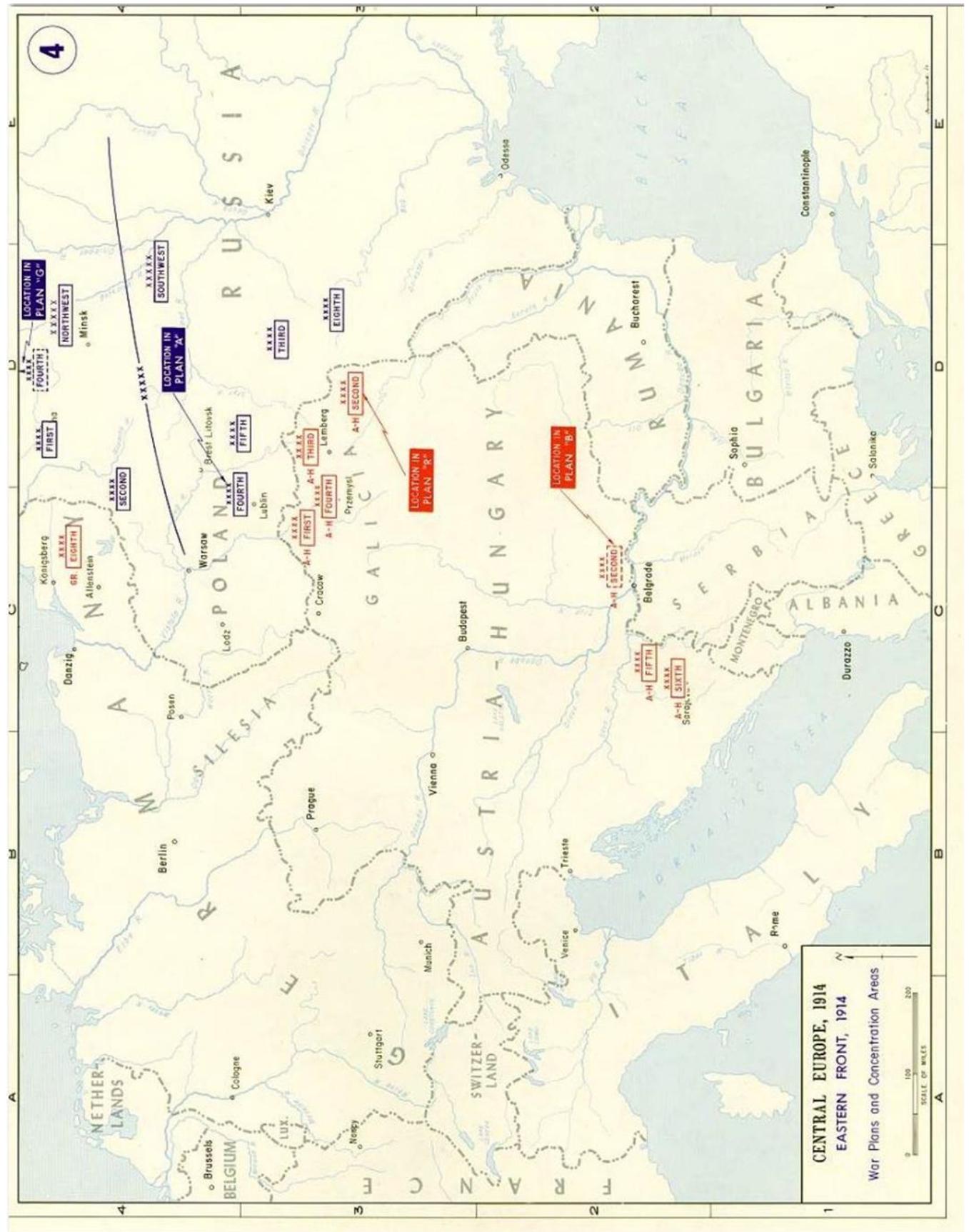
The Russian post-1905 modernization program had suffered much due to arthritic Russian bureaucracy; improvements were delayed, never implemented or simply ignored; in some respects the Russian army could not meet international standards.

[First and Second Armies deployed] ... nine corps to Prittwitz's four, and seven cavalry divisions, including two of the Imperial Guard, to his one. Rennenkampf, commanding First Army, and Samsonov, commanding Second, were moreover both veterans of the Russo-Japanese War, in which each had commanded a division, while Prittwitz had no experience of war at all.

Their formations were very big, divisions having sixteen instead of twelve battalions, with large masses of - admittedly often untrained - men to make up losses. Though they were weaker in artillery, particularly heavy artillery, than their German equivalents, it is untrue that they were much less well provided with shells; all armies had grossly underestimated the expenditure that modern battle would demand and, at an allowance of 700 shells per gun, the Russians were not much worse off than the French fighting at the Marne. Moreover, the Russian munitions industry would respond to the requirements of war with remarkable success.

Nevertheless, Russia's forces were beset by serious defects. The proportion of cavalry, so much greater than that in any other army, laid a burden of need for fodder on the transport service, itself inferior to the German, which the value given by mounted troops could not justify; forty trains were needed to supply both the four thousand men of a cavalry division and the sixteen thousand of an infantry division.

MAP L: DEPLOYMENT PLANS OF THE EASTERN THEATRE



There were human defects also. Russian regimental officers were unmonied by definition and often poorly educated; any aspiring young officer whose parents could support the cost went to the staff academy and was lost to regimental duty, without necessarily becoming thereby efficient at staff work. As Tolstoy so memorably depicts in his account of Borodino, the Russian officer corps united two classes which scarcely knew each other, a broad mass of company and battalion commanders that took orders from a narrow upper crust of aristocratic placemen.

The qualities of the peasant soldier - brave, loyal and obedient - had traditionally compensated for the mistakes and omissions of his superiors but, face to face with the armies of countries from which illiteracy had disappeared, as in Russia it was far from doing, the Russian infantryman was at an increasing disadvantage. He was easily disheartened by setback, particularly in the face of superior artillery, and would surrender easily and without shame, en masse, if he felt abandoned or betrayed. The trinity of Tsar, Church, and Country still had power to evoke unthinking courage; but defeat, and drink, could rapidly rot devotion to the regiment's colours and icons. (1)

To this litany a failed artillery policy and communication problems could be added. Russian artillery officers tended to view the main task of heavy guns in defending the chain of fortresses which secured the Russian border perimeter and were very much averse of schlepping big guns over a battlefield. Thus Russian armies were chiefly equipped with small and medium calibre guns, of lesser firepower and diminished range. As in the naval gun race, lighter guns became the victims of the enemy's heavier ones; for lack of range unable to return the fire. Radio communications suffered from a lack of trained cipher clerks, which forced the radiomen to transmit many messages en clair, especially in the heat of battle.

In the event of August 1914, Fourth Army marched south, to the Austrian border, and Army Group Northwest dispatched First and Second Armies to East Prussia. The plan envisioned a two-pronged manoeuvre of enveloping 8th Army. STAVKA directed Rennenkampf to attack north of the lakes and the Angerapp River east of Königsberg and to proceed along the Baltic Sea Coast in westerly direction. Samsonov was ordered to invade from the south-east - from the direction of Warsaw - and to march in north-westerly direction until he would meet Rennenkampf, coming from the other direction, somewhere on the Vistula, perhaps in the vicinity of Marienwerder or Marienburg. The defenders would be surrounded and once the Vistula was gained, the way into West Prussia and Silesia lay open.

The plan had two weaknesses: it was obvious, like a tarantula on the cheesecake, and it depended upon close cooperation and communication of the two armies, conduct neither Rennenkampf nor Samsonov were renowned for. The German General Staff had actually based pre-war games upon the premise of such a two-pronged attack and had established that the correct counter-strategy was to delay one prong while attacking the other. Such a strategy necessitated rapid troop movements between the two sides of the Lakeland, the north-eastern part around Insterburg and Gumbinnen, and the southwestern side from Allenstein in the centre of the province to Thorn on the Vistula. A railway was built traversing the Lakeland for this exact purpose, running on a line Gumbinnen - Insterburg - Allenstein - Osterode - Deutsch-Eylau - Thorn.

Map LI shows the early stage of the East Prussian campaign. The Russians appeared three weeks earlier than anticipated, Rennenkampf's vanguard crossing the border and reconnoitring in westerly direction on August 15. Two days later, his III, IV and XX Corps marched on Gumbinnen, eighty miles east of Königsberg. They were screened by his 1st Cavalry Division on their southern flank and the Guards Cavalry Corps on the northern one. Their counting on strategic surprise, however, was nullified as early as August 9 on account of the German 2nd Aircraft Observer Battalion and the services of two dirigibles stationed at Königsberg and Posen. They informed Prittwitz of the Russian presence, but what worked for the Germans failed, inexplicably, for the Russians: their cavalry could not find any trace of the enemy, and Rennenkampf's aerial reconnaissance unit, consisting of a fleet of 244 aircraft, mysteriously failed to spot a single German unit.

The most important information for Prittwitz was that Second Army seemed to be late. The German staff began to believe that they might have a shot at Rennenkampf first and Samsonov later.

Geography was to disrupt the smooth onset of the Russian combined offensive in space. Less excusably, timidity and incompetence were to disjoint it in time. In short, the Russians repeated the mistake, so often made before by armies apparently enjoying an incontestable superiority in numbers, the mistake made by the Spartans at Leuctra, by Darius at Gaugamela, by Hooker at Chancellorsville, of exposing themselves to defeat in detail: that is, of allowing a weaker enemy to concentrate at first against one part of the army, then against the other, and so beat both.

The way in which geography worked to favour the Germans' detailed achievement is the more easily explained. Though eastern East Prussia does indeed offer a relatively level path of advance to an invader from Russia, the chain of lakes that feeds the River Angerapp also poses a significant barrier. There are ways through, particularly at Lötzen, but that place was fortified in 1914.

As a result, a water barrier nearly fifty miles long from north to south confronted the inner wings of First and Second Army, so tending to drive them apart. Strategically, the easier option was to pass north and south of the Angerapp position rather than to force it frontally, and that was what the commander of the North-Western Front, General Y. Zhilinsky, decided to direct Rennenkampf and Samsonov to do.

He was aware of the opportunity such a separation offered to the Germans and accordingly took care to provide for the protection of his two armies' flanks. However, the measures taken enlarged the danger, since he allowed Rennenkampf to strengthen his flank on the Baltic coast, which was not at risk, and Samsonov to detach troops to protect his connection with Warsaw, equally not threatened, while arranging for one corps of Second Army [II Corps, ¶] to stand immobile in the gap separating it from First. The result of these dispositions was a diversion of effort which left both armies considerably weakened to undertake the main task. Having commenced the deployment with a superiority of nineteen divisions against nine, Rennenkampf and Samsonov actually marched to the attack with only sixteen between them.

Worse, critically worse, the two armies arrived on their start lines five days apart in time. First Army crossed the East Prussian frontier on 15 August, a very creditable achievement given that the French and Germans were then still completing their concentration in the west, but Second not until 20 August. As the two were separated in space by fifty miles of Lakeland, three days in marching time, neither would be able to come rapidly to the other's assistance if it ran into trouble which, unbeknownst either to Rennenkampf or Samsonov, was the way they were heading. (2)

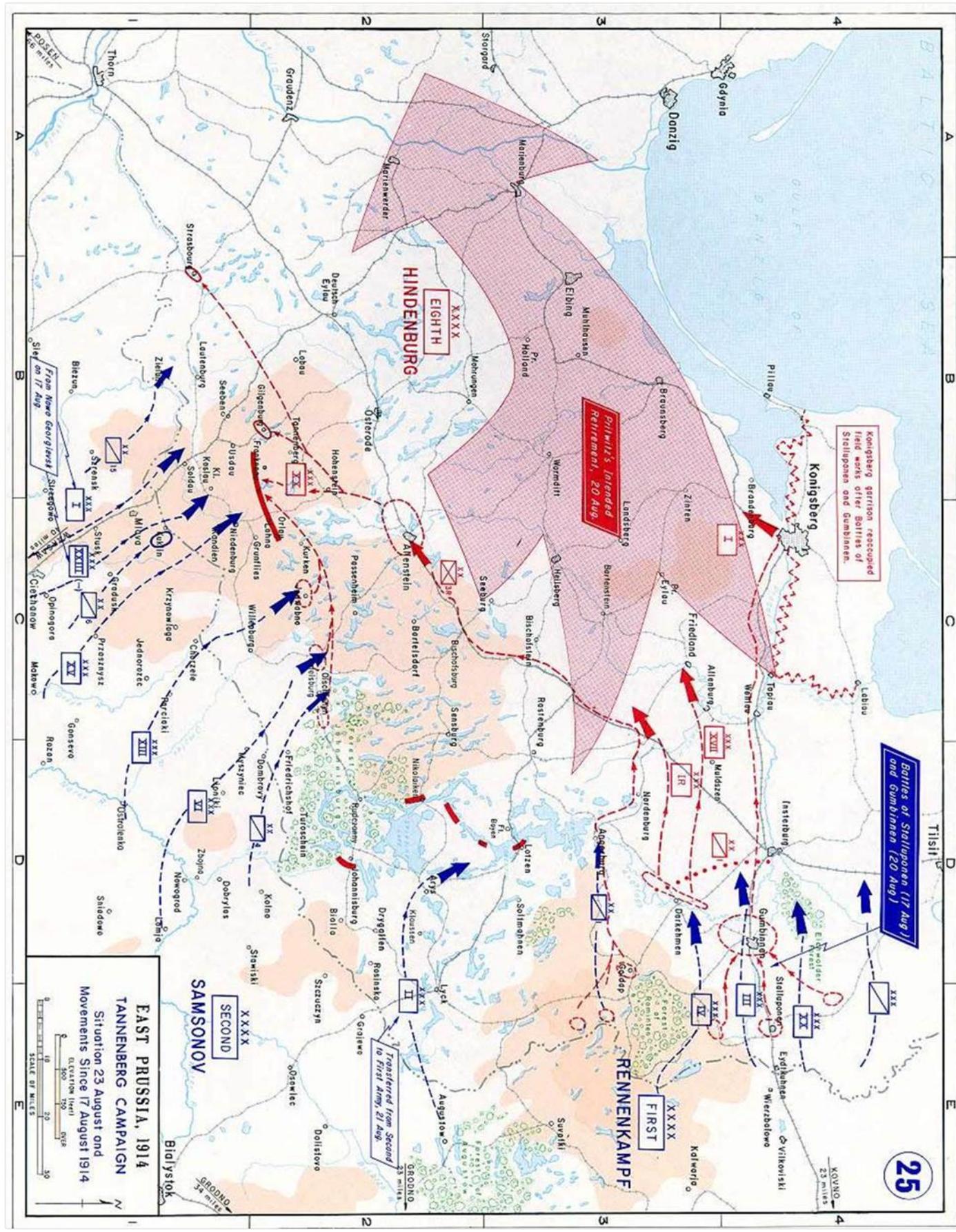
The aviators' intelligence initially paid off for Prittwitz. When Rennenkampf began offensive operations on August 17, Prittwitz knew that Samsonov was late and thus could momentarily afford to keep most of 8th Army in the northeast. A Russian probe which showed up at the small town of Stallupoenen, ten miles east of Gumbinnen, was quickly checked, but when Prittwitz ordered a counter-attack of General Herrmann von François's I Corps on August 20, the Russians had already prepared an entrenched position near Gumbinnen. I Corps was, as was the whole 8th Army, composed of East Prussian men defending their homeland, and their aggressiveness in assaulting a fortified Russian position cost them dearly.

By mid-afternoon, I Corps had come to a halt. Its neighbouring corps, XVII, commanded by the famous Life Guard Hussar, von Mackensen, who was encouraged by early reports of its success, was meanwhile attacking north-eastwards into the Russians' flank.

It did so without reconnaissance which would have revealed that, on its front as on that of von François, the Russians were entrenched. From their positions they poured a devastating fire into the advancing German infantry who, when also bombarded in error by their own artillery, broke and ran to the rear. By late afternoon the situation on the front of XVII Corps was even worse than that on the front of I Corps and the battle of Gumbinnen was threatening to turn from a tactical reverse to a strategic catastrophe.

To the right of XVII Corps, I Reserve, under von Bülow, counter-attacked to protect Mackensen's flank against a Russian advance. At Eight Army headquarters, however, even the news of that success could not

MAP LI EASTERN PRUSSIA - SITUATION AUGUST 23



stay the onset of panic. There Prittwitz was yielding to the belief that East Prussia must be abandoned and the whole of his army retreat beyond the Vistula. (3)

The big red arrow on Map LI shows the intended retirement to the west, beyond the Vistula, that Prittwitz thought unavoidable. The bold blue arrows in squares DE 3-4 symbolize Rennenkampf's III, IV and XX Corps, moving westward, into the direction of the fortified zone of Königsberg. At its southern flank, First Army is protected by 1st Cavalry Division and in the north by the Guard Cavalry Corps. Squares BCD 1-2 show Second Army, composed of I, XXIII, XV, XIII and VI Corps, plus 15th, 6th and 4th Cavalry Divisions. Samsonov's II Corps is located in the geographical middle of the Lakeland, square DE 2, in the act of being transferred to Rennenkampf on August 21. It is on the way northwest, to join First Army at Angerburg.

At OHL, Moltke balked at the very thought of withdrawing 8th Army behind the Vistula. But for the margins of the operational plan being too narrow, Moltke had no troops available for an immediate reinforcement. To make the situation worse, the men of 8th Army had their roots and families in East Prussia; an order to retreat might cause a revolt. Moltke decided that a new broom was needed on the Eastern front. Two brooms, actually.

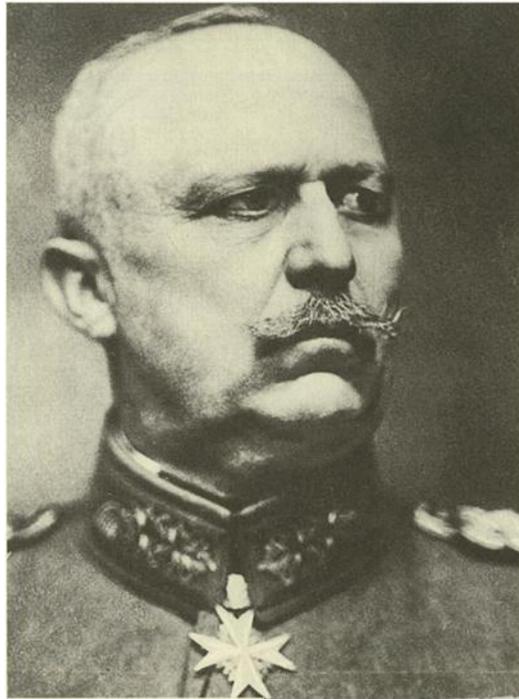
Moltke decided first that a director of operations of the first quality must be sent instantly to the east to take charge. He chose Ludendorff, who had twice so brilliantly resolved crises in Belgium. He next determined to dispose of Prittwitz altogether, judging his declared intention to retire behind the Vistula, even if subsequently reconsidered, to be evidence of broken will.

In his place he promoted Paul von Beneckendorff and Hindenburg, a retired officer noted for his steadiness of character if not brilliance of mind. As a lieutenant in the 3rd Foot Guards, Hindenburg had been wounded at Königgrätz in 1866 and fought in the Franco-Prussian War. He claimed kinsmen among the Teutonic Knights who had won East Prussia from the heathen in the northern crusades, had served on the Great General Staff and eventually commanded a corps.

He had left the army in 1911, aged sixty-four, but applied for reappointment at the war's outbreak. When the call from Moltke came, he had been out of service so long that he was obliged to report for duty in the old blue uniform that had preceded the issue of field-grey. He and Ludendorff, unlike as they were, the one a backwoods worthy, the other a bourgeois technocrat, were to unite from the start in what Hindenburg himself called "a happy marriage." Their qualities, natural authority in Hindenburg, ruthless intellect in Ludendorff, complemented each other's perfectly and were to make them one of the most effective military partnerships in history. (4)

PAUL VON HINDENBURG





ERICH LUDENDORFF

On August 23, Hindenburg and Ludendorff arrived at Rastenburg whither the HQ of 8th Army had been moved, and summoned the staff for a conference the very next day. The discussion began with an analysis of the situation by General Scholtz, commander of XX Corps which was, at the moment, the sole German unit opposing the slowly advancing Samsonov in the south. Strategically, the newcomers in command were much aided by a resolution Prittwitz had enacted just before he was relieved of duty. During his years at the Staff Academy, Prittwitz had participated in the aforementioned war games and hence was familiar with the East Prussian counter-strategy, which called to defeat the Russians "in detail". Prittwitz had decided that, after the tie at Gumbinnen, as he saw it, *Rennenkampf* could be counted as checked, and that First Army would typically need a few days to regroup and redeploy. If he acted fast, he might beat Samsonov in the south before *Rennenkampf*, in the east, resumed the offensive. Aply assisted by his Chief of Staff, Colonel Max Hoffmann, he ordered von François's I Corps from Königsberg whither it had retired, and von Mackensen's XVII Corps, at the moment southwest of Gumbinnen, to entrain southward to meet Samsonov.

These movements are indicated on Map LII, by the thin dashed lines and bold red arrows, showing the early stages of the German movements. I Corps retired to Königsberg in order to board the coastal railway line while XVII and I Reserve traversed first westward, then southwest, into the direction of Allenstein. Scholtz's II Corps was already in the vicinity, around the small towns of Hohenstein and Tannenberg.

Thus Hindenburg and Ludendorff did not have to design a new plan, whose development might have cost precious time but were able to adopt Prittwitz's strategy, which they pursued at best speed. To their aid came a few monumental errors in the Russian dispositions, chiefly by *Rennenkampf*. When First Army's forward reconnaissance units, after the four days of the Battle of Gumbinnen, reported that the presence of German troops facing them was thinning out, *Rennenkampf* assumed that 8th Army had retreated to the fortified zone of Königsberg. Such a move might be reasonable, at some level, since it would compel First Army to a lengthy siege, which might give the Germans time enough to send reinforcements from the Western front. Thus *Rennenkampf* stopped the pursuit of I and XVII Corps, consolidated his territorial gains, and initiated preparations for the upcoming siege.

He reported his decision to STAVKA and asked for assistance with the investment of Königsberg, for which his troops, lacking heavy artillery, were ill prepared. But since the delay meant that he was, for the time being, incapable of keeping touch with the rest of the German army, he proposed to Zhilinsky to send Samsonov in the direction of the Vistula, i.e. northwest. Once First Army had reduced Königsberg, the planned envelopment of 8th Army could be reactivated. Army

Group Northwest followed Rennenkampf's suggestion and Samsonov was ordered to proceed in north-western direction, to the Vistula, but away from First Army.

Rennenkampf's proposition was risky in itself - what if the siege failed? But what transpired in the event was worse. On the morning of August 25, First Army's radio traffic with STAVKA and Army Group Northwest, which included the siege plan, was intercepted and deciphered by Ludendorff's radio monitors. Moreover, the messages yielded the priceless information that First Army would halt and thus be unable to support Second Army in case it headed into trouble.

Rennenkampf's decision to halt allowed Hindenburg and Ludendorff to concentrate against Second Army. They could afford to leave Königsberg essentially unprotected except for its entrenched garrison and a weak screen of 1st Cavalry Division [see Map LIII, overleaf, the red dots, C 3-4, west of Rennenkampf, ¶]. Now the railways came into play. The existence of two lines allowed 8th Army to route parts of XVII and I Reserve Corps southward, via the Insterburg - Allenstein line traversing East Prussia, and to convey I Corps by the coastal railway to Elbing, and then route them via Marienburg and Deutsch-Eylau to Seeben, into a position opposite the left flank of Samsonov's I Corps which stood between Soldau and Usdau. Ludendorff even ordered the small Vistula garrison from Thorn to meet François's I Corps near Lautenburg [Map LII, B 1, ¶]. By August 26, XVII Corps stood at Bischofstein [Map LII, C 3, ¶], and I Reserve between Allenstein and Seeburg [Map LII, C 2-3, ¶], opposing Samsonov's northernmost unit, VI Corps at Bartelsdorf. The main body of Second Army still stood south of Allenstein [XIII, XV and XXIII Corps, Map LII, BC 1-2, ¶].

The tactical situation on Map LII depicts the advantage the Germans earned by the flexibility of their troop movements, which, in addition, almost completely evaded Russian detection. There are hardly any German troops left in the northwest, vis-a-vis Rennenkampf - except for the very light screen of 1st Cavalry - and the Russian II Corps, now detached to First Army's southern flank, lingers in a completely uncontested area. Except for her cavalry, First Army remained almost stationary; by August 26 it had moved barely ten miles west - cautiously - through empty land. Second Army was still moving northwest but was spreading all over the Lakeland, from Zielun, 15th Cavalry in the southwest, to Sensburg, 4th Cavalry, in the northeast. This was when Hindenburg

... was passed the transcript of a complete Russian First Army order for an advance to the siege of Königsberg which revealed that it would halt some distance from the city on 26 August, well short of any position from which it could come to Second Army's assistance in the battle he planned to unleash.

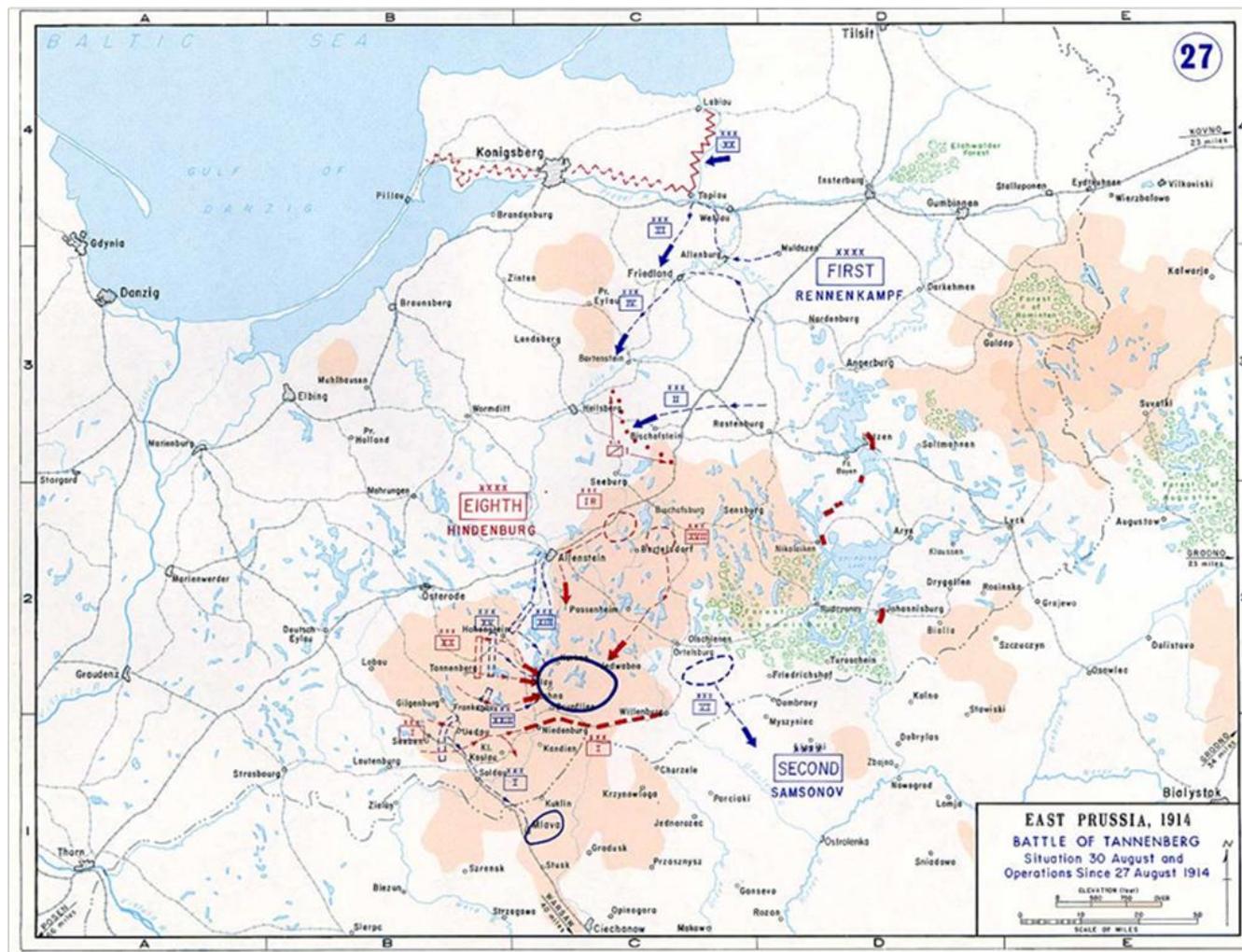
Furnished with this assurance, he met von François, whose corps was just beginning to arrive on Samsonov's flank, in confident mood. Distance was working for him, the distance separating Samsonov and Rennenkampf's armies, and so now too was time, the self-imposed delay in Rennenkampf's advance which, had it been pressed, would have put the First Army well behind the Lakeland zone in positions from which it could have marched south to Samsonov's assistance. (5)

Hindenburg and Ludendorff's plan were successive attacks into Second Army's right flank, that is, to attack from Allenstein in southwestern direction. François's I Corps was to begin the offensive on August 25.

Then François, whose stubborn aggressiveness could take a wilfully uncooperative form, interrupted the smooth unrolling of a plan that should have brought his I Corps, XVII and XX successively into action against Samsonov's flanks. Claiming that he was awaiting the arrival of his artillery by train, he was slow off the mark to attack on 25 August, and slow again the next day.

Ludendorff arrived to energise the offensive, with characteristic effect, but François's hesitation had meanwhile had a desirable if unintended result. Unopposed in force to his front, Samsonov had thrust his centre forward, towards the Vistula against which he hoped to pin the Germans, thus exposing lengthening flanks both to François, now to his south, and to Mackensen and Scholtz, who were marching XVII and XX Corps down from the north. On 27 August François rediscovered his bite, and pushed his men on. Samsonov, disregarding the danger to his rear, pressed on also. On 28 August his leading troops savaged a miscellaneous collection of German troops they found in their path and broke through almost to open country, with the Vistula beyond.

MAP LIII- EASTERN PRUSSIA - BATTLE OF TANNENBERG



Ludendorff, seized by a fit of his nerves his stolid appearance belied, ordered François to detach a division to the broken units' assistance. François, creatively uncooperative on this occasion, did not obey but drove every battalion he had eastward at best speed. With the weight of Samsonov's army moving westward by different routes, there was little to oppose them. On the morning of 29 August, his leading infantry reached Willenberg, just inside East Prussia from Russian territory, and met German troops coming the other way [see Map L, ¶]. They belonged to Mackensen's XVII Corps, veterans of the fighting south of the Masurian Lakes, who had been attacking southward since the previous day. Contact between the claws of the two pincers - the units were the 151st Ermland Infantry of I Corps and the 5th Blucher Hussars of XVII - announced that Samsonov was surrounded. (6)

Map LIII portrays the situation on August 30. I Corps had begun its move at Seeben and marched east via Niedenburg, to Willenberg. Since Samsonov was marching in the opposite direction, northwest, none of his units encountered I Corps, and Second Army remained oblivious of the Germans' presence in their rear. After I and XVII Corps had met at Willenberg, Scholtz's XX Corps closed the trap on the western side. Except for VI Corps which escaped by retiring in south-eastern direction over the Russian border, the whole of Second Army was caught in a huge pocket east of the towns of Hohenstein and Tannenberg.

The bag amounted to approximately 50,000 Russian casualties and 92,000 prisoners, compared with losses of about 30,000 killed, wounded or missed on the German side. These numbers made the Battle of Tannenberg, as it was named according to Hindenburg's wishes, a most particular event compared to the battles on the Western front which

frequently caused wholesale destruction but so far had rarely yielded significant numbers of prisoners. For the moment, the danger to East Prussia and Silesia was averted, and Hindenburg and Ludendorff hailed as the saviours of the nation.

Rennenkampf, however, proved a tougher customer than Samsonov. When the Germans, now reinforced by the arrival of IX and the Guard Reserve Corps from France, attempted to repeat the encircling manoeuvre against First Army, Rennenkampf managed to evade the German pincers adroitly in what was called the Battle of the Masurian Lakes. On 13 September he was safely back in Russian territory, regrouped, and, reinforced by a new Russian army, the Tenth, conducted a counteroffensive which succeeded in re-establishing a Russian line near the Angerapp River, which was held until February 1915.

The fighting in the Eastern theatre now turned to the south. In this context, we may revisit Map XLVII's picture of the deployments in southern Poland and Galicia. Not unlike Joffre and Lanrezac, or the Russian "swing option" of Fourth Army, the Austrian General Staff had been faced with the necessity to contemplate a two-front war, against Serbia and Russia, and sought flexibility of dispositions. Until 1912, Conrad von Hötzendorf, chief of the Austrian General Staff and an aggressive despiser of Slavs in general and Serbs in particular, relied on a war plan **B**, for "Balkan", which presumed the deployment of the complete Austro-Hungarian army against Serbia. In the wake of the Balkan Wars of 1912/13, a clash simultaneously involving Serbia and Russia became a distinct likelihood and the plan had to be changed accordingly. The first measure was to improve the fortifications, garrisons and supplies of the two enormous forts Lemberg and Przemyśl in Galicia, and the second was to tinker with the initial deployment of the Austro-Hungarian forces.

Eventually, a plan **R** for "Russia" was developed, which directed two armies, 5th and 6th, to the Serbian border and three, 1st, 3rd and 4th, to the Russian frontier. To allow for circumstances unforeseen, the Austrians prepared a "swing" option of their own design: depending on the tactical situation, 2nd Army would either march to the right wing of the Russian front or to the left wing of the Serbian.

When push came to shove, however, Hötzendorf could not make up his mind and, after prolonged hesitation, consigned 2nd Army to the south. When the Russian deployment became evident, he changed his opinion and tried to turn 2nd Army around in its tracks; alas, the railway tables could not be substituted swiftly enough and, on August 1, Hötzendorf allowed 2nd to take part in the Serbian operation, with the proviso to be retrained as soon as possible to Galicia. The miscue ensued that, by the end of August, Austria only had thirty-seven infantry and ten cavalry divisions on the Galician front against a Russian force of fifty-three infantry and eighteen cavalry divisions. Action, however, began in Serbia.

The opening phase of the Serbian campaign favoured Austria, because the Serbian General Staff had anticipated and prepared for an attack from southern Hungary, over the Danube, not from Bosnia, between the Drina and Sava Rivers where the Austrians did attack. About 200,000 men, commanded by Field Marshal Oskar Potiorek, crossed the Serbian border on August 12 without encountering resistance for two days. The Serbian army had to march south from their stations along the Danube, whence they arrived late on August 14. Their timely counterattack on the very next day caused an instant dilemma on the side of the Austrians. Potiorek soon asked for the assistance of 2nd Army, the "swing" force, but his repeated requests were only granted on August 17, and then only on the condition that 2nd Army's expected entrainment to the Russian front was not to be delayed. Since this entrainment happened, in the event, as scheduled on August 20, 2nd Army's help was but a token affair, and 5th and 6th Army were forced to retreat to Austria by August 21. The Serbs now followed them, but had to retract their steps quickly when encirclement threatened.

For five weeks the fortunes of war swayed forth and back on the Balkan front until a renewed Austrian offensive, in the first week of November, succeeded in pushing the Serbian forces over a hundred kilometres to the south, to the Morava River. Belgrade fell on December 2, but soon it were the Austrian lines that proved overextended. Only a day later, the Serbian commander Radomir Putnik unleashed a - costly - counterattack and by mid-December not only succeeded in liberating Belgrade but in driving the Austrians completely off Serbian ground as well. Subsequently, fighting on this front ended until the autumn of 1915, while the Austrians' attention shifted to the Russian front.

Where things did not look good. The new Austrian plan called for an attack, with a strong left wing, into the great Polish plain; essentially from Cracow in northern direction, along the Wisla and San rivers. The aim was to envelope the

Russian right wing, stationed south of Warsaw, between Lodz and Lublin. On its own right wing, the Austrian army was to remain on the defensive, along the Carpathian Mountains and supported by the great fortresses of Lemberg and Przemysl.

The Russian strategy was less clear, which reflected a discongruance of opinions between STAVKA in St. Petersburg, Army Group Southwest HQ and the local commanders. Unity prevailed as far as that an envelopment of Austrian forces should be attempted, but arguments ensued where to strike, east or west. In the end, a sort of compromise was reached which combined the disadvantages of both options.

The Austrians had to cope with a physical and a psychological handicap. The physical was rooted in geography, which favoured the Russians: the Austrian positions in eastern Galicia, basically aligned along the forward, that is, north-eastern slope of the Carpathian Mountains, formed a salient protruding into Polish Russia; any Austrian advance was likely to head into a trap, because it could be outflanked on both sides.

The psychological problem was the heterogeneity of the Austro-Hungarian forces and in particular the issue of the Slavs living under Austrian suzerainty. They were not only suspected of little enthusiasm but, worse, of sympathizing with the enemy. In the event, the reality of war deteriorated the troops more than their nominal ethnicity.

Of the nine language groups of the army, of which 44 per cent was Slav (Czech, Slovak, Croatian, Serb, Slovene, Ruthenian, Polish and Bosnian Muslim), 28 per cent German, 18 per cent Hungarian, 8 per cent Romanian and 2 per cent Italian, the Germans were always dependable, if some never wholly enthusiastic; the Hungarians, non-Slavs and privileged co-equals, remained reliable until defeat stared them in the face at the end; the Catholic Croats had a long record of loyalty to the empire, which many of them maintained; the Poles, hating the Russians, distrusting the Germans and enjoying large electoral and social privileges under the Habsburgs, were Kaisertreu; the Bosnian Muslims, sequestered in special, semi-sepoy regiments, were dependable; the Italians and the rest of the Slavs, particularly the Czechs and Serbs, lost the enthusiasm of mobilization quickly. Once war ceased to be a brief adventure, the army became for them "a prison of the nations," with the ubiquitous German superiors acting as gaolers.

This was an unhappy destiny for an army which, for much of Franz Josef's reign, had been a successful and even popular multi-ethnic organisation. Commanded in their own languages, spared the brutal discipline of the Kaiser's army, prettily uniformed, well-fed, loaded with traditions and honours that ascended to the seventeenth-century Turkish siege of Vienna and beyond, the regiments of the imperial army - Tyrolean Rifles, Hungarian Hussars, Dalmatian Light Horse - made a kaleidoscope of the empire's diversity and, for three years of a young conscript's life, provided an enjoyable diversion from the routine of workshop or plough. Annual manoeuvres were a pleasurable summer holiday. Regimental anniversaries, when the band played, wine flowed, and the honorary colonel, an archduke, a prince, perhaps the Emperor himself, came to visit, were joyous feasts. The return home, time expired, brought more celebration and adult respect. The reality of war was a distant eventuality.

Reality intruded rapidly and cruelly on the Carpathian front in August 1914. (7)

The Russian campaign began with advantages for the Austrians, whose 1st, 3rd and 4th Armies were spaced along a front of over 400 kilometres' length, from Cracow, near Prussian Silesia, almost to Czernowitz on the border to Romania. On August 23, 1st Army, on the left wing, attacked along the San and forced the opposing Russian Fourth Army to retreat, within the next three days, approximately fifteen miles in the direction of Radom and Lublin, i.e. northwards. The Russian retirement, however, was to prevent encirclement only, not because they were beaten. To the right of 1st Army, 4th encountered the advancing Russian Fifth Army on the eastern side of the San, and drove them back as well. Then the fortunes of war began to change.

A dilemma materialized in late August at the Austrian right wing. 3rd Army (Brudermann), which secured the Austrian border in the East and was deployed around Lemberg, should have been able to defend itself without great difficulty behind the lines of the Bug and Dniester Rivers, reinforced by the great fortress which might serve as a retreat if

things went wrong. Its right flank was covered, imperfectly, by units of 2nd Army which were arriving from Serbia and deployed southeast of 3rd Army, around Ternopol.

But since the SCHWERPUNKT, the offensive concentration of the Austrian line-up, was on the left wing, the right wing's defensive orientation had led to its stationing as far as sixty miles distant from the Russian frontier, deep inside Austrian territory. On August 25, however, Brudermann received reports of two or three Russian corps advancing west of Ternopol and decided to meet them. Although he had to give up his best unit, the elite XIV Corps, the Tyrolean KAISERJÄGER [The Emperor's Hunters, ¶] to 2nd Army on the very same day, he continued to proceed despite two unfortunate circumstances. Not only were his remaining forces a mix of Romanians, Slovenes, Italians and Ukrainians of limited enthusiasm, they were by now far outnumbered by the Russian Third Army they were going to meet. Against a Russian force of almost two hundred battalions and seven hundred artillery pieces Austria pitted roughly one hundred battalions with three hundred guns. Oblivious of the imbalance, Brudermann attacked, with predictable results. In three days of heavy fighting his army was defeated and pushed back almost to Ternopol whence it had come; some of his troops sought shelter as far back as Lemberg, although the Russians did not pursue them.

Why didn't they? Both parties misjudged the significance of the encounter. Third Army's commander Ruszki considered the engagement a "fine defensive success," (8) but nothing more, and Hötendorf at the Austrian HQ was so delighted with the great victory he had achieved, in his opinion, with 1st Army at the San that he considered the reversal in the south a minor ache. Moreover, he believed that by reinforcing 3rd Army he could still accomplish an envelopment of the Russian Third Army. By the end of August he had augmented 3rd Army's strength by the addition of 2nd Army units still trickling in from the Serbian front to 150 battalions and over 800 guns. For the purposes of the renewed offensive, the two armies were united as an army group under the command of 2nd Army's General Boehm-Ermoli.

Under Conrad's orders, Second Army attacked again on 29 August between the rivers, this time with results even more disastrous than at first. Russian strength opposite now exceeded three hundred and fifty battalions, supported by 1,304 guns, and, in the ensuing maelstrom, 20,000 Austrians were captured and thousands more killed and wounded. In the face of all the evidence, Conrad continued to believe he was winning. (9)

Hötendorf was not the man to be content with less than what Hindenburg, the wooden titan, and Ludendorff, the technician, had accomplished in East Prussia. He wanted to direct and win his own cauldron battle and devised a strategy for a scheme even more elaborate than the last one (which had failed). If he were to withdraw 2nd and 3rd Armies deep into the Austrian hinterland behind Lemberg, and leave the fortress itself unprotected, he might lure the Russians into an overhasty pursuit of the Austrians, in which case he could bring 4th Army down from the north and attack the Russians' open right flank, thereby cutting them off. Lemberg, respectively its fortress, would be the cheese in the trap, but, in the event, the Russian mice remained unfooled. When 4th Army's southward move reached Rava Russka, still thirty miles north of Lemberg, it was checked by an energetic Russian counterattack and "Conrad's efforts to outflank with a weaker force a stronger force that was attempting to outflank him now threatened catastrophe." (10)

Conrad's manoeuvring had essentially bisected the Austrian deployment. On his original left wing, 1st Army still fought the Russian Fourth Army [close to its original position in Map XLVII, ¶], but then a wide gap yawned to the southeast: the closest Austrian troops were now a hundred kilometres distant. 2nd and 3rd Armies were west of Lemberg and 4th Army just to the north of them. In the north and east of the three Austrian armies, however, stood Russian forces ready to devour their prey. Hötendorf's battle plan had failed, again, and since a short counteroffensive of 2nd and 3rd Armies failed to extricate them from the looming Russian encirclement, he...

... had no recourse but to order a general retreat, first to the River San, then to the Dunajec, a tributary of the Vistula only thirty miles east of Cracow, the capital of Habsburg Poland and the greatest city of Catholic Eastern Europe between Vienna and Warsaw. Przemyśl, the huge fortress guarding the gaps in the Carpathian chain where the Rivers San and Dniester rise to flow into the Polish plain, had been abandoned, leaving its garrison of 150,000 soldiers surrounded behind Russian lines. Austrian territory to a depth of a hundred and fifty miles had been surrendered.

The Habsburg Emperor had lost 400,000 men out of the 1,800,000 mobilised, including 300,000 as prisoners. Among the heaviest of the casualties were those that had fallen on the 50,000 men of the XIV Tyrolean Corps, formed of Franz Josef's four treasured KAISERJÄGER regiments, their KAISERSCHÜTZEN reservists, the 6th Mounted Rifle Regiment and the corps mountain artillery batteries. No less than 40,000 had become casualties, a loss that deprived the Austrian army of its best and bravest element, never to be replaced. (11)

Hötendorf's operations, however, resulted in more than simply a lost engagement, their misfortune threatened possible disaster for the Central Powers' whole south-eastern front. A huge gap had opened between the German 8th Army in East Prussia and the closest Austrian forces near Cracow, 150 miles away. Not only were the Hungarian provinces in danger of a Russian invasion, the route into Silesia, and hence the road into the very heartland of Germany lay open, undefended.

On his last day in office, September 14, Moltke ordered Ludendorff to form a new "southern" army, the 9th, at the Upper Vistula in West Prussia, to protect the inroads to Germany. Ludendorff asked for the incorporation of most of 8th Army's units into the new force, which was granted two days later by Moltke's successor, General Falkenhayn. The Tannenberg troika took over 9th Army: Hindenburg commanded, Ludendorff became Chief of Staff, and Hoffmann director of operations.

Mere defensive tasks were not to Ludendorff's taste. On September 18 he set out to meet Hötendorf with a proposal to amend the dangerous situation in the East by an offensive with the aim of conquering Warsaw, the centre of Russian transportation and communication on their Western front. 9th Army would cross the Upper Vistula eastward bound and head for Warsaw, their southern flank protected by the Austrian 1st and 4th Armies.

Meanwhile STAVKA was sorting out its strategic options. Army Group Northwest's new commander, General Ruzski, argued, in the face of the German success at Tannenberg, for a return to the defensive and, perhaps, a cautious retreat. Army Group Southwest, however, longed to pursue the Austrians to Cracow and, if possible, further back. St. Petersburg planned to concentrate all its western forces around Warsaw and launch a spoiling attack into Silesia.

Cannibalizing most of 8th Army's units, the new German 9th Army was assembled by rail in the vicinity of Cracow in late September and on the 28th, Hindenburg launched the offensive towards Warsaw. This time, alas, it was the German military intelligence service's turn to misjudge the situation. It failed to discover any major Russian troop concentration around Warsaw when in fact the Russian Fourth and Ninth Armies were already advancing to block 9th Army's approach of Warsaw south of the town, whereupon First, Second and Fifth would attack the German right flank from the east.

Not only were Ludendorff's designs on Warsaw premature - given the strength of the opposition - but the Russians had predicted the - far too obvious - manoeuvre and were biding their time. 9th Army dutifully marched northward; on the left (western) bank of the Vistula, for days on end, when the absence of Russian troops, initially met with relief, at length aroused Ludendorff's suspicions: the Russians had to be somewhere. On 12 October he was checked near Deblin [now Ivangorod, ¶], 50 miles southeast of Warsaw, by a strong Russian detachment. Originally discounting the attack, Ludendorff realized six days later that he was heading into a trap and 9th Army had to retract its steps; which was just as well, for in this sector thirteen German and thirty-one Austrian divisions faced fifty-five Russian ones. The operation still reaped a small tactical success in delaying the preparations for the Russian invasion of Silesia.

To his right, however, Conrad von Hötendorf showed no such instincts: his - unwarranted - pride could not abide the thought of letting any Russians 'escape', as he saw it. As a consequence, he fell for the oldest trick in the book: he followed, with 1st Army, the - entirely voluntary - Russian retreat from Przemysl, which they had besieged, to the San river, i.e. northward [in the direction of even more Russian troops, ¶] and decided, on October 22, to attack near Deblin. 1st Army ran into a Russian chainsaw. Forced to retreat four days later, the army suffered 40,000 casualties and Przemysl had to be abandoned to Russian siege yet again. As a whole, the October operations had been a small tactical defeat for the Germans, who had in time escaped the noose, but a big one for the Austrians, who had not. For the moment, Ludendorff's designs on Warszawa had fizzled.

The victory gave STAVKA time to collect and deploy new units from its sheer inexhaustible supply of young conscripts, and the Russian army prepared to switch from the defence of the motherland to a substantial offensive. Second and Fifth Armies were freshened up and fortified for an attack into Silesia, in the direction of Breslau, further on to Posen and, hopefully, to Berlin. At the same time Third, Fourth and Ninth Armies were to finish off the Austrian troops in Galicia by attacking between Cracow and Przemysl, a line the Austrians could ill afford to lose and hence were doomed to defend at any cost.

A problem of infrastructure, however, much undermined the Russian efforts and assisted the implementation of German countermeasures: unlike the episode of October, in which the Russians had been able to move troops quickly from one point to another on the extensive rail network around Warsaw, they were now planning to move through western Poland, which "had deliberately been deprived of railways as a defensive measure; there were only four east-west lines and only two rail crossings over the Vistula." (12)

Moreover, during its retreat 9th Army had deliberately destroyed the western Polish railways to a depth of a hundred miles, with the exception of the rail link between Thorn on the Vistula and Breslau [Wrocław, ¶] in Silesia, which Ludendorff retained for his as of yet undiminished dream of enveloping the Russians in the western Polish plain. Anticipating a Russian advance into Silesia, Ludendorff sent 9th Army by rail to Thorn, the old fortress town guarding the Vistula where the river entered German territory. They were ready by November 10, and the next day attacked south into the right flank of the Russian Second Army.

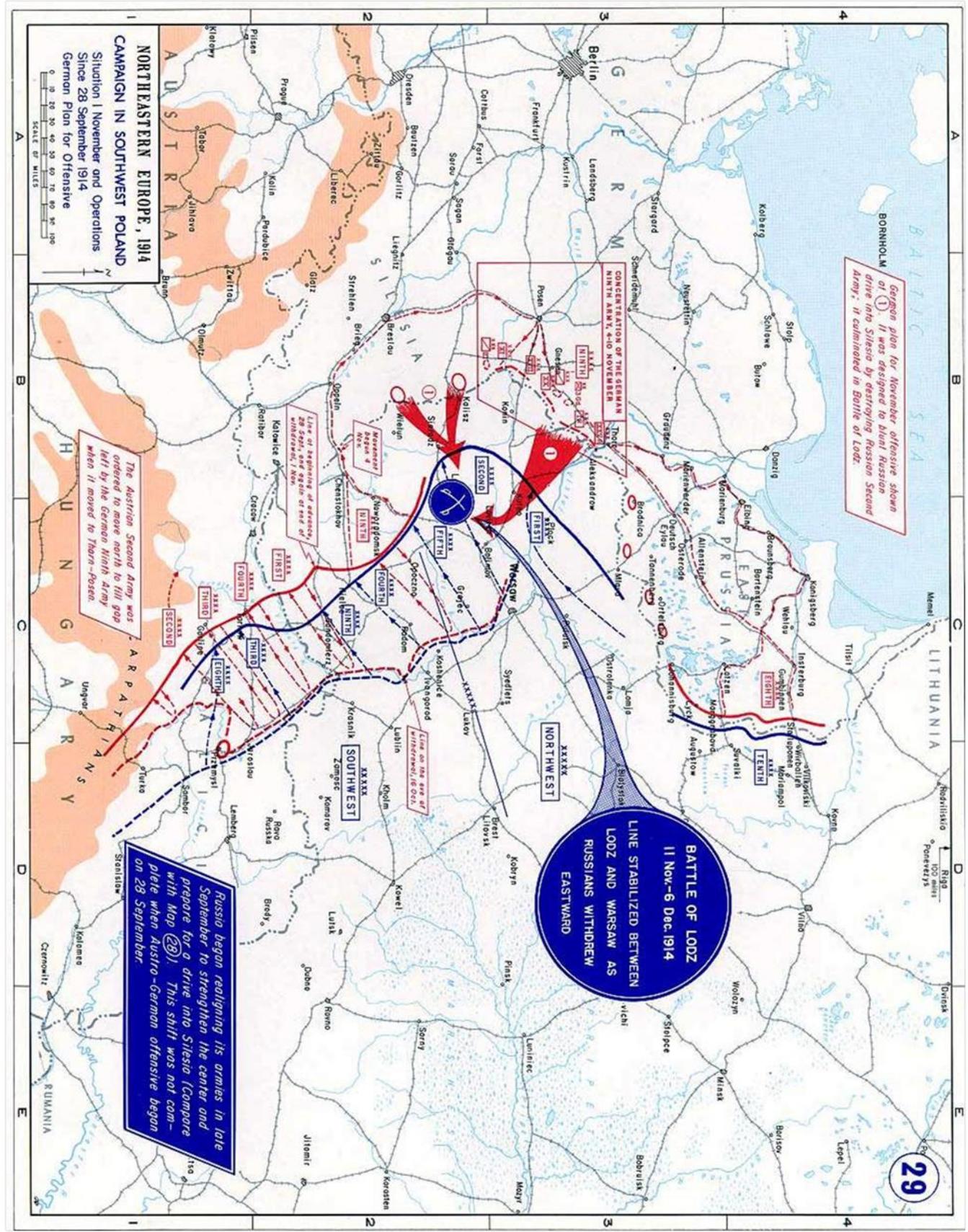
The blow quickly separated V Siberian Corps from the rest of the army, which had meanwhile moved thirty miles to the west, closer to Germany. This time it took High Command in St. Petersburg four days to understand that Second Army was heading into a trap but the danger was barred by a timely retreat to Lodz, the industrial town sixty miles southwest of Warsaw. The retreat almost bestowed on the Russian army an unexpected triumph when three German reserve divisions, who followed them to Lodz, found themselves outflanked and could be liberated only with the greatest of efforts. The Battle, or rather, Confusion of Lodz ended by November 23 in another stalemate which, despite a few skirmishes in December, paralysed the central sector of the Eastern theatre until the end of January 1915.

The situation in the south was more difficult. The German XXIV Reserve Corps had been sent to reinforce the Austrian front in Galicia and their assistance initially aided the Habsburgers in pushing the Russians back and regaining lost territory north of Cracow in early November. But by the midst of the month, the Russians, reinforced yet again, had regrouped and successive attacks by six armies against the Austrian front forced Hötendorf to undertake another retreat which cost more ground than the preceding offensive had obtained. Some Austrian units for the November offensive had been withdrawn from the south-eastern front, where their absence helped Brusilov's Eight Army to conquer the Lupkow pass over the Carpathians by the end of November. Budapest and the plains of the Hungarian Pusztas now lay open to an eventual Russian invasion. Then the Central Powers' position suddenly improved.

At the end of November, the two Army Group commanders Ruzski and Ivanov attended a conference in St. Petersburg, summoned by Grand Duke Nicholas, and their absence momentarily incapacitated their commands. For once, Hötendorf was able to exploit the Russian weakness, which his intelligence service had identified as being most acute at the juncture between the Russian Third and Eight Armies. There seemed to be a gap of thirty kilometres width between the two small towns of Limanova and Lapanow, and the best troops available were deployed opposite the void; the fresh German 43rd Division and the not-so-fresh Austrian XIV Corps.

The ensuing attack was a complete success, and the Russians found themselves pushed back more than sixty kilometres within a week. Their dire straits required the urgent assistance of a few of Brusilov's divisions which hurried north at best speed. Their disappearance, in turn, enabled the Austrians to retake the Lupkow pass and their earlier defensive positions in the Carpathian Mountains against the now-weakened Eight Army. Even though the Austro-German breakthrough was stopped on December 10, its success entailed the momentary blockage of both Russian operational prospects: for now, they could neither advance directly into Germany via Silesia nor into Hungary.

MAP LV: STABILIZATION AFTER THE BATTLE OF LODZ



A mournful consequence for the Austro-Hungarian army would, however, only become evident in time: Limanova-Lapanow was the last successful operation the Austrian General Staff would conceive and execute on its own, and the last victory an Austrian commander could properly claim as his own. In their subsequent victories in the Eastern and Southern theatres, at Gorlice and Caporetto, they remained the junior partner in battles won by German divisions under German supervision. The Habsburgers' losses were staggering: out of 3,300,000 men Austria had mobilized, 1,300,000, almost 40%, were lost after only five months of war.

Just as bad were the psychological aspects.

Many [of the eventual replacements], moreover, were reluctant servants of empire and would prove growingly so as the war prolonged. The valiant mountain men of the Tyrol and Vorarlberg had given almost their all before the end of 1914; the Germans of Austria proper had also suffered heavily, as had the warlike Magyars of the Kingdom of Hungary; the Emperor's Slavs would prove an increasingly doubtful quantity.

The original setback in Serbia had been blamed on the half-heartedness of the VII Corps and its 21st Division, almost wholly Czech, in particular. During the fighting with the Russians, the Czechs of IX Corps were suspected of large-scale desertion to the enemy. The steadfastness of the army was further undermined by the very heavy losses suffered at the outset among its regular officers and long-service NCOs. It was on its way towards becoming what the Austrian official history would itself call "a Landsturm [second-line] and militia army." (13)

A second joint Austro-German offensive east of Limanova-Lapanow began promising. The new Austro-Hungarian 10th Army (Pflanzer-Baltin) succeeded in conquering Czernowitz, at the Austro-Russian-Romanian frontier triangle, on February 17, and collected 60,000 Russian prisoners. North of them, however, the progress of the Austrian Third and Fourth Armies was halted in the quagmires of winter and the face of Russian counterattacks, and the target of the whole exercise, the deliverance of Przemysl, had to be abandoned. The collapse of the relief operation resulted, after 194 days of Russian siege, in the surrender of the fortress on March 18, 1915 and "two thousand five hundred officers and 117,000 soldiers passed into Russian captivity. The officers, whom the British observer described as having a 'prosperous and well-fed look,' at first suffered little thereby; an artist of the ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS depicted them sharing the cafés of the city with the conquerors, sitting at separate tables but exchanging salutes on entry and departure as if by the protocols of eighteenth-century warfare." (14)

In the north, the Russian Tenth Army had been able to hang onto a leftover of Rennenkampf's late September counteroffensive in East Prussia, a piece of German territory around the western rim of the Forest of Augustow, the easternmost part of the province. The outpost became the objective of a renewed German attack, which resulted in the so-called Masurian Winter Battle. 8th and the new 10th Army, which included six fresh divisions, were dispatched to dislodge the enemy, beginning on February 9.

The two armies attacked simultaneously from north and south, and General Siever's Tenth Army, which had been denied reinforcements by STAVKA on the theory that Russian intelligence could not find any troops threatening them, soon found itself in danger of encirclement. XX Corps was, in fact, surrounded and had to give up on February 21, but except for the 12,000 prisoners it yielded, the rest of Tenth Army escaped to Russian territory. While this German success was in no way comparable to Tannenberg, East Prussia remained free of Russian visits for the duration of the war.

The exhaustion of both camps led to a brief suspension of hostilities, which both sides used to regroup and replenish. The strategic equilibrium on the Eastern Front was, however, completely upended when, on May 23, 1915, Italy declared War on Austria, her Triple Alliance Confederate.

THE DAYS OF MOLOCH

*If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud of vile,
incurable sores on innocent tongues -
my friend, you would not tell with such high zest
to children ardent for some desperate glory
the old lie: Dulce et decorum est
pro patria mori.*

Wilfried Owen "Dulce et Decorum" (1918)

Homer and Herodotus agree that times of war are times of change, except for generals. The soldiers, by and large, are familiar with this observation: they are being educated in the ways their generals won the most recent war, the strategies used, the weapons and tactics of the past, which were the ones these generals actually comprehended. A man like John French was a cavalry officer of the 19th Century and neither understood modern firepower nor the lessons of trench warfare.

But the great wars inescapably alter the societies that embark on them as well - depending only partially on the results of the military engagement. Literally every war is a societal challenge, temporarily upending the rules governing life; this is, perhaps, how the adage of war being the "Father of all Things" came into being. A substantial modification of military paradigm, as introduced by Scharnhorst in Prussia or Napoleon in France, does not end in enlisting men and buying stocks and guns - it starts there. They are results of changes occurring in the civil society, and typically have consequences far surpassing the limits of the military sphere.

The campaigns of Alexander, irrelevant as the ephemeral character of military conquest rendered them in less than fifty years, spread Hellenistic culture and philosophy all over the known world. Caesar's and Pompey's clash resulted in the collapse of the Roman Republic and the institution of the Imperial Principate. Luther's critique of the Catholic religion and the subsequent Thirty-Years-War ended the medieval order of the European continent, and the Napoleonic Wars introduced the citizen army, a product of the nation-state, into the military canon.

Vice versa, a lack of societal development may easily inhibit the evolution of its military forces. After a period of flowering culture, the subsequent stagnation of the Caliphates and the Ottoman Empire resulted in centuries of military stasis. As a consequence of their cultural disposition, these Arab/Turkish states tended to embrace campaigns fought with great numerical advantage over the enemy; if superiority was absent, they were likely to retire; perhaps to fight another day.

Their keen sense of self-preservation eventually precipitated the employment of mercenaries. These praetorian guards, Mamelukes and Janissaries, composed of Christian respectively Caucasian men - seized as boys, as a tribute - were trained in classic horsed warfare and taught to refuse the employment of firearms. From the 15th Century on, however, their artistry with sabre, lance and bow could no more hope to prevail against Western guns. Still, such was their orthodoxy, or indoctrination, that their traditions superseded survival on the battlefield. The eventual transition to

musketry a number of Arab troops adopted in the 19th Century was a half-hearted affair fraught with difficulties in purchase and delivery; as we have seen at Omdurman in 1898, the army of the Mahdi fought with sabres and front loaders against Lord Kitchener's British troops equipped with Hiram Maxim's machine-guns and Lee-Enfield repeating rifles. The Arabs lost.

Similarly, Japan took the drastic step in the 17th Century to essentially outlaw firearms, so that their Samurai caste of swordfighters could retain the monopoly on military matters. Even in the First World War, a few generals on both sides - firmly rooted in the past - insisted on open cavalry charges, sabre drawn, in the face of field artillery and machine-guns. Such attacks were obviously doomed to fail.

The opening battles of the Great War had made it plain to see that this conflict of industrialized nations had no resemblance to the short, victorious and honourable war patriots cheered for and generals had promised. Not only had the latter, in every country, gravely underestimated the expenditures of modern war in regards to ammunition, gear and victuals, it became shockingly clear that, in the age of mechanized war, infantry attacks over open fields would produce casualties in numbers never beheld before. Poison gas was soon to add one more horrific dimension to the suffering.

One of the great contrasts that this war produced was that of ages. While the industrialized countries of Europe conscripted their young men by the age of twenty, in war below that age, the chief generals of the Great War were of, comparably, biblical ages. On the German side in 1914, Moltke was 66 years old, Hindenburg 67 and Kluck and Bülow both 68. On the side of the Allies, Joffre and French were 62 and Gallieni 68. Their advanced age was not a matter of chance, but the expression of the pre-War belief in "experience", the preeminent value in what Stefan Zweig called the 'World of Security' before the war.

The world about and above us, which directed all its thoughts only to the fetish of security, did not like youth; or rather it constantly mistrusted it. ... Austria was an old state, dominated by an aged Emperor, ruled by old Ministers, a State without ambition, which hoped to preserve itself unharmed in the European domain solely by opposing all radical changes. ...

So arose the situation, incomprehensible today, that youth was a hindrance in all careers, and age alone was an advantage. Whereas today, in our changed state of affairs, those of forty seek to look thirty, and those of sixty wish to seem forty, and youth, energy, determination and self-confidence recommend and advance a man, in that age of security everyone who wished to get ahead was forced to attempt all conceivable methods of masquerading in order to appear older.

The newspapers recommended preparations which hastened the growth of the beard, and twenty-four- and twenty-five-year-old doctors, who had just finished their examinations, wore mighty beards and golden spectacles even if their eyes did not need them, so that they could make an impression of "experience" upon their first patients. Men wore long black frock coats and walked at a leisurely pace, and whenever possible acquired a slight embonpoint, in order to personify the desired sedateness; and those who were ambitious strove, at least outwardly, to belie their youth, since the young were suspected of instability. (1)

It didn't occur to anybody's mind that this was the first mechanized, "World War", for any rank, corporal and general alike. But as long as the generals insisted on sending unprotected men to attack, over open fields, other men, who had the advantages of being protected in entrenched positions, secured by barbed wire and supported by rapid-fire arms, casualties were to mount. This was "the simple truth of 1914-18 trench warfare." (2) What rankled the troopers was the Olympian aloofness shown by some of the principal commanders.

The impassive expressions that stare back at us from contemporary photographs do not speak of consciences of feelings troubled by the slaughter over which those men presided, nor do the circumstances in which they chose to live: the distant chateau, the well-polished entourage, the glittering motor cars, the cavalry escorts, the regular routine, the heavy dinners, the uninterrupted hours of sleep. Joffre's two-hour lunch, Hindenburg's ten-hour night, Haig's therapeutic daily equitation along roads sanded lest his horse slip, the STAVKA's diet of champagne and court gossip, seem and were a world away from the cold rations, wet boots, sodden

uniforms, flooded trenches, ruined billets and plague of lice on, in and among which, in winter at least, their subordinates lived. (3)

Sooner or later, inevitably, the soldier will seek responsibility for the conditions he is exposed to not only with the enemy but his own higher-ups. All of the three early C-in-C's on the Western front of 1914 were eventually replaced, Moltke in September 1914 [his successor Falkenhayn at the end of 1916, ¶], Sir John French in December 1915, and Joffre, who was promoted to the honourable but hollow position of "Marechal de France", in December 1916. Alas, their replacements tended to be not much younger either of age or intellectual freshness. The British press coined the expression of describing the BEF as "Lions, led by Donkeys," and nobody mistook the generals for the lions. War, to paraphrase Yeats, is "no country for old men", but, over most of its duration, the Great War was.¹

Considering the carnage plainly visible on the battlefields, at the latest after the First Battle of Ypres, it is hard to believe that there were indeed a few countries entertaining to join in the butchery at a later date: without being forced by treaty or enticed by reason, and in plain view of the possible cost. These countries joined the war either to use it as a principal undertaking of nation-building, as did the "Young Turks" - who slaughtered hundreds of thousands of innocent Armenians in the process - or for a dangerous mixture of avarice and infantilism, as in the case of Italy.

Her entry was essentially a product of an awesome misapprehension of reality.

The majority of Italians, people and parliamentarians alike, had no enthusiasm for the dangerous adventure. The impetus came from Salandra, the Prime Minister, Sonnino, the Foreign Minister, the King, Victor Emmanuel III, and a collection of political and cultural revolutionaries, including Mussolini, then a socialist, the poet D'Annunzio and the artist Marinetti, inventor of Futurism. The last, in particular, saw war as a means of dragging a backward Italy into the present and modernising it even against its will. ...

Italy's territorial ambitions lay towards Austria first, from which it had failed to "redeem" the Italian-speaking parts of the Tyrol and Slovenia in the last Austro-Italian War of 1866, but also towards the Turkish Dodecanese Islands (of which she had been in occupation since 1912) and part of Turkish Syria.

Diplomatically, Italy was still a party to the Triple Alliance of 1906, binding her to Germany as well as Austria, but had wriggled out of its provisions in August by a narrow interpretation of its terms, recognising that she was not strong enough to fight France by land or Britain and France by sea. ... With Germany heavily engaged in France and Russia, Austria in the throes of a military crisis [Przemysl had just capitulated, ¶] and Turkey overcommitted at the Asiatic borders of her empire, the reversion of Alliance appeared not only risk-free but potentially highly profitable. (4)

The spirit of the Italian army of 1915, the first since Roman ages, formed after the unification of the country in 1870, was an unknown factor. Her equipment and supply situation, however, was believed to be inferior to that of other powers and so it appeared when the army could not muster more than 212 guns, most of small calibre, on the occasion of her first offensive, on June 23, 1915. Moreover, the terrain chosen by the Italian C-in-C, General Luigi Cadorna, for this first attack of his unblooded army was of the greatest extremity.

The whole of the Italian frontier with Austria rested against the outworks of the highest mountains in Europe, from the Tyrol in the west to the Julian Alps in the east, forming a semi-circle of often precipitous crags 375 miles in extent, along which the enemy everywhere held the crests. At the western end, the Trentino, nine routes led through passes into the mountains; at the eastern end, where the Isonzo river cuts through the curtain, there is an avenue of advance.

The Trentino, however, was a detached pocket of Austrian territory and so an unprofitable objective, while beyond the Isonzo valley the ground rises to form two desolate plateaux, the Bainsizza and the Carso, "enormous natural fortresses towering two thousand feet or more above the surrounding lowlands." The

¹ "Sailing to Byzantium", W.B. Yeats, 1928

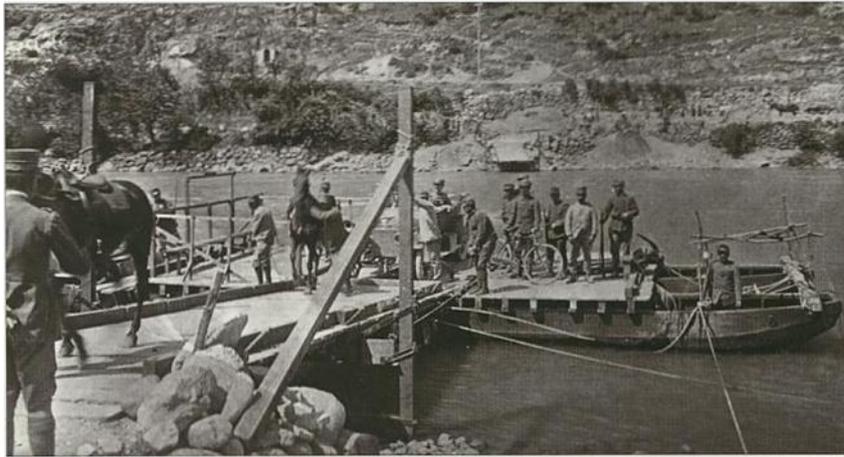
former is broken by a succession of steep ridges; the latter has been described as a "howling wilderness of stones sharp as knives." (5)

The narrow canyon, in which the Isonzo River runs, along the steep mesas of the Bainsizza and the Carso, from Carinthia to the Adriatic Sea near Trieste, was Cadorna's choice for the invasion of Austria. Once the mountain barrier was passed, the Italian army would follow the rivers Drava to Klagenfurt and Sava to Agram [Zagreb, ¶] - into the enemy's heartlands.

Italy had declared war on Austria, but not on Germany, on May 23, and exactly one month later attacked in what was to become known as the "First Battle of the Isonzo". Eleven more were to follow until 1917, none of which resulted in more than an exchange of dolomite rocks and a few hundred feet of Isonzo shoreline here and there. Two factors much augmented the death toll of combat at the Isonzo front. The first was the nature of the battlefield itself, with "rock splintered by exploding shells becoming secondary projectiles which caused frequent injury, particularly to the head, and eyes." (6) The second was the implacability of the Italian staff in rejecting the experiences won by the greatest of sacrifice in the trenches of Belgium and France. Italian trenches were seldom deeper than three feet and were armoured only with sacks of earth and stone which offered no protection from artillery fire or a well-aimed rifle shot. As their contemporaries in other staff offices, Italian generals were convinced of the superiority of frontal mass attacks of infantry, with as much fire support as there was, which was little enough in the Italian case. As mentioned earlier, the Italian army could mount only 212 guns in their first attack. They were unable to break the Austrian resistance which had initially relied on local militia battalions, reinforced in May by a regular division sent from the Serbian front and a few weeks later with three sent south from Galicia.



THESE TWO PHOTOGRAPHS REVEAL THE NARROWNESS AND THE HOSTILITY OF TERRAIN OF THE FRONT CHOSEN BY CADORNA, THE ITALIAN C-IN-C. TWELVE BATTLES WOULD BE FOUGHT IN THESE HARSH CONDITIONS, BETWEEN MAY 1915 AND THE AUTUMN OF 1917 - THE ITALIAN TROOPS SUFFERED ALMOST 500,000 CASUALTIES.



Three further battles at the Isonzo in 1915 pushed the Italian casualty list to over 100,000 entries but victory remained elusive. Still, it remains impossible to say whether the Italian operations at the Isonzo might have had a greater impact on the war had not the Central Powers meanwhile struck gold on the Eastern front.

In February 1915, the Second Battle of the Masurian Lakes had driven the Russian Tenth Army through the Forest of Augustow off German terrain, but when 8th and the new 10th German Army faced counterattacks by the newly established Russian Twelfth Army, they stopped the pursuit into the Russian plain and established a security perimeter around East Prussia, which was not to be re-breached in this war. Hindenburg and Ludendorff, who now were in charge of the Eastern theatre [as "OberOst", High Command East, ¶], planned a renewed campaign, this time in the southern part of the Eastern front, but their requests for troop allocations were regularly curtailed by Falkenhayn who feared to weaken the Western front by withdrawing troops from it. When at last a plan for a renewed offensive in Galicia was agreed on, it was based on a strategic concept by Hötendorf, who also brought lots of Austrian troops to the venture, and a tactical design by Falkenhayn, not upon the plans of Hindenburg and Ludendorff. Why?

It was, again, the chimera of Cannae, the double-encirclement battle that had infected OberOst's plans.

The plan for the offensive was Falkenhayn's, who entrusted its execution to Mackensen, victor in the East Prussian battles of 1914. Ludendorff and Hindenburg would have preferred not to prepare a breakthrough in the centre but to launch a double envelopment of the Russians from the Baltic and Carpathian fronts; like Schlieffen, they disfavoured "ordinary victories", which led only to Russian withdrawal to lines further east, and argued for cutting off the enemy from the great spaces of the Tsar's empire by a manoeuvre of encirclement.

Though exercising command in the east, they were, however, subordinate to Falkenhayn, whose fear was that their encirclement plans would require withdrawals of troops from the west on a scale dangerously weakening the German front there, and so overruled them.

Moreover, the Ludendorff-Hindenburg plan placed reliance upon Austrian participation which the continuing decline in quality of the Habsburg forces, Falkenhayn believed made unrealistic. (7)

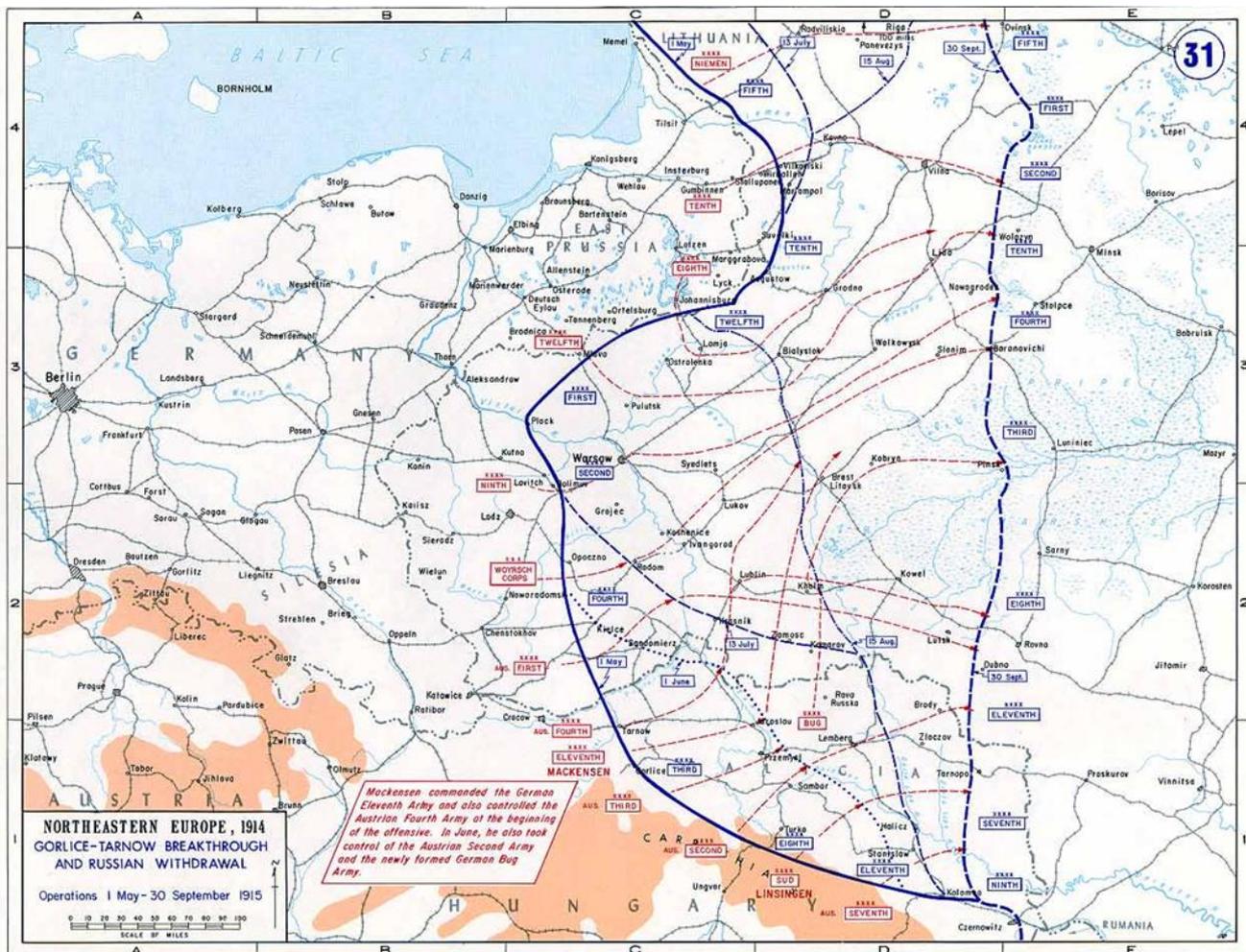
The part of the Galician front chosen for the offensive was only about thirty kilometres wide, between the medium-sized town of Tarnow, fifty kilometres east of Cracow, and Gorlice, a village southeast south of it. The Cracow front was still defended by the Russian Third Army, composed of fourteen infantry and five cavalry divisions, which were, however, low on stock and ammunitions. Opposite of them, Falkenhayn constituted a new 11th German Army, commanded by Mackensen, which he supplied with some of the best divisions still available, 1st and 2nd Guard and the regular ID's 19 and 20. An Austrian army protected the flanks. On the Russian side, the Tarnow-Gorlice perimeter was defended only by two infantry divisions of average quality, the 9th and the 31st, whose defensive abilities were seriously curtailed by a lack of artillery shells. It turned out later that the commanders of the great Russian border forts of Kovno, Grodno, Ivangorod

(Deblin) and Brest-Litovsk had hoarded shells in gargantuan quantities, many millions, but had found it wise to inform neither STAVKA nor their own field formations about their hidden treasures.

This weak opposing force could not withstand long Mackensen's concentrated hail of steel, emanating from 2,228 guns of all calibres. The preparatory bombardment began, against the customs, on the evening of May 1st, and the Russian trenches proved vulnerable. The next days' infantry attack, at first light, passed through the enemy lines without encountering much resistance, and within the next 48 hours rolled up the secondary and tertiary Russian trench lines, breaking into open country on May 4th. The Russian flanks collapsed, and after three days 140,000 prisoners were counted. Ten days later, Mackensen's 11th Army had recovered most of the territory Conrad von Hötzendorf had lost in the early calamities of winter 1914: the southern pincer of 11th Army had reached Przemysl and the northern one Lodz.

After the mad rush of the first days, the attack was continued through the open Polish plain. On August 4 Mackensen entered Warsaw and within the next six weeks 11th Army conquered the four famous frontier fortresses

MAP LVI: THE BREAKTHROUGH AT TARNOW AND GORLICE



guarding the old Russian-Polish border, Kovno, Grodno, Novogeorgievsk and Brest-Litovsk. The POW count rose to 325,000 and the Russians lost three thousand pieces of artillery.

Map LVI depicts the main thrusts of the Central Powers Spring-Summer offensive of 1915, which developed from the initial breakthrough between Tarnow and Gorlice. The Russian High Command realized that, for the time being, given the condition of the army and her supply situation, nothing but a concentric retreat would enable the reestablishment of a new front in the future. By retreating from the huge Polish salient they shortened their supply lines and lengthened those

of the Germans. This was a very reasonable strategy and worked out well enough. Ludendorff was able to claim a final success in September when he conquered Vilnius, the capital city of former Lithuania, but the onset of the RASPUTITSA, the liquefaction of all surfaces under the torrential autumn rains, stopped the movements of all combatants. A new front line established itself, by fiat of transportational paralysis, in an almost straight north-south line from Riga via the Dvina and the Pripet Rivers, a hundred miles east of Brest-Litovsk, to Ternopol and Czernowitz at the Romanian border. North of the Pripet, and its impassable marshes, the front would hold until the end of 1917, and in the south until June 1916.

The Western theatre saw no such movements. After the "Race to the Sea" had ended in the First Battle of Ypres, the resulting temporary stalemate gave the general staffs of both sides ample time to develop new plans. It was recognized that the resumption of a war of movement hinged upon a preceding, successful breach of the enemy's trench system, but the lore on this particular subject was still much in development. On the German side, Falkenhayn had laid out the basic strategy for 1915: defence in the West and offense in the East. He allowed for the exception that, if things looked good enough in the West, a local attack might be undertaken to reduce the Ypres salient.

The Allies had no clear orientation. At home, the British Army was accepting and training volunteers in record numbers, and thus, early in 1915, the BEF could actually be divided into First and Second Armies. Various new, smaller theatres also saw the arrival of British and Imperial troops: at Gallipoli, in Palestine and Mesopotamia, all directed against the Ottoman Empire. A huge Allied base was established at Salonika in Greece, in plain disregard of Greek sovereignty. One may remember here that it was the German violation of Belgium's sovereignty that had brought Britain into the war in the first place. *Quod licet Iovi non licet bovi.*

The Allied quest for the best strategy in France concentrated upon the question whereto, if the German trenches could be breached, the subsequent advance should aim to bring the liberation of the French terrain. The Allied general staffs spotted the supply routes as the weak point of the German army; hence the strategic aim must be the invalidation of German rail transport.

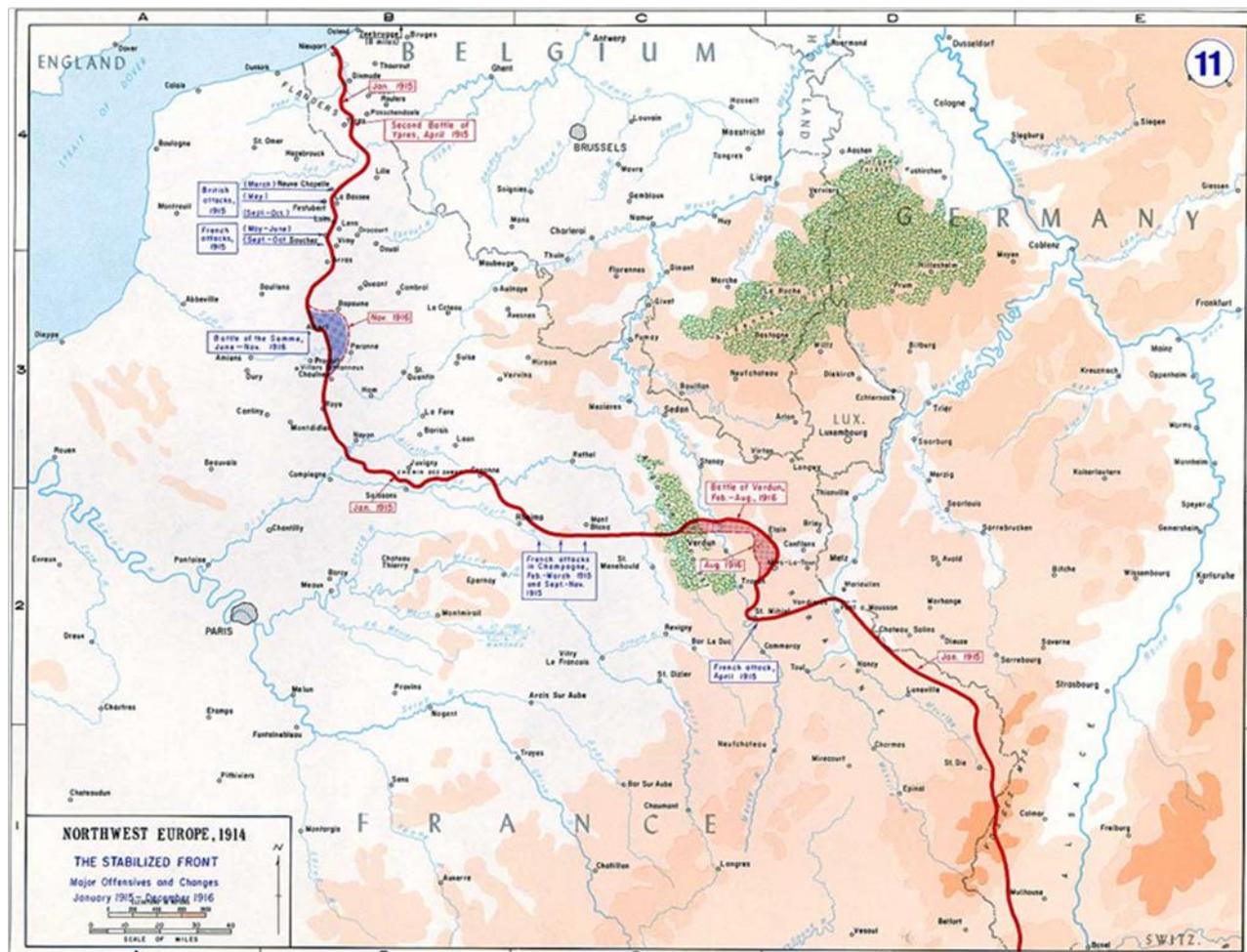
There were three [rail] systems that led back across the Rhine into Germany. The southernmost was short and easily defended. That left the two systems that supplied the Germans holding the great salient between Flanders and Verdun. If either, or preferably both, could be cut, the Germans within the salient would be obliged to fall back, perhaps creating once again those conditions of "open warfare" which, it was believed, alone offered the chance of decisive victory.

The French at Chantilly, the British at GHQ at St.Omer, therefore agreed during January that the correct strategy during 1915 was for offensives to be mounted at the "shoulders" of the salient, in the north against the Aubers and Vimy ridges which stood between the Allies and the German railways in the Douai plain behind, in the south against the Champagne heights which protected the Mezieres-Hirson rail line. The attacks would, in theory, converge, thus threatening the Germans in the great salient with encirclement as well as disruption of their supplies. (8)

The Allies' initial operations on the northern "shoulder" of the salient began with an attack at Neuve Chapelle, March 10 - 13 [Map LVII, square B 4, ¶1]; against the southern one with a thrust into the Champagne, on April 6 to 15 [C 2, ¶1]. Their petering out without much ado was perhaps what convinced Falkenhayn that now was the proper time for the conquest of the high ground at the Ypres salient, and, incidentally, for trying out the effects of the recently developed chlorine gas.

The operation began on April 22. Due to the experimental character of the manoeuvre, Duke Albrecht's 4th Army delivered only a short artillery barrage against the opposite trenches, which were manned by French and Algerians troops. After the artillery had stopped, the gas was released from canisters. A yellowish-greenish cloud wafted over to the Allied trenches, and on this April 22 death by poison gas was added to the lustre of human achievement.

MAP LVII: ALLIED ATTACKS 1915



The small gains made this day were lost again soon, but on the 24th, a second German attack aimed at the Canadian units in the northeast of Ypres. After some forth and back, renewed German attacks and French and British counterattacks, this Second Battle of Ypres [B 4, ¶] ended in late May with the Germans acquiring possession of the high ground they sought, three kilometres outside of Ypres. The view down on the town had come at a high price; 35,000 German, 60,000 British and 10,000 French casualties were counted. The Ypres salient would not change hands until the summer of 1917, but the constant artillery fire was to reduce the town to a heap of rubble.

Two months after the British attack on Neuve Chapelle, March 10 to 13, another Allied offensive was unleashed in the Artois. On May 9, Haig's First Army attacked the ridge of Aubers, south of Lille and only twenty miles south of Ypres. The dearth of artillery shells the British suffered restricted their opening barrage to forty minutes duration. When it was found out that the German trench system was intact, the strike had to be called off the very next day in the face of losses amounting to over 11,000 casualties. Rupprecht's 6th Army, opposite, lost approximately 1,500. On the 15th, Haig attacked again, five miles to the south, at Festubert [B 4, ¶]. This assault drove the Germans back less than a kilometre, for 16,000 casualties on the British and 6,000 on the German Side.

The French part of the operation opened the same day as Haig's attack at Aubers, May 9, just south of the BEF, at Lens and Vimy, where Dubail's new command, the Tenth Army, went into combat after a preliminary bombardment of four days. The target of the operation was the ridge of Vimy, a plateau between Arras and Lens. For once French élan seemed to work: one corps broke through the German perimeter and advanced three miles in ninety glorious minutes. But the timely arrival of German reserves ended the advance, and after ten days Vimy ended in another stalemate.



YPRES IN 1915. THE CONSTANT SHELLING EVENTUALLY FLATTENED THE TOWN COMPLETELY.

The spring offensives were disappointments for the Allies, and the British ammunition crisis brought a change from a Liberal to a Coalition government. It was agreed on that, as soon as the supply situation allowed it, a combined British-French offensive was to target both "shoulders" of the German salient simultaneously: in the north, the offensive opened on September 25 with a British assault just south of their earlier strikes in the Artois, at Loos [B 4, ¶], and a resumed French attempt for the ridge of Vimy. "In both sectors the offensives were preceded by a discharge of chlorine gas." (9)

The second duel of Dubail's Tenth Army and Rupprecht's 6th ended much as the first had, with mounting losses but inconclusive results and petered out in early November, in the mud of the autumn rains.

It was worse at Loos. Not only did the wind misbehave, the chlorine idling between friend and foe and sometimes even wafting back into the British trenches, the advancing six divisions soon found their progress halted by overlapping German machine gun fire from excellent defensive positions established due to a detailed and comprehensive order issued by Falkenhayn in late 1914. The early apex of the British attempt was the capture of the town of Loos, but small gains came at too high a price. When the Battle of Loos had to be called off on October 8 in the face of intensive German counterattacks, British losses amounted to 16,000 dead, 25,000 wounded and many thousands missed or taken prisoner. What Loos did was to prove the final nail in Sir John French's coffin: he was dismissed in December 1915 and replaced by Douglas Haig. Operations in the Champagne, the southern "shoulder" proved just as senseless. Petain's Second and Langle de Cary's Fourth Army with their combined twenty divisions, supported by 1,000 artillery pieces and clouds of chlorine gas, could not get further ahead than two miles at any place. They never reached the German second defence line, and when Joffre called off the slaughter on October 31st, the two French armies counted over 140,000 casualties. Clearly, something different had to be worked out, and while the generals went back to the planning boards, combat ceased on the Western front for the rest of the year.



THE BATTLEFIELD AT LOOS. THE MULTITUDE OF TRENCHES, EACH ONE IDENTIFIED BY A WHITE LINE, FORMED ONE GIGANTIC DEATH TRAP.

The Western front of 1915 had seen, however, only one half of the British commitment. A Turkish attack on the Suez Canal, the main artery of British eastern commerce and naval deployment, was mounted from Palestine southward on January 14, 1915. In early February, the Ottomans' attempt to cross the canal in boats failed in face of the fire of a British and Imperial force under General John Maxwell. The Turks retired to Palestine, and were never seen again at the canal.

A small British detachment had been sent at the war's beginning to protect the English oil interests in Persia, and had taken to the Turkish declaration of war in October 1914 by invading Mesopotamia and capturing Basra, the important harbour town. Eventually, the British HQ set its eyes on Baghdad, and one division was sent from Basra up the Tigris River and another one up the Euphrates. The Tigris force met a Turkish detachment, about 10,000 heads strong, at Kut-el-Amara, two-thirds the way to Baghdad and won the subsequent encounter on September 27-28. When the commander, General Townshend, was ordered to proceed in direction of Baghdad, he demurred, citing supply lines far too long and the loss of over 1,000 casualties in the earlier battle, but obeyed. Outside the ancient town of Ctesiphon, he ran into a superior Turkish force blocking his way and had to retreat after four days of combat. He was back in Kut a week later. The Turks followed and laid siege to the town which was to last until 1916.

But these were sideshows. The main British offensive against the Turks was to take place at one of history's famous spots - the Dardanelles or Hellespont. The Dardanelles is the narrow sea lane, fifty kilometres long and at its closest point only a kilometre wide, which connects the Aegean Sea with the Sea of Marmara, which itself joins, at the Bosphorus, the Black Sea. The strategic importance of the Dardanelles respectively the Bosphorus is obvious: these two points control the traffic between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea, and hence the access to the oceans. It has always been the object of the powers controlling the Black Sea to command these spots and their hinterland, for they are the bottleneck constraining their ambitions. The Bosphorus was, and is, dominated by Byzantium [Constantinople, Istanbul], whose conquest was a Russian dream for centuries; only escalating when the religious component of removing the Muslims from the former seat of the Christian Empire became a secondary motive.

The Battle of Troy was fought on the southern shore of the Dardanelles; on the European side of the straits, at the ancient town of Adrianople [now Edirne, ¶] "fifteen recorded battles had been fought; at the first, in AD 378, the Emperor Valens was killed by the Goths, a disaster that caused the collapse of Rome's empire in the west; at the most recent, in 1913, the Turks had repelled a Bulgarian attempt on Istanbul itself." (10)

The strategic importance of the straits in 1914 lay in the Allies' plans to provide war supplies to Russia, but since no land route existed sea lanes had to suffice. There was one, the North Sea-Arctic Sea passage, to the Russian ports of Murmansk or Archangel in the Arctic Ocean respectively the White Sea. But this was a difficult route, prone to adverse weather conditions, with the additional disadvantage that the goods would arrive in a veritable no man's land, arctic Russia, and would have to be transported over yet another two or three thousand miles to their eventual destinations.

There was a second route, through the pleasant Mediterranean Sea to the Black Sea, to Sevastopol, on the Crimean Chersonnese, whence the goods would have a short and convenient rail trip to the Eastern front. The Royal Navy was confident to defend convoys of merchantmen on their way to Sevastopol, with the exception of the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus, which were in Turkish hands and considered fortified, armed, and dangerous. A sneak attack of a British naval squadron in November 1914, however, found little resistance and was able to damage the defences on the mouth of the straits. Although the squadron failed to penetrate further, the success of the attack much impressed Winston Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty.

After the initial freeze-up of the entrenched front lines in the Western theatre in late 1914, the British government sought other points suitable to attack. Churchill was able to convince Lloyd George, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, Lord Kitchener, the Secretary of State for War, and finally the First Sea Lord, Admiral Fisher, of the merits of an invasion of the Dardanelles.

Churchill's ministrations resulted in a two-tiered operational miscellany, a plan, like its inventor, designed to gain the greatest show from the least of assets: naval gunfire, from a squadron of old battleships, would neutralize the Turkish forts at and around the Dardanelles, giving the Allies control of the seaway. The second stage would be a landing of mostly Imperial, i.e. non-English, infantry at the Gallipoli Peninsula itself, the northern pillar of the Dardanelles, whence the land forces were to proceed to capture Constantinople.

The naval bombardment began on February 19 but soon ran into difficulties. After the British raid of the preceding November, the Turks had brought in mobile artillery, heavy howitzers, which completely eluded the British gunners and, with well-aimed fire, frustrated the attempts of the Allied minesweepers to clear the way for the heavy ships. These ships were the new dreadnought QUEEN ELIZABETH, the new British battle cruiser INFLEXIBLE and two older ones, plus twelve British and four French pre-dreadnoughts. After preliminary manoeuvres, the great fleet attack was set for March 18.

It was to be the greatest British naval disaster since a single German mine had sunk the brand-new British battleship AUDACIOUS in October 1914. The fleet attempted to force the straits: the twenty big ships advancing in three lines, ushered in by minesweepers and orbited by cruisers and destroyers.

At first the armada made apparently irresistible progress. Between 11:30 in the morning and two in the afternoon it advanced nearly a mile, overcoming each fixed and mobile battery as it moved forward. "By 2 p.m. the situation had become very critical," the Turkish General Staff account reports. "All telephone wires were cut ... some of the guns were knocked out, others were left buried ... in consequence the fire of the defence had slackened considerably."

Then, suddenly, at two o'clock, the balance of the battle swung the other way. The old French battle cruiser BOUVET, falling back to allow the minesweepers to go forward, suddenly suffered an internal explosion and sank with all hands. A torpedo fired from a fixed tube ashore seemed to the worried fleet commander, Admiral de Robeck, to be the cause. Later it became known that, on the night of March 7, a line of mines had been laid by a small Turkish steamer parallel to the shore and had remained undetected.

In the confusion that followed, the minesweepers, manned by civilian crews, began to fall back through the fleet and, as it manoeuvred, the old battleship IRRESISTIBLE was damaged also and fell out of the line. Next OCEAN, another old battleship, also suffered an internal explosion and soon afterwards the French pre-Dreadnought SUFFREN was severely damaged by a plunging shell.

As GAULOIS and INFLEXIBLE, the modern battle cruiser, had been damaged earlier, de Robeck now found himself with a third of his battle fleet out of action. By the end of the day, OCEAN and IRRESISTIBLE had, like BOUVET, sunk, INFLEXIBLE, SUFFREN and GAULOIS were out of action and ALBION, AGAMEMNON, LORD NELSON and CHARLEMAGNE had suffered damage. As darkness fell, de Robeck drew his fleet away. The ten lines of mines laid across the Narrows, numbering 373 in all, remained unswept and most of the shore batteries, though they had shot off all their heavy shell, preserved their guns. (11)



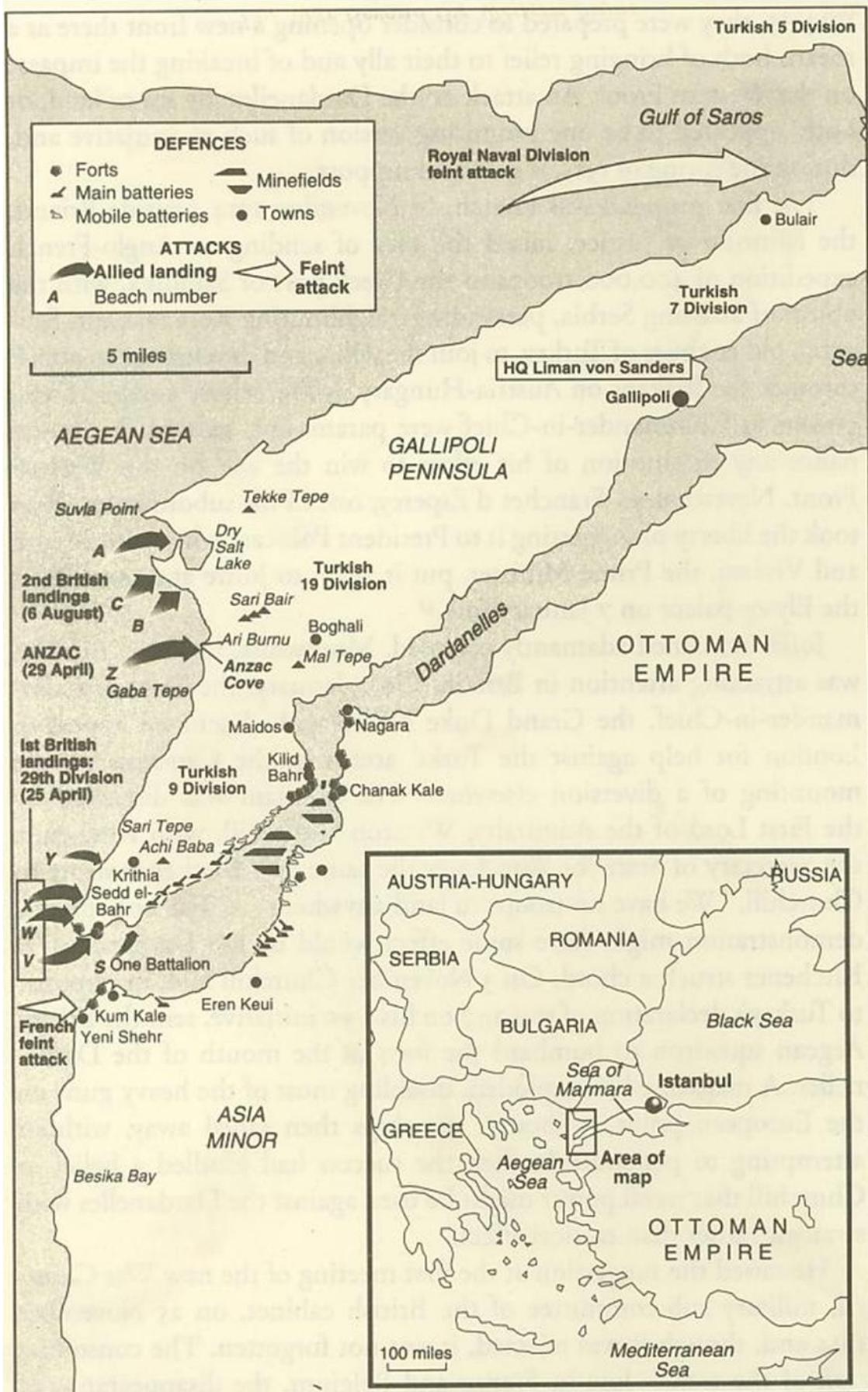
THE ALLIED BATTLE FLEET, IN TWO ORDERLY ROWS, APPROACHING THE DARDANELLES.

With the ships sunk Churchill's naval plan, and the army had to take over. The muster of the available forces yielded five divisions: four on the British side, the 29th Infantry Division, the Royal Naval Division, and the ANZAC Corps [1st Australian and the Australia/New Zealand division, ¶] and one on the French side, the Corps Expéditionnaire d'Orient. Allied Intelligence regarding the opponent was poor: the Turkish strength was estimated at 170,000 men in ten divisions when reality allowed Liman von Sanders, the German commander of the Turkish troops, less than half of that number. In addition, nothing was known of where the Turks would be strong or where they would be weak; hence the choosing of the landing zones on the Gallipoli Peninsula was a matter of educated guesses.

The British infantry commander, General Hamilton, entertained thoughts of landing his troops on the southern, the Asian shore, where the plain of Troy would provide accessible beaches and level terrain. But Kitchener nixed the idea, pointing out that the available forces would be too thinly spread in the vastness of Anatolia. It had to be a landing on the northern, the European shore, but here the topography was forbidding, rugged mountains rising steeply from the sea. On forty miles of shore, only one suitable beach was found, opposite the Sari Bair Ridge, and reserved for the ANZAC Corps [whence it got its name, 'Anzac Cove', ¶]. The 29th Division would try its luck at Cape Helles itself, the northern tip of the peninsula, where there were some small but serviceable beaches. Here they could also be supported, on three sides, by naval artillery. Meanwhile, the remaining troops would undertake feint attacks: the Royal Naval Division at Bulair, in the Gulf of Saros north of the Gallipoli Peninsula, and the French troops on the southern, Asian tip, at Kum Kale and Yeni Shehr. These positions are depicted on Map LVIII, Allied Invasion Points at Gallipoli.

The operation began on April 25 simultaneously at both places. A landing on a defended shore is a most hazardous military manoeuvre at the best of times, and at Gallipoli, unlike at the Allied landings of the Second World War, there existed no proper landing craft, DUWK's or other special equipment. Neither had simulations or rehearsals been possible; one had it to get right the first time. It was perhaps asked too much. For reasons still unclear today, the ANZAC troops landed a mile north of their target, in a wilderness of slopes which, if they could not be taken, would allow the enemy an excellent look down at ANZAC Cove and present the most exciting targets for his artillery.

MAP LVIII: ALLIED INVASION POINTS AT GALLIPOLI



Unless the Australians and New Zealanders could reach the crests before the enemy, all their positions, including the beach, would be overlooked, with calamitous effect on subsequent operations.

The ANZACs knew the importance of getting high quickly and, after an almost unopposed landing, began climbing the ridges in front of them as fast as their feet could take them. The reason their landing had been unopposed soon, however, became apparent. The enemy were few because the Turks had dismissed the likelihood of a landing in such an inhospitable spot and the landing parties rapidly found that the terrain was as hostile as any defending force. One crest was succeeded by another even higher, gullies were closed by dead ends and the way to the highest point was lost time and again in the difficulty of route-finding. Organisation dissolved in the thick scrub and steep ravines, which separated group from group and prevented a co-ordinated sweep to the top.

If even some of the 12,000 ashore could have reached the summits of the Sari Bair ridge, two and a half miles above ANZAC cove, they would have been able to look down on the Narrows, and the beginnings of a victory would have been under their hands. Their maximum depth of penetration by early afternoon, however, was only a mile and a half and, at that precipitous point, they began to come under counter-attack by the assembling Turkish defenders. The ANZACs, clinging lost and leaderless to the hillsides, began, as the hot afternoon gave way to grey drizzle, to experience their martyrdom. (12)

The British troops landing around Cape Helles made sharply diverging experiences. At the flanks of the Cape, on S beach inside of the Dardanelles and X and Y beaches, at the Mediterranean side of the peninsula, the invaders came ashore relatively unopposed and had set up shop soon. At V beach, south of the village Sedd-el-Bahr, and W beach, southwest of it, on the Cape itself, however, the Dublin respectively Lancashire Fusiliers ran into a combination of wire and Turkish machine-gun fire and died in the hundreds. By nightfall, casualties suffered on all beaches amounted to 5,000 men.

What should have alarmed the British commanders - Hamilton of the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force (MEF), Hunter-Weston of the 29th Division, Birdwood of ANZAC - was that the injuries done to their brave and determined soldiers had been the work of so few of the enemy. MEF's estimate of the Turkish strength committed to the defence of the Dardanelles had been a gross exaggeration. The number of troops deployed by Liman von Sanders on the Gallipoli peninsula was only a fraction of his force, the rest being dispersed between Bulair and Kum Kale, between Europe and Asia.

The assault area was held by a single division, the 9th, with its infantry deployed in companies all the way down the coast from ANZAC to Cape Helles and beyond. In places there were single platoons of fifty men, in some places fewer men or none: at Y Beach none, at X twelve men, at S a single platoon. Even at ANZAC there was only one company of 200 men, while V and W Beaches were defended by single platoons. The massacre of the Lancashire, Dublin and Munster Fusiliers and the Hampshires had been inflicted by fewer than a hundred desperate men, survivors of the naval bombardment, and killing so that they should not be killed. (13)

Seldom has the importance of holding the high ground been demonstrated more unequivocally than at Gallipoli. After six weeks of battle, the commanding summits of Achi Baba, near Cape Helles, and Chunuk Bair, opposite ANZAC Cove, remained in the hands of the Turks. The high ground allowed them to survey all Allied moves and aim their artillery accordingly. In addition, small but agile Turkish counterstrokes, directed at the local level by Mustapha Kemal, the eventual founder of the modern Turkish nation, thwarted many Allied attacks. Eventually, both sides dug in. The greatest menace for the Allied Expeditionary Corps, however, as it turned out soon, was their commander who seemed not to realize when he was beaten. Instead of withdrawing from the narrow beaches his troops hung on, under mounting losses, Hamilton asked for and received reinforcements - seven, if second-line, British infantry divisions, the 2nd Australian Division, the 2nd Mounted Division and another French division. The plan created by his staff envisioned another, far larger landing, at Suvla Bay, just north of ANZAC Cove. As soon as the Suvla Bay landing had a foothold, the Australians and New Zealanders should break out of ANZAC Cove northwards and link up with the new arrivals.



GALLIPOLI - ONLY SMALL BEACHES EXISTED FOR THE LANDINGS, AND LITTLE COVER WAS AVAILABLE.

The landings at Suvla Bay, beginning on August 7, were little opposed at first, but the invaders inexplicably failed to occupy the coastal heights as soon as possible. Mustapha Kemal, meanwhile being in charge of the northern front, recognized the fatal failure and immediately dispatched troops and artillery to the heights east of Suvla Bay, to the Sari Bair Ridge and the controlling peaks of Chunuk Bair and Tekke Tepe. The heights and their Turkish defenders withstood all Allied attempts and, eventually, as at Cape Helles and ANZAC Cove, both attackers and defenders dug in, adding a third stalemate to the two preceding ones.

Hamilton was relieved of his command on October 15 and his substitute, General Monro advised the War Office that withdrawal was the only viable solution left. He was given permission for a complete evacuation on December 3, and managed a very orderly and safe withdrawal that only added three (3) casualties to the approximately 275,000 the Gallipoli campaign had cost the Allied armies. Turkish losses, never properly established, may have been in the neighbourhood of 300,000. The misadventure precipitated Churchill's resignation and failed to open a supply route for Russia. Turkey remains in control of the Dardanelles until this day.

The New Year brought reorientation in the thoughts and plans of the belligerents' general staffs. After the successes on the Eastern front in 1915, Falkenhayn shifted the strategic SCHWERPUNKT for 1916 back to the Western theatre. He had come up with a truly diabolical plan. For its far smaller population, France could simply not draw into uniform the same number of bodies as Germany could, and hence she would be critically vulnerable in a battle of attrition, designed not to conquer ground or reach a strategic aim but solely to slaughter the greatest number of men in the shortest time.

A suitable location for the abattoir to be established Falkenhayn believed to have found at Verdun, the city on the Meuse River a few miles east of the Argonne Forest, which had been a fortress since Roman times. Her fortifications were modern, updated the last time in 1885, when the addition of a second ring of forts, at slightly larger distance from the city, gave her a total of twenty-one steel-and-concrete girded complexes. The fate of Liège and Namur earlier in the war, however, had convinced GQG that the forts' artillery might better be used on the field of battle, and most of the guns had been dismantled. The Battle of the Frontiers in August 1914 had sidestepped the town for the most part and the eastern

slope of the Argennes Forest had become a quiet part of the Western theatre, many of the forces stationed there having been recalled to Paris in late August 1914, to Manoury's new Sixth respectively Foch's new Ninth Army, and by 1916, only the three divisions of XXX Corps remained.

For OHL, the attractiveness of the town lay in its location less than twenty kilometres distant from a German-controlled railhead, which ensured a steady flow of personnel and supplies. The Crown Prince's 5th Army was reinforced by the addition of six new divisions to their normal ten divisions, and the artillery corps gathered approximately 1,200 guns and three million shells for an initial front of about ten miles: from the hamlet Brabant, northwest of the town on the Meuse to the village of Ornes east of it, six miles as the crow flies. Due to the smallness of the attack front, which translated to one gun per less than fifteen metres, it was expected that no French troops could survive the curtain of fire, and that the advancing German regiments would encounter little resistance. The French, however, could not afford not to reinforce the front, since "if the French gave up the struggle, they would lose Verdun; if they persisted, they would lose their army" in the maelstrom. (14)

After the usual period of bad weather, the German bombardment began on February 21, 1916. A quite impressive affair, it was estimated that a million shells fell upon the French lines and forts before a single German soldier was spotted. But some local troops of XXX Corps were well prepared and deeply dug in, and hence not only survived the barrage but subsequently defended their lines vigorously. On the whole, however, the German attack made steady progress; had it been an all-out attack, 5th Army might have gained Verdun in a matter of days.

But the design called for a bloodbath, not a victory, and the German offensive became eerily lethargic, enticing the defenders to consign more of their troops to the massacre. Still, by February 24, the first trench zone was taken as was, a day later, Fort Douaumont, supposedly the core of the French defence on the right flank, "by a lone German sergeant of the 24th Brandenburg Regiment who, blown into the fort's moat by a near-miss, decided to explore the interior, found it occupied by only a handful of French troops and bluffed them into surrender." (15) Rumours of the fort's capitulation immediately spread to the city, and garrison and townspeople alike began to pack their belongings.

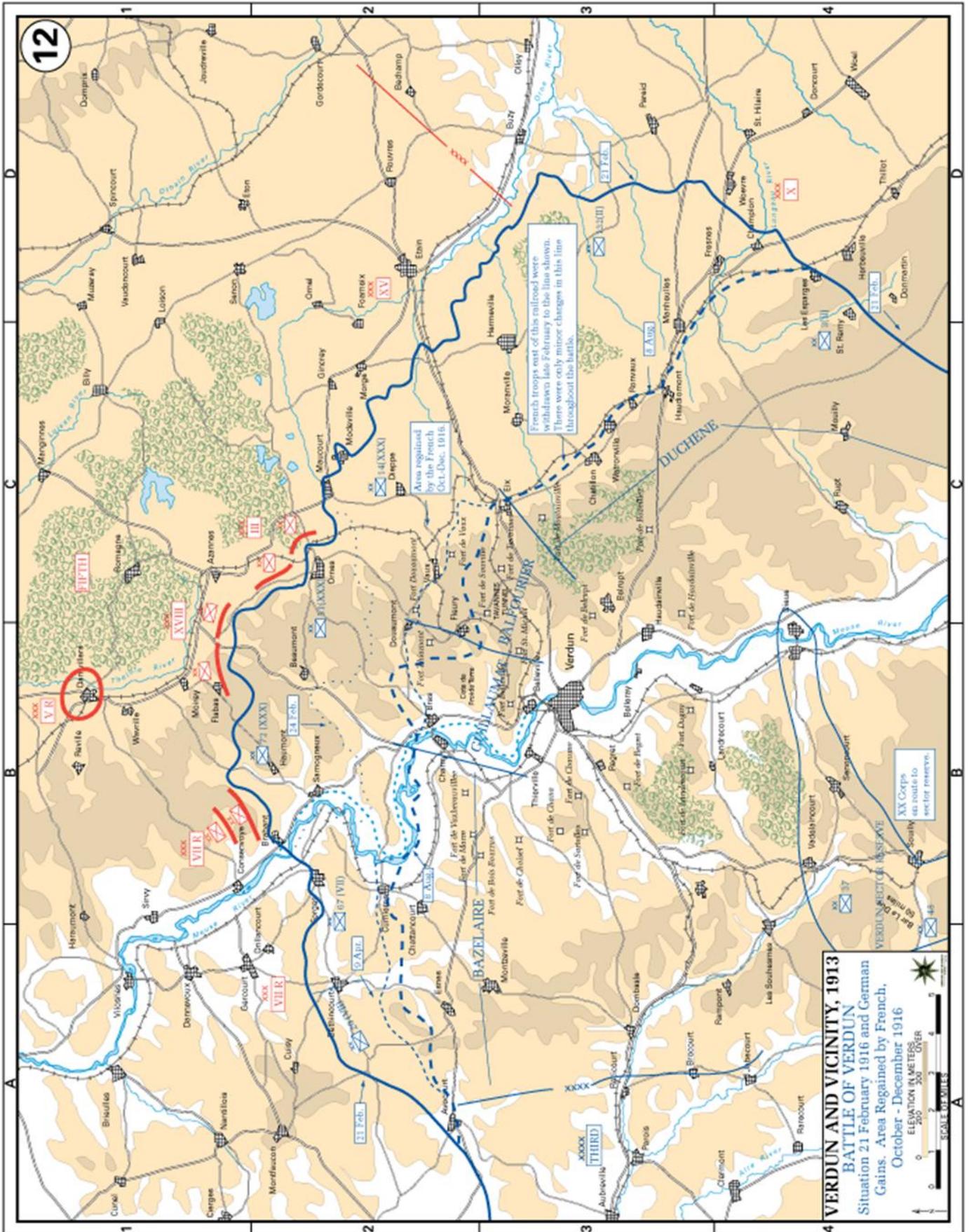
Had Verdun been evacuated on this February 25, many lives might have been saved. On the same day's morning, however, Castelnau arrived, sent by Joffre to Verdun to assess the situation. He could not know that his decision was in Falkenhayn's interest when he concluded that the town must be held - why, exactly, nobody knew - and put stoic Philippe Petain into command. The British army on the Somme was asked to take over Tenth Army's front line so that units of the latter could reinforce the town.

Map LIX, overleaf, gives a picture of the initial situation, February 21 and the development of the campaign. The French Third Army secures the left flank of the town [Square A 3, ¶] and VII Corps' 20th and 67th Infantry Divisions [AB 2, ¶] defend the line between Avocourt, east of Third Army, and the left bank of the Meuse. The front east of the river is, as mentioned above, defended by XXX Corps, with its 72nd ID just east of Brabant, 51st ID between Beaumont and Ornes and 14th ID to the southeast, at Dieppe. The right, eastern flank is being held by two divisions of II Corps.

Petaín arrived February 27. His first order was to recover the 350 heavy and 442 light guns the forts had possessed and add to them any other artillery that might be found. Their fire was to be concentrated directly upon the attacking German infantry, less on tactical targets like command positions or bunkers. His second measure was to ensure arms and provisions, and the road leading southward from Verdun, on the left side of the Meuse, to the town Bar-le-Duc became the principal route of supplies for the battle. It became known as the 'Voie Sacrée'.

The return of the artillery and arrival in line of the French XX Corps strengthened the defence considerably and also bolstered up the meagre sector reserve that was stationed at Souilly [B 4, ¶]. While the Germans had previously advanced six kilometres in six days, after February 27 their efforts stalled in the fire of the French defenders. Falkenhayn's strategy had overlooked that, as it was clear at the latest since First Ypres, a well-trained defence, able to wield rapid-fire arms and artillery from entrenched and protected positions, could be overcome only under the acceptance of truly hideous losses. The pre-war fable of the superiority of the offense had literally collapsed in the heaps of bodies that lay

MAP LIX: VERDUN



dead in front of defensive installations. Many generals, mired in their suddenly obsolete beliefs, comprehended this in the abstract yet still failed to recognize it to the necessary degree when making plans. Far from becoming the crucible for the French army, Verdun inflicted equal losses to the Germans, who counted 25,000 casualties in the first week of combat alone.

Finding no success anywhere on the original front between Brabant and Ornes after the end of February, the Germans extended their attack to the area west of the Meuse, between Avocourt and Forges [AB 2, ¶]. There an assault by VII Reserve Corps on March 6 surprised and much perturbed the 67th ID, which had to be rescued by the reserves which counterattacked soon and regained the ground lost at and around Mort Homme Ridge, the principal summit of the high grounds at Verdun's western flank.

At this time casualties exceeded 100,000 on both sides. France began to rotate her divisions in and out of the theatre - of the 330 infantry regiments in the French army of 1916, 259 saw service in Verdun - while the Germans depended upon replacements which frequently exceeded 100% of the unit's original establishment. A renewed German offensive secured the peak of Mort Homme on May 8th but failed to gain its southern slope, and a further expansion of the front, to the east of Ornes [C 2, ¶] finally yielded, after six weeks of combat, the fall of Fort Vaux on June 7. This success carried the Germans tantalizingly close to the nearest fortresses, Fort Thiaumont and Fort Souville, which, however, resisted all German attacks. By now Falkenhayn's original plan of one-sided attrition was all but a chimera of the past; the fight took on the character of an industrial slaughterhouse. Not even the efforts of the famous ALPENKORPS, the elite mountaineer corps from Bavaria, achieved a decisive success; their initial progress bogged down due to a lack of provisions [see bold dashed line, furthest advance of German troops, ¶]. It was June 23.

That day, 23 June, marked both the high point and crisis of the Verdun offensive. About twenty million shells had been fired into the battle zone since 21 February, the shape of the landscape had been permanently altered, forests had been reduced to splinters, villages had disappeared, the surface of the ground had been so pockmarked by explosion that shell hole overlapped shell hole and had been overlapped again.

Worse by far was the destruction of human life. By the end of June over 200,000 men had been killed and wounded on each side. The losses had fallen more heavily on the French, since they had begun the war with a third fewer men than the Germans, but to both armies Verdun had become a place of terror and death that could not yield victory. The Germans made a final effort on 11 July, which reached Fort Souville, but it was beaten off. (16)

Pétain was promoted out of the theatre in April and replaced by General Robert Nivelle, an artillery specialist. He planned a French counteroffensive for late autumn and sought to diminish the German forces opposite by drawing their reserves to other theatres. On the Eastern front, the Russian General Brusilov opened an initially successful offensive against the Austrian and German front south of the Pripet Marshes on June 4, and the British began the Battle of the Somme on July 1. Both of these new engagements reduced the German reserves, in general on the Western front and specifically at Verdun. Fifteen divisions alone were sent from France to the Russian front.

On August 29, Falkenhayn was sacked for the mismanagement of Verdun and replaced by the team of Hindenburg and Ludendorff, who sought for a way to get out of Verdun with their reputations intact. Their survey of the theatre in September, however, clearly exposed French preparations for a large counteroffensive, a fact that "fixed" the German units in the Verdun theatre while the French were putting on the finishing strokes to their design. The storm broke loose on October 24, when Third Army under General Charles Mangin, now switched to the right flank of the front, reconquered Fort Douaumont the very same day. Fort Vaux was retaken a week later, but the same circumstances which had erstwhile limited the German success soon encumbered the French. The counteroffensive petered out, eventually, in December 1916, in difficult, hilly terrain just north of Forts Douaumont and Vaux, the slopes turning into mud by the autumn rains. The extent of the area the French regained is marked with the thin dashed blue line on Map LIX.

The tally of Verdun climbed to 430,000 German and 540,000 French casualties, of which a great number, perhaps 50%, died. The eyes of the world, however, soon concentrated on a more exciting target, the Somme, where, since the beginning of July 1916, an even bigger butchery was in the making.

Since the outbreak of the war, the British army had found herself in a state of nearly continuous rebuilding. The seven infantry divisions of the original BEF in November 1914 had suffered casualties of over 100%, and the time when Britain had a small but professional army was, for this war, a thing of the past. New British "Territorial Divisions" arrived on the field of battle and, since early 1915, units of Lord Kitchener's "New Army".

On 7 August 1914, Lord Kitchener, on appointment as Secretary of State for War, had issued an appeal for a hundred thousand men to enlist for three years, or the duration of the war, which he believed would be long. Further appeals for "hundred thousands" followed, and were met with an overwhelmingly enthusiastic response, in part because the promise was given that "those who joined together would serve together."

As a result men from the same small locality, workplace or trade went to the recruiting offices in groups, were attested and then went forward to training and eventually active service in the same unit. Many called themselves "Chums" or "Pals" battalions, among which the largest group was the Liverpool Pals of four battalions, largely raised from the shipping and broking offices of the city.

Smaller towns supplied single battalions like the Accrington Pals, the Grimsby Chums and the Oldham Comrades; others were raised by occupation, the Glasgow Tramways Battalion, or nationality; Newcastle-on-Tyne, the English industrial city, produced four battalions each of Tyneside Scottish and Tyneside Irish.

The "first hundred thousand" had included many of the pre-war unemployed. Subsequent hundred thousands - there were to be five altogether - were formed of genuine volunteers including, by January 1915, 10,000 skilled engineers, and over 100,000 each from the coal mining and the building trades.

From this magnificent human resource, Kitchener was able eventually to form six "New" or "Kitchener" Armies, each five divisions strong, to join the army's eleven regular divisions and the twenty-eight infantry divisions of the part-time, voluntary Territorial Force. By the spring of 1916, Britain had seventy divisions under arms, a tenfold expansion since peace, and of those twenty-four were New Army divisions on or waiting to go to the Western Front. (17)

This augmentation of the British forces in France allowed Haig and Joffre to contemplate a consolidated Allied offensive in the Western theatre for the summer of 1916, a decisive attack on the German front in the Picardy. There, at the high ground north of the Somme River and the town of Peronne, east of Amiens, the Germans had constructed a formidable entrenched position. Bunkers had been dug up ten metres below the ground, which made them practically impervious to artillery fire, machine-gun nests abounded, positioned for overlapping fields of fire, and barbed wire sealed off all possible approaches. A handful of German divisions secured the Somme position, most of which had been in the sector for a year or longer and knew the terrain inside out.

The extraordinary strength and depth of the German positions was not altogether appreciated by the Allied intelligence departments. The planning for the offensive itself ran into difficulties when the German assault on Verdun drained from Joffre's order of battle units which had already been earmarked for the Somme offensive. In the event, only one French army, the Sixth, now commanded by General Marie Fayolle, partook in the initial attack at the Somme, on the right, i.e. southern wing [see Map LX, BC 2, ¶]. The handicap of the shrinking French participation Haig avowed to make up for with meticulous preparation of the British forces and the gathering of as much artillery as could be begged for, borrowed or stolen. The opening barrage was to last a week.

Nearly three million shells had been dumped forward for the preparatory bombardment, to feed 1,000 field guns, 180 heavy guns and 245 heavy howitzers, giving a density of one field gun per twenty yards of front and one heavy gun or howitzer to fifty-eight yards.

The artillery plan was for the field guns to concentrate, before the battle, on cutting the enemy's wire in front of his trenches, while the heavy guns were to attack the enemy's artillery with "counter-battery" fire and destroy his trenches and strongpoints. At the moment of assault, as the British infantry left their trenches to advance across no man's land, the field artillery was to lay a "creeping barrage" ahead of the leading wave,

which was intended to prevent the German defenders from manning the parapet opposite so that, in theory, the German trenches would be empty when the British arrived. (18)

Haig's tactical deployment is depicted on Map LVIII. Third Army (Allenby) covers the left, i.e. northern flank [B 4, ¶], and stands by for supportive action if necessary. General Rawlinson's Fourth Army is deployed south of Third, obligated by the plan to dish out the brunt of the attack. It is composed of six Corps, VIII, X, III, XV, XIII and XX, totalling nineteen divisions, standing at the ready along the British line north of the Somme. They are assisted, south of the river, by Fayolle's Sixth French Army made up of I Colonial and XXXV Corps.

After eight days of bombardment, the attack began on 7:30 a.m. on July 1, 1916. In preparation of the battle, Fourth Army had issued a general order and an additional missive explaining the infantry tactics to be employed. They decreed "an advance by successive waves or lines of troops and a continuous movement forward by all involved. The assaulting troops must push forward at a steady pace in successive lines, each line adding fresh impetus to the preceding line." (19) This was, we may remember, twenty months *after* First Ypres had demonstrated the suicidal nature of open attacks against entrenched positions. If the British artillery barrage did not remove the German defenders from the first and second trench lines, catastrophe might occur.

Three factors ensured that it did. First, the bombardment could not inflict damage seriously enough on the German dugouts; they remained serviceable and their defensive value essentially unimpeded. Second, the artillery strikes plainly failed to destroy the enemy's barbed wire barriers. This condition resulted from the fact that most British shells were shrapnel instead of the high-explosive kind needed to cut the wires; shrapnel but flung the wire forth and back, making the obstacles even harder to penetrate.

Miscues at the top made it worse. General Hunter-Weston, commander of VIII Corps, a veteran of Gallipoli who should have learnt there "how tough wire was, reported before 1 July that the enemy wire on his front was blown away and 'the troops could walk in,' but one of his junior officers 'could see it standing strong and well.' Since uncut wire in front of defended trenches was death to attacking infantry, this complacent misappreciation by the staff was literally lethal." (20)

The third and decisive problem, however, was the difficulty in the coordination of infantry and artillery, the basic requirement for the effective use of a "creeping barrage". The British divisions were, for the most part, new to battle, as were many gun crews, and since mutual communication was impossible in battle, the artillery had to fire by a plan and the infantry move forward in relation to it. The artillery would concentrate its fire for a certain period on a target, say, the first German trench line, and saturate it. When this line was deemed "safe" after so-and-so many minutes of fire, the infantry was to close in and the artillery move ahead to the next target. The pause between the end of the artillery fire and the infantry attack should ideally be kept to a minimum to improve the efficiency of the process.

That was the theory. In practice, since the effectiveness of the artillery was over- and the time needed by the infantry to clear the enemy trenches underestimated, the fire curtain tended to move ahead of the infantry, and the widening gap between the two allowed the Germans to leave the shelter, take gear and ammunition and man the trenches, or even to bring reinforcements to the line. The barrage simply did not work as intended: the wire remained uncut and slowed the attackers down in these crucial minutes in which they could hope to arrive at the target, the German trench, before the enemy. This small delay proved lethal over and over again, for it allowed the trained German machine-gun teams to set up shop and fire at the ranks of the attackers from distances often measured at a few dozen metres only. The German field artillery meanwhile aimed at the next British line.

July 1, 1916, became the worst disaster in the history of the British army.

Appalling loss of life was the result of the first day of the Somme along the whole front of the attack. When, in the days that followed, the 200 British battalions that had attacked began to count the gaps in their ranks,

the realisation came that, of the 100,000 men who had entered no man's land, 20,000 had not returned; another 40,000 who had been got back were wounded. In summary, a fifth of the attacking force was dead, and some battalions, such as the 1st Newfoundland Regiment, had ceased to exist.

The magnitude of the catastrophe, the greatest loss of life in British military history, took time to sink in. The day following the opening of the attack, Haig, conferring with Rawlinson and his staff at Fourth Army headquarters, was clearly still uninformed of how great the casualties had been and discussed, as a serious proposition, how the offensive was to be continued, as if it were a possibility for the morrow or the day after. He believed that the enemy "has undoubtedly been severely shaken and he has few reserves in hand." In fact, the Germans had brought up several reserve divisions during the day, while the losses suffered by their troops in line - about six thousand altogether - were a tenth of those of the British. The German 180th Regiment, for example, lost only 180 men out of 3,000 on 1 July; the British 4th Division, which attacked it, lost 5,121 out of 12,000.

If the Germans had been shaken, it was by the "amazing spectacle of unexampled gallantry, courage and bulldog determination" and by their eventual revulsion from the slaughter inflicted; in many places, when they realised their own lives were no longer at risk, they ceased firing, so that the more lightly British wounded could make their way back as best as they could to their own front line. (21)

Allied results were somewhat better in the southern sector, where the French gained almost five miles over the next two weeks, their vanguard reaching the southward bend of the Somme west of Peronne [Map LX, C 1-2, dotted red line, ¶]. The massacre of July 1 did teach the British army to refrain from further mass attacks, and more limited operations, sometimes with the assistance of Haig's preferred troops, the cavalry, gained between two and three miles around Mametz Wood in the two weeks until July 14 [C 3, dotted red line, ¶].

On the German side, Falkenhayn replaced 2nd Army's Chief of Staff, in whose sector the (limited) French advance at Peronne had occurred, and replaced him with his own Chief of Operations, Colonel von Lossberg, "the main architect of German defensive methods on the Western Front." (22) His invention of a "defence in depth", the reliance on a network of defensive positions instead of focusing on a single front line, was widely tested against multiple British attacks: at Pozières, July 23 to September 3 [on the road Amiens - Lapalme, Map LVIII, BC 3, ¶]; Thiepval, two miles northwest of Pozières, on September 26 to 28; and the heights of the Ancre River near Beaumont-Hamel, three miles northwest of Thiepval, between October 1 and 11.

The territorial gains of these assaults were trifling, but an attack on the road Amiens - Bapaume, between the villages of Flers and Courcellette in the week following September 15 resulted in a moderate breakthrough of approximately two miles depth [C 3, ¶]. The assault marked the battlefield premiere of a new British weapon, the tank. The contraption proved its basic usefulness, at least until the thirty-six monsters who participated surrendered to mechanical breakdown, artillery fire or miring in mud. The German infantry was suitably frightened, but, after an hour or two of chaos, brought reinforcements to the line which stopped the armoured menace.

The Allied offensive, however, petered out in the midst of November and the Somme sector returned, like the rest of the Western theatre, to a stalemate. The Allied front had been advanced, at the outermost line of conquest, on a line between Le Sars, Guedecourt and Morval, about seven miles [Map LX, C 3-4, 'Final Line, Nov.', ¶], for a tally of approximately 1, 3 million casualties, evenly divided between the opponents. For the young men of the Thames and the Clyde who did not return from the Somme, John Keegan wrote this epitaph:

The regiments of Pals and Chums which had their first experience of war on the Somme have been called an army of innocents and that, in their readiness to offer up their lives in circumstances none anticipated in the heady days of volunteering, it undoubtedly was. Whatever harm Kitchener's volunteers wished the Germans, it is the harm they thereby suffered that remains in British memory, collectively but also among the families of those who did not return.

There is nothing more poignant in British life than to visit the ribbon of cemeteries that marks the front line of 1 July 1916 and to find, on gravestone after gravestone, the fresh wreath, the face of a Pal or Chum above a khaki serge collar staring gravely back from a dim photograph, the pinned poppy and the inscription to "a father, a grandfather and a great-grandfather." The Somme marked the end of an age of vital optimism in British life that has never been recovered. (23)

Just as omnipresent was the grief of bereaved mothers, parents, siblings and lovers in Germany. For worse, Verdun and the Somme only provided the biggest, but not the sole slaughterhouses of the year 1916. More blood was to be shed in the East and in the mountains of the Alps.

On September 1, 1915, Czar Nicholas II personally took over command of STAVKA, promoting his uncle, Grand Duke Nicholas, to the post of C-in-C of the Caucasian front against Turkey, a minor command. General Mikhail Alexeyev, a veteran of the battles of Lemberg, took over the duties of Chief of Staff, and the Russian war industries were reorganized. Russian shell production was increased from 50,000 a month in March to 220,000 rounds in September and four million new recruits were called up in 1916-17, from a reserve of more than ten million men. (24) Representatives of the Allied General Staffs subsequently met in Chantilly, France, in December 1915, to coordinate the offensives of the following year. It was resolved that Italy was to draw Austrian divisions away from the Russian theatre by a renewal of attacks at the Isonzo river and that Russia was to aid the Allied operations at the Somme with a synchronous offensive at the Eastern front; ideally to be launched on the very same day, July 1, 1916. The German attack at Verdun, however, wrought havoc on the Allied timetable and the French and British called on the Czar for an immediate attack.

Although the dutifully exercised Italian assaults on the Isonzo failed to breach the enemy's lines, the effect of thinning out the Austrian resources on the Eastern front did materialize. After careful preparations, STAVKA was able to launch its first effort by March 18, 1916. It was directed, however, not at the Austrians south of the Pripet Marshes, but, to the north of them, against the positions of the German 10th Army (von Eichhorn) east of Vilna [Vilnius, ¶].

The Russian armies now outnumbered their opponents, by 300,000 to 180,000 in the north and 700,000 to 360,000 in the centre; only in the southern sector, commanded by Brusilov, did numbers remain equal at about half a million men on each side. In the north the Russians for the first time had a large superiority in guns and stocks of shell, with 5,000 guns and a thousand rounds per gun, considerably more than assembled by the Germans for the Gorlice-Tarnow breakthrough.

Somehow, however, the advantage was cast away. The artillery preparation was not co-ordinated with the assault by the Infantry of Second Army which, attacking on a very narrow front, ran into its own fire and then, in the salient it had won, came under bombardment by German guns from three sides.

Three-quarters of the infantry, 15,000 men, were lost in the first eight hours; yet 350,000 men were theoretically available for the offensive, had it been launched on a wider front. Reinforcement merely increased the casualty list without the gain of more ground.

By 31 March, when the offensive ended, Russian losses totalled 100,000, including 12,000 men who had died of exposure in the harsh late-winter weather. In April a counter-attack by the Germans, who had lost 20,000, recovered all the ground the Russians had gained. (25)

The fiasco much reduced the Russian fervour, but incessant French and Italian petitions for a new attack kept St. Petersburg busy. On a STAVKA conference on April 14, the commanders of the Northern front, Evert and Kuropatkin, evidenced a clear reluctance to renewed attacks, which would exhaust their reserves solely to please the French; thanks but no thanks. Alexeyev attempted to regain their support by promising copious amounts of supplies and numbers of men for a renewed offensive in the north when Brusilov, Ivanov's successor commanding the Russian forces south of the Pripet Marshes, asked whether not an attack in the south, where only a few German divisions were in place among the weak Austrians, might be a superior alternative.

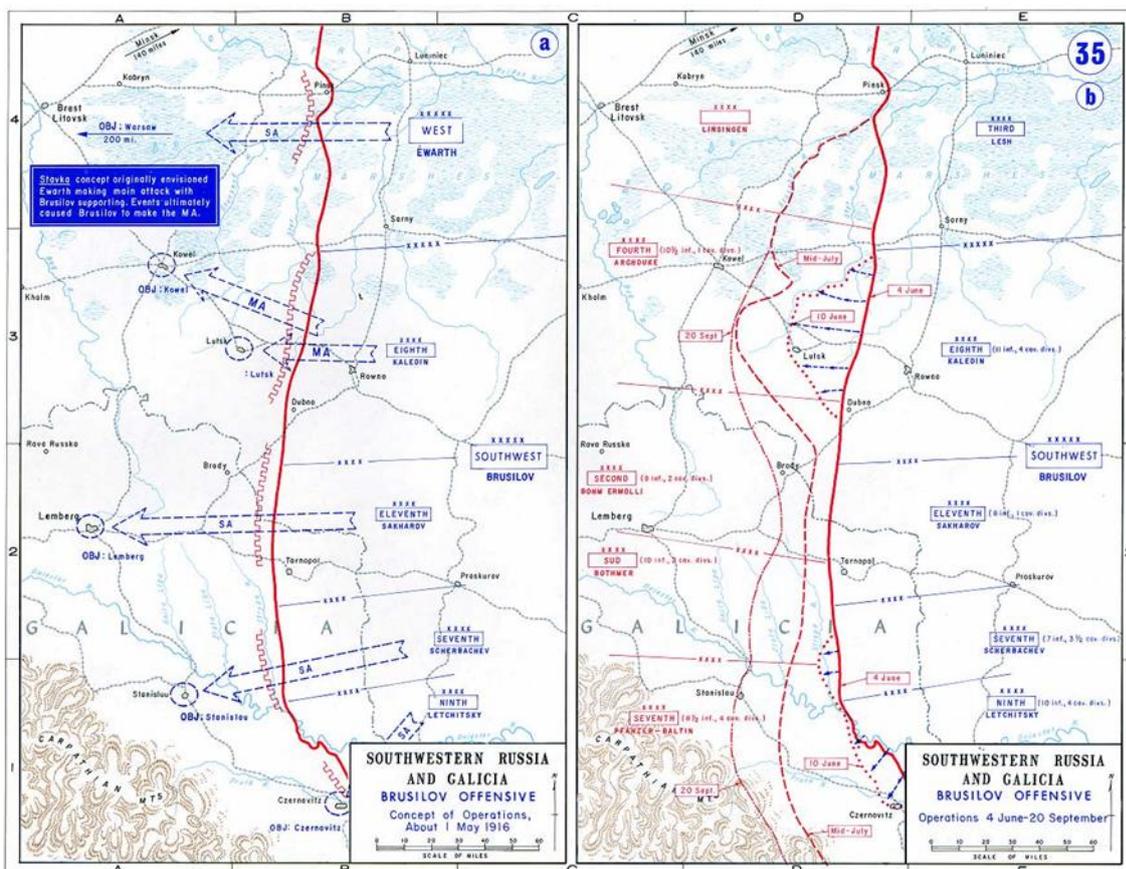
He pointed out that the best Austrian divisions had long since been dispatched to the Italian front, and that he believed he could mount a reasonable offensive with the forces already at his beck and call, hence relieving STAVKA of the need to provide reinforcements. His plan had the additional advantages that it could be executed without much delay and that he had implemented a few tactical changes which promised to lower infantry losses.

He was given permission to proceed, and lined up, between the southern end of the Marshes and the Romanian border at Czernowitz four armies: Eighth, Eleventh, Seventh and Ninth, comprising thirty-six infantry and twelve cavalry divisions. The initial assault on June 4 was delivered by Eighth Army, at the southern end of the Marshes, and directed at the Austrian 4th Army. The attack became the greatest Russian success in this war as of yet: within two weeks Eighth Army conquered Lutsk, communication and supply centre of the Northern Ukraine, and pushed back 4th Army forty miles to the West [see Map below, ¶]. On their left, i.e. southern flank, the other Russian armies advanced successfully as well.

For the sake of Allied coordination, STAVKA initialized a parallel attack north of the Marshes in early July; a thrust in the direction of the rail and road centre Baranavicy, seventy miles north of Pinsk, in Belorussia. After initial gains the attack could not be sustained and eventually bogged down in yet another stalemate. In the south, however, Brusilov's offensive maintained progress through the summer and by September had conquered Czernowitz, Stanislaw and Lutsk. The whole southern front advanced twenty to sixty miles to the West, with the laurels going to Ninth Army which split the Austrian 7th Army in two, inflicted 100,000 casualties, and pushed them sixty miles back to the foot of the Carpathian Mountains. (26)

Again, military success came at a gigantic cost. German losses totalled approximately 350,000, including those suffered on the northern front, while the Austrian casualty count exceeded 600,000. Approximately 400,000 Austro-Hungarians were taken prisoner. Had Brusilov not finally run out of supplies and men - the campaign cost the Russian army at least a million dead, wounded, missing and captured - he might have rolled up, from left to right, the complete Austrian front.

MAP LXI: THE BRUSILOV OFFENSIVE 1916



The Brusilov offensive proved the last nail in Falkenhayn's coffin; he resigned on August 29 and was replaced by the team of Hindenburg and Ludendorff. As it were, the discharge was softened by appointing him C-in-C of the new Central Powers front in Romania.

Both sides had wooed Romania since the beginning of the war for her grain, oil and the strategic railway that connected her with Turkey and the Near East. In the Second Balkan War of 1913, the country had acquired the former Bulgarian province of Dobrudja, the land between the Danube and the Black Sea [see Map overleaf]. That did not sit well with the Bulgars, who had entered the war on the side of the Central Powers by attacking Serbia in October 1915. Romania still dithered. For war against Austria-Hungary spoke the yearning to add Transylvania with its three million ethnic Romanians to the national fold; against the enterprise spoke that the nation would be surrounded by enemies, Bulgaria in the south, Austria in the north and west.

Under the impression of the successful Brusilov offensive, Romania signed a treaty with France and Russia on August 17, 1916. The agreement promised, in return for Romania's entering the war against the Central Powers, not only Transylvania but also the Bukovina, parts of Galicia and the Banat, once victory was achieved. The country was ignorant, however, of the fact that Russia and France had earlier agreed to disregard their obligations after the successful conclusion of the war. But, as John Keegan points out, "What the Romanians could not have known the treaty was made in bad faith does not excuse their entering into it." (27) Although the German government had advised Romania in no uncertain terms that attacking Austria would invoke the Austro-German Military Treaty, Romania declared war on Austria on August 27.

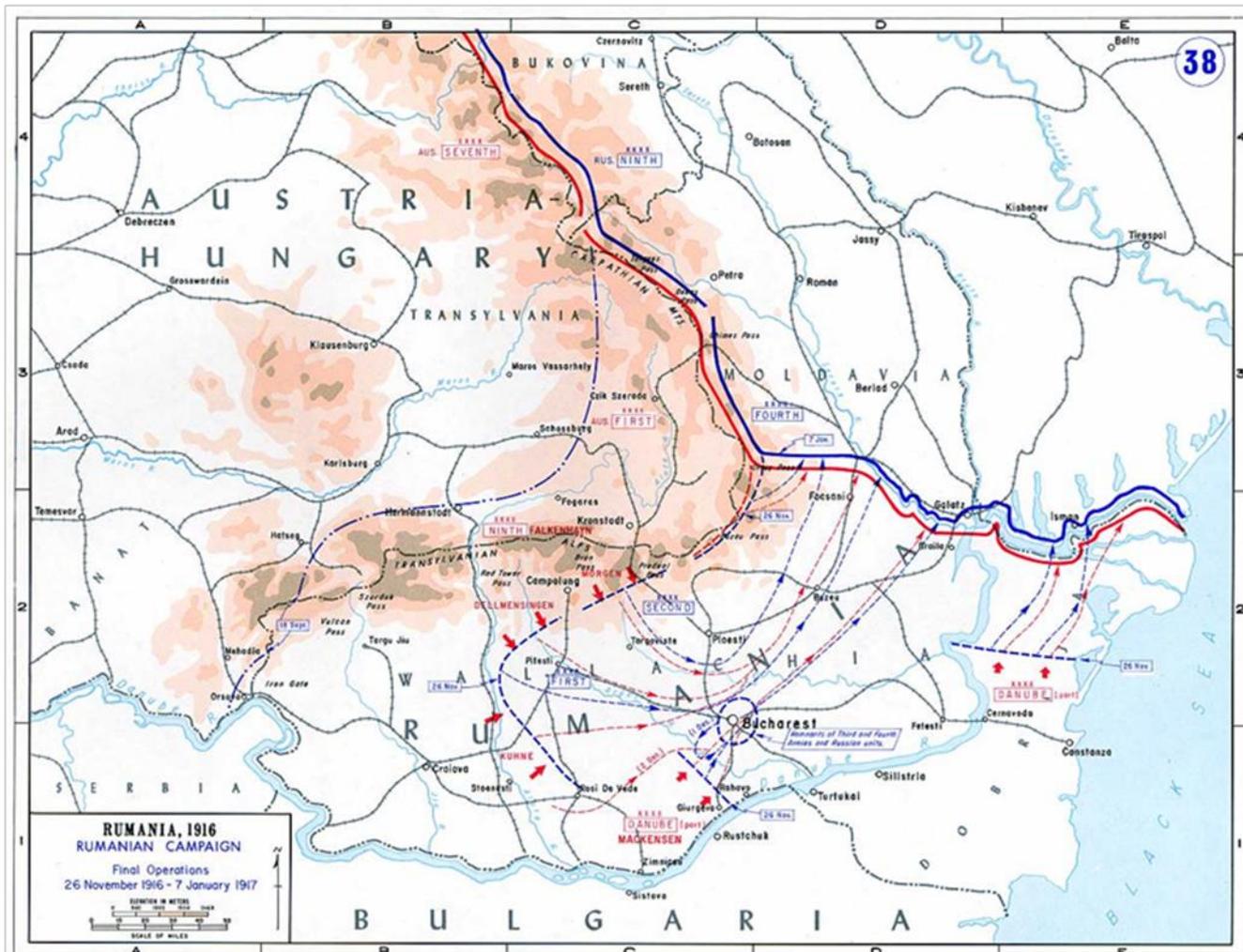
Considering the German declaration, the most attractive strategic option for Romania would have been a thrust southward, over the Danube, into Bulgaria; a push that could have been supported by a simultaneous attack into Bulgaria by the Allied forces in the Greek province of Salonika, which stood only a hundred miles or so south of the Bulgaro-Grecian frontier. But the Romanian desires pointed to the northwest, to Transylvania, and about half of the Romanian Army, eleven out of twenty-three divisions advanced over the four main passes of the Transylvanian Alps into Hungarian territory. They made initial progress, celebrating their conquest.

But their laggard pace of advance allowed the Austrian General von Straussenberg to organize his local reserve battalions and militia regiments into five makeshift divisions whose simple existence deterred the Romanians from advancing further. Germany, Turkey and Bulgaria now declared war on Romania, and OHL discovered that Falkenhayn, in an earlier General Staff study, had anticipated Romania's conduct and had developed and pigeonholed a plan ready-made for this eventuality. Hindenburg and Ludendorff managed to find a few unoccupied German divisions which together with two of the better Austrian divisions and a few Bulgarian formations were used to create two relatively fresh armies: 9th Army under Falkenhayn in Hungary, which would attack south-eastward into Transylvania, and 11th Army, commanded by Mackensen, the winner of Tannenberg and Gorlice, which gathered in Bulgaria, vis-a-vis the Romanian province of Dobrudja, located between the Danube and the Black Sea.

While Falkenhayn and Mackensen were still preparing their forces, the Bulgarian army launched the first counterattack, invading north-eastward, into the Dobrudja, on September 2. In Transylvania, Falkenhayn began to roll on September 25. He held an ace up his sleeve in the form of the ALPENKORPS, the South German mountaineer corps, in whose ranks a certain young Lieutenant Erwin Rommel was serving. The task of the unit was to prevent the setting up of defensive Romanian positions in the passes over the Transylvanian Alps and to keep the roads open for the German advance.

9th Army's thrust southeast went as planned and pushed the Romanians out of Austro-Hungarian territory; the passes were secured and advance units moved into Walachia, Romania's western province. The army's main body which followed over the four principal pass roads was soon met there by Mackensen's troops which had crossed from Bulgaria into Romania via the Danube. A battle at the Arges River, in early December, trounced the Romanian army badly; the capital, Bucharest, fell on December 6, and the remaining troops, government, royal family and everybody who was able to move fled to the north-eastern province of Moldavia. In this remote territory the Romanian state and army remained,

MAP LXII: FINAL SITUATION - ROMANIAN CAMPAIGN



essentially, for the rest of the war. The Romanian forces had lost over 300,000 men and the country's resources of oil and grain now benefitted their opponents. Map LXII depicts the final situation of the Romanian Campaign.

The coordination of Allied offensives in 1916, enjoined at the conference of Chantilly of December 1915, had failed to deliver the expected results. Nowhere had breakthroughs been achieved nor were losses significantly lowered. It is true that the reinforcement of Italian forces at the Isonzo front and their regular offensives drew Austrian divisions off the Russian front: of the sixty-five available Austrian divisions thirty-five saw service in the Alps during 1916. (28) Yet the effect was too negligible to aid Brusilov decisively, nor did the Italian government seem to have acknowledged the reality of war in the 20th Century when it had weighed its options prior to declaring war.

At any rate, the prospect of immense loss of life and a stalemate war seems not to have featured at all in the [Italian pre-war] deliberations. Amazingly, the Italian army had learned nothing from the experience of its allies over the previous ten months. ...

It is hardly surprising that there were huge losses in the first four bitter battles of the Isonzo for very little gain in territory, and one Italian general called the campaign of 1915 'a war of madness': from May 24 to 30 November 62,000 men were killed and 170,000 wounded, out of an army of about one million. The enthusiasm for war in the 'radiant days' of May 1915, expressed in the joyful nationalist demonstrations of the interventionists, soon dissolved upon contact with war. ...

In eleven great battles on the line of the Isonzo River from May 1915 to September 1917 the Italians tried to overcome the resistance of Austrians. A strip of territory was gained, but at the cost of great massacres. One

factor was the inferior quality of Italian trenches: while the Austrian troops were behind well-constructed deep trenches with parapets and barbed-wire entanglements the Italians had shallow trenches little more than one metre deep with only sacks of earth and stones which afforded no protection from artillery fire.

Not even that fundamental lesson had been learned from the western front. Italian military doctrine prescribed mass frontal attacks, but the army lacked sufficient artillery support. There were not enough field guns and heavy artillery; modern infantry weapons, machine guns, munitions, trench-building equipment, even uniforms were in short supply; the men were poorly trained for modern warfare, and the medical service was patchy.

The harsh terrain of the Carso, with its barren rock, windswept and cold in winter, lacking water in the summer and always without shelter ... caused immense suffering to the men and gave the defenders a great advantage. The attempt to advance by sending men to cut the wire often amounted to a suicide mission, and the frontal attacking waves of Italians were mown down by Austrian machine guns and artillery. (29)

On May 15, 1916, however, it was the Austrians who attacked. The Austrian Chief of Staff Conrad von Hötzendorf, whose hate of the Serbs was now matched by his furor for Italians, launched what he termed a "STRAFEXPEDITION", a 'punishment expedition', against the former confederate of the Triple Alliance. He had gathered two armies, the 3rd and the 11th, and collected about 2,000 guns for an attack on a front of roughly seventy kilometres' breadth, in the Trentino province between Lake Garda and the springs of the Brenta River which flows to Venice.

The STRAFEXPEDITION, however, fizzled early, when the outnumbered Italian First Army (Brusati) proved an incontestable obstacle to the Austrian endeavours. While being blooded heavily, they prevented Austrian advances greater than ten miles or so, and the Habsburgers' attack petered out after a few weeks when Italian reinforcements arrived. Notwithstanding the return of stalemate to the Trentino front, Cadorna, the Italian C-in-C, continued to launch attacks on the Isonzo front: the Sixth, Seventh, Eighth and Ninth Battle of the Isonzo in the months between August and November. These battles, again, yielded but a few square miles of rock or a league of river shoreline while adding losses to the Italian army in the neighbourhood of 200,000 to the 150,000 casualties suffered in the defence of the Trentino. Austrian losses in Italy 1916 approximated 200,000 men.

Following this syllabus of the main battles of 1916, which so much remained the same despite having been designed to differ, we must ask what the reasons were that seemed to relegate the battles of this war to perpetual stalemates, after the most painful losses. Were the commanding generals, perhaps, to blame, was it the "Donkeys" leading the "Lions"? John Keegan explains the problems of tactical command in the Great War:

Though the practice of establishing headquarters well behind the lines was indeed a "novelty" in warfare - Wellington had ridden the front at Waterloo in full view of the enemy all day, while several hundred generals were killed in the American Civil War - it was one justified, indeed necessitated by the vast widening and deepening of fronts, which put the scene of action in its entirety far beyond the field of vision of any commander; indeed, the nearer a general was to the battle, the worse placed was he to gather information and to issue orders. Only at the point of junction of telephone lines, necessarily located behind the front, could he hope to gather intelligence of events and transmit a considered response to them. ...

He depended ... once the trench lines had been dug, on a fixed and inflexible grid of telephone cables leading back through the chain of intermediate headquarters - battalion, brigade, division, corps, army - to the high command. Further from the front, the cable could be strung above ground; in the "beaten zone" where shells fell, it had to be buried. Experience proved that a "bury" of less than six feet was broken by bombardment, so trench floors were laboriously excavated to provide the necessary protection. By 1916 the British army had developed a sophisticated system of branching at each intermediate command level, so that headquarters could communicate in three directions - forwards, rearward, and laterally, to neighbouring headquarters - from the same exchange.

All worked excellently, until fighting began. Then the system broke down, almost as a matter of routine, at the point that mattered most, the front. In defence, under the enemy's bombardment, the points of transmission were smashed up and the key personnel, forward artillery observers, were killed trying to do their job. In offence, as the troops moved forward from the heads of the cable grid, they automatically lost contact with the rear. ...

To the unsatisfactory outcome in either situation there is ample and repetitive testimony. In defence on the Somme in 1916, for example, it was found by Colonel von Lossberg, OHL's tactical technician, that eight to ten hours were needed on average for a message to reach the front from divisional headquarters and so, reciprocally, to pass in the opposite direction. In offence, communication could break down completely, as the reports of six levels of command - battalion, brigade, division, corps, army and general headquarters - during the first day of the battle of the Somme, 1 July 1916, reveal. (30)

What could the generals do?

Robbed of the ability to communicate once action was joined, they sought to overcome the obstacles and accidents that would inevitably arise in the unfolding of battle by ever more elaborate anticipation and predisposition.

Plans were drawn which laid down minute-by-minute manoeuvre by the infantry and almost yard-by-yard concentration of artillery fire, in an attempt not so much to determine but to predestine the outcome. The attempt was, of course, vain.

Nothing in human affairs is predestinable, least of all in an exchange of energy as fluid and dynamic as a battle. While battle-altering resources - reliable armoured, cross-country vehicles, portable two-way radio - lay beyond their grasp (and they did so, tantalisingly, only in a development time to be measured in a few years), the generals were trapped within the iron fetters of a technology all too adequate for mass destruction of life but quite inadequate to restore to them the flexibilities of control that would have kept destruction of life within bearable limits. (31)

RULE, BRITANNIA! RULE THE WAVES!

*I bring you the stately matron named Christendom,
returning bedraggled, besmirched,
and dishonoured from pirate raids
in Kiao-Chou, Manchuria, South Africa, and the Philippines,
with her soul full of meanness,
her pocket full of boodle,
and her mouth full of pious hypocrisies.*

Mark Twain in the "New York Herald" (1900)

The clashes at Verdun and the Somme had run out of steam by Christmas 1916, and the silence of exhaustion languished over the trenches and battlegrounds. The guns fell silent, the men sat paralyzed, and a confused tranquillity set in and remained until the spring of 1917. Moreover, the factors critical for the outcome of the war ceased to depend entirely upon land warfare. Success in the east suggested that Germany might win the war before the USA were able to send troops to France, a scenario that in turn depended on the naval developments above and below the waters.

The naval program of Tirpitz and Wilhelm had earned the irritation and subsequently the enmity of England's admiralty, and the search for the proper response became a continuous issue of British politics between 1890 and 1914, second only to the Irish question. Great Britain's survival policy was never to let anyone power dominate the continent, and in particular the Channel ports, and thus the Royal Navy's supremacy of the oceans must never be jeopardized. Hence Britannia's wont was always to oppose the powers-that-be on the continent and side with the lesser nations. To support the "underdogs" also made for good political propaganda.

Great Britain was a sea power, and thus the strategic view of her admiralty upon possible conflicts with European land powers was one tied upon the evolution of naval warfare in the Belle Époque. The Royal Navy had dominated the seas since Nelson's victory over the French and Spanish fleets at Trafalgar in 1805. The British Empire, unlike, say, Russia, depended upon the maintenance of naval pre-eminence for its economical and political survival: power over the oceans supplied cheap transport, preserved the trade and communication lines and provided the defence of the colonies and the home waters. These were the classic duties of the ships which flew the White Ensign.

In the last decade of the 19th Century, a cabal of German nationalists, history professors and other assorted lunatics convinced Kaiser Wilhelm II to build the "HOCHSEEFLOTTE" or "High Seas Fleet", a gigantic armada-at-sea which would equal or even surpass the might of the Royal Navy. Since there was simply no strategic reason for the eccentric undertaking, Great Britain could not interpret it as anything but a maritime challenge, as evidence of hostile intentions. These were all too real, considering Wilhelm's hate for his English mother.

The equilibrium of the global battle fleets, or "ships of the line", as they were called, had been completely upset in 1906 by the Royal Navy's presentation, to an astonished world, of the new battleship DREADNOUGHT, a design that immediately rendered all other capital warships obsolete. Her builders had rejected the amalgamate of small-, medium-,

and large-calibre guns traditionally carried by capital ships in favour of outfitting her with only a single class of artillery, the biggest available. Thus DREADNOUGHT's principal armaments were ten 12-inch [305 mm, ¶] guns, in five twin turrets.

The importance of the calibre, the diameter of the gun's bore, lies in the fact that, with identical propellants, the effective radius of a ship's artillery depends in the first order on its calibre; the greater the calibre, all other things being equal, the further the projectile flies, and thus the greater the radius in which the ship can bring her fire to effect. In other words, the shells of a 12-inch gun fly farther than those of a 10-inch gun, and the ship with the bigger guns can sink the opponent from a safe distance without being exposed to return fire.

The second peculiarity of DREADNOUGHT's revolutionary design was the thickness and the distribution of her armour: by avoiding to spend armour on non-essential systems of the ship, the constructors were able to use plates up to eleven inches thick covering the most important sections, an arrangement which became known as "all-or-nothing" armoury. The drawbacks of the massive metal coverings and the colossal guns were, of course, their contribution to the ship's immense weight and the consequent reduction of her speed. The Dreadnoughts were rather slow for modern men-of-war, their maximum speed hovering around the twenty-knot mark. The whole conception of the Dreadnought class rendered them supremely fit for the slugfests of battling other capital ships; their low speed disabled them, however, from being used in the other half of naval warfare, the economic or cruiser war.

The word "cruiser" was coined in the 18th Century and originally denoted any warship on detached duty as a commerce raider. In the second half of the 19th Century, following the improvements in steam engines and gun technology, cruisers began to be outfitted with armour: if the ship in question had an armoured deck but no side armour she was called a "protected" cruiser, if she had both, she was called an "armoured" cruiser. The importance of cruiser warfare lies, of course, in the impediment of the flow of the opponent's war supplies; the cruisers preferred prey were fat merchants, coal ships, or oilers. Yet, the indispensable need for speed, to chase the prey but to escape superior ships, limited the weight of armour and the size of guns available in cruiser design.

In the first decade of the 20th Century, the Royal Navy's engineers conceived a compromise in design which at length became the so-called "battle cruiser". A proper battle cruiser, so the idea, was to combine the guns of a Dreadnought, albeit a lesser number of them, to save weight, with as much armour as possible while retaining high speeds. The first British battle cruiser was commissioned in 1907, only a year after DREADNOUGHT, and, quite modestly, named "INVINCIBLE".

Human genius has frequently attempted to combine the advantages of two types, or designs, of weapons, while simultaneously striving to avoid their peculiar weaknesses. The creation of the battle cruiser was such an exercise in genius.

France - still the potential enemy [pre-1890, ¶] - had provoked Admiralty concerns by suddenly launching a series of big cruisers capable of 21 knots. These ships were the brainchild of a school of French admirals who, despairing that France would ever be able to match Britain battleship for battleship, concluded that the best way to bring down the maritime colossus was to unleash a pack of swift, deadly cruisers and torpedo boats that could attack and cripple Britain's vulnerable overseas merchandise trade. British admirals grasped the threat. Their reaction was to produce the anti-cruiser cruiser, a ship even faster, stronger and more heavily gunned, to hunt down and sink anything the French sent out.

These ships, designed to fight, not simply to shadow and report, were given more armour and called armoured cruisers. Class after class was designed, launched and sent to sea ... [a description of classes and tonnages between 1898 and 1905 follows, ¶]. In all, there were thirty-five of these British armoured cruisers, some of them as big, or bigger, than the Royal Sovereign or Majestic class battleships. Yet no matter how big they got or how impressive they looked, they were never expected to fight battleships. ...

This was Fisher's understanding and purpose too, at least in the beginning. [Admiral Fisher headed the design committee of the Royal Navy which had drawn up Dreadnought and other ships, ¶] His first battle cruisers were intended to be the ultimate in armoured cruisers, so fast and heavily gunned that they could overtake

and destroy any other cruiser in the world. ... Fisher wrote to Lord Selbourne [First Sea Lord, in March 1902, ¶] that he was working with Gard, the Chief Constructor of the Malta Dockyard, on a design for an armoured cruiser which would make all existing armoured cruisers obsolete.

Fisher called the hypothetical ship H.M.S. PERFECTION, and at the top of the list of her design characteristics he put "Full Power Speed of 25 Knots."... The Sea Lords' response was not everything Fisher had hoped. They authorized the Warrior and Minotaur classes, big ships with 9.2-inch guns and a speed of 23 knots, two knots beneath that what Fisher had demanded for PERFECTION.

Meanwhile, other admiralties were experimenting. Towards the end of 1904, word reached London that Japan was laying down two large, 21-knot armoured cruisers, each carrying four 12-inch guns and twelve 6-inch. In Italy, four Cuniberti-designed ships carrying two 12-inch and twelve 8-inch guns and capable of 21 knots were on the way. Foreigners were creeping on PERFECTION.

In February 1905, once Fisher's design committee had completed the plans for DREADNOUGHT, PERFECTION appeared. No longer did Fisher have to urge his projects on the Admiralty; now he was the Admiralty. [He had become First Sea Lord, ¶] And in the Fisher era, he immediately made clear, British commerce was to be protected not by scattering armoured cruisers around the world, but by building a few, immensely fast, powerful ships which could hunt down and destroy enemy cruisers wherever they fled - if necessary, "to the world's end."

By then, of course, the potential threat had changed nationality; it was not French cruisers that worried the Admiralty, but German ocean liners, the huge, swift, blue-water greyhounds of the North-German Lloyd and Hamburg-Amerika Lines, being constructed with a capacity to carry 6-inch guns. Designed to whisk passengers across the North Atlantic in five or six days, they could easily outrun any existing British cruiser.

Speed, then, was the preeminent requirement; speed to overtake the enemy and speed also for the new ship's own defence: she must be able to keep out of range of battleship guns. Fisher fixed the minimum absolute margin at four knots, and, since he was building the DREADNOUGHT to steam 21 knots, H.M.S. PERFECTION must be able to steam at 25 knots. Fisher also wanted maximum firepower. The biggest guns available were 12-inch, already being installed on new armoured cruisers and fast battleships by the Italians and Japanese. Having successfully argued the case for the all-big-gun battleship, Fisher now demanded an all-big-gun armoured cruiser.

Once again, the faithful and imaginative Gard gave the Admiral what he wanted. PERFECTION, which was to become the Invincible-class battle cruiser, came off the drawing board with eight 12-inch guns in four twin turrets. Fisher was overjoyed. With 25-knot speed and eight 12-inch guns, here was a warship capable of destroying any vessel fast enough to catch it, and fast enough to escape any vessel capable of destroying it. She could "mop up" a whole squadron of enemy cruisers with the greatest of ease, using her speed to establish her range and her long-range guns to sink the enemy without exposing herself to return fire.

She had only a single flaw: her armour was too light. Like Sleeping Beauty, for whom life was serene as long as she stayed away from spindles, the INVINCIBLE and her sisters could lead happy lives as long as they stayed away from battleships. Her speed was a precious, expensive commodity, and had been purchased at heavy price.

The three vital characteristics of a warship - guns, speed and armour - are interrelated. A designer could not have everything: if heavy guns and heavy armour were required, then speed had to be curtailed; this was the compromise built into most battleships. If a higher speed was demanded and heavy guns retained, armour had to be sacrificed. This was the case with the INVINCIBLE and her sisters. To gain four precious knots of speed, the INVINCIBLE gave up one turret and two twelve-inch guns of DREADNOUGHT'S armament.

This saved two thousand tons, which could be invested in propulsion machinery. A more dangerous sacrifice was made in armour. The DREADNOUGHT, intended to steam through a cataclysm of shell bursts, was fitted along her belt amidships with armour plate eleven inches thick, enough to stop a plunging heavy shell. Over the INVINCIBLE'S vital midship spaces, the belt armour was only seven inches thick. If the battle cruiser's mission was to scout or to engage enemy cruisers, seven inches of armour would keep her safe. But if she were to be deliberately taken within range of enemy battleships, seven inches were not enough. ...

Some naval experts saw the potential danger. BRASSEY'S NAVAL ANNUAL said: "... [The problem with] vessels of this enormous size and cost [is that] an admiral having Invincibles in his fleet will be certain to put them in the line of battle where their comparatively light protection will be a disadvantage and their high speed of no value." In short, because she looked like a battleship and carried a battleship's guns, sooner or later INVINCIBLE would be expected to fight like a battleship. (1)

Since no good deed goes unpunished, the Germans adopted the hermaphroditic concept and built their own battle cruisers.

Because the two nations had built capital ships at frantic speed and with enormous cost for fifteen years, everybody expected a thunderous clash to occur within the war's opening months. But the first two years of the conflict only saw minor engagements. On August 28, 1914, Admiral Sir David Beatty's squadron of battle cruisers cornered a mixed German flotilla of cruisers and destroyers in the Heligoland Bight and sank three respectively one of them. In January 1915, an encounter between Beatty's fleet and a few German battle cruisers at the Dogger Bank led to the loss of the German BLÜCHER and severe damage to the SEYDLITZ, while the British TIGER and LION suffered lesser impairments.

The Germans scored big in October 1914 when a single mine sunk the brand-new British battleship AUDACIOUS. Somewhat smaller successes were achieved by the U-boats ["Unterseeboot", i.e. submarines, ¶]. U 9 sank three old British cruisers, the ABOUKIR, HOGUE and CRESSY, in September 1914 and U 24 sank the older battleship FORMIDABLE on January 1, 1915.

Lack of action in the North Sea ended when the German Admiral Reinhard Scheer was invested with the command of the High Seas Fleet in January 1916. In a quest for a solution to the numerical superiority of the Royal Navy, he concentrated on Beatty's battle cruiser division, which was by now stationed at Rosyth near Edinburgh. If he played his cards well, he thought it possible to lure Beatty's ships into a trap and destroy them before the Home Fleet, anchored at Scapa Flow in the Orkney Islands, could come to their rescue. Scheer's plan took into account that the Grand Fleet was bigger than the High Seas Fleet by about 40%, but the multitudes of duties she had to perform necessarily meant that she was spread over the oceans. If he could bring momentarily superior forces against a smaller part of the Grand Fleet, he could overcome the numerical deficit and victory might be possible.

One tactical variable in his plan remained a question mark to him as well as to his opponents on the British side: it was the uncertainty of how the battle cruisers would fare if they faced battleships. On another tactical variable he had to trust his luck, in regards to how early or late British naval intelligence would discover his sortie. In May 1916, his plans condensed in a scheme to lure Beatty's squadron, composed of six battle cruisers and four battleships anchored in Rosyth, southward, by dangling before Beatty's eyes a bait of a few German battle cruisers. Since these ships were too fast for the British Dreadnoughts harboured at Scapa Flow, only Beatty's flotilla had a chance to catch them. As soon as Beatty was informed about the German vanguard and set out to intercept it, the German battle cruisers would turn south and lead the British ships into the trap, the guns of Scheer's battleships.

In the event, the vanguard consisted of five German battle cruisers under the command of Admiral Franz von Hipper, plus assorted escorts, which sailed northward along the western coast of Denmark on the morning of May 31, 1916. Scheer followed about fifty miles further south, but his luck was not up to date. British signal intelligence had intercepted and decoded German radio transmissions regarding Scheer's plans for a major operation as early as mid-May and informed Admiral John Jellicoe, commander of the Grand Fleet. Scheer had barely passed Heligoland when Beatty's battle cruisers were sent on their way south, followed, at a distance of perhaps seventy miles, by the battleships from Scapa Flow. The Brits had reversed the role of trapper and bait.

In terms of tonnage and weaponry, the engagement that was to occur became the biggest of naval history yet. The High Seas Fleet had mobilized sixteen Dreadnoughts, six older battleships, five battle cruisers, eleven light cruisers and sixty-one destroyers. Jellicoe's combined fleets comprised twenty-eight Dreadnoughts, nine battle cruisers, eight armoured cruisers, twenty-six light cruisers, seventy-eight destroyers, a seaplane carrier and a minesweeper. (2)

First contact occurred at 2 p.m. when both sides' destroyer screens chanced to investigate the same neutral merchant ship and thus ran into each other. Their radios alerted the battle cruiser fleets of Hipper and Beatty which now turned on collision course. Beatty's five battle cruisers, sailing ahead of the battleships, sighted Hipper's flotilla at around 4 p.m. and opened fire. In the battle cruiser duel, the shortcomings of the design were cruelly exposed. Beatty's own flagship, LION, was heavily damaged by hits from LÜTZOW, Hipper's flagship, but things got worse:

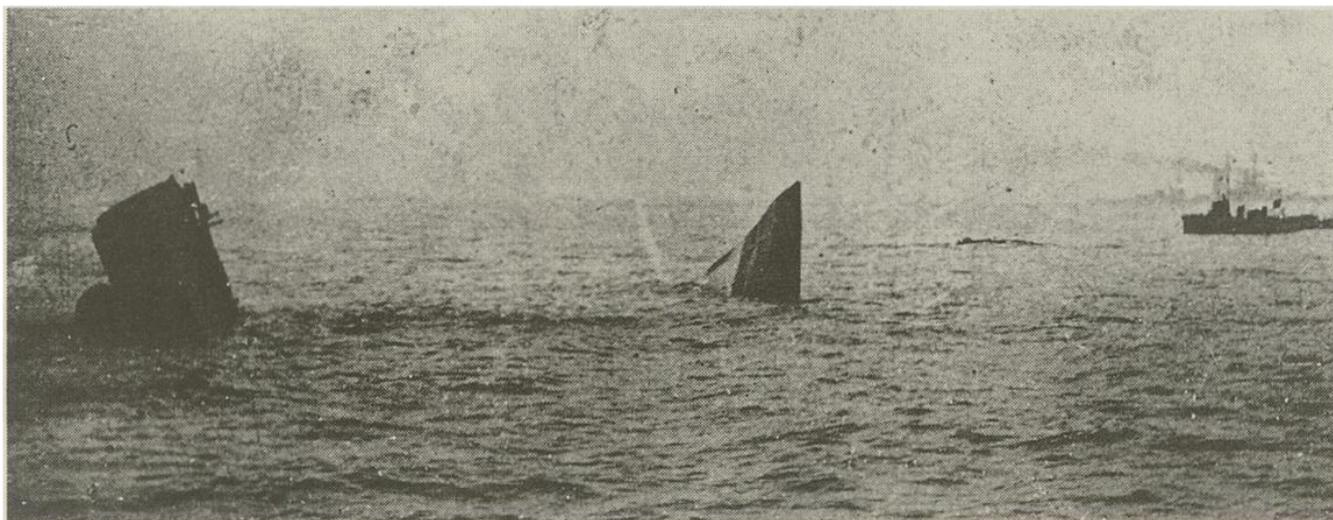


BATTLE OF JUTLAND, THE BRITISH BATTLESHIP LINE
IRON DUKE, ROYAL OAK, SUPERB, CANADA

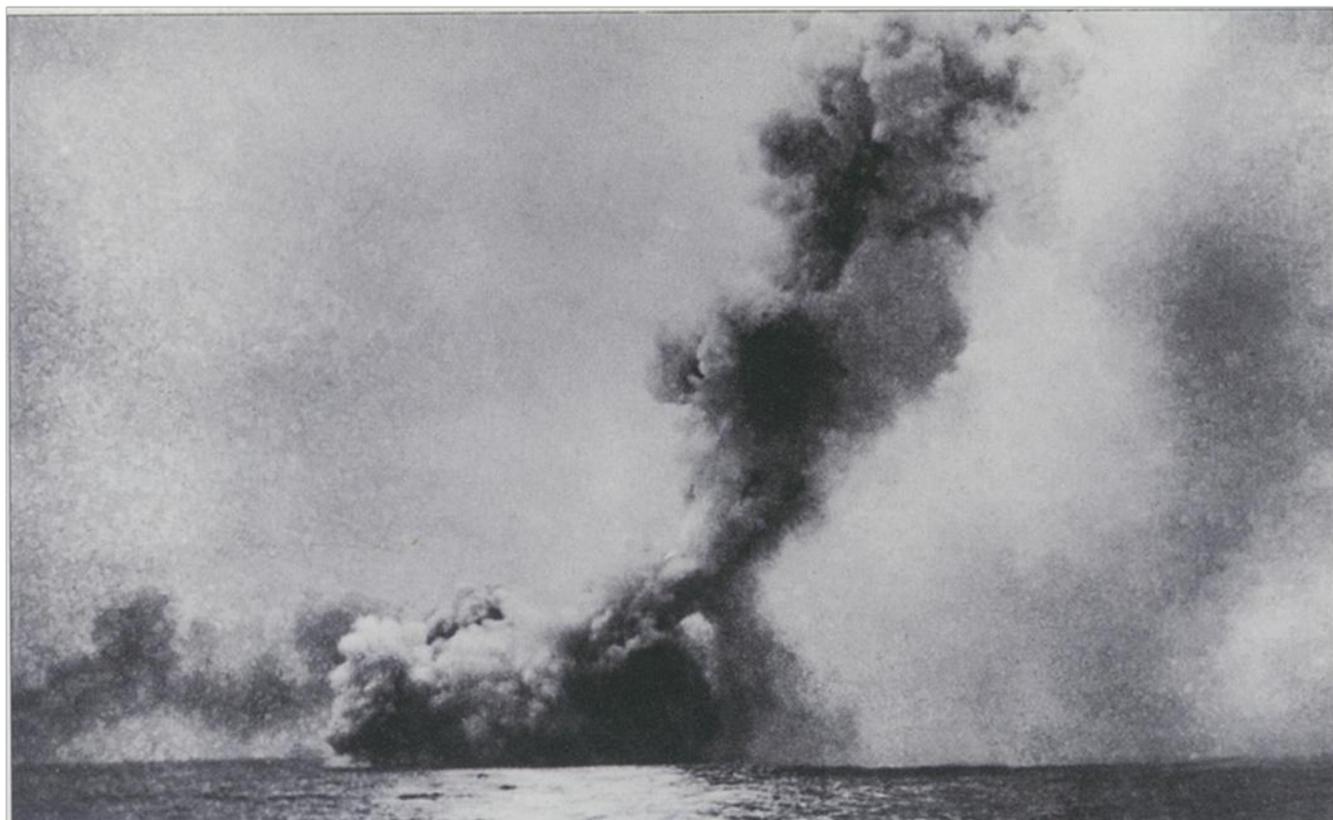
INDEFATIGABLE, duelling with the German VON DER TANN, suffered an internal explosion which literally tore her asunder; only minutes later, QUEEN MARY exploded and sank after having received a salvo from DERFFLINGER. Only eight men survived.

German ships showed much less vulnerability to the impact of British shells - whether it was better armour or a problem with the English fuses is still much discussed.

Post-battle investigation established that the German shells had penetrated the weak armour belt protecting the propellant store rooms, where the essentially unstable charges were stockpiled in the open, to be forwarded to the gun



INVINCIBLE, BROKEN IN HALVES



QUEEN MARY EXPLODES

turrets. The explosion of the shell subsequently caused the detonation of the ship's main magazine. Beatty's first line was thus quickly reduced, but the elation aboard Hipper's ships was of short duration. When the four British battleships emerged from the clouds of smoke and palls of rain, it was Hipper's time to reverse course, Beatty in pursuit. Half an hour later, the British vanguard recognized Scheer's battleships coming up on the horizon as expected, and now it was their turn to reverse northwards, to lead Scheer into the direction of the ambush, Jellicoe's Grand Fleet, which closed in swiftly. The slugfest continued through all these entertaining chases, and now favoured the British, who could bring the fire of their

battleships' new 15-inch guns to bear. Several hits severely damaged SEYDLITZ, again, after her unfortunate experience at the Dogger Bank and proved at least that German battle cruisers were just as vulnerable to well-aimed shells as were the British ones. SEYDLITZ's troubles caused disarray in Scheer's battle formation at the exact moment when, in a confused situation, a German salvo found INVINCIBLE. She blew up, and her fragments joined her younger sisters in their North Sea grave.

That was, however, the last lucky pot-shot for Scheer who faced an increasing curtain of 15-inch gun shells. At around six in the evening, overpowered, he decided to pull out of the game.

There might have ended, inconclusively, an already unsatisfactory encounter [from the British point of view, ¶]. Scheer, however, then decided to turn back, perhaps to come to the assistance of the damaged light cruiser WIESBADEN which had been left behind, perhaps because he judged that he could pass astern of Jellicoe's fleet as it continued its advance towards the Heligoland Bight, while he made his escape through the Skagerrak into the Baltic. Jellicoe, however, once again reduced speed, with the result that the German Dreadnoughts, heading north-east, encountered the British heading south-east, and steering to pass their rear so as to cut them off from safety.

At the moment of encounter moreover, the British were deployed in line abreast, the Germans in line ahead, a relative position, known as "crossing the enemy's T," that greatly favoured the British. More of their guns could be brought to bear than could those of the German fleet, ranked one ship behind the other, which thus also presented an easier target. Ten minutes of gunnery, in which the Germans suffered twenty-seven hits by large-calibre shells, the British only two, persuaded Scheer to turn away again into the dark eastern horizon, leaving his battle cruisers and lighter ships to cover his retreat in a "death ride."

The torpedo threat they presented caused Jellicoe to turn away also - for which he has ever afterward been reproached - and, by the time he turned back, Scheer had put ten miles between his Dreadnoughts and the pursuit.

Many German ships remained to cover Scheer's flight, including his squadron of vulnerable pre-Dreadnoughts, and in a series of dusk and night actions they suffered losses. So, too, did the British cruisers and destroyers that remained in contact. By the morning of 1 June, when Scheer had his fleet home, he had lost a battle cruiser, a pre-Dreadnought, four light cruisers and five destroyers. Jellicoe, though remaining in command of the North Sea, had lost three battle cruisers, four armoured cruisers and eight destroyers; 6,094 British sailors had died, 2,551 German. (3)

As far as tactical issues were concerned, the "Battle of Jutland," as the Royal Navy called it, or "Battle of the Skagerrak", as it became known in Germany, was a success for the young High Seas Fleet: both German armour and ammunition had proven superior to the British armaments. In terms of strategy, however, the advantage of controlling the North Sea and hence the approaches to the Atlantic Ocean remained with Great Britain; for the rest of the war the German fleet remained at anchor and ceased to be a threat to the Empire. The international press described the encounter at Jutland as an "attack on the gaoler, followed by a return to jail." The German ships' peaceful rusting in port was only disturbed in 1919, when a clause of the armistice commanded the fleet's internment at Scapa Flow. The crews sailed the ships to the Orkney Islands as ordered but scuttled them after arrival, so that they would not fall into British hands.

The true casualties of Jutland were the battle cruisers which vanished from the arsenals of the modern navies as far as they had appeared. They were, however, not the sole memorable failure of military ordnance committees in the age of the World Wars.

Time and again, military procurement offices have proven to attract hubris and error the way a magnet attracts iron. The military, the most narcissistic government segment of all, suffers in particular from its lords' profligacy in erecting temples to themselves in form of hardware. The preferred road to waste seems to be strategic misapprehension, although debatable tactical concepts run a close second.

One may consider as the most recent example the fate of the fighter jets of the United States Navy and Air Force. The copious numbers of expensive F-15s, F-16s, F-18s, and F-22s in service, some of the world's most advanced aircraft, have flown no actual combat missions in either Afghanistan since 2001 nor Iraq since 2003, and actually achieved but a single dogfight victory in the last forty years - perhaps because the Afghans and Arabs were malicious enough not to possess any bombers or other toys these supreme fighter jets could target and shoot down; all this happening at a time when their comrades on the ground lacked personal armour or reasonably bomb-proof vehicles.

One can only hope that things turn out better for the new F-35 fighters, presently being estimated to cost the U.S. taxpayer a minimum of \$ 1,400,000,000,000.00. (4) Various Republican Members of Congress are likely to introduce legislation to compel all future enemies to build or purchase targets for the F-35s. Reports of December 2014 cite many issues with the new design and - quite surprisingly - increasing cost.

A few of the notable military hardware hiccups from the World Wars include:

I. Hitler's strategic blunder of insisting that the world's first jet fighter, the twin-engined Messerschmitt Me-262, was to be (mis)used as a light bomber; a decision which delayed the aircraft's mass-production for critical fourteen months and saved many Allied bomber crews,

II. The frantic development of the A 4, the world's first advanced liquid-fuelled rocket, built by Wernher von Braun and his team in Peenemünde at the Baltic Sea coast. The machine was a demonstration of technical and scientific brilliance but it was, in terms of military economics, a disaster. An A 4 could deliver just under a ton of explosives [1,000 kilogram or 2,200 pounds, ¶] over a distance of roughly two hundred miles, once, while an American B-29 bomber, at approximately the same cost, delivered ten tons of payload over a thousand miles distance every day. Moreover, every A 4 fired exhausted scarce supplies of rare metals and electronic parts.

III. Another road to military mismanagement is that of the flawed use of perfectly good gear by bad timing. The first generation of German magnetic mines caused havoc in the British coastal waters of late 1939 and early 1940 because the Royal Navy found no way to protect her ships for a year or so. The problem was that only a few of the mines were initially available; when they were mass-produced a year later the British had already found a defence.

IV. Tactical misapprehension caused the unsatisfactory performance of the French armoured forces in the campaign of May and June 1940. Not only was the French tank force numerically superior to the German, at about 3,000 units against 2,400, but French tanks were thicker armoured and equipped with guns of greater calibre. Besides, their opponents often were the obsolete German model Pz. Mk. II or the Czech-made T 38. The French General Staff, however, had chosen to ignore the prophets of modern mobile war, Liddell Hart, Fuller, and Guderian, and insisted to use their machines piecemeal for infantry support while the German Panzer divisions drove through France almost at will, enjoying close air support.

This must close the short list of misguided ingenuity for the moment, since we have to return to naval matters. No further decisive big ship encounters occurred after Jutland and the admiralty's attention concentrated upon the U-boat campaign, which was of greater strategic importance to begin with. The battleships of the High Seas Fleet could not win the war for Germany, but the submarines just might, if they succeeded in blocking the British importation of food and industrial essentials. Vice versa, England might be able to afford the loss of a battleship here or there but had no alternative to a successful defeat of the U-boats but hunger: in this way, the German U-boats were the strategic counterweight to the Allied continental blockade of Central Powers harbours, which denied them all trade with the world outside of the European continent.

Both camps had engaged in economic warfare from the outset of the war. By 1916, the continental blockade occasioned widespread malnutrition and induced hunger riots in Germany and Austria. From the stern winter of 1916-17 on, the "turnip winter", as it was called, the famine began to claim the lives of weaker persons, especially of children; by the end of the war approximately 500,000 persons had died of starvation. This consequence of the blockade hardly resonates in Allied historiography, much less is it noted that the blockade was upheld far past the armistice of 1918. The

number of victims was much augmented in the last two years of the war, of weak men, women, children, succumbing to disease. The influenza of 1918-1920 alone killed an estimated twenty million people worldwide, twice as many as the war.

The Germans had mounted a few attempts at cruiser warfare in the early days of the war, but the U-boats soon became the naval weapon of choice. Submarines were, however, a relatively new technology: their operative radius was much smaller than that of cruisers, they had a limited supply of torpedoes and could not remain at sea very long. Another operational disadvantage was the fact that the U-boats had to follow the "Rules of Naval Engagement" as per the Protocols of the Hague War Conventions.

According to these regulations, a U-boat captain shadowing a merchantman was required to (1) identify the vessel, (2) establish whether it belonged to a belligerent or a neutral country, (3) stop it, (4) search it for contraband, and, if such cargo was found, (5) evacuate the crew and eventual passengers before, finally, (6) being allowed to sink the quarry. These awkward rules of engagement naturally exposed the submarine to attacks from enemy forces which their putative prey had in the meantime alerted by radio. German U-boat captains found soon out that over 60% of the commercial goods England imported came in via "neutral" shipping, and, although neutral vessels were, in theory, inviolable, "accidents" did happen.

In February 1915, the German admiralty announced that henceforth U-boats would engage in *HANDELSKRIEG*, i.e. economic war, which meant that they would sink Allied merchantmen around the British Isles without warning. The problem was, of course, that this was, by the Hague Conventions, illegal, as was, of course, the British blockade. As it was to be expected, the change in policy resulted in a few neutral ships being sunk and much diplomatic ballyhoo ensued - for...

... the British saw more clearly than the Germans the need to win the battle for what we would now call the world opinion. Making the maritime blockade of Germany effective was only possible by ignoring international agreements, like the Declaration of London of 1908, which set out clear rules governing the treatment of neutral shipping in wartime but which the House of Lords had refused to ratify.

This, and the ruthless way in which the Royal Navy harassed neutral ships believed to be trading with Germany, was not calculated to win friends about. Nevertheless, the British were adept at diverting attention to German misdemeanours at sea. For their part, the Germans failed to see that, when they shelled British ports or ordered their submarines to sink merchant vessels without warning, they were doing as much damage to themselves as to their enemies.

*The British and American press liked nothing better than tales of women and children blown to pieces or drowned by German *SCHRECKLICHKEIT* (frightfulness). As the former German Colonial Secretary Bernhard Dernburg put it shortly after the sinking of the liner *Lusitania* by a German submarine: "The American people cannot visualize the spectacle of a hundred thousand ... German children starving by slow degrees as a result of the British blockade, but they can visualize the pitiful face of a little child drowning amidst the wreckage caused by a German torpedo." Quite why 128 Americans should have felt entitled to cross the Atlantic on a British ship during a world war with impunity was never entirely clear. (5)*

British claims that the *Lusitania* had been but a harmless cruise liner formed the basis for the second of the big stories of ghastly German wickedness that were distributed by the Allied press agencies worldwide [the earlier one had been the incidents at Louvain, ¶]. The fact that the Allies controlled the global press, with the exception of the Central Powers countries, ensured that the little sins of the Royal Navy or the Allied armies were overlooked. The English-speaking newspapers' reports of the bloodcurdling acts of the Germans, in epic detail, served as the necessary psychological preparation for the active intervention of the U.S.A. in the war.

*In early 1915, the British liner *Lusitania* was torpedoed and sunk by a German submarine [U 20, ¶]. She sank in eighteen minutes, and 1,198 people died, including 124 Americans. The United States claimed the *Lusitania* carried an innocent cargo, and therefore the torpedoing was a monstrous German atrocity.*

Actually, the Lusitania was heavily armed: it carried 1,248 cases of 3-inch shells, 4,927 boxes of cartridges (1,000 rounds in each box), and 2,000 more cases of small-arms ammunition. Her manifests were falsified to hide this fact, and the British and American governments lied about the cargo. (6)

While the sinking of the Lusitania was technically legal, the impact of the false accusations spread by the Allied and American governments and media led to Germany's repeal of the Handelskrieg proclamation on August 30, 1915. By this time, however, the commercial relations between the U.S.A. and the Allies, and Great Britain in particular, all but guaranteed that the United States were to join the Allies should the tides of war turn against them.

In 1914 a serious recession had begun in the United States. J.P. Morgan later testified: "The war opened during a period of hard times. ... Business throughout the country was depressed, farm prices were deflated, unemployment was serious, the heavy industries were working far below capacity and bank clearings were off." But by 1915, war orders for the Allies (mostly England) had stimulated the economy, and by April 1917 more than \$2 billion worth of goods had been sold to the Allies. ...

In 1897, the private foreign investments of the United States amounted to \$700 million dollars. By 1914 they were \$31 billion. Wilson's Secretary of State, William Jennings Bryan, while a believer in neutrality in the war, also believed that the United States needed overseas markets; in May of 1914 he praised the President as one who had "opened the doors of all the weaker countries to an invasion of American capital and American enterprise."

Back in 1907, Woodrow Wilson had said in a lecture at Columbia University: "Concessions obtained by financiers must be safeguarded by ministers of state; even if the sovereignty of unwilling nations be outraged in the process ... the doors of the nations which are closed must be battered down." In his 1912 campaign he said: "Our domestic markets no longer suffice, we need foreign markets." In a memo to Bryan he described his aim as "an open door to the world," and in 1914 he said he supported "the righteous conquest of foreign markets"

With World War I, England became more and more a market for American goods and for loans at interest. J.P. Morgan and Company acted as agents for the Allies, and when, in 1915, Wilson lifted the ban on private bank loans to the Allies, Morgan could now begin lending money in such great amounts as to both make great profit and tie American finance closely to the interest of a British victory in the war against Germany. (7)

The economic perspective allowed the anglophile Wilson to unite financial gains for his country with his own brand of philanthropy; support for the oppressed of this earth, say, for example, the British Empire. In early 1915 he confessed:

Gentlemen, the Allies are standing with the backs to the wall fighting wild beasts. I will permit nothing to be done by our country to hinder or embarrass them in the prosecution of the war unless admitted rights are grossly violated. (8)

If there was to be a conflict between the U.S.A.'s "neutrality" in the war and her material interests, the former had to suffer, as Wilson's Counsellor and later Secretary of State, Robert Lansing explained:

"If European countries cannot find means to pay ... they will have to stop buying, and our present export trade will shrink proportionately. The result would be restriction of outputs, industrial depression, idle capital and idle labour, numerous failures, financial demoralization and general unrest and suffering among the labouring classes. ... Can we afford to let a declaration as to our conception of 'the true spirit of neutrality' stand in the way of our national interests, which seem to be seriously threatened?" (9)

The problem remained, and Lansing perceived it, how to convince the American public, which could as of yet see no compelling necessity to fight for J.P. Morgan or the survival of the British Empire, for that matter, on a foreign continent. Practically all American or British historians describe Wilson as a somewhat ethereal, idealistic good-wilier, who "had formed the belief that plain dealing between nations in open diplomacy was the secret of averting and evading conflict."

(10) Such a characterization stands in stark contrast not only to Wilson's economic ideas, as cited above, but also to his treatment of Meso- and Australoamerican nations and his repressive internal politics, prominently the Espionage Act of 1917. His peacenik image stems mostly from the famous "Fourteen Points", which he introduced on January 8, 1918, before the U.S. Congress, as a general remedy for the universe.

The program Wilson took to Paris [to the Peace Conference in 1919, based upon the Fourteen Points, ¶] envisioned a world order based upon national self-determination, free trade, and a League of Nations to keep the peace. "What we seek," he explained, "is the reign of law, based upon the consent of the governed and sustained by the organized opinion of mankind."

National self-determination, the international equivalent of democracy in domestic politics, would embody the principle of consent of the governed. Free trade would soften national rivalries and broaden prosperity. The League was to give security to the whole system through mutual guarantees of territorial integrity and common action against an aggressor.

Conspicuously absent from the Fourteen Points was any meaningful demand for a substantial change in international economic relations. Eight of the Fourteen Points applied the doctrine of self-determination to specific parts of Europe. The remaining six points were of general application, and of these only three dealt with economic matters: freedom of the seas in peace and in war, the removal of all economic barriers between nations, and an impartial adjustment of colonial claims.

Not one of these three points represented anything more than a pious hope, and not one was even remotely realized in fact. The structure of colonial claims was hardly touched by the mandate system of the League. Freedom of the seas had to be waived at the outset upon the insistence of the British, who would not even indulge in the hypocrisy of endorsing it on principle.

The removal of economic barriers was an idle suggestion if one could not remove the economic and social structures, the profit motives and systems of domestic business power that made trade barriers inevitable; Wilson dared not even try to commit his own country to further removal of trade barriers - and it was the United States that actually began international tariff warfare in the post-war era. Finally, the idea of multiplying national sovereignties [by breaking up large states like Austria-Hungary, ¶] and expecting a reduction of international trade barriers to follow was certainly tempting the wrath of the gods. (11)

The Fourteen Points, not to be forgotten, were not introduced before the entry of the U.S.A. into the war but eight months later. They are often misrepresented as a proposal of a well-intentioned outsider [Wilson, the President of the USA, ¶] for the benefit of the adversaries [Allies vs. Central Powers, ¶]. This is false. But Wilson was clearly aware of the delicacy of his diplomatic ruminations. On January 22, 1917, four months before the U.S.A. joined the war, he had informed the Senate that, according to his opinion, neither side could be granted outright victory.

Victory would mean peace forced upon the loser, a victor's terms imposed upon the vanquished. It would be accepted in humiliation, under duress, at an intolerable sacrifice, and would leave a sting, a resentment, a bitter memory upon which terms of peace would rest, not permanently, but only as upon quicksand. Only a peace between equals can last. (12)

If Wilson could see so remarkably clearly what was to happen if the USA allowed the eventual victors, their Allies, too much triumphal leeway, why did he fold the game, play dead, in Paris 1919? It was there that his politics fell apart and left seeds of bitter fruit. But this is a matter for a later chapter.

As laid out above, the United States' eventual entry in the war was indissolubly hinged upon their economic relations with the Allies and the only real threat to them, submarine warfare. On May 4, 1916, the German government had pledged to restrict its U-boat warfare according to certain U.S. demands. This was, however, not an exactly voluntary decision; Wilson had threatened to join the war.

In the meantime, from late 1916 to early 1917, the German government discussed its U-boat options and whether to reinstitute *HANDELSKRIEG*. The success of the U-boats had increased, partly due to their greater numbers: compared with the whole year of 1915 in which 227 British ships were sunk, in January 1917 alone the U-boats sank 180 Allied ships. The German Navy Department, led by Admiral von Holtzendorff, produced statistics which amounted to a bet that unrestricted submarine warfare would starve England into submission before American forces could appear on the continent in sufficient numbers, and "this gamble almost succeeded in the summer of 1917." (13) As it was to be expected, the renewal of unrestricted submarine warfare on February 1, 1917, led to the sinking of a few American merchantmen and the loss of lives. The clamour of the U.S. media reached new heights on March 1, 1917, when a ridiculous design of the German Foreign Office backfired with the most serious consequences.

On January 17, 1917, Count Bernstorff, the German ambassador to the United States, received a cable from his lord and master, the German Secretary of State, Alfred Zimmermann. The note promised Mexico, were she to ally with Germany and declare war on the USA, the return of Texas, New Mexico and Arizona. Due to circumstances not entirely clear, the document was intercepted and deciphered by both U.S. and British signal intelligence and subsequently published. This "Zimmermann Note" was globally taken as proof of German wickedness, as if the Allies had not made similar offers to territories to be gained to Italy and Romania, to make them join the war.

Still, there was no initial enthusiasm for war in the United States. "Americans did not rush to enlist. A million men were needed, but in the first six weeks after the declaration of war only 73,000 volunteered. Congress voted overwhelmingly for a draft." (14) Another factor urging on the swift participation of the United States in the war was the Russian Revolution in February [March, by the Western calendar, ¶] of 1917, which produced doubts as to whether and how long Russia could remain in the war. Czar Nicholas II had abdicated on March 15, 1917, and been replaced by a provisional liberal government chaired by Prince Lvov. This government's authority, however, was disputed by many opposition groups, among them the Bolsheviks, a group of revolutionary communists, and seemed altogether instable.

The possible implosion of Russia made the scenario of a German victory likely enough for the American president to take precautionary measures. On April 2, 1917, Wilson informed Congress of his intent to join the war, albeit for the best of reasons - "for democracy, for the right of those who submit to authority to have a voice in their own Governments, for the rights and liberties of small nations, for a universal dominion of right by such a concert of free peoples as shall bring peace and safety to all nations and make the world at last free." (15) Congress was delighted by such honourable objectives and declared war on April 6, 1917.

It was high time. The resumption of the unrestricted U-boat campaign had caused the loss of 245 Allied ships in February, 310 in March and 373 in April. This was partially due to the new First Sea Lord Admiral Jellicoe's resentment of the convoy system, merchantmen travelling in groups protected by warships. Once reasonable voices prevailed and the system was established, German sinkings almost dropped overnight: from a peak of 852,000 gross tons in April 1917 to 500,500 in May, to 300,200 in September, and to 200,600 in November. Due to a program of increasing the capacity of American dockyards, by late 1918 new ship launches exceeded losses: in October 1918, the Allies launched 511,000 tons of new ships against a loss of only 119,000 tons to the U-boats. The tide of the naval battle had turned.

The year 1917 also marked the changing of the Imperial guards; while the gradual reduction of the British Empire was to take another forty-odd years, it was already on the verge of stagnation; to be replaced by the American Empire, launched in the closing decade of the 19th Century with the takeovers of Cuba, the Hawaiian Isles, and the Philippines. American loans to the Allies were but the cost of setting up Imperial shop, a fact that even the Encyclopaedia Britannica makes no qualms in admitting:

The entry of the United States was the turning point in the war, because it made the eventual defeat of Germany possible. It had been foreseen in 1916 that if the United States went to war, the Allies' military effort against Germany would be upheld by U.S. supplies and by enormous extensions of credit. These expectations were amply and decisively fulfilled.

The United States' production of armaments was to meet not only its own needs but also France's and Great Britain's. In this sense, the American economic contribution was decisive.

By April 1, 1917, the Allies had exhausted their means of paying for essential supplies from the United States, and it was difficult to see how they could have maintained the war effort if the United States had remained neutral. American loans to the Allies worth \$7,000,000,000 between 1917 and the end of the war maintained the flow of U.S. arms and food across the Atlantic. (16)

Three days after the U.S. declaration of war, the eyes of the world returned to the Western theatre. The Russian weakness made it a distinct possibility that Germany might draw forces from the Eastern to the Western front and revert to the offensive, perhaps in late 1917 or early 1918. On the other hand, U.S. reinforcements could not, at least not in significant numbers, arrive before the summer of 1918. In April 1917 the U.S. Army, National Guard and Marine Corps together disposed of only 250,000 soldiers. Conscription, introduced swiftly when the expected masses of volunteers failed to materialize, was expected to provide about two million recruits, but the necessary training and the manufacture of sufficient materiel meant that combat-ready units could not be shipped to France before the next year.

Even in retrospect it remains a mystery why the Allies launched several costly offensives in the West in 1917, instead of waiting for 1918 and the arrival of the Americans. After all, 1917 was the fourth year of the war and all illusions had long since evaporated. That is, except for the French General Robert Nivelle, an artillery specialist, who replaced Joffre as the French C-in-C in December 1916. He had developed new artillery tactics which promised to accomplish a break through the German lines - what he called "rupture". His proposal essentially demanded even more artillery, whose relentless fire would saturate the enemy lines with iron and clear the way for the infantry. It was Nivelle's considered opinion that he would win the war in 48 hours. Not all French generals were convinced.

A few months earlier, at yet another Allied conference at Chantilly in November 1916, the aims of 1916 had mostly been revisited: the Italians would stage more offensives at the Isonzo, the Russians promised an operation even greater and more successful than the Brusilov campaign [the revolution nixed the promise, ¶], and, in the West, the strategic concept of 1916 was retained with only minor modifications: the French were to attack the southern "shoulder" of the German salient, at the Chemin des Dames, along the Aisne west of Rheims, while the BEF would concentrate, again, in the north, only twenty miles south of Neuve Chapelle and Festubert where they had attacked in 1915.

Unknowingly, the Germans threw a spanner in the Allied works when they began, on March 15, to withdraw their whole front approximately twenty miles eastward, to a new defensive position called the "Hindenburg Line", between a point just south of Arras and the town of Soissons at the Aisne. The Allies had to follow up and dig a completely new trench system west of the new German line, which delayed Nivelle's planned offensives somewhat. Fortunately for the Allies, the Hindenburg Line began west of the Chemin des Dames and ended just east of Arras, outside of the perimeters Nivelle had designated for the 1917 attacks.

The British assault was scheduled to begin a week earlier than the French and opened up on April 9 in the Artois east of Arras, only a few miles south of the battlefields of 1915. Two British armies, First (Horne) and Third (Allenby), faced the German 6th Army commanded by General von Falkenhausen, the successor of Crown Prince Rupprecht. Falkenhausen had left only seven of his Bavarian divisions in the front line itself and withheld the rest, slated for counterattacks, about fifteen miles to the east. That was fourteen miles too many. The opening day was a complete success for the British Army whose eighteen divisions attacking the German lines enjoyed superior artillery support. They advanced up to three miles and took about 9,000 German prisoners while suffering relatively few losses. The Canadians of First Army stormed Vimy Ridge, the heights that had cost the blood of many thousand French soldiers in 1915, and looked down upon open country.

Alas, the strictures of military logistics stopped the momentum. A predetermined pause of two hours stopped the Canadian attack in its most promising moment, and dusk eventually saved the day for the Germans. They were able to bring reserves to the front the very next day and eventually re-established a defensive position. After four more weeks of indecisive fighting another stalemate developed. The British Army mourned 150,000 casualties while the Germans lost 100,000 men.

Meanwhile Nivelle's French offensive had begun on April 16 along the river Aisne, ominous auspices notwithstanding. At this sector of the front, the distribution of the German forces was the inverse of Vimy, fifteen counterattack divisions waiting behind twenty-one line units. (17) In addition, while the British preparations had gone

unnoticed by the Germans at Arras, the French busi-ness at the Aisne plainly evidenced their intentions. Nivelle had assembled a major force: four armies, totalling 1,200,000 men and 7,000 guns, on forty miles front line between Rheims and Soissons.

One way or another, the Germans had got ample warning of Nivelle's plan for "rupture." They had also put in place their own new scheme for "defence in depth," devised by Colonel von Lossberg, which left the front line almost empty, except for observers, while the "intermediate zone" behind was held by machine gunners dispersed either in strongpoints or improvised shell hole positions. The supporting artillery, meanwhile, was deployed not in lines but in a haphazard pattern to the rear, while the real strength of the defence lay in the reserves deployed outside artillery range 10,000 and 20,000 yards from the front.

The arrangement spelled doom to Nivelle's plan, which required the French infantry to cross the first 3,000 yards of the Chemin des Dames front, a steep, wooded slope, pitted by natural cave openings, in three hours, the next 3,000 yards, on the reverse slope, where they would pass out of sight of their supporting artillery, in the next three hours, and the final 2,000 yards in two hours.

Quite apart from the difficulties to be encountered in contesting those 8,000 yards - initial German resistance, wire entanglements, by-passed machine guns, local counter-attacks - the intrinsic weakness of Nivelle's plan was that the energy of its initial stage was to be expended in an area that stopped 2,000 yards short of the real German defences. However successful, therefore, the French assault, and that was problematical, the attackers, when and if they achieved their final objectives, would immediately confront fresh troops whom, in their exhausted state, they would be hard-pressed to resist. (18)

The synchronization of infantry and artillery remained the problem. After a preliminary bombardment of ten days' duration, the attack began, over a front of sixteen miles, on the morning of April 16. The initial impression was favourable; the British liaison officer General Spears observed how the "immense mass of troops within sight began to move. Long, thin columns were swarming towards the Aisne. Suddenly some 75s appeared from nowhere, galloping forward, horses stretched out, drivers looking as if they were riding a finish. 'The Germans are on the run, the guns are advancing,' shouted the infantry jubilantly. Then it began to rain and it became impossible to tell how the assault was progressing." (19)

The weather worsened: mist and snow added to the gun smoke that hid the massacre into which the attack had transformed. German military intelligence had been able to obtain somehow parts of the enemy's plans and resolved to trust their findings, a far-from-customary decision. When the real German defence lines finally came into the view of the French infantry - 2,000 yards behind the front line - the German machine guns had been set up. In their fire, the assault lost its pace, came to a halt - but the French artillery barrage moved ahead, one hundred yards in three minutes. Arriving on the uphill slope of the Chemin des Dames, the French infantry could not keep the pace, since the addition of their own artillery fire with rain and sleet had turned the slope into a slippery lunar landscape, fraught with shell craters and barbed wire obstacles. The gain of ground was measured in meters rather than miles, as it had become usual on the Western front. On the first day's evening, the French army counted 40,000 casualties, and not a single one of the 128 new Renault tanks had reached the front line; victims of the mud. On the third day, the road along the Chemin des Dames was in the gun sights of the French vanguard, but on the evening of April 20 the offensive was essentially abandoned, even if a bit of the road was captured on May 5 and skirmishes occurred until May 9. No breakthrough was achieved; worse, the attack had not even come close, and the loss of over 185,000 casualties, who could not readily be replaced, led to Nivelle's sacking and replacement by Philippe Petain.

At length, the repetitions of senseless slaughter undermined the moral fibre of the troops. After the fiasco of the Nivelle offensive, a sort of spiritual collapse engulfed the French army, which is usually called the "Mutinies of 1917". But, as John Keegan pointed out, "mutiny" implies violence against superiors, of which there was none. "On the contrary, a strange mutual respect characterised the relations between private soldiers and the commissioned ranks during the 'mutinies,' as if both sides recognized themselves to be mutual victims of a terrible ordeal, which was simply no longer bearable by those at the bottom of the heap." (20)

It was rather some combination of unrest and frustration: the poilus would defend the homeland were the Germans to approach, but they refused to attack. They clamoured for better food and pay, demanding more leave, time with their families. These complaints found ready support in the general population which was tired of the war, high food prices and profiteering. Civilian and military protest threatened to feed on each other, to spiral out of control, engulf the country in a conflagration of discontent.

It was in this hour that Philippe Petain saved the nation. Of far greater importance than his military deeds, it became his greatest achievement to tackle the critical situation with psychological finesse, a steady nerve and sober authority, enough of each to defuse the potential bomb. He was aware that much of the underlying resentment resulted from the social differences between officers and draftees, the perquisites of the former and the rancour of the latter. He realized that the whole French layout of trench warfare was in dire need of reform and came up with his own version of "defence in depth", in which the front line would only sparsely be manned. He ordered to avoid "the tendency to pack together the infantry in the front lines, which only augments casualties." (21) He promised better food and pay, more leave, more rest & recreation. For all his sympathy with the simple soldier, he was no soft-boiled liberal. Almost 3,500 court-martials were held, over 550 soldiers sentenced to death and forty-nine of them actually executed.

Petaun was lucky, however, in that the Germans never became aware of the enemy's paralysis: the German High Command was quite content with the absence of major French offensives between June 1917 and July 1918. Since the German forces were busy enough in Russia and Italy, they were inclined not to inquire too deep into the reasons for the French passivity.

The British, meanwhile, were preparing another go at Ypres. Haig's new plan linked two separate objectives: not only were the German defences to be pierced, but, once the penetration was accomplished, the British left wing was to turn northwards in an attempt to recapture the Belgian channel ports that were used by the German Navy for submarine operations. David Lloyd George, the new British prime minister, had advised Douglas Haig that a bloodbath akin to the First Day of the Somme had to be avoided at all costs. Haig, essentially impervious to counsel, incorporated a few tactical changes in the plan for the offensive, chiefly to have his obedience reflected in the official record.

The jump-off points for the offensive, on a front of eleven miles, were between Messines, six miles south of Ypres, and four miles north of the village of Boesinghe, opposite the Houthulst Wood. Just south of Messines, a German-occupied salient on a small ridge not only overlooked the southern sector of Haig's planned deployment but was a point most suitable for outflanking the British right wing, north of it, were it to advance eastward. The dangerous spot needed to be eliminated before the general offensive could proceed, and General Herbert Plumer's Second Army was given the task of eradicating it. Plumer was of a different calibre than Haig. He was meticulous but considerate, thorough but imaginative, and thus emerged "as a sort of 'intellectuals' hero of the British Great War." (22)

Near Messines, south of Ypres, British miners had been tunnelling for a year under the German front lines, and by early June they had dug twenty-one horizontal mineshafts stuffed with a million pounds of high explosive a hundred feet below crucial points in the German defensive system. At 3:10 in the morning [of June 7] these mines were set off all at once. Nineteen of them went up, and the shock wave jolted Lloyd George in Downing Street 130 miles away. ... [Plumer's mines] totally surprised the Germans, ten thousand of whom were permanently entombed immediately. Seven thousand panicked and were taken prisoner. Nine British divisions and seventy-two tanks attacked straightway on a ten-mile front. At the relatively low cost of 16,000 casualties, they occupied Vimy [Messines, ¶] Ridge. (23)

If Plumer had shown at Messines what creativity could accomplish, Haig proved seven weeks later that bullheadedness only increased the casualty count. The terrain at Ypres was, for two reasons, in worse condition than in the year before: the incessant shelling of three years had not only removed any trace of cover, but had, with the addition of an unseasonably copious amount of rainfall, turned the area into a quagmire of mud and wetlands pockmarked with millions of shell holes, a lunar landscape of mini-lakes and filthy muck: thousands of soldiers, on either side, were sucked up in the muddy swamp, never to be seen again.



THE RIDGE OF MESSINES, BRITISH VIEW, EARLY JUNE 1917. BELOW, THE GERMAN VIEW AFTER THE EXPLOSION OF THE MINES.



On the other hand, not only did the weather refuse to cooperate with Haig, the location turned out a most unfortunate choice for offensive operations.

The "Flanders Position," as the Germans called it, was one of the strongest on the Western Front, both geographically and militarily. From the low heights of Passchendaele, Broodseinde and Gheluvelt, the enemy front line looked down on an almost level plain from which three years of constant shelling had removed every trace of vegetation; it had also destroyed the field drainage system, elaborated over centuries, so that the onset of rain, frequent in that coastal region, rapidly flooded the battlefield's surface and soon returned it to a swamp.

To quagmire and the absence of concealment the Germans had added to the BEF's difficulties by extending the depth of their trench system and its wire entanglements and by building a network of concrete pillboxes and bunkers, often constructed inside ruined buildings, which offered concealment to the construction teams and camouflage to the finished work.

The completed Flanders Position was actually nine layers deep: in front, a line of listening posts in shell holes, covering three lines of breastworks or trenches in which the defending division's front-line battalions sheltered; next a battle zone consisting of machine-gun posts, supported by a line of pillboxes; finally, in the rearward battle zone, the counter-attack units of the division sheltered in concrete bunkers interspersed between the positions of the supporting artillery batteries.

As important as the physical layout of the defences was the formational; the German army had, by the fourth summer of the war, recognised that the defence of a position required two separate formations and reorganized their divisions accordingly. The trench garrison, which was expected to bear the initial assault, had been thinned out, to comprise only the companies and battalions of the divisions in line. Behind it, in the rearward battle zone, were disposed the counter-attack divisions, whose mission was to move forward once the enemy assault had been stopped by the fixed defences and local ripostes of the troops in front. (24)

Haig had mustered a sizable body of troops: Fifth Army (Gough) in the centre of the assault, supported by Plumer's Second Army, recently so successful at Messines, to the south and the French First Army (Anthoine) to the north. Thus Haig had more than one division per mile of front, and had assembled almost 2,300 guns, one to each five yards of front line. They were opposed by ten divisions of 4th Army (Arnim), which possessed a bit over 1,550 guns.

The disaster of the Somme had imparted even to Haig - largely indifferent to advice - which further open assaults into German positions were but senseless slaughter. Hence the new and improved battle plan called for the conquest of enemy territory slice by slice; the first targets were identified approximately two to three miles, 4,000 to 6,000 yards away, distances within reach of the moveable field artillery. When these goals had been reached, the artillery was to be transported forward and its fire directed upon the next objects, a few thousand yards away, which then could be taken, and so forth. The German front would be conquered piecemeal but irresistibly. What was to come was the Third Battle of Ypres, also known as Passchendaele, depicted below in Map XLI.

This time, the ten-day opening fusillade expended over four million shells, on a front line of approximately eleven miles, between Messines and the Forest of Houthulst. The front's extent alone hints at the operation being nothing but one more full and frontal attack à la Haig, not a careful nibbling at the German defences. On July 31, 3:50 a.m., the men of Second and Fifth Army, supported in the north by the men of Anthoine's First Army, went over the parapet, assisted by more than 130 tanks. It was dry, and in the early morning hours the offensive made good progress against surprisingly laggard German resistance.

The seemingly insurmountable breakdown of communication, and hence the loss of coordination, occurred around noon. Cables were found cut, runners were late or disappeared, low-hanging clouds diminished the visibility for both flyers and artillery spotters - the familiar chaos, into which, at two o'clock, the German counterattack struck. Hossbach's concept of "defence in depth" could not have wished for a more spectacular inauguration; a curtain of shells from the German artillery and a hail of machine gun bullets was directed against the vanguards of XVIII and XIX Corps, and was soon augmented by rain, which began this afternoon and hung in the skies for three more days. A British officer, in a letter home, testified that "the ground is churned up to a depth of ten feet and is the consistency of porridge ... the middle of the shell craters are so soft that one might sink out of sight...there must be hundreds of Germans dead buried here and now their own shells are reploughing the area and turning them up." (25)

Too many British soldiers would eventually join their German cousins in a grave of mud, as it had happened at the Somme. At the village of Thiepval, a memorial had been erected for 72,000 British soldiers without known grave. First-day losses in this Third Battle of Ypres, or "Passchendaele", as the melee was to be called in the alternative, for its eventual objective, were lower than at the Somme, but by August 4 none of the British targets had been reached, although, on the northern part of the front, a modest mile-and-a-half from the starting line, the village of Pilckem had actually been conquered. Haig cabled to London that the battle had turned out "highly satisfactory and the losses slight," (26) which translated to about 35,000 British casualties and slightly less on the German side between July 31 and August 3.

Since the losses had been so low, compared to the Somme, Haig felt entitled to unleash another attack, on August 16, on his left flank, directed at the town of Langemarck, where the German student volunteers had died in October 1914. A second assault was directed, in the centre, upon Gheluvelt, between Sanctuary Wood and Polygon Wood, opposite the town of Ypres itself. The enemy forces there included the Regiment List, in whose ranks Corporal Hitler was still serving. Both attempts were soon checked, however, and more British soldiers paid with their blood for little gain. By August 24 Haig, clearly out-of-wit, moved the Schwerpunkt of the British attack to the right, to Plumer's Second Army at Messines, south of Ypres. Before the attack could be renewed, Haig was called to a war council in London to justify the prolongation

of an offensive whose total number of casualties threatened to reach a six-digit figure for the second time. Haig survived Lloyd George's acidic criticism of his strategic planning, style of command and lack of compassion perhaps only because "there was ... no obvious successor to Haig and so, however ill-judged his strategy and harmful its effects on his long-suffering army, it was to be continued for want of a better man or plan." (27)

Once given the go-ahead, Plumer's attack preparations included a bombardment of unprecedented length, three weeks, which was to herald in the new piece-by-piece strategy. This modus operandi required less time to reach its objective; the German counterattack divisions would be too far away and would take too long to assemble and strike. Hence the unavoidable counterattack might be delayed long enough for the British infantry to secure its hold on the conquered terrain. On the morning of the actual attack, the artillery fire would be shifted and concentrated upon a very small part of the German line, less than three miles wide.

On September 20, four divisions of Second Army attacked in the direction of Menin, on a front line of 4000 yards [i.e. one division for each 1,000 yards, or ten men for each yard, ¶]. The weight of the concentrated artillery attack upon a target of only a few thousand yards' depth and the density of the infantry assault following the fusillade eventually drove the defenders back a few thousand yards, as did subsequent assaults on Polygon Wood and Broodseinde. The Germans realized that the British made use of an issue unsolved in the German defensive strategy: the question in which distance to park the counterattack divisions. Were they too far away, they were safe from the enemy's artillery but might take too long to join the action. Were they close to the front and ready to move in, they became targets for the hostile batteries. The latter was what had happened in the encounter at Broodseinde, where 4th Guard Division was caught too close to the front and suffered heavy losses from Plumer's guns.

As a consequence, Ludendorff ordered the counterattack divisions further back, which decreased their ability to mount quick and nimble counterattacks in favour of massive counterthrusts with accompanying artillery barrages. Both sides' tactics resembled now "as if by consultation ... each other exactly. The attackers were to shatter the defenders with a monstrous weight of shellfire and occupy the narrow belt of ground on which it had fallen. The defenders were then to repeat the process in the opposite direction, hoping to regain the ground lost." (28) The futility of such seesawing did not seem to perturb Haig.

He continued the attacks, seemingly immune to the appalling fate suffered by his men. On October 12, he sent 3rd Australian and the New Zealand Division to conquer a modest hillside of some fifty yards height east of Ypres, upon whose crest the village of Passchendaele looked down to the town. Haig had taken the liberty to inform the British press of the offensive's success on October 9 - three days before it started - but the eventual results failed to follow the predictions. When it reached the Germans' Second Flanders Line, the assault ran into a meat grinder, and when the ANZAC's faced German crossfire from the west of the village's remains, they had to return empty-handed. Nearly continuous rainfall had



THE BATTLEFIELD AT PASSCHENDAELE (THIRD YPRES)

softened the ground so thoroughly that British artillery shells disappeared in the mud without exploding. It was subsequently called the "First Battle of Passchendaele".

Undaunted, Haig sent ahead the four divisions of the Canadian Corps. On October 26, the 3rd and 4th Canadian divisions broke through the first German line and advanced about five hundred yards; four days later they gained a bit more. On November 6, the 1st and 2nd Canadian divisions took over and managed to conquer Passchendaele, by now a gigantic swamp, devoid of structures, natural or man-made. By November 10 the gains were consolidated, but eventually, this "Second Battle of Passchendaele" ended in yet another bloody stalemate. The tally of the Passchendaele battles, or "Third Ypres", as it is known in the alternative, came to almost 300,000 casualties on the British and approximately 260,000 on the German side [July 31 - November 10, 1917]. Apparently, Field Marshal Haig considered it a good investment.

The more so, when Colonel John Fuller, a tank specialist, reiterated a proposal he had made earlier in the year, namely to use the new weapon in a raid against a quiet sector of the front, southeast of Arras, near Cambrai. By the fall of 1917, Haig could well use a victory, any victory, whatever the size, since his Passchendaele operation still failed to meet expectations. His penchant for size, however, changed the idea of a small foray into enemy territory to a complete breakthrough attempt. Two problems remained: the mud might constrain the tanks' mobility too much once they were off the relatively dry ground around Cambrai, and tank crews and infantry had not had much practice in cooperative tactics yet.

Nevertheless, on November 20, General Byng's Third Army stood ready on a front of about six miles southwest of Cambrai; eight infantry divisions with three hundred tanks and about 1,000 pieces of artillery. They were opposed by only two German divisions, the 20th and 54th Landwehr, i.e. Reserve Class II, divisions. But in one of the war's eerie coincidences, the commander of 54th Landwehr, the better of the two, General von Walter, an artillery man by trade, was one of the few German officers aware of the possibilities of tanks and had trained his gunners in the engagement of moving targets.

The main task of the tanks was to crush the wire, and thus the machines had to be used at the leading edge of the assault, to clear the way for the infantry. Alas, General Harper, commander of the 51st Highland Division, at the very centre of the operation, was afraid that the tanks would attract German artillery fire needlessly endangering his infantrymen, and insisted on reversing the order of battle: the men marched ahead with the tanks, about 150 metres behind, in their wake.

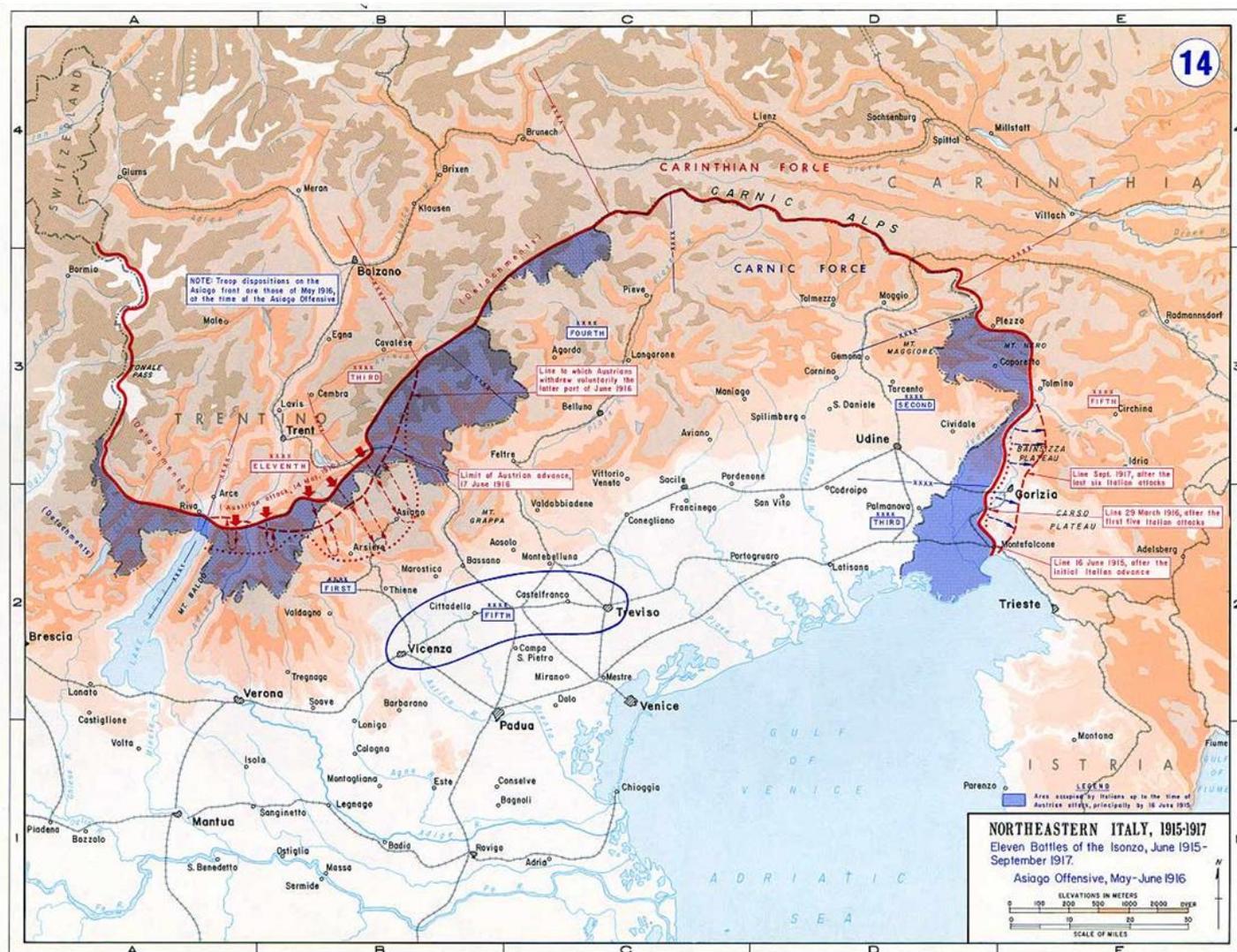
As seen below on Map XLII, the attack began well: by noon of November 20, the tanks had rolled up to four miles into the German trenches, which had been deserted by their panicked occupants. Losses were uncommonly low, at least at the wings, but a problem arose in the centre, where the tanks accompanying Harper's Highlanders were taken out by the well-aimed fire of Walter's gunners as soon as they became visible on the crest line west of the villages of Flesquieres and Graincourt. Although the Scots had the town of Cambrai in their sights by the end of the day, the loss of the tanks allowed the Germans to plug the holes. The dotted line on Map LXIII shows the area gained by November 26, and the success was celebrated by the ringing of victory bells over England. The inevitable counterattack on November 30, however, was far stronger than Haig had anticipated, because Rupprecht had been able to gather twenty divisions for the task. They took back the ground the British had gained on the right flank and then some [Map LXIII, Square D 1, ¶]. After the gun smoke had cleared by early December, both sides realized that they had but traded forth and back the same five square miles.

But the true strategic threat of 1917 lingered in the East, where no British troops could influence the outcome. The problem was, in simple terms, that Germany had a second army in the East, and if she was able to beat the Russians, redeploy and counterattack on the Western Front with superior strength before American units could arrive in sufficient numbers to save distressed Britannia, she might win the war irrespectively of the American effort to save their British loans.

In the war's southern theatre, the Austro-Italian front at the Isonzo, important operations took place parallel to the Entente offensives of autumn 1917. The Italian C-in-C, Cadorna, had continued to unleash offensives along the narrow river valley approximately every three months: between May 1915 and August 1917, ten attacks had cost Italy losses in the neighbourhood of a million men, and perhaps half that number on the Austrian side. Map LXIV depicts the meagre results.

The Eleventh Battle of the Isonzo, fought between August 19 and September 12, yielded mixed results all over again; a south-eastern thrust of Third Army in the direction of Gorizia and Trieste was swiftly blocked, but Second Army, advancing in north-eastward direction, along the Isonzo, captured the western half of the Bainsizza Plateau [Map LXIV, DE 2-3]. The Italian success caused the new Austrian Emperor Karl, who had followed Francis Joseph on the throne in November 1916, to ask for German assistance. A new 14th Army was established, commanded by Otto von Below, from seven specially selected German and six Austrian divisions. Among the German units were the 117th Division which had collected mountain experience in prolonged service in the Carpathians during the Romanian campaign, the 200th Division which sported ski troops, and the famous Alpenkorps, the Bavarian mountain troops, and their cousins of the Württemberg Mountain Battalion, one of whose companies was commanded by a certain Lieutenant Erwin Rommel. The numbers were still on the side of the defenders. The Italian forces numbered thirty-four divisions, supported by 2,485 guns, against thirty-five attacking units with 2,430 guns; an almost even match which, given the superiority of the defence so far in the war, much disfavoured the Germans and Austrians. (29)

MAP LXIV: SITUATION AFTER ELEVEN BATTLES AT THE ISONZO



It were the defenders' dispositions, however, which aided the Austro-German plot. Cadorna had left the bulk of the Italian front troops along the river valley which, at Tolmino, curves from a north-easterly direction to the northwest, to the town

of Caporetto or Karfreit, in German. The closest reserves were twenty miles away near Gorizia. Worse, the enemy still manned the heights just east of Tolmino and north of Caporetto, at Piazza, and thus was well informed about the Italian deployment; a dual thrust from Piazza southwards and from the east of Tolmino would trap the flower of the Italian Second Army along the river, between Caporetto and Tolmino.

That, in a nutshell, was what happened. The German and Austrian point divisions reached their positions undetected by the evening of October 23, 1917. They were, from Austria, the 22nd Division, composed of local Slovenians familiar with the terrain and the 8th Division which harboured what was left of the famous Tyrolean KAISERJÄGER.

On the German side, the ALPENKORPS led the way. They descended from the heights, and, by circumventing the Italian strongpoints using what was later known as INFILTRATION TACTICS, trapped four whole divisions of the Italian Second Army between Tolmino and Caporetto. Not only did the Italian forces collapse without further ado, the advance of the Austro-German units westward in the direction of Udine, once they were out of the Isonzo valley, threatened to implode the entire eastern Italian front.

That, on the third day of the battle, Lieutenant Rommel, aided by a corporal and a platoon, was able to receive the capitulation of a whole Italian regiment, 1,500 men strong, without any other German troops present, exposed the brittleness of the Italian army. Defeat became a rout, and attempts to establish new defensive lines at the Tagliamento and Livenza Rivers failed. Alarm bells rang at the Allied headquarters, and eleven British and French divisions under General Plumer were dispatched to northern Italy post haste. With their aid, the retreat was eventually halted at the Piave River, northeast of Venice, where the pursuers outran their supply lines. Within eleven days, they had gained almost eighty miles, pushed the enemy from the mountains to the sea and captured over a quarter million Italian prisoners.

A positive effect, if overdue, for the much weakened Italian army was that, after a million casualties, the demented martinet Cadorna was sacked. The Allies recognized that coordination among the participants had to be improved and established, soon after Caporetto, as the Twelfth Battle of the Isonzo became known, a permanent war council staffed by the government heads.

While the French mutinies, the lesser British successes or the Italian debacle could be taken as normal manifestations of the ups and downs of war, the situation in Russia became disorderly. The transient success of the Brusilov Offensive had given way to another stalemate, and when STAVKA began to organise the spring offensives their envoys had promised at the third conference in Chantilly in December 1916, the moral crisis that had simmered among the Russian privates flared up. There was a widespread feeling that the war could not be won in any way, and a desire for peace no matter the consequences engulfed the lower ranks.

The onset of the war had united strange bedfellows without a consistent vision for the future après-war. In her own alliance, Russia's position was strange enough: the authoritarian monarchy of the Czar stood allied with the French post-revolutionary republic and the British constitutional monarchy in a triangle of heterogeneous interests, temporarily united by the negative goal of keeping Germany from winning the war. Considering their domestic problems, the Russians were lucky in that the winter of 1916/17 was extremely severe and forbade greater German operations which might have undone the Czar's troops.

Who had suffered, by the end of 1916, approximately 6.5 million casualties; killed, wounded, captured. The fact that Czar Nicholas II, a plodder, had taken control of STAVKA personally in September 1915 did not improve the mood of the country: the losses were laid at his door. Neither did it help that the Imperial family and the high nobility continued to live in luxury, nor that the Czarina Alexandra was, of course, a German princess. The worst trouble however, of economic nature, emanated from a runaway industrial boom.

Industrial mobilisation in Russia, financed by an enormous expansion of paper credit and abandonment of budgeting balanced by gold, had created a relentless demand for labour, met by releasing skilled workers from the ranks - hence so much of the discontent among peasant soldiers who did not qualify for a return to

civilian life - and by a migration of exempt peasants, those who could show family responsibilities, from the land to the cities, where cash incomes were far higher than those won, often by barter, on the farm. Migrant peasants also found work in the mines, where employment doubled between 1914 and 1917, on the railways, in the oilfields, in building and, above all, in factories; state factories more than tripled their workforce during the war.

Higher wages and paper money brought rapid inflation, inevitable in a country with an unsophisticated treasury and banking system, and inflation had a particularly disruptive effect on agricultural output. Large landowners took land out of production because they could not afford the threefold increase in wages, while peasants, unwilling or unable to pay high prices for trade goods, withdrew from the grain market and reverted to self-subsistence.

At the same time the railways, though employing 1,200,000 men in 1917, against 700,000 in 1914, actually delivered less produce to the cities, partly because of the demands made on them by the armies, partly because the influx of unskilled labour led to a decline in maintenance standards. By the beginning of 1917, at a time when exceptionally low temperatures had increased demand, supplies of fuel and food to the cities had almost broken down. In March, the capital, [now "Petrograd", ¶] had only a few days' supply of grain in its warehouses. (30)

These developments had not escaped the attention of the German General Staff, which had assisted underground movements bent on revolution in various countries from 1914 on. It provided monetary and promised military assistance to every group that claimed to work against the Allied governments; in the same way Great Britain funnelled monies and guns to separatist movements in the Austrian Balkans and the Ottoman Empire.

None of these undertakings appeared to bear much fruit in the years between 1914 and 1917, with the possible exception of the Irish Easter Sunday uprising of 1916, which, as it has been pointed out, occurred despite German aid, not because of it. The situation was different in the Czarist Empire. The German General Staff and the Foreign Office had been interested observers of the bloody subjugation of the rebellion of 1905. Russia, with her reactionary government, corrupt and authoritarian judiciary and pre-modern agriculture was an obvious candidate for subversion; a fruit ripe for revolution. In some ways she resembled Austria's ethnic multiplicity: in her western parts alone, Finns, Poles, Estonians, Lithuanians, Latvians and Ukrainians vied for opportunities to break away, as did the ethnic minorities along the Caucasus, Middle and Far Eastern borders.

By the fall of 1914, the German Foreign Office considered several options how to eliminate Czarist Russia by means of internal revolution and began a vetting of suitable revolutionary groups. From its own experiences with the diversity of socialist movements the German government was aware that the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP) had split in 1913 into the Menshevik ["Minority"] and Bolshevik ["Majority"] factions; the latter committed to world revolution.

At first glance, there were dozens, perhaps hundreds of communist underground movements to choose from in 1914, among which the Bolsheviks were not the biggest. But they were among the few socialist groups which had denied the Czar War credits in August 1914. This act, alas, did not aid their popularity in the patriotic fever of this summer, and a number of their leaders had to go underground or into exile, or were jailed in Siberia.

The leadership-in-exile of the Bolsheviks was located in Switzerland whither Herr Uljanov had reposed after his studies in Munich, a few secret visits to Russia and a stint in Vienna. An initial contact to the German government had been provided by a shady Estonian communist named Alexander Keskuela, who established communication between the Bolsheviks and the German embassy in Bern. The Foreign Office in Berlin had its doubts about Lenin's clique and decided to obtain an opinion from the eminence grise of German Marxism, Alexander Helphand, before they would commit themselves.

Helphand, nicknamed "Parvus", Latin for "small one" because of his enormous girth, was a living legend among socialists. Born in the vicinity of Minsk in 1867, he had become an activist in early years. After fleeing the Okhrana, the

Czar's secret police, he settled in Germany where he became one of the most important journalists and writers of the Socialist International. His acquaintances included the greats of early communism: Karl Liebknecht, Rosa Luxemburg, Herrn Uljanov or "Lenin" and, in particular, Herrn Leo Bronstein, who called himself "Leon Trotsky".

Helphand and Trotsky risked to return to Russia in 1905 to support the nascent revolution but were swiftly arrested and jailed. They shared a prison cell and the Okhrana torture regimen before they were dutifully convicted of terrorism and deported to Siberia. Luckily, they were soon able to escape and Helphand returned to Germany. Back in the hot water of the socialist schism into reformers and revolutionaries, he endured not only political but family troubles as well, whose detrimental influence he escaped by moving to Constantinople, where he set up an international trading company specialized in contraband. At the beginning of the war, he rapidly amassed a fortune by providing the hapless Turkish government with wartime supplies, calculated with generous profit margins. He was tipped off about the discrete inquiries of the German government regarding revolutionary groups and contacted the German ambassador. As it turned out soon, the interests of the Foreign Office and of the Bolsheviki were compatible: the fall of the Romanovs, civil revolution, and the termination of Russian participation in the war.

Helphand visited Berlin for a few weeks in February 1915. Nothing is known about the details of the discussions he had at Wilhelmstrasse, but the plan of action he composed has survived, on twenty-three pages. The scheme proposed to undermine, and eventually depose, the Czarist government by mass strikes in Petrograd and other key cities, political agitation in the factories and on the streets, the mobilization of national and ethnical minorities, the destruction of important bridges, the wrecking of railways, and the seizure of jails and the release of the prisoners. The latter would not only free the political detainees but would further enervate civil society and social peace by releasing common criminals. The Foreign Office was impressed by Helphand's handiwork and supplied a passport, a ton of dynamite and one million Reichsmark in cash for preliminary expenses. Helphand left for Switzerland at the end of May 1915.

Here the story takes a somewhat unexpected turn. One might have expected that Lenin's cabal were to take the gifts and head off to Petrograd, throwing bombs left and right, but, for the moment, Lenin declined the offer. In his opinion, Russia was not only far down on the list of countries preferred as targets of revolution, as long as the war was still popular, the inner condition of the country was not yet ripe for insurrection. In addition, he grumbled, no self-respecting revolutionary could do business with Kaiser Wilhelm, the great enemy of socialists. All that Lenin really wanted at that time was to lay his hands on money enough to publish a European communist newspaper.

Nothing yet decided, Helphand returned to the contraband trade. With the help and connivance of the German embassies in Copenhagen, Denmark and Stockholm, Sweden, he set up various Import/Export companies which flourished in the rarefied atmosphere of wartime economy. He traded in everything and sold to both sides; only much later did the governments of his partners realize that many of the go-betweens and middlemen Helphand used had been communist sympathizers, who had channelled enormous sums into the revolutionary war chests.

Meanwhile, civil order in Russia disintegrated.

The road to civil war began in Petrograd, as the Russian capital had been renamed during the war as a sop to national sentiment ("Sankt Petersburg" had too German a ring to it). Nicholas II, a pious, puritanical man of limited intellectual capacity, came to regard ruling Russia as one long test of inner strength.

He worked himself hard, as if determined to prove the veracity of his claim that he was "the crowned worker". "I do the work of three men," he had declared. "Let everyone learn to do the work of at least two." Unfortunately the two other jobs he relished doing - rather more, it would appear, than that of Tsar - were those of secretary and gardener. While conditions at the front deteriorated, he doggedly ploughed through routine correspondence, pausing only to sweep the snow from his own paths.

His German-born wife, the Empress Alexandra, did not help, having embraced her own caricature version of Orthodoxy and autocracy. "Ah my love," she wrote to him (in English, as in all their correspondence), "when at last will you thump with your hand upon the table & scream at [your ministers] when they act wrongly [?] -

one does not fear you - & one must.... Be Peter the G., John [Ivan] the Terrible, Emp. Paul - crush them all under you - now don't you laugh, naughty one."

It was hopeless. To the last, Nicholas declined to "bellow at the people left right & centre." On December 16, 1916, the royal couple's charismatic and corrupt holy man Rasputin was murdered by the Tsar's own cousin, Grand Duke Dimitry, aided and abetted by the effete Prince Felix Yusupov and a right-wing politician named V. M. Purishkevich, in the belief that the monk was exercising a malign influence on the Tsar and on Russian foreign policy.

But things did not improve. Deserted by his own generals in what amounted to a mutiny in early March 1917, Nicholas agreed to abdicate, complaining bitterly of "treachery, cowardice and deceit." Neither he nor his wife ever understood the revolution that was now unfolding. Indeed, Alexandra's comment on its outbreak deserves wider celebrity as one of the great misdiagnoses of history: "It's a hooligan movement, young boys & girls running about & screaming that they have no bread, only to excite - ... if it were cold they wld. probably stay in doors." [Sic!] (31)

Like the French Revolution of 1789, the Russian February Revolution did not begin as a political undertaking but as a rising of famished peasants and workers. Hunger riots were nothing new to Czarist Russia, the standard reaction of the regime throughout the Romanov reign being to suppress them: by the police, if possible, by the army, if necessary. But in this early spring, the Czar lacked decisiveness, giving the impression of being a mere tool in the hands of his advisors, relatives and courtiers; this lack of decisiveness decreased his government's authority and fed the insurrection.

As in Paris 1789, women in search of food eventually confronted the powers-that-be. The mood of the burghers had worsened over the food and fuel shortages of the winter, and their furor began to express itself in demonstrations; starting on January 9, the twelfth anniversary of the "Blood Sunday" of 1905, when the insurrection of the fleet's sailors and their sympathizers had been drowned in a river of blood by the Cossacks, the Czar's bloodhounds. The streets of the capital were taken by 140,000 strikers on January 22 and over 200,000 on February 25, who seemed to overpower the regular police [all dates Russian, i.e. Julian calendar; add 13 days to get Gregorian calendar equivalent, ¶].

On February 27, the demonstrations turned violent all over the town and by the next day parts of the Petrograd military called upon to quell the burghers' ire by force not only refused to fire on the protesters, but took to the street themselves in support of reform or revolution. By March 11, 170,000 of the 180,000 men of the garrison had gone over to the protesters; only the Cossack guards followed the Czar's order to stamp out the rebellion. A sergeant of the Finland Guards remembered:

"I saw a young girl trying to evade the galloping horse of a Cossack officer. She was too slow. A severe blow on the head brought her down under the horse's feet. She screamed. It was her inhuman, penetrating scream that caused something in me to snap. I cried out wildly: 'Fiends! Fiends! Long live the revolution. To arms! To arms! They are killing innocent people, our brothers and sisters!'" (32)

Like Louis XVI, Nicolas II seems to have believed that the riots were nothing but another temporary upheaval of the kind that had successfully been defeated in 1905. It is not clear when he was informed about the Petrograd garrison's change of side and the political elites following the army's example. As did the police, secret or not; without its instruments of repression the throne of the Romanovs as well as the rule of the Russian aristocracy was doomed.

The Czarist government lost the control of events by the end of February, and the power vacuum was filled by a strange duality of parliament and self-organization of the street. After protracted discussion, the Duma, the Russian parliament, formed a "Provisional Committee" on February 27 which, in good time, would supervise the creation of a new government. On the street, "Soviets" ['Councils', ¶] formed by workers and soldiers took over the organization of the public affairs and eventually transferred authority to the "Ispolkom", a committee representing all organized political parties, from conservatives to liberals, and from reform socialists, the Mensheviks, to the revolutionary Bolsheviks.

The generals at the Czar's headquarter in Mogilev proposed to send a few corps under General Ivanov to exterminate the insurgents, a proposal the Czar, credit where credit due, declined. On March 1 he transferred to his summer palace of Tsarskoe Selo for prolonged consultations with his advisors. The following day, he granted the Duma permission to form a cabinet, i.e. a new civil government and agreed to abdicate.

The Czar's abdication immediately posed not only the question of the succession but whether the war would, or could, be prolonged at all. The generals were (correctly) afraid that the country could not go through a revolution without rupturing the (not very firm) cohesion of the army, and that the revolution would ensue military defeat by Germany. Hence the revolution was treasonous in nature and had to be subdued at whatever the cost.

The Czar's abdication on March 2 left the country leaderless: Grand Duke Michael, next in line, was offered the post but was unwilling to serve; the Tsarevich Alexey was willing to serve but his application was denied by the Duma. For the worse, a ukase agreed on by both Duma and Ispolkom on March 3 dismissed all provincial governors and dissolved the Russian police forces. No governmental structures survived in wide parts of the country except for local councils and the responsibility for national political, economical, military, diplomatic and all other affairs the Ispolkom relegated to itself. (33)

Yet the issues of national leadership and the continuation of the war remained a work-in-progress. For the lack of alternatives, Duma and Ispolkom agreed to continue the war, if for different reasons: the Soviets strove to protect the revolution by keeping the generals on the front, away from the cities; the Duma for the nationalistic fervour which they hoped would aid their case.

As far as administration went, the Duma instituted, in mid-March, a "Provisional Government", whose task it would be to manage the country and the war until general elections could legitimate a Constituent Assembly which then would take over matters. The "Provisional Government" was chiefly composed of middle-class men of liberal or moderate socialist pedigree, under the leadership of Prime Minister Prince Georgi Lvov, himself a liberal member of the Duma. The dominating personality of the body was Justice Minister Alexander Kerensky, a member of impeccable standing in the Socialist Revolutionaries, who, despite their martial name, represented agrarian interests and the small-town bourgeoisie. He rose swiftly: by May 18 he was Minister of War and by July 21 Prime Minister. By mid-spring, Kerensky's government was able to check its fiercest opponents, the Bolsheviks, by a populist call for a renewed war effort. Kerensky began to purge the all-too-monarchist and all-too-defeatist General Staff, made Brusilov its chief, and sent envoys to the front lines to rekindle a warlike spirit.

The German Foreign Office, which had followed developments in Petrograd closely, was perplexed at the news that both the Provisional Government and the Petrograd Soviet had declared themselves in support of war. It seemed that the power in Petrograd was in the hand of the wrong insurgents, and the German embassy in Basel reopened the contacts to Lenin's group. They were aware that the Bolsheviks were the sole Russian party to oppose war; perhaps an agreement might be in the offing.

Lenin and the exiled leadership of the Bolsheviks were understandably eager to return to Russia but wartime conditions complicated their plans. They could not risk travelling through French- or English-controlled territory because these countries were aware of the Bolsheviks' anti-war policy and would certainly detain them. The only possible route was, as a few recent émigrés proposed, by train through Germany and Scandinavia to the Russian border in Finland; this route, however, depended on the cooperation of the German authorities.

Lenin's proposal slowly climbed up the diplomatic ladder until it reached Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg and Hindenburg, by now Chief of OHL. They authorized a train and an allowance of three million Reichsmark for preliminary expenses. More money was to flow later.

Three days before Easter Sunday 1917, a strange party assembled at the Central Railway Station of Zurich, Switzerland, to board a train carrying two sealed compartments. These were but a ruse that allowed Lenin to pretend independence of German assistance. Among the thirty-one fellow travellers that boarded were Lenin, his closest assistants and a few family members. The train proceeded through Frankfurt, Berlin and Copenhagen to the Danish coast vis-a-vis

Sweden where a ferry was taken. In Sweden, a different train conveyed the party to the small frontier station of Haparanda, where the border to Russia could be crossed without fanfare but the tacit understanding of the provisional government in Petrograd. In the next twelve months, incoming trains from Germany kept the little border station busy, delivering hundreds of Bolshevik cadres and millions of Reichsmark to assist the overthrow of the Kerensky government.

On the evening of April 16, 1917, at 11 p.m., Lenin and his party arrived in Petrograd, to be greeted, to their surprise, by a welcome party arranged by the Petrograd Soviet, complete with red flags and a brass band; a delegation of the Provisional Government passed greetings to the man who would have many of them executed soon. Lenin was immediately briefed about recent developments, which included the unwelcome news reported by the Bolshevik newspaper PRAVDA ["Truth", ¶], that the Petrograd Soviet, with the support of both the Kerensky government and the Bolsheviks, had voted for the continuation of the war; the local party leadership apparently thought the time not yet ripe for the second revolution.

Lenin delivered a speech right at the ramp of the railway station, standing on the dais customarily used by the station's conductor general. It was the first of a series of lectures which became known as the "April Theses" or "Peace, Land and Bread" addresses; their demands included the non-recognition of the Provisional Government's authority, the immediate preparation of the second revolution, the nationalization of banks, newspapers and factories, the conversion of the army into a socialist militia, an end to the war and the concentration of all power in the hands of the Soviets (which the Bolsheviks were soon to control).

This was too much too fast, and even a significant faction of his Bolshevik brethren refused to follow these policies. They had not yet realized what Lenin had perceived all too clearly: the pre-war order of the Russian society was doomed, and so were the nobility's and the bourgeoisie's efforts to hang on to the past. What he wanted to avoid was to wait until a Constituent Assembly would yield apparently legitimate power against which it would be much harder to proceed.

But Lenin had what none of the competition had - ready money. The German government kept the purse open in the hope that a Bolshevik revolution would take Russia out of the war and might offer a chance for a decisive stroke on the Western Front whence the troops currently employed in the East could be moved.

The paper mark had lost value considerably but the Germans paid in Gold marks, which, under the circumstances prevailing in Russia, continued to skyrocket against the failing rouble.

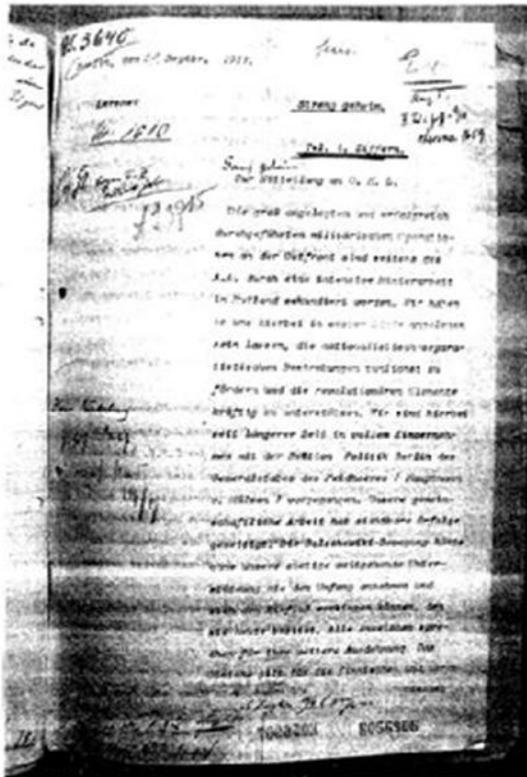
Lenin's German connection stayed busy and delivered the goods. Following strict accounting procedures, the German Foreign Office requested receipts for every expense. Lenin handled this demand creatively: the company which printed PRAVDA billed the Bolsheviks for the 80,000 specimens actually produced, while the Bolsheviks billed Kaiser Wilhelm for 300,000.

A secret archive of the Foreign Office was opened in 2006 and delivered astonishing glimpses into the Russo-German cooperation. The German Deputy Secretary of State Richard von Kühlmann, for example, informed Hindenburg, Ludendorff and the Kaiser that "without the regular support of the Foreign Ministry, the Bolshevik movement could never have grown as big and influential as it is now."

Only German money had enabled the Bolsheviks "to create and run the 'Pravda', to effect broad agitation and enlarge the basis of their party." (34) A German treasury document reveals that one single payment to the Bolsheviks, in June 1918, amounted to forty million Reichsmark; all in all the Kaiser's contribution to Lenin's cause must have exceeded RM 100,000,000, an enormous sum at that time, but certainly cheaper than a war [see Photographs XLIV and XLV below, ¶].

It is impossible to come up with a definitive number on the German financial aid, but estimates lead us in the direction of at least one hundred million Reichsmark - a veritable fortune. Below an exchange of letters from the files of Richard von Kühlmann discussing German support for the Bolsheviks (reproduced from an old photocopy as the original was lost).

The Sponsors of the Revolution - Secret Files from the German Foreign Office



Berlin, Sept. 29, 1917

Top Secret

Message to Army High Command

The great and successful military operations on the Eastern Front have been supported by the Foreign Office through intensive seditious work in Russia. We have particularly aimed at encouraging the nationalist-separatist movements and to fortify the revolutionary elements. We have proceeded in this in full cooperation with the Political Section of the Great General Army Staff (Captain v.Huelsen). Our mutual work has resulted in visible success. Without our assistance and provisions the Bolshevik Movement would never have been able to grow this fast and to acquire the influence it has today. All signs indicate their further expansion. The same is true for the Finnish and Ukrainian separatist movements ...

The Secretary of State
of the Treasury
SECRET Z.B. 965

June 11, 1918

Dear Kuehlmann !

Regarding your note of June 8th, with which you sent me the Document No.: 2562 regarding Russia, I am willing to agree to an application without mentioning of purpose for the sum of 40 Million Marks for the suggested use.

Signature

Letter to the State Secretary of the Foreign
Office, Kuehlmann



Meanwhile the power duality of Duma and Soviet, which had continued uneasily, approached a crisis in July. On June 18, 1917, the Russian army opened what became known as the "Kerensky Offensive," for the new minister of war, and on behalf of the Provisional Government, with an attack of Seventh and Eleventh Armies east of Ternopol in north-westerly direction, aimed at Lemberg [see Map LXVI, p.666, ¶]. After initial success, much due to the desertion of the Czech Infantry Regiments 35 and 75 to the Russians, the assault was halted, countered, and the ensuing retreat turned into a rout, allowing the German response to gain up to sixty miles southeast, in the direction of Mogilev [Map XLIV, red arrows, ¶].

In the Baltic, another German attack conquered Riga, the most important harbour town on the Baltic coast in the first week of September, and a follow-up in mid-October took the isles of Ösel and Dagö, which control the access to the Gulf of Riga.

Kerensky's gamble ended in calamity and prompted a widespread abandonment of military discipline; insubordination and desertion became the order of the day. Almost coincidentally with Kerensky's flop at Ternopol, on July 16, the Bolsheviks initiated an uprising. The dilettante attempt was put down by the Provisional Government, if barely, Trotsky was captured and arrested and Lenin went back into hiding. His political influence was diminished by Kerensky's spreading rumours of the Bolsheviks being financed by the Germans, but the Provisional Government's authority faded even quicker after the "July Events", as the aborted putsch was called. Kerensky was determined to keep the military leadership loyal to his administration and replaced, on August 1, Brusilov with General Lavr Kornilov. This proved a mistake. Kornilov, born 1870 of Siberian Cossacks, was a popular man, a soldiers' soldier, a courageous and charismatic megalomaniac. His aims were, in that order, to eradicate defeatism, i.e. the Bolsheviks, and all other socialist and liberal traitors, restore authoritative government, that is, *his* authoritative government, and defeat Germans, Austrians and Turks.

In pursuit of Step One, he ordered General Krymov's 3rd Cavalry Corps to Petrograd, at the end of August, with instructions to disarm or shoot unreliable elements, which chiefly, but not exclusively, meant Bolsheviks. He only wanted to save the RODINA, the motherland, he said - perhaps for himself?

Kerensky now realized the magnitude of his error: Kornilov's counterrevolution would not only be directed against the Bolsheviks but his own Provisional Government, the Petrograd Soviet and the garrison as well. He decided to arm any volunteers the Petrograd Soviet could mobilize against Kornilov, including, fatally, the Bolsheviks. The Soviet also dispatched agitators to meet Krymov's troops advancing to the capital; their mission of fraternization proved so successful that Krymov committed suicide in mid-September when his soldiers deserted. Kornilov collected the few loyal units he still commanded in a feeble effort at a military putsch; the enterprise failed pathetically, the troops disintegrated and Kornilov was arrested and cashiered, together with fellow generals and future civil war commanders Denikin and Markov.

Thus Kerensky had averted the instant military threat, but with the dismissal of the popular Kornilov he lost all support from the right and the moderates without gaining any sympathy on the left. (35) The Bolsheviks, now armed, prepared for the showdown and by early October mounted a propaganda drive which demanded to transfer all power to the soviets and to arrest the Provisional Government. This was, of course, a tactical ruse: all Lenin, now in firm command of the party, needed was pretence, and the war soon provided one. The German success in the Baltic had put them in a position whence they threatened the capital directly, and the Kerensky government proposed to move the seat of power to Moscow. This was perhaps Kerensky's decisive mistake, for the Bolsheviks claimed the proposal was but high treason and an obvious ploy to move power from Petrograd, where the soviets, i.e. "the people", were in control, to reactionary Moscow.

In late September, Leon Trotsky was elected chairman of the Petrograd Soviet. A "Military Revolutionary Committee" was established in mid-October and tasked with the defence of the capital. The committee commanded all available military forces: not only the Petrograd garrison but also the Latvian Rifles, a former elite division now converted to communism, i.e. the Bolsheviks' fifth column. The august body was - conveniently - directed by Trotsky as well. Kerensky transferred himself, the rest of the Provisional Government and the few remaining loyalists to the Winter Palace, seat of the Czars since Peter the Great, and awaited developments.

With this move he fatally constricted his base. In the vacuum he left, Bolshevik soviets and nationalist committees composed of ethnic minorities intent on independence established themselves in big parts of the country and took over local command. In Petrograd, the Bolsheviks set up camp in the Smolny Institute, and Lenin moved in for the kill.

All eyewitnesses attest to the eerie, inexplicable calm that enveloped the city in the final days before the coup. Kerensky had surrounded his quarters at the Winter Palace with 800 troops, six armoured cars, six pieces of artillery and 19 machine guns. Both he and the commandant of the Petrograd garrison, Colonel Polkovnikov, expressed confidence that they were more than a match for the Bolsheviks. Not content to wait, on 5 November Kerensky ordered the arrest of the Military Revolutionary Committee, closed Bolshevik

newspapers and cut the telephone lines to Smolny. Additional troops thought loyal were brought in, including the 1st Petrograd Women's Battalion. Visible tension had now come to the city.

On Tuesday, 6 November, the Bolsheviks strengthened Smolny with barricades and artillery. Both sides began taking control of key points in the city, including the bridges. Kerensky called a session of his ministers, but nothing except scuffles in the street had taken place by evening. Lenin, waiting at a colleague's apartment, now penned a furious letter to the regional party committees, going directly to the membership, demanding immediate action. The letter ended with "The Government is tottering. We must deal it the death blow at any cost." He then moved directly to Smolny.

Kerensky meanwhile had been up all night. He positioned himself in the early hours of 7 November at the General Staff Building across the square from the Winter Palace where he issued orders to troops, who did not respond. Returning to the palace he took a moment's respite on the bed of Nicholas II before rising at 9 am to discover his phone connections dead and the closest bridge over the Neva River in Bolshevik hands.

The revolution that day assumed more of the proportions of a tragicomedy than the blazing epic portrayed in later years by Soviet movie propagandist Sergei Eisenstein. That morning, Kerensky decided to leave the city in order to raise loyal troops in person. This was not easy because Bolshevik sympathizers had disabled all Russian automobiles in the vicinity. Eventually, he convinced the American embassy to loan him a Renault car, which he said he would return in a few days. In the meantime, his staff also had commandeered a Pierce-Arrow car. Sitting in the Pierce-Arrow with the Renault in front, still flying the American flag from the hood, Kerensky raced off for the town of Gatchina and lunch.

Lenin also had been up most of the night. Wednesday, 7 November found him at Smolny with the Military Revolutionary Committee, demanding the coup go forward. At 10 am, he declared the deposition of the Provisional Government and Bolsheviks began plastering the announcements across the city. The government, however, still existed.

Throughout the day, Red Guards and sailors from Kronstadt [the principal naval base of Petrograd, ¶] gradually infiltrated the city and captured most strategic points in the central area. Entering the Mariinsky Palace that afternoon, they simply told the government officials to leave, and they did. By late afternoon all communications centres, railway terminals and major public buildings were in their hands. The garrison of Petrograd had stood idly by, refusing to take sides.

Meanwhile, the last of Kerensky's ministers had retreated to the Malachite Chamber of the Winter Palace to await events. Their defenders were a handful of cadets and the 1st Petrograd Women's Battalion, much of the other garrison having trickled away in sections. Upon this tiny group the Bolsheviks now focused their attention. According to convention, the defenders would be asked to surrender, and if they did not, a red lantern would be hoisted and the cruiser AURORA, anchored nearby, would commence firing on the Winter Palace.

In the end, the ultimatum was refused and the Bolsheviks, failing to find a red lantern, eventually shot off a purple flare. This was thought well enough and the AURORA started firing at 6:30 pm, but only with blank shells. Orders to have the guns at the Fortress of Peter and Paul start firing were to no avail because those guns had not been properly serviced. Eventually, at 11 pm, these were brought into line but 33 of the shells fell wide, only two hitting and damaging the plaster of inside rooms. In response, the cadets fired their machine guns into the dark and the Women's Battalion got up and left.

The last moments came at 2 am on 8 November when the Bolsheviks, who had already infiltrated the palace in force, prepared to enter the room where the remnants of Kerensky's ministers resided. One faithful cadet prepared to make the last stand, but the minister of justice declined to countenance violence. Military Revolutionary Committee member Vladimir Antonov-Ovseenko walked through the door at the head of his Bolshevik troops and announced the arrest of the Provisional Government.

Such was the vaunted October Revolution. Only six casualties resulted and these among the attackers. In Lenin's own words, the Party had "found power lying in the streets and simply picked it up".

As news of the revolution's success in Petrograd spread, similar uprisings occurred in most of Russia's cities. At noon on 7 November, the Bolsheviks in Moscow began forming a Military Revolutionary Committee while the mayor of the city, a Socialist Revolutionary, began organizing a Committee of Public Safety, both sides girdling for conflict.

Fifty thousand Red Guards, most hailing from the city's many factories, invaded the city centre and captured the ancient medieval fortress, the Kremlin. In response, on 9 November, the Committee of Public Safety directed its 10,000 men, consisting of officers, cadets and the still-dependable troops at its disposal to counter-attack. They recaptured the city centre, with the Kremlin falling the following day.

Over the next few days, Moscow's defenders held the city centre in street-to-street fighting while Lenin ordered reinforcements and arms into the city from outlying areas in support of the Reds. On 15 November the Kremlin was breached by artillery and the final Red Guard assault went in. The Bolsheviks suffered 228 killed, while the number of dead among the defenders went unrecorded.

As the new Bolshevik-dominated regime came to power, the struggle to retain that power began in earnest. On 13 November, the Petrograd Red Guards had successfully turned back General Krasnov's Cossacks at Pulkovo Heights, just outside the city. This ended the threat of Kerensky's counter-revolution. However, Russia was still technically at war with the Central Powers. Moreover, new nationalist states based on the peripheries of the now-broken empire began to declare independence: the Ukraine on 20 November, Finland on 6 December, and Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia in the early weeks of 1918.

Russia was in chaos. Industrial production had come to a standstill. Winter was coming and the scarcity of food in the hungry cities promised famine. Ominously, those discontented with the path of revolution began to gather. (36)

Most conveniently, Lenin and Trotsky were able to take over an assembly of delegates from councils originally convoked by the Kerensky administration, which was already in session in Petrograd. It was the "Second All-Russian Congress of Councils", and it might give a Bolshevik government the rubberstamp of national acquiescence. The august body had very little practical experience in anything and none in revolutionary activities, a field that was now familiar to the Bolsheviks. It was but a kinderspiel for Lenin and Trotsky to outwit them. The administrative body of the Congress was the "Central Committee", later the "Politburo", which was soon headed by Lenin with the assistance of Trotsky, Sverdlov and Stalin. They also controlled the "Council of Peoples Commissars" or SOVNARKOM, which functioned as a cabinet of specialists without political backing. From the beginning, the Bolsheviks erected the a dual system of political and party bodies which was to become the trademark of communist regimes; among the latter, for example, the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party or the General Secretary. (37)

The soviets proved to be an important means of Bolshevik political consolidation. Each soviet echelon, from highest to lowest, elected a Military Revolutionary Committee, an arm empowered to "take action" on behalf of the host soviet.

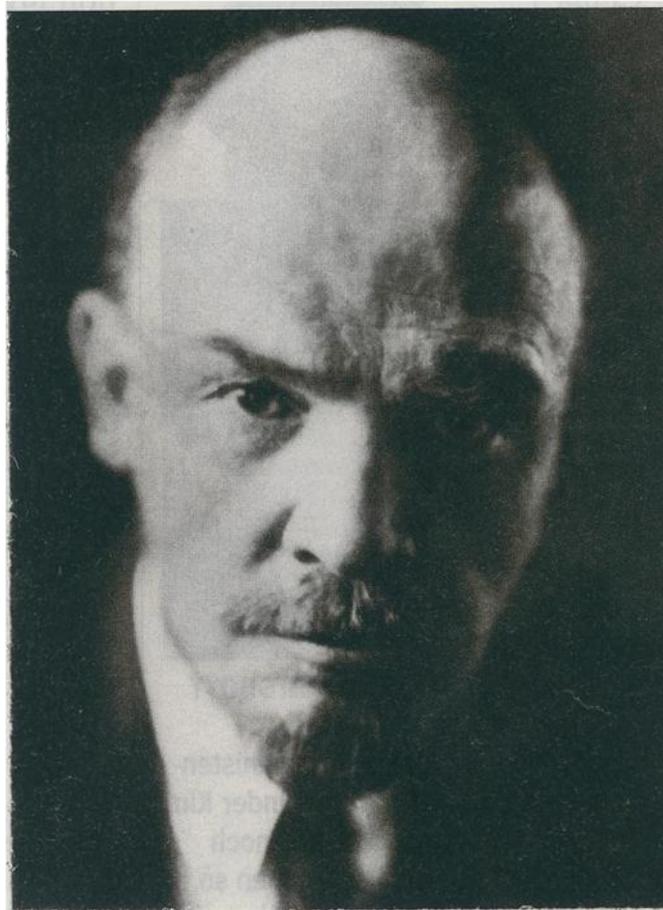
The factories, army units and larger cities tended to be dominated by the Bolshevik Party, a fact that gave Lenin an almost decisive advantage over his political opponents. In a word, the Bolsheviks had "troops", namely the revolutionized urban proletariat and factory workers, and the soldiers and sailors known as Red Guards. Beyond these, the Bolsheviks had the assured support of the elite Latvian Division, a "revolutionized" body of at least 18,000 men divided into ten regiments. Moreover, increasing control of the soviets, or at least the more critical ones, gave Lenin a loose command-and-control structure throughout Russia. As a result, all political rivals, from the Socialist Revolutionaries to the Anarchists and the Mensheviks, had been effectively neutralized by late spring 1918.

Given control of the cities and railways, the Bolsheviks could easily wield power in the countryside. Lenin further extended this power into the rural areas through his promotion of the "Committees of Village Poor", or Kombedy. The Bolsheviks promoted the destabilization of the countryside by setting the poorer peasants against the so-called 'middle peasants' who had slightly better living conditions, and especially against the hated kulaks or richer peasants. The Kombedy were encouraged, with Bolshevik blessing, to seize the holdings of richer peasants and if necessary through cooperative action with the Red Guards....

... These actions went hand-in-hand with the policy known as "loot the looters" taking place simultaneously in the towns and cities. Supporters of the Revolution were encouraged to take over all industrial enterprises, seize church property and local banks and take the possessions of the nobility and the middle classes or bourgeoisie.

These were cunning policies that won the Bolsheviks support from the poorer elements of society, whether urban or rural, and arguably established a grassroots base that would either actively promote, or at least acquiesce in, future Party actions. Official nationalization of property and the means of production began under the auspices of the Supreme Council of the National Economy in mid-1918. (38)

Meanwhile in Berlin, Kurt Riezler of the German Foreign Office noted in his diary: "The Bolsheviks are great guys and have done everything nice and well." (39) All that was required now, from the German point of view, was an armistice followed by a peace treaty.



VLADIMIR ILITCH ULJANOV, CALLED "LENIN"

The Bolshevik leadership was quite aware that, whatever their initial revolutionary success, a civil war was in the offing, and decided that they could not afford to fight two adversaries, i.e. their internal opponents and the Germans at the same time. The hardliners, especially Trotsky's supporters, had initially expected a bushfire of revolution to spread to Germany and on to Western Europe, but these dreams remained illusions. Russia had been far down on the list of countries targeted

for a revolutionary takeover: Germany - Karl Marx's and Friedrich Engels' country - topped the list, although France or even England might be acceptable. The normative power of reality soon began to change the Bolsheviks' outlook - better Russia than nothing.

On the question of war and peace, once it advanced from a useful political pretence to the realm of actual possibility, the Bolsheviks' opinions were far from unanimous: Lenin advocated peace at any price, for a continuance of the revolution and the defeat of monarchists and reactionaries; Bukharin and his comrades of the left wing, the anarchists, preferred to export the revolution by force, with troops they would find somehow, and Trotsky's faction believed time on their side: Germany, they argued, exposed to war on many fronts, her own and Austria's, was too weak to strike decisively in the East or to advance much further into Russian territory; there was time enough to sit the war out until the revolution was secured.



IOSEB BESARIONIS DZUJUGASHVILI (IOSIF VISSARIONOVICH), CALLED "STALIN", AND LEV DAVIDOVICH BRONSHTEIN, CALLED "LEON TROTSKY"

Trotsky, however, forgot to inform the German General Staff of this analysis and by December, German troops oblivious of their presumed infirmity advanced practically undisturbed to a line east of Riga, fifty miles east of Vilna, and ninety miles east of Brest-Litovsk. To a great degree, this progress was aided by the effects of the land decree Lenin had signed on November 8, expropriating all former landowners. The peasants deserted in droves, in pursuit of shares of land at home, and the Russian army all but disintegrated. Hapless officers threatening court-martials were ignored.

On November 26, Lenin ordered the Russian troops to cease fire, and on December 3 representatives of Germany, Austria-Hungary, Turkey, Bulgaria and Russia met in Brest-Litovsk to discuss an armistice. By December 16, a three-month cease-fire was signed, but the Bolsheviks, "with no hand to play", (40) began to delay the ensuing peace talks in the hope that revolution would break out in Germany and thus render a treaty superfluous. Soon the negotiations were hopelessly

mired in Trotsky's tergiversations and the Germans threatened to renew military action once the armistice ran out. When that failed to accelerate the negotiations, OHL launched Operation FAUSTSCHLAG ["fist strike", ¶], on February 17, 1918. Within a week German troops advanced over 150 miles and Lenin ordered Trotsky to sign the convention whatever the cost. On March 3, the Bolshevik government and Germany concluded the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk.



THE BOLSHEVIK DELEGATION, LED BY TROTSKY, ARRIVES IN BREST-LITOVSK EARLY DECEMBER 1917

The conditions of the treaty were brutal. Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and the Ukraine split off the Tsar's former empire to become independent nations; Russia lost approximately 300,000 square miles of land, a quarter of her population and industrial capacity and a third of her agrarian land. (41) Far more important to the victor, Russia's drop out of the war provided the Germans the chance to revert to what was, after Caporetto, essentially a single-front war in the West, against Great Britain and France. Speed was the parole of the day, to whisk the troops westward before the Americans arrived.

Yet Russia was to remain in the Western psyche, for what happened in the aftermath of the relatively unbloody October Revolution evoked a worldwide fear of Bolsheviks and Communism. Like the politicians of the 19th Century had used the fear of a French-style revolution, "la grande peur", to draw the bourgeoisie to support the monarchies and justify police terror in their respective countries, the fear of communism was remorselessly exploited after 1918 by politicians of all conservative, nationalist and/or reactionary colours, and perhaps most effectively by Adolf Hitler.

The legend goes that the style of Soviet governance inspired George Orwell. Below are photos which perhaps played a role as an idea in his novel "1984":

After his escape from the USSR and subsequent exile in Mexico, Leon Trotsky and Kamenev were airbrushed out the famous picture of Lenin speaking to the workers at Sverdlov Square. The doctored photo was used until Gorbachev's time - Trotsky had become an Orwellian "unperson".



THE FOUR HORSEMEN

*[Russian Communism is]
the illegitimate child of
Karl Marx and Catherine the Great.*

Clement Attlee, British Prime Minister, The Times, April 12, 1956

*While the state exists,
there can be no freedom.
When there is freedom,
there will be no state.*

Lenin, "State and Revolution" (1919) Ch. 5

Very soon after the October Revolution its opponents began to gather. They became known in general as the "Whites", although the common appellation hid the substantial differences between them.

Contrary to Soviet propaganda, most of the Whites were not monarchists. They had lived through the fall of the Tsar in March 1917 and the assassination of the royal family in July 1918. Indeed, General Mikhail Alexeyev had advised the Tsar to abdicate in 1917 and General Lavr Kornilov had actually arrested the Tsarina. Both men would become prominent leaders of the White movement later that year. Nevertheless, most of the Whites had felt comfortable enough under the Tsar's regime.

Officers and politicians who remained pro-monarchist attached themselves to each of the White armies because politically there was nowhere else for them to turn. Tension would surface in each of the White armies between those favouring the more democratic progressivism of the February Revolution and those who could not reconcile themselves to it. They made a common but uneasy cause against the Bolsheviks.

From November 1917 through the spring of 1918 and even beyond, those who would fight the civil war began to choose sides. Overall, the White armies were middle class in orientation but were amazingly heterogeneous. Their ranks contained the full spectrum of former Russian society, from peasant to noble. They were united only through their opposition to Bolshevism, a political movement that they regarded as anti-religious, anti-property, anti-business and anti-Russian. (1)

The social heterogeneity of the Whites prevented their achieving military or political unity. In theory, and as far as their propaganda went, the principal White "fronts", i.e. armies, paid lip service to such democratic procedures as a new Constituent Assembly would establish once the war was won. But they avoided taking definite positions on current issues, in particular on land reform. Denikin and Wrangel, the most important White generals, as well as Admiral Kolchak, each introduced his own preliminary measures, either recognizing or modifying the land confiscations that had transpired, in outbursts of revolutionary élan, at the village and county levels in the days of November 1917. But their efforts largely failed to keep the old landowners from returning to their former estates and retaking them with force and vengeance. This, in turn, caused sympathies for the Reds to soar.

Another problem dividing the Bolsheviks' enemies was that all Russian Whites, regardless of social status, were Russians first and hence opposed the independence movements arising in the border regions of the former empire; in Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Belorussia and the Ukraine.

Denikin coined the phrase 'Russia One and Indivisible', a phrase that resonated with each of the other White leaders, and an ideal meant to keep 'Mother Russia' intact. This ideal alienated the new nationalistic states that had no intention of surrendering their ethnicity, language and independence and returning to the Russian fold. Failure to recognize reality and the aspirations of the breakaway nations cost the Whites critical support against the Bolsheviks to whom the new states themselves were generally opposed. (2)

What transpired in Russia between the spring of 1918 and the summer of 1923 was a mindboggling chaos of movements, parties, ethnicities and their militaries, a free-for-all of an enormous magnitude. We shall have a look at how the situation presented itself, in turn, on the western, northern, southern and finally eastern border of the region controlled by the Bolsheviks.

The Peace of Brest-Litovsk signed on March 3, 1918, had ceded to the Central Powers the greater part of western Russia: Livonia, i.e. northern Latvia and Estonia, a slice of Poland, one of Belorussia, and the complete Ukraine, up to Rostov, on the estuary of the Don river and the Sea of Azov [see Map LXV, above]. In addition to the German occupation forces which remained in these lands until October 1918, the following armed forces began to assemble: in the Baltic countries of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania nationalist forces moved eastward, or clashed with Bolshevik usurpers in Reval [Tallinn, ¶] and the Red Latvian Rifles; east of Brest-Litovsk Polish volunteer units moved eastward into Belorussia; to their south, Hungarians and Romanians launched mutually hostile invasions into the western Ukraine, where both encountered Ukrainian national troops under Hetman Pavel Skoropadsky, which were trained and assisted by the Germans, and were defeated. Along the lower Don, their ancient tribal lands, the Cossacks assembled under their new leader, General Petr Krasnov.

In the north, Finnish nationalists had declared the independence of their country on December 6, 1917, aiming to establish a bourgeois state with a liberal, parliamentary government, but the local Reds had a significant armed following and attempted to back a Bolshevik-style councils' republic. By mid-January 1918, the Whites had assembled military volunteers and formed a corps under the command of General Baron Carl Mannerheim, who had previously served in the Russian army. They achieved a preliminary victory over the socialists, who had mustered in the east, in Karelia, by January 20. The Reds subsequently declared revolution, on January 26, and solicited support from their Russian fellow-Bolsheviks.

Due to too many urgent requisitions elsewhere, the Bolshevik aid never exceeded about 10,000 Russian Reds fighting in Finland among the perhaps 50,000 Finnish Reds. The Whites had a force of roughly equivalent strength at their disposal but also required and received assistance from the Germans. The German-tutored "Jäger" [German for "hunters", ¶] became the first Finnish elite unit in the civil war, and the cause of the Finns was further aided by the 10,000 strong German Baltic Sea Division under General von der Goltz that arrived in March 1918, and another, 3,000 men strong, German command, the Brandenstein Detachment, which landed on April 3. The Red troops lacked the training and discipline of the professionals, and the White Finns eventually triumphed in mid-May 1918. But what happened in Finland was only a part of the great northern Russian front.

Russia's elimination from the war alarmed the Allied headquarters. Not only could Germany transport her eastern troops to the Western Front and achieve, at least for a time, numerical superiority, she would also be able to exploit the Russian industries for weapons and supplies. The possession of the grain-rich Ukraine would end the precarious food situation imposed on Germany by the British continental blockage which had brought the country to near-starvation by 1916. Thus a sort of Russian front had to be maintained, even if Russia itself was out, to "fix" as many German troops as possible in the East, and to prevent the worst-case scenario, that Bolshevik Russia might turn up on Germany's side, for...

... at the time there was considerable evidence that what was feared could come to pass. First, the Germans had been responsible for Lenin's return to Russia in 1917. Then, the Bolsheviks staged their first abortive insurrection, the "July Days", during the height of the Provisional Government's summer offensive. Next, they

overthrew that government in November and began efforts to end the war. To the Western allies, these actions were clear indications that the Bolsheviks were German surrogates in whole or part. (3)

MAP LXVII: RUSSIAN LOSSES AFTER THE TREATY OF BREST-LITOVSK



During the war, the western Allies had used the northern Russian ports of Murmansk, in the Barents Sea, and Archangel in the White Sea, as well as Vladivostok on the Pacific Ocean, to deliver supplies for the Czar's troops. In their attempt to keep at least some fighting alive in Russia, these harbours became the unloading points of Allied intervention troops. The first embarkations targeted Siberia. Japan landed its 12th Division in Vladivostok on August 3, 1918, where they were greeted by parts of the Czech Legion, whose story is detailed below. Another division, the 14th, followed, and by the end of the year Japanese troops numbered in the neighbourhood of 70,000 soldiers. The American 27th Infantry Regiment landed in the same place on August 16 and the 31st five days later. The tactical approach of the Japanese was different from that of the Americans, in that they not only occupied the stations along the Trans-Siberian Railroad and the local infrastructure that came with it, roads, towns and bridges, they also dispatched supplies to two White Cossack and a White Mongolian force along the line. The American effort, however, was limited, by presidential order, to the provision of local security and, perhaps, to aid an evacuation of the Czech should the need arise; no combat troops were to be deployed westward and American troops were not to favour either Whites or Reds.

The British, who landed two battalions in July and October, had no such qualms. They joined the local Whites and Czechs in battling Red guerrilla along the Ussuri River and then proceeded westward to Omsk, where they affiliated themselves with the Ural Whites under Admiral Kolchak and some more Czechs. The local Whites had founded a temporary political union known as the KOMUCH [Committee of Members of the Constituent Assembly, ¶], whose volunteers the British began to train.

A Canadian Brigade, the 16th, arrived in Vladivostok in late October 1918, but a sudden turn in internal Canadian politics prevented their actual deployment and they were shipped home in June 1919. A French detachment, about 1,000 strong, showed up in Vladivostok in the summer of 1918 and followed the British path, first on the Ussuri River, then on to the Ural. Eventually, they were drawn back east after the defeat of the KOMUCH forces and evacuated from Vladivostok in late April 1920. In addition to their own, rather modest force, the French organized military units from the hodgepodge of POW's, deserters and displaced troops that abounded along the Trans-Siberian Railroad.

The French formed a Polish Division of 12,000 that saw action along the rails in central Siberia from late spring 1919, a regiment of Serbs at Chelyabinsk and another at Tomsk combined with Slovenes and Croatians, these two units totalling 4,000. President M. Masaryk of the Czechoslovak National Council permitted the French to directly incorporate the Czech Legion into the French Army for the duration of the war. The French Military Mission recorded their number at over 60,000. (4)

Approximately a battalion and a half of Italian troops showed up in Siberia as well as a Chinese brigade sent to protect the Chinese railroad in Manchuria which split off the Trans-Siberian Railway at Khabarovsk. The commanders of all these various nationalities formed, ad-hoc, an Inter-Allied Committee which attempted to control and pacify the land along the essential railroad. Their opponents, the Red partisans, who could perhaps muster 100,000 men between Omsk and Vladivostok, enjoyed all the tactical advantages of guerrilla warfare: they could divert as little as a dozen or as much as 10,000 men to a mission or objective, were able to choose the time and location of the attack and find refuge and concealment in the civil population.

From the beginning, the efforts of the Committee were obstructed by coordinative and political disunities that all but stymied decisive military action. Given the poor training, dilettante leadership and often paltry armaments of the Red soldateska, a couple of proper Western divisions, well-led and sufficiently equipped, could have nipped in the bud the consolidation of Bolshevik power and the ascent of Communism as late as mid-1919. But it was not to be. Torn apart by political disagreements the Committee dissolved and its member forces retreated back to Vladivostok and evacuation. The British left by November 1919, the Americans by April 1920, and the last Czechs in August 1920. The Japanese closed the chapter of the Siberian intervention troops by embarking on October 20, 1922.

Siberia, however, was a theatre of secondary importance to the Bolsheviks in 1918. The most imminent dangers to the consolidation of Red power were the White "fronts", i.e. armies, in the East, between the Volga and the Ural Mountains and in the South, the Ukraine and the Caucasus. We shall account for the East first, where we shall encounter the strange story of the Czech Legion.

According to the lore and perhaps the truth of the story, once upon a time, on May 14, 1918, two trains adjoined, purely by accident, side by side at the main railway station of Chelyabinsk, just east of the Ural Mountains. One train was carrying soldiers of the Czechoslovakian Legion, deserters from the Austro-Hungarian army, who fought on Czarist Russia's side since 1915 because the Allies had promised them an independent Czechoslovakian state after the war.

The other train conveyed Hungarian prisoners of war to a camp somewhere east of the Ural. Naturally, the Hungarians considered the Czechs traitors to the Austrian-Hungarian monarchy, feelings that were reciprocated by the Czechs. Catcalls flew, then stones, and in the end at least one Hungarian soldier was lynched. The news of this "Chelyabinsk Incident" spread over the globe in a few days and the stupid event was to bear bitter fruit.

While the Czechs and Slovaks may well have been traitors, they certainly were not Bolsheviks, and they had sought a way to move to France and the Western Front since the end of Russia's active involvement in the war. Initially, the Bolsheviks had begun to get this possibly counterrevolutionary body of 50,000 armed men out of the way by loading them on the Trans-Siberian Railway and ferrying them to Vladivostok, whence they could be shipped via the USA to France.

When the Germans learned of the plan they vetoed it, and urged the Bolsheviks to have the Czechs disarmed and interned somewhere east of the Urals for the duration of the war. When the evacuation to Vladivostok stalled, the Czechs smelled a rat and took up arms against their hosts. Between late May and late June 1918, they succeeded in driving the Bolsheviks out of the lands between the Ural and Volga rivers. In these four weeks they conquered the Red towns of Chelyabinsk, Ufa and Samara (Kubyshev). A Czech brigade then headed eastward, "along the Trans-Siberian Railway, taking Omsk and Irkutsk, and finally reaching Vladivostok and the Pacific Ocean by the end of August." (5)

The somewhat unexpected success led to a confederacy of Czechs and local Whites and to the founding of two significant White governments between the Volga and the Pacific Ocean, the aforementioned KOMUCH in Samara and the Provisional Government of Siberia ['PSG', ¶] in Omsk. The KOMUCH was dominated by the Socialist Revolutionaries, the party of the farmers and small bourgeoisie, which had landed a relative majority in the nation-wide elections of summer 1917. KOMUCH, the Czechs and the local Cossacks eventually consolidated their forces into the "People's Army", which headed along the Volga northwards and conquered Kazan and the Kama River valley by early August.

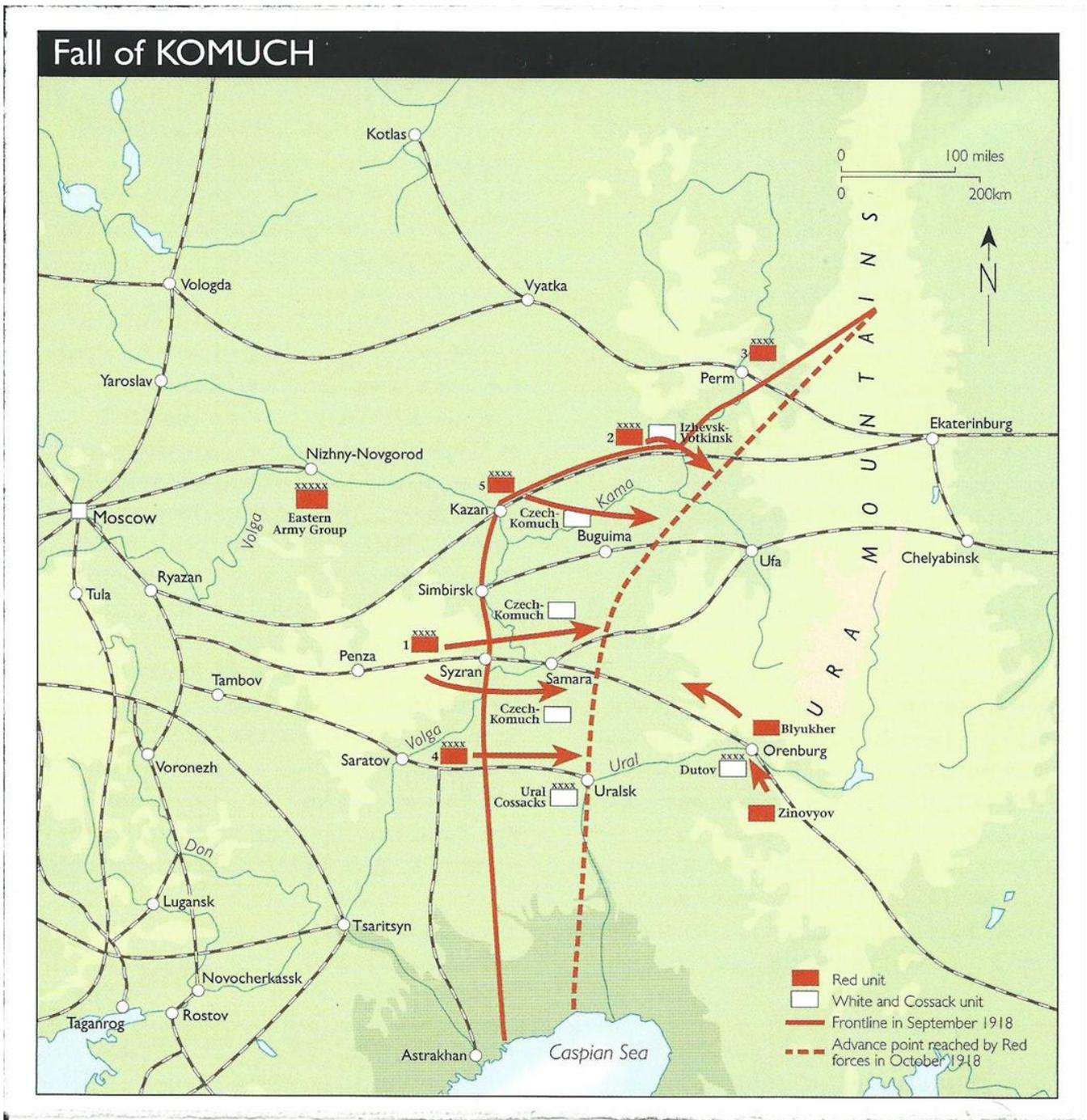
Bolsheviks, who assembled approximately 100,000 soldiers, including the famous Latvian Rifles, in the five armies of the "Eastern Group" based in Nizhny-Novgorod. From the opposite direction, south-east, a Red corps from Turkestan and Vasily Blyukher's South Ural partisans readied themselves to strike into the back of the KOMUCH troops. On September 8, the Red Army opened a concerted offensive on a front four hundred miles wide, from Perm to Saratov on the Volga. Somewhat unexpectedly, KOMUCH resistance faltered rapidly and Kazan was lost within 48 hours. Simbirsk fell only two days later, and on October 8, the Red Army captured Samara.

After the loss of its capital, the KOMUCH government in exile agreed to subordinate itself politically and militarily by becoming the junior partner in a coalition with the PSG. The new body called itself the "All Russian Provisional Government", but its five executive officers became known as the "Directory". The new entity remained in Omsk, the capital of western Siberia, but its perhaps 35,000 military volunteers barely replaced the losses the People's Army had incurred earlier. To the relief of everybody, a few of the newly minted units were able to stop the Red progress at the piedmont of the Ural Mountains.

The success of the People's Army was, however, quickly devaluated by the refusal of the more conservative, almost reactionary PSG to enter into a military alliance. The disunity of its enemies offered an opportunity to the

The differences between the right-wingers of the former PSG and the Socialist Revolutionaries of earlier KOMUCH provenance remained the weak point of the Directory. Thus nobody should have been unduly surprised when, on November 18, a military putsch removed the Directory and raised Admiral Alexander V. Kolchak to the august position of "Supreme Ruler of All the Russias". In his person, Kolchak unified attributes which had become rare after two revolutions had failed to improve on the mediocre record of the Czar's government.

Map LXIX: The Fall of KOMUCH



THE KOMUCH FORCES (WHITE) ARE SIMULTANEOUSLY ATTACKED IN THE WEST BY THE RED EASTERN ARMY GROUP IN NIZHNY-NOVGOROD, WHICH ATTACKS ON A BROAD FRONT FROM PERM IN THE NORTH TO SARATOV ON THE VOLGA RIVER, AND IN THE SOUTHEAST BY VOLUNTEERS AND PARTISAN TROOPS LED BY BLYUKHER AND ZINOVIEV. THE KOMUCH TROOPS HAD TO WITHDRAW EASTWARD ON THE TRANS-SIBERIAN RAILWAY.

The man they chose to elevate as Supreme Ruler was widely respected in Russian and Allied circles. Kolchak had been born in St. Petersburg in 1873, the son of a naval engineer. After graduating from the Naval Academy in 1894 he won acclaim from the scientific community for his work in oceanography and hydrology. He followed this up in 1900 with a three-year exploration of the Arctic.

Immediately after, he participated in the Russo-Japanese War, directing the laying of minefields at Port Arthur. Kolchak served in World War One, attaining the rank of rear admiral and command of the Black Sea Fleet in July 1916. He won national attention after the February Revolution in 1917 when he defiantly threw his sword overboard rather than submit to the demands of the sailors' councils.

The Americans then asked Kolchak to tour naval facilities in the United States and Kerensky approved the tour in July. After meeting President Wilson, Kolchak sailed for home through the Pacific, stopping in Japan. There, he learned of the Bolshevik Revolution and promptly offered his services to the British ambassador in Tokyo.

Before the British could effectively utilize him, however, the Russian ambassador in Peking requested he join General D. L. Horvath at Harbin, China. Horvath was assembling an army of anti-Bolsheviks in northern Manchuria to fight in the Russian Far East. From April 1918 until September, Kolchak tried and failed to form a credible coalition between White elements in the Far East or to establish cooperative relations with Japan.

Frustrated, he left Vladivostok on 21 September and headed for the front in the west. Almost immediately after arriving in Omsk on 13 October, the Directory placed him in charge of the Ministries of the Army and the Navy. On 9 November he began a tour of the front in his new capacity, returning on the evening of the 16th, scarcely a day before the coup.

On 18 November he made his first speech as Supreme Ruler, which made a profound impression on the Russians as well as the Allies from whom he sought diplomatic recognition. As quoted in the work of Serge Petroff:

"I will not go down the path of reaction, nor the ruinous path of party politics ... my main goal is to create a battle-worthy army, attain a victory over Bolshevism, and establish law and order so that the people may without prejudice choose for themselves the manner of government which they prefer."
(6)

Or, rather, what Lenin preferred. When Kolchak thus challenged the Reds, he had mustered his own forces in tours of inspection and visits to the front, but he did not know much about his adversaries. Who, exactly, was the Red Army, and what were their strengths or weaknesses?

His opponents had begun as not much more than ragtag collections of revolutionary soldiers, sailors, students and civilians. Red soldier councils had taken over local military affairs in most big and medium-sized cities between November 1917 and February 1918, but their present military proficiency was much diminished by their revolutionary enthusiasm having abandoned the structures of the old Imperial army, in particular the authority of its officers and the sophistication of its specialists. Decisions were arrived at by majority vote, frequently after protracted discussion; such procedures promised little combat effectiveness.

In late 1917, the Bolsheviks had begun to weed out political undesirables by training small groups of soldiers with revolutionary experience, the first "Red Guards", of which battalions of politically reliable soldiers emerged by early 1918. They formed the core of the future Red Army. Still, many of the early units were little better than partisan gangs or ad-hoc volunteer congregations.

The Bolshevik government faced the task of establishing military discipline without an officer corps and instilling battle skills without the training the sergeants and corporals of the Imperial Army had provided. On April 22, 1918, Lenin issued a ukase imposing "universal military training" and on June 12 ordered the conscription of the classes of 1892 to 1897, i.e. all usable 21 to 26 year-olds. In December the "Red Army" mustered about 60,000 heads.

The problem of drills and skills remained, until Trotsky, entrusted by the unmilitary Lenin with the formation of a true "Red Army", found a peculiar solution. Military specialists, chiefly former staff officers of the Czarist army, were assigned to advisory positions, sometimes even to command. This was dangerous, as Trotsky was completely aware of, and to ensure obedience he kept the family members of these officers hostage. There were, of course, defections, and ensuing

executions, but the specialists proved a necessity for the nascent army, and many of them had to be retained for years. To control them, Trotsky invented the political officer.

A new position, the "commissar", was created to watch over these military specialists and to instill political correctness throughout the entire command structure. Each unit commander, whether he led a front, an army, a corps, a division, a regiment or even a company, would receive as his opposite at least one commissar. The commander and the commissar were considered equals. The commander ruled over military matters while the commissar reigned over political questions, including the state of a unit's morale and its level of revolutionary fervour. ...

Leon Trotsky was primarily responsible for the genesis and nourishment of the Red Army. Trotsky (real name Lev Davidovich Bronshtein) was born into a Jewish family in Yanovka, Ukraine, in 1879. "Trotsky" became his pseudonym while he pursued revolutionary activities against the Tsar. A former Menshevik, he joined the Bolshevik Party in August 1917 and became a member of the Bolshevik Central Committee the following month.

In September 1917 he was elected deputy of the Petrograd Workers' and Soldiers' Soviet and participated directly in the Revolution, after which he received successive posts as Commissar for Foreign Affairs from November 1917 and Commissar for War from March 1918 in the newly-formed Supreme Military Council. Possessing no military experience, he nevertheless demonstrated a genius for military organization and a penchant for fiery oratory. (7)

In the future, Soviet power would be based upon a triad of party, military and secret police. The latter was constituted in December 1917 as the "All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution and Sabotage", abbreviated "Cheka". "The Cheka assumed additional roles throughout the civil war: frontier control, transport and railway security, espionage, counter-espionage, the officially sanctioned 'extermination of the bourgeoisie', and fielding a combat corps of troops to whatever sector needed reinforcement or political stiffening." (8) These armed battalions aided the field agents and the gaolers in their revolutionary duties. Many of these duties required the greatest of dedication.

The Cheka as a whole contained an unusually high percentage of "internationalists", including Poles, Finns, Jews, Latvians and Chinese who habitually dressed in black leathers. Felix "Iron Felix" Dzerzhinsky, a Pole who had dreamed of becoming a Catholic priest before spending much of his life in prison, in exile, or on the run from police, commanded all Cheka franchises. Their motto, "Shield and Sword of the Revolution", described their purpose.

Over time, the Cheka proved itself an equal-opportunity employer dedicated to internal repression. A few ex-Tsarist prison guards remained at their posts and former criminals who exhibited revolutionary fervour accepted new positions without discrimination. One black man, a communist-internationalist who went by the name "Johnson", skinned his victims alive before murdering them in Odessa. One high-born female known as the "Baroness" played the role of stool pigeon among the prisoners at the notorious Lubyanka No. 11 jail in Moscow.

Nina Maslova, the nymphomaniac lover of a Cheka agent, plied her sexual charms in exchange for needed information. Still another female, a Hungarian known by the sobriquet "Remover", personally executed 80 young men, each in a way suggesting sexual obsession. Nor was alcohol or drug addiction a bar to employment. Before gruelling assignments, the Cheka distributed extra rations of liquor to their operatives and turned a blind eye to cocaine, as long as dutiful service was not impaired.

Local Cheka establishments dotted across Russia and the Ukraine, in fact, were noted for particular specializations. A few examples only will suffice. At Kremenchug the clergy were impaled on stakes, hand-saws were driven through bones at Tsaritsyn, victims were scalped at Kharkov, and crucifixion or stoning was DE RIGUEUR at Ekaterinoslav. A few were noted for their artistry: at Orel in winter, humans were turned, progressively, into virtual statues of ice. (9)

Trotsky customarily displayed an almost aristocratic disgust when confronted with the excesses of the Cheka Kops, and his open contempt for the butchers eventually led to friction within the Bolshevik leadership. While he was able to count on Lenin's full support in his creation of the Red Army, his relations to the other EMINENCE GRISE of the Bolshevik revolution, Josef Stalin, suffered.

Stalin, whose real name was Iosif Vissarionovich Dzhughashvili, was born the son of a poor peasant in Georgia, 1879. His mother sent young Iosif, in an attempt to escape the dreariness of farm life and to provide an education, to the Orthodox academy in the capital, Tiflis. Her son turned out, however, to be far less interested in divinity than in revolutionary designs, and joined the illegal socialists under his early NOM DE GUERRE "Koba". He went through the normal stages of a young rebel - arrests, jails, escape and exile. In 1912 he changed his alias to "Stalin", i.e. "Man of Steel", and - being more of a Fouché than a Talleyrand - joined the editors of the party newspaper PRAVDA ["Truth", ¶] in 1917. This established him as a possible kingmaker, behind the veils of power.

In the first months following the February Revolution, Lenin was very far from holding a position of unchallenged authority, even within his own Party. As late as mid-October 1917, a handful of leading Bolsheviks continued to oppose his plan to carry out a coup d'état against the Provisional Government, arguing that the Party was unprepared to take power, and that it did not yet have popular support. He won the argument, however, and on October 25 the coup took place. ...

Yet although Lenin had succeeded in taking power, his Bolshevik critics had not been entirely wrong. The Bolsheviks were indeed wildly unprepared. As a result, most of their early decisions, including the creation of the one-party state, were taken to suit the needs of the moment. Their popular support was indeed weak, and almost immediately they began to wage a bloody civil war, simply in order to stay in power.

From 1918, when the White Army of the old regime regrouped to fight the new Red Army - led by Lenin's comrade, "Herr Trotsky" from the "Cafe Central" [his favourite hang-out in Vienna, ¶] - some of the most brutal fighting ever seen in Europe raged across the Russian countryside. Nor did all of the violence take place in battlefields. The Bolsheviks went out of their way to quash intellectual and political opposition in any form it took, attacking not only the representatives of the old regime but also other socialists: Mensheviks, Anarchists, Social Revolutionaries. (10)

Such extracurricular activities and special assignments soon proved Herr Dzhughashvili's forte. He had used his position at the newspaper to manipulate the Bolshevik delegates that convened in Petrograd in August 1917 as a result of the nationwide elections, and carried enough votes to become a member of the party's Central Committee. Shortly after the October Revolution, in November 1917, he was elected to the post of Commissar of Nationalities. It was now his job to keep in the Russian socialist fold all the ethnicities on the borders of the former empire that sought to establish their own, not necessarily socialist, nation-states. The Ukraine, indispensable as a region of heavy industry and bread basket of the nation, had declared independence on November 20, 1917, and Finland had followed on December 6. Stalin had his work cut out.

Perhaps for the less than strictly military nature of his task, Stalin opposed the allocation of manpower and supplies to Trotsky's regular Red Army which, to his horror, also employed former Czarist officers. He rather liked to employ partisans, terrorist cadres, and irregular Cheka units: the employment of informal outfits also had the advantage that, in a pinch, it could be officially denied. In late 1921, the Cheka alone mustered over 250,000 men, or beasts, who either followed orders or freelanced in espionage, political repression, ordinary theft and robbery, torture and the aforementioned "officially sanctioned 'extermination of the bourgeoisie.'" But before the ethnicities on the former imperial limbus could be persuaded to return to Russia, the war against the Whites had to be won.

The establishment of regular White troops began in the south, where the political order was in a state of breakdown. On the one hand, revolutionary gangs - not only Bolsheviks but also various Menshevik, Anarchist and unaffiliated ["green", ¶] groups - engaged in the wholesale seizure of land, destruction of property and the hanging or shooting of whatever opponents, real or imagined, they could get their hands on; on the other hand perhaps one hundred thousand former Czarist soldiers, disbanded from the Army Group Caucasus where they had fought the Turks, roamed the

land, in search of their families, friends, and, in particular, of food; the beginning of the civil war immediately resulted in the collapse of regular food supplies.

The former Czarist general Lavr Kornilov, failed putschist against Kerensky in the summer of 1917, and his co-conspirators, among them the subsequently famous White generals Anton Denikin and Sergei Markov, had been imprisoned in a monastery near Mogilev, the site of the Czar's former military headquarter. They were informed that in mid-November 1917, another well-known general, Mikhail Alexiev, had arrived in the territory of the Don Cossacks, between the Don and Volga rivers, to form a volunteer army able to fight both the Germans and the Reds. With the assistance of a few trusty soldiers, the generals bailed out and fled southward, to link up with Alexiev and his Cossacks in Novochoerkassk, the Don Cossacks' capital.

Unfortunately, they reached the lower Don when the local towns were in the process of being overtaken by Red shock troops arriving by railway: Rostov went Red on November 10, Tsaritsyn [later Stalingrad, ¶] on November 27, and Kharkov, the capital town of the Donets Basin, on December 24, 1917.

That threw a spanner into the Whites' works. Kornilov had taken over the establishment and training of the actual units, while Alexiev was tasked with finding the necessary money and securing alliances. But now it was the Cossacks that found themselves in political disaccord, and their ATAMAN [leader, ¶], General Kaledin, could only muster a small formation, the "Chernetsov Partisans", to support the White Army in statu nascendi. The country's state of distress much obstructed Kornilov's attempts at recruiting loyal troops: only approximately four thousand men joined up between December 1917 and February 1918." (11) By January, the Red Army moved into the lower Don area around Rostov, Taganrog and Novochoerkassk, threatening Kornilov's administrative base. In despair, General Kaledin committed suicide, and Kornilov lost his only ally. Aware of the numerical superiority of the Red troops, which had also gained the townspeople's' popular support, Kornilov opted for a retreat south-westward, into the direction of Novorossiysk, where he hoped to gain the support of the Kuban Cossacks. The march began on February 22, 1918.

What followed was one of the epic events of military history; a campaign known by historians as the First Kuban Campaign and by veterans as the "Ice March". Over the next weeks, the Volunteers weathered snow and sleet, forded icy streams and rivers, and trudged through the late spring mud, while sleeping in the rough, eating scant rations and receiving half the minimum wage allotted to Bolshevik workers. Their arms and ammunitions were what they carried with them, or what they could capture from the enemy. (12)

The Reds chased them with enthusiasm, but their lack of operational aptitude times and again allowed Kornilov's men to win or escape. It was not uncommon that Red forces actually passed them, by railroad, and appeared ahead of them, blocking the way. Only their military proficiency allowed Kornilov's men, among whom were many officers and cadets from the Ukraine's military schools, to fight their way through; giving no quarter and receiving none. In April, Ekaterinodar, the Kuban Cossack's capital, was gained, only seventy miles distant from Novorossiysk on the Black Sea, but the Reds had conquered the Kuban towns and Ekaterinodar was controlled by the Bolsheviks.

Kornilov's desperate men received some unexpected reinforcement in the arrival of 2,500 Kuban Cossacks, and their general put all chips on a last throw of the dice: to survive, his men and the Cossacks, numbering perhaps 5,000 souls, would have to wrest the city from over 15,000 Bolshevik guards possessing machine guns and artillery, and being fortified by daily arrivals of reserves via the railroad. (13)

The attack began on April 10. Three days later, half of Kornilov's men were dead, as was their leader, killed by an artillery grenade. His successor, General Anton Denikin, withdrew the remnants of the White Army north-westward, in the direction of the Don, whence they had come. For a change, there was good news to be had. It was learned that the Don Cossacks had finally made up their mind and declared against the Bolsheviks. A regiment of two thousand Ukrainian volunteers under Colonel Drozhdovsky joined the White standard in June, and with the addition of stragglers and incidentals General Denikin was able to muster close to 10,000 troops in mid-June. A few armoured vehicles and twenty guns completed the new White volunteer army. Denikin detached the Don Cossack corps to cover his northern front, facing Voronezh and the Upper Don, and set out southward, in the direction of Kuban and the Caucasus.

The launching of this Second Kuban Campaign met with far greater success than the previous one. The Whites essentially followed the Kuban railroad which connected Rostov with Ekaterinodar and continued to Novorossiysk on the Black Sea. They conquered town by town along the railway, losing, however, General Markov, the gallant leader of the vanguard, to an artillery shell at Belaya Glina. On July 15, they prevailed against over 30,000 Red troops at the strategic rail hub of Tikhoretskaya; and this accomplishment not only augmented their artillery strength by the capture of ten or so Red batteries, it also severed the Bolsheviks' telegraph lines. After a ten-day battle with the Red Army's elite Taman Army Group, Ekaterinodar was gained, and, eleven days later, the port town of Novorossiysk.

The capture of the port not only allowed future supplies to be delivered faster and more reliably by ship, it also announced the arrival of volunteers from the Crimean peninsula led by the popular cavalry general Baron Peter Wrangel, who went on to command the White 1st Cavalry Division. Another cavalry formation, the Kuban "White Wolves" under General Shkuro arrived by the end of July, and by September, the White volunteer army had a ration strength of sixty thousand souls.

The rising confidence of the troops, alas, had to survive a temporary spiritual low, occasioned by the death from pneumonia, on October 8, of the Whites' political head, General Alexiev. His political, diplomatic and representative duties were taken over by General Denikin, assisted by a civil council. The second phase of the campaign, a thrust southeast in the direction of the Caucasus, led to intensive battles around Armavir and Stavropol, which cost the Whites multiples of the losses incurred earlier in the Kuban steppe. Many regiments lost a hundred percent or more of their original complement; the Kornilov Shock Regiment was only 500 men strong in December although it had taken in 5,000 men in 1918. (14)

On the bottom line, however, the White Army had survived, and the armistice and the subsequent peace with Germany would allow them in the future to concentrate their fight solely upon the Reds. Denikin's diplomatic contacts with the western Allies, who were in the business of winning the war on the Western Front, hinted at the marvellous possibility that military supplies, and perhaps Allied volunteer troops might reinforce them soon, to drive the Reds from the Donets Basin and out of the Ukraine.

Meanwhile the Reds began to invade, by railroad, the towns of the central Ukraine, such as Dnepropetrovsk, which fell on January 11, 1918, Poltava, which fell eight days later, Nikolayev on January 27 and Kiev on February 8. Then the Bolshevik troops turned southeast, to Don and Volga. Astrakhan in the Volga delta was taken on February 7 and the capital of the Don Cossacks, Novocherkassk, on February 25. For centuries, the Cossacks had been the henchmen of the Czars, and it was this unfortunate legacy that drove the Bolsheviks to special enthusiasm in destroying Cossack towns and villages. Although the Cossacks had long remained neutral in the fight between Kerensky, Kornilov and Lenin, they now proclaimed the counterrevolution. Their council, the Krug, elected General Petr Krasnov to the post of "ATAMAN" [leader, ¶], and by early summer 1918 forty thousand armed Cossacks had assembled in the triangle formed by Rostov, Tsaritsyn and Lugansk, north of Rostov.

Without the towns, which remained in the hands of the Bolsheviks, and thus without access to railways, Krasnov was in dire need of allies who could provide supplies for his troops: the horsed Cossacks demanded much larger supplies than regular infantry units. His tactical situation was problematic: the Bolsheviks closed in from the north and east, and while Denikin's troops in the south might be natural allies, they were occupied in the Kuban steppe, and could hardly be of assistance. In the west, the Germans were approaching fast. Faute de mieux, Krasnov arranged a temporary alliance with them, who provided, not quite logically, arms and supplies for the Cossacks, against the Reds they had brought to power earlier by their financial largesse.

The Germans sponsored a few aircraft and a few artillery batteries, and armoured cars and even trains were improvised. In August the first tentative strike was made at Tsaritsyn, the town which controlled the lower Volga, but the attempt was defeated as was a second initiative in September. Subsequently, the late autumn was used for reorganization, and the Cossacks' third offensive on Tsaritsyn began on December 3. It was to last deep into January.

Meanwhile the situation in the Ukraine had changed. The country had declared independence and the formation of a titularly "socialist" but in fact liberal republic on November 20, 1917, but, as we have seen above, the newborn state

faced almost immediately Red takeovers of Kiev and the other important towns. At length, the best option to survive was considered, as the Cossacks had done, to enter into an alliance with the German troops which were advancing eastward. The alliance was, truth be told, more of a dependence on German aid than a covenant between equal partners. The deal was, quite typically for the Ukraine, bread for arms, and the leader of the country, Hetman Pavel Skoropadsky began to court the big landowners, in an attempt to raise the maximal amounts of grain. That did not go down well with the smallholders and Skoropadsky managed to incense the nationalists as well with his recommendation of a union with Russia once the Bolsheviks had been defeated. (15)

The conflict now centred upon the middle and lower Volga, from Tsaritsyn to Samara [Kubyshev] and Kazan. In the south, the Don Cossacks pushed eastwards, from the Don to the Volga, and, from west of the Ural Mountains, Kolchak and the KOMUCH army pressed westward. The Cossacks allowed themselves, incautiously, to be pinned between a Red army pincer moving southeast from Kharkov and a second one moving in northward from the eastern Caucasus and were defeated in February 1918. Almost at the same time, the aforementioned rebellion of the Czech Legion and their alliance with KOMUCH troops and local Cossacks along the Ural had occurred, and Red governments in Siberia collapsed by the score. On August 6, 1918, KOMUCH troops advancing westward seized Kazan and split the Russian opposition in two: the Red 2nd Army north and the 1st south of Kazan. The Whites could now proceed either westward, to Moscow, or to the north, to establish a common front with the Allied forces that were arriving in Archangel and Murmansk. This dire possibility called Trotsky to the Eastern Front.

He set up shop at the Sviazhsk railway station, forty miles west of Kazan, and began to set up and train the first regular Red army, the 5th.

Punishment for the loss of Kazan and the imperial gold [which had been stored there, ¶] was immediate. Trotsky ordered the shooting of the commander and commissar, and lined up and decimated, in full Roman fashion, units that had panicked. Similar discipline was applied to the personnel of the monitors, river barges and armoured steamers of the Volga Flotilla, under Commander Raskolnikov, including its flagship the ILYA MOUROMETS. Four naval destroyers were brought in as reinforcements. Reserves were transferred from the west and rallied around his one reliable unit, the 5th Latvian Semigallian Soviet Regiment. (16)

The attack on Kazan eventually began in late August, and 2nd Army was brought in to support the 5th. After two weeks of battle, the meagre Czech and White units that had delivered a spirited defence had to abandon the town. Simbirsk, eighty miles south of Kazan, fell on September 12 to the Red 1st Army, commanded by the soon legendary Mikhail Tukachevsky, and the great bridge over the Volga was gained. A few weeks later all the recent conquests of the KOMUCH troops had been retaken and Soviet mythology praised the battles of Kazan and Simbirsk as the birth of the "real" Red Army and enshrined Trotsky among the Bolshevik legends.

The middle Volga had thus been secured for the Red cause, but what was the situation at the lower Volga, at Tsaritsyn, which stood like a wave breaker between the Whites in the east and their comrades in the south and southwest and obstructed their coalescing into a single front? Tsaritsyn was the most important railway junction between Moscow, the oil from the Caspian Sea and the supplies of food and raw materials arriving from Asia. The defence of the city and railway network was entrusted to Comrade Stalin.

Legend has Stalin arriving in the city which soon was to bear his name with only two armoured cars and a few hundred Red guards on June 6. Four months later, as Commissar of the "Southern Army Group" [8th, 9th, 10th and 11th Armies, ¶], he had organized the defence of the lower Volga, aided by his lifelong henchmen Kliment Voroshilov and Semyon Budenny, both of whom would become Marshals of the Soviet Union in later years.

Together with Stalin, these men and other like-minded associates would form the "Tsaritsyn Clique", a group that would profoundly affect Soviet history. Stalin received credit for successfully defending Tsaritsyn from three Don Cossack offensives that took place in August, September and finally from December 1918 to January 1919. Far from facing overwhelming odds as their reports indicated, the Reds had a marked superiority in artillery, machine guns and armoured trains and their forces rose from a rough numerical parity to a distinct superiority by January. (17)

Not surprisingly, future Soviet propaganda was to compare Comrade Stalin's deeds with the most exquisite military achievements of Alexander, Caesar or Napoleon. Equally obvious, once the tiny¹ paranoiac had established his despotism, the legend could not be gainsaid. But while the future Communist Czar defended Tsaritsyn against the Don Cossacks, the Eastern Front faced a far greater danger: the White armies readied by Admiral Kolchak.

In January and February 1919, both sides had celebrated small victories which tended to cancel each other out: the Whites had conquered Perm, on the Kama River, 250 miles northeast of Kazan, and the Reds took, in the opposite direction, south and east, the cities of Uralsk, Orenburg, the capital of the Orenburg Cossacks, and Ufa. In Siberia, Admiral Kolchak recognized that with the usual improvised units neither effective offensives nor reliable occupations could be accomplished. He asked the British troops, who had come to Siberia via Vladivostok, for assistance in training his approximately 200,000 green recruits and for any military equipment they could spare. The Brits acceded: they opened an infantry school near Vladivostok and established two mixed units in close proximity to the Western Front, the Anglo-Russian Brigade and General Kappel's corps of Russian volunteers, a remnant of the "People's Army". They also provided uniforms, guns and grenades. The problem was time: the immediate needs of the front curtailed the time available for training and manoeuvre; many units sent to battle were just as inexperienced as their predecessors.

Moreover, senior Russian commanders went out of their way to break up such promising formations at the earliest opportunity, because they dreaded comparisons to their own less dedicated units.

While the White front along the western piedmont of the Ural was filling up with new brigades and regiments, the Czech Legion retired eastward to occupy and safeguard the Trans-Siberian Railway, its branches, and the towns and stations along its run, assisted by the Allied troops in Siberia. Thus Kolchak's great spring offensive had to do without the Czechs, but he was nonetheless able to muster forces numerically superior to the Red Army's Eastern Group, headquartered at Simbirsk.

Kolchak's deployment extended over a front of about six hundred miles, from Perm in the north almost to the Caspian Sea. Headquartered at Yekaterinburg, General Gaida's Siberian Army was positioned at Perm and faced the Red 3rd Army and the northern units of the 2nd. It was the largest of Kolchak's formations, comprising almost 50,000 men, but it harboured a great percentage of unblooded recruits. Its objective was the railway triangle at Vyatka.

Next in line was the Western Army, commanded by General Khanzin, headquartered at Chelyabinsk and situated south of Gaida's troops. With over 40,000 men it was slightly smaller than Gaida's army, and was poised to attack into the central Volga valley, to Nizhniy-Novgorod [or "Gorky", ¶], and perhaps all the way to Moscow. They faced Trotsky's elite 5th Army centred at Simbirsk and some units from 1st Army south of it. General Below's Southern Army, smaller than the other two, perhaps counting 25,000 men, was tasked to "fix" the Red 1st Army, to prevent their coming to the aid of 4th Army, south of it, which would be the main target of the Cossacks. Its secondary mission was flank protection - to have an eye on Western Army's southern flank and the Orenburg Cossacks' northern one. Two Cossack nations were to attack at the southern front: the Orenburg clans under Ataman Dutov, approximately 15,000 heads strong, who were to advance on the southern, the Tashkent railway, to cut off the support route of the Red forces in Uzbekistan, and to recover their ancient seat, Orenburg. The Ural Cossacks, of about equal strength, directed their effort against Uralsk and the Red 4th Army.

The numerical advantage rested with Kolchak's troops, perhaps in the neighbourhood of 140,000 against 120,000 men, but the Bolsheviks eclipsed them in artillery and had far more machine guns. They also enjoyed the strategic advantage of the inner, shorter lines, which shortened the supply routes and increased the mobility of their reserves. The element of surprise, however, aided the Whites at the opening of the attack between March 4 and 13, and early results were auspicious. In the middle of the front, the Western Army captured Ufa on March 16; in the south, Dutov retook Orsk on the ninth; in the north, the Siberian Army conquered Glazov and reached the Kama River, at Sarapol, on March 11. But when the advance continued, the sheer vastness of the front and the onset of the Rasputitsa, the vernal mud season, obstructed the advance and thinned out the ranks. By the end of April, Khanzin had proceeded four hundred kilometres southwest, in the direction of Kazan, but Gaida's Siberians simultaneous marching forward northwest about half this

¹ He was only 5 foot 3 inches tall. (18)

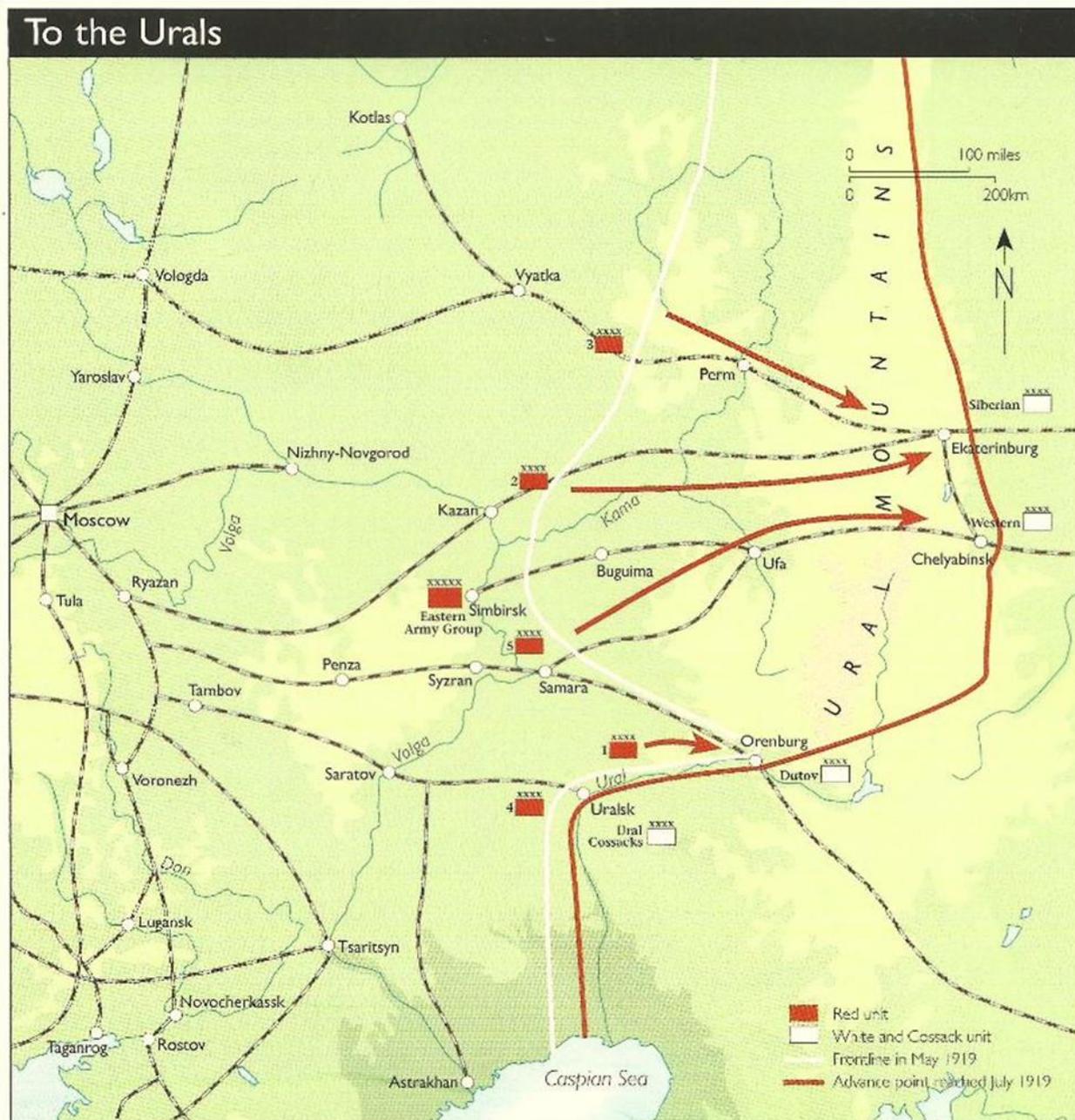
MAP LXX: THE KOLCHAK OFFENSIVE



distance eventuated a yawning opening between the two forces, into which the Red Army counterattacked as soon as, by early May, the ground began to dry. (19)

Khanzin's forces had to withdraw behind Ufa, but when General Chapaev's 25th Division, a part of Trotsky's elite 5th Red Army, managed to cross the Belaia River, the Whites had to retreat further; eventually to the east of Chelyabinsk, whence they had come. The fate of Gaida's Siberians was not much better; Perm was lost to a Red counterattack on July 1, and the wholesale desertion of young recruits weakened the troops to a degree that, by July 15, they had to retreat behind Yekaterinburg, their own starting point. The front held only in the south, and in some places the Cossacks managed to advance twenty or thirty miles. But the overall outlook was not promising and, in early July, Kolchak began to reorganize his forces.

MAP LXXI: RED COUNTERATTACK TO THE URAL



New brooms were brought in, old nomenclature abandoned. Gaida's Siberians became the First Army, commanded by General Pepelyaev, but the Western Army was split up into Second and Third Armies, under General Lokhvitsky respectively General Sakharov. A plan was devised to deal with the approaching 5th Red Army, but the reversal of the White armies' fortunes aggravated the desertion problem. Kolchak hatched a plot to bait the Bolsheviks with Chelyabinsk, to allow them to enter the town and then to encircle and destroy them. The scheme was enacted, but although the battle for the city, which raged from July 23 to 31, resulted in Red losses of more than 10,000 men compared to only about half that figure for the Whites, the drain of desertion blooded them out, and they had to retreat, pursued by Trotsky's best, far east along the great Siberian plain until they reached the Ishim river, approximately 150 miles west of Omsk, Kolchak's capital. At this point the Bolshevik attack had finally overrun its supply lines. The Whites, now close to their own provisions, counterattacked on September 1 and, for some time, reconquered two hundred miles worth of Siberian steppe. Six weeks later, the Reds had received fresh supplies and pushed the Whites back to the Ishim River. It was very entertaining.

A decisive factor in favour of the Reds was that the conquest of the Chelyabinsk and Petropavlovsk [the one on the Ishim River, not the one in Kamchatka, ¶] railway facilities cut off Kolchak's remaining forces from receiving supplies on either line. Belov's Southern Army found itself between the jaws of a vise formed by Red units advancing from both sides of the Tashkent railway and was all but eliminated. The Cossacks had, under mounting Red pressure, found no way to bring in the harvest and the lack of food and provender swiftly decreased the military effectiveness of the horsed soldiers. The majority was eventually forced to migrate south or southeast to Persia or China. Admiral Kolchak's remaining forces settled for a cold winter in Siberia.

Meanwhile, divided loyalties managed to split the Ukrainian anti-Bolshevik effort into a confused political and military miscellany:

On 22 January 1919 the Ukrainian National Republic (UNR) united with the West Ukrainian National Republic (ZUNR). This action was effectively an exercise on paper, as each republic retained its own army and government.

The western republic, which had proclaimed its independence in October 1918, immediately clashed with the new, nationalistic Poland. Both claimed the province of Galicia. The western republic's armed forces, the Ukrainian Galician Army (UHA), which attained a strength of 70,000 in June 1919, included the elite 1st Brigade of the Ukrainian Sich Rifles which had served in the Austro-Hungarian Army in World War One in the hope of liberating their country from imperial Russia.

After hard-fought battles during the first half of 1919, Poland succeeded in defeating the UHA in July. The army then retreated to join the Ukrainian National Republic in the east. (20)

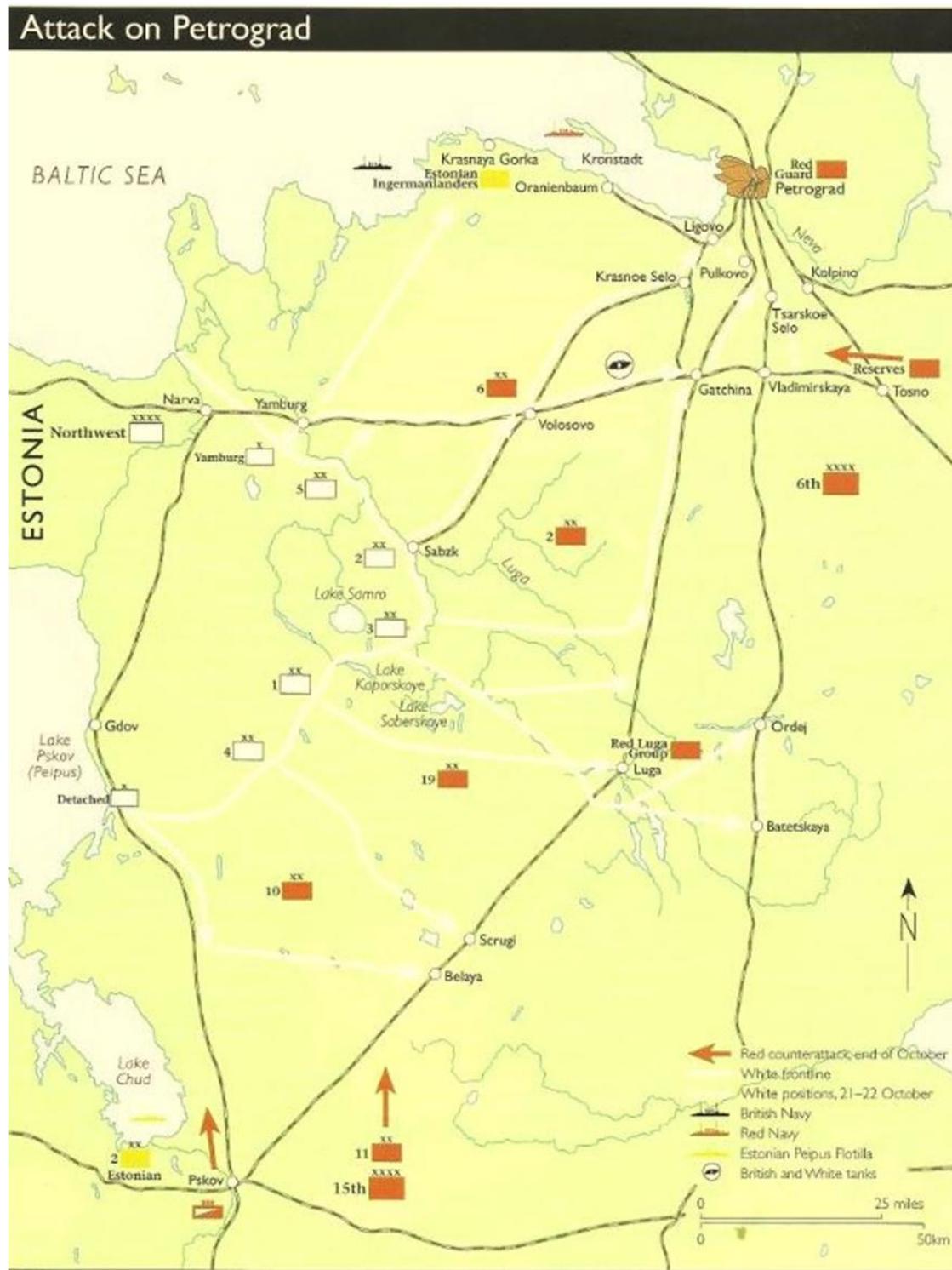
As so often in her history, the unlucky country faced enemies simultaneously on the inside and outside: Poles and Romanians encroached upon the western and northern parts while the Bolsheviks sponsored the preliminary foundation, based upon the guns of the Red Army, of a Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic. The Reds had conquered Kiev on February 8, 1918 for the first time; all in all, the unfortunate town was to change hands nineteen [19] times during the civil war.

In late 1918 the Skoropadsky government was overthrown by a putsch of the moderate socialists led by Simon Petlyura. Since they were Ukrainian nationalists as well, they reinstated the Ukrainian National Republic, governed by a five man "Directory". But when units of Denikin's Whites from the southeast re-established contact with the Republican forces in June 1919 and received an offer of alliance, their general hesitated. The Ukrainians were not only socialists, if anti-Bolshevik, they were also nationalists, and Denikin, a conservative believer in Russian suzerainty, could accept neither proposition. Hence none of his troops joined the aforementioned reunified Ukrainian army, which was still able to muster about 35,000 men for an offensive in summer 1919 against the Bolsheviks.

Before this campaign could begin, a strike in the Baltic, aiming at Petrograd, commanded the Bolsheviks' attention. Various anti-Bolshevik factions had founded a White "Northern Corps" in Pskov in September 1918. When the mixed unit was defeated by the 7th Red Army, it retreated and split up into various factions, its core joining the Estonian army as an independent unit. With the addition of smaller bands, ad-hoc outfits and partisans, the Estonian army mustered over 35,000 men in the spring of 1919. The Estonian troops were commanded by General Johannes Laidoner and the Russian volunteers by former Imperial Guards General Alexander Rodzianko. Their united forces began to attack the Red 7th Army in May 1919 and swiftly conquered the cities along the coastal railroad, Pskov, Gdov, Narva and Yamburg.

The success gave the Russian troops its own, independent base of operations around Narva and Yamburg; former Red prisoners swelled Rodzianko's ranks to 25,000 and Kolchak, Supreme Ruler of all the Russias, sent General Nikolai Yudenich to assume command of the new Northwestern Army ['NWA', ¶]. After protracted diplomatic forth and back with the British, whom he asked to send supplies, and the Finns, Latvians and Estonians who sought independence and hence were cautious to support the former Czarist Russian element, Yudenich was able to commence offensive operations aimed at Petrograd on August 15. The attack partly coincided with a renewed Kolchak offensive in Siberia and Denikin's thrust to Kursk which might open the road to Moscow. By October 20, the NWA conquered the Pulkovo Heights and looked down on Petrograd.

MAP LXXII: WHITE ATTACK ON PETROGRAD



A mixed White Russian and Estonian volunteer force attacked Petrograd beginning on August 15, 1919. The corps, approximately 60,000 men strong, made it as far as Oranienbaum and the Pulkovo Heights, whence they looked down upon the town on October 20, before a concerted Red counterattack of the 15th Army at Pskov and the Red Guard and 7th Army from Petrograd drove them back.

Unfortunately, this was also the time when a few wheels fell off the White truck due to separate interests of the prospective allies. The Finns, who had been asked to support the White thrust with a simultaneous attack from the north, refused, an independent Russian corps, the "Western Army" under Prince Bermond-Avalov, in cahoots with some

Germans, turned against Latvia instead of supporting Yudenich, and the 3rd White Division's failure to reach and cut off the Petrograd - Moscow railway at Tosno meant not only that the Bolsheviks could resupply Petrograd at will but were also able to summon fresh troops for a counterstroke.

This assault began on October 21, and concentrated upon the two points the White offensive was hinged upon: the Red 15th Army attacked from south of Pskov northwards, threatening the Whites' rear areas on the right wing and centre, and the Red 7th Army in Petrograd, reinforced by thousands of Red guards levied in the town itself, struck at the White left wing and centre, on a line Oranienbaum - Pulkovo - Tsarskoe Selo. Their numerical superiority of over 70,000 to the Whites' number less than half of it translated into swift progress; by November 14, the NWA found itself back at its starting point, at Narva. Weakened by a typhus epidemic it was unable to resist when the Estonians disarmed and interned the remnants. Estonia subsequently signed a peace treaty with the Bolsheviks, on February 2, 1920, and the threat to Petrograd vanished. (21)

In the spring of 1919, the southern Whites prepared a decisive attack. A few excursions during the winter had brought mixed success: an operation of Denikin's best, including the elite cavalry formations, ejected the Red 11th and 12th Armies from their positions along the lower Volga and the western Caspian Sea and thus enabled the local Cossacks, the Tereks, to clean the western Caspian shore from Bolshevik partisans. On the other hand, the Don Cossacks had been badly mauled by the Red 8th, 9th and 10th Armies and needed a rest. After the signing of the General Armistice on November 11, 1918, which ended hostilities between Germany and the Allies, the German troops that had occupied big parts of the Ukraine according to the Peace of Brest-Litovsk of March 1918, retired westward and left a gaping hole in the Cossacks' eastern flank, at the critical Donets Basin, at Rostov and Taganrog. The Cossacks had no forces left to cover the gap and had to withdraw.

The British, now rid of the German threat, declared to support Denikin's Whites for his dependable anti-Bolshevik and pro-Western politics, and Krasnov, still Ataman of the Cossacks, and his troops had no choice but to join the new "Armed Forces of South Russia" ["AFSR", ¶] under Denikin's command. He subsequently retired and was replaced by General Bogaevsky. Denikin then designated Wrangel commander of the Caucasian Army and General Mai-Maevsky to command the Volunteer Army.

The AFSR deployed along a great arch that bent from Tsaritsyn on the Volga to Zhitomir in the western Ukraine. Its right wing, formed by the Caucasian Army, the Don Cossacks and the Volunteer Army, reached from Kursk to the Caucasus and the Caspian Sea. Wrangel's Caucasian Army hinged at Tsaritsyn and covered the lower Don west of it, the Don Cossacks, left of Wrangel, spread out in the direction of Saratov and Tambov, and to their left, in the direction of Voronezh and Kursk, the Volunteer Army covered Kharkov and the central Ukraine.

Red offensives against this wing began in March 1919 and continued into April and May. The idea was to pin down the Cossacks in the centre, and to outflank them either in the west or east with a southward stroke, a manoeuvre that would split the AFSR in two. On the eastern, i.e. left wing of the AFSR, General Mai-Maevsky led a brilliant defence with the Volunteers and in particular with the 6,000 men of his elite 1st Corps. He centred operations on the complex network of railroads that crisscrossed the Donets Basin, and, with the help of reconnaissance aircraft, was able to outmanoeuvre the Red 13th, 9th and 8th Armies time and again. Of particular usefulness was Mai-Maevsky's nimble use of armoured cars and trains which outclassed the Red units in mobility.

On the right wing, where the Manych River held the key to the Caucasus, Wrangel's forces crossed the river in the night of May 17 to 18 in an improvised but successful operation which occasioned their appearance, out of the blue, in the enemy's open flank. A full charge of the cavalry broke Red resistance, netted 15,000 prisoners and forced a bewildered 10th Red Army to retire to Tsaritsyn. Good news was also to be had at the centre: rural Cossack communities revolted against Bolshevik dominion in the spring, and by May 1919 an estimated 30,000 Cossack partisans were active behind the Red lines. This opportunity was not lost on Denikin who called a general offensive. Don Cossacks breached the lines of the Red 8th and 9th Armies and gained over one hundred fifty miles in less than a week. They collected and integrated the rebels and set their sights on Voronezh. On their left wing, Mai-Maevsky's forces, reinforced by General Shkuro's "White Wolves" partisan cavalry, rolled up the Red 14th and 13th Armies in the centre and west, between Oral, Bryansk and

Gomel. The 3rd Corps advanced to the Crimea and detached cavalry units chased Reds towards Tsaritsyn and Astrakhan. Red troops withdrew everywhere. On the AFSR's left flank, the offensive proceeded just as well. General Kutepov's 1st Corps and the Terek Cossacks advanced two hundred miles and conquered Kharkov by June 27. To their left, Shkuro's White Wolves defeated an early uprising of the Makhno Guerrilla, a corps of Anarchists home based in and around Aleksandrovsk, which had, for the time being, joined forces with the 14th Red Army. The Wolves captured Ekaterinoslav [Dnepropetrovsk, ¶] on June 29.

On the eastern fringe of the front, Wrangel's Caucasian Army set its sights for Tsaritsyn and the lower Volga. The town was a target of the greatest strategic importance, for it controlled both the oil-transporting railways from the south and east and the shipping on the river. The first assault was stopped by trenches and barbed wire, as countless attacks had been stopped in the Great War, and Wrangel required assistance from the British. He received not only tanks, some armoured cars and aircraft but also British volunteers to drive the tanks. The tanks eventually did the trick and on June 30, Tsaritsyn fell. (22)

The conquest of the prominent town set the stage for the planning of the decisive offensive of the civil war. On July 3, Denikin unveiled his plan for the capture of Moscow. The Volunteer Army would proceed in the direction of Kursk - Tula - Moscow, the Don Cossacks slightly east of them, to Moscow via Voronezh and Ryazan, covered on their right flank by Wrangel's cavalry. Once Moscow was gained, a second offensive would be directed to regain Kiev and liberate the Black Sea coast. The strategic problem the Whites faced was that, while at the moment the Red front was receding, the Bolsheviks could draw on the masses in the big Russian cities for volunteers or conscripts, and hence time worked for the enemy. To minimize this effect, Denikin put an emphasis on the conquest of as much territory as possible, thus to deny the Bolsheviks access to fresh recruits.

Initial progress was satisfactory, if not exceedingly so: during early summer some of Wrangel's units actually made contact with Ural Cossack patrols of Admiral Kolchak's Siberians, east of the Volga, and more Wrangel troops gained over one hundred and fifty miles in the direction of Saratov, the other great town on the lower Volga. On the left flank, a thrust into the western Ukraine proved fruitful: Kherson, Nikolayev and Odessa were captured by the end of August.

A Red counterattack at the lower Volga almost cost Wrangel the possession of Tsaritsyn, in whose defence the British Air Squadron # 47 assisted. The Don Cossacks exploited a local breakthrough and their 4th Cavalry Corps raided cities as far north as Voronezh or Tambov, where they very nearly caught Trotsky. After tactical regrouping, the offensive was refreshed and 1st Corps took Kursk and Orel by mid-October. Its horsed vanguard almost reached Tula, only two hundred miles from Moscow. To their right, Shkuro's cavalry finally seized Voronezh, and, further at the flank, Wrangel still held Tsaritsyn. Not only had notable success been achieved, the ASFR was able to draw in recruits and thus grew from approximately 65,000 men in May 1919 to almost 160,000 in October. Only 100,000, however, were front line troops.

The picture changed in late September. The Anarchist leader Nestor Makhno, whose partisan corps by now numbered perhaps 20,000 heads, defeated a few White units that had chased him and set out on a wide sweep through the southern Ukraine, molesting the AFSR's vulnerable rear areas. To contain him, Denikin had to assign a Cossack brigade, two cavalry divisions and some infantry; the absence of these troops, however, weakened the ASFR's front line in the moment when they were needed most.

For on October 13, the Reds counterattacked with the resupplied and reinforced 14th, 13th and 8th Armies, supported by Budenny's cavalry corps, which was soon elevated to the status of cavalry army. The spearhead that 1st Corps had advanced on the road to Tula and Moscow was crushed, and, between the end of October and mid-November, the greatest cavalry battles seen yet raged between Voronezh and Kursk. Budenny's cavalry was numerically about equal to the White formations but had more infantry support, and his masterful thrust into the flank of the Whites between Voronezh and Tambov was perhaps the decisive manoeuvre of the war. It was the first time that the White cavalry had lost a battle in this war, but it proved the crucial one. On October 25, Trotsky noted, prophetically, that "the enemy has been dealt a blow from which he will never recover." (23)

MAP LXXIX: RED COUNTERATTACK IN THE UKRAINE



This, however, occurred at the same time that Yudenich's NWA was advancing on Petrograd, and Trotsky's attention was directed northwards. At his arrival in Petrograd by train, his first task was to calm a panicked Lenin who wanted to abandon the city. Then Trotsky took command of the town's defence and devised a psychologically clever mixture of soothing fears, stiffening morale and toughening discipline.

In his own words, the enemy "always keeps just within range, and by using his machine guns and automatic rifles he develops an impressive firepower which conceals the insignificance of his numbers". He also derided the persistent cries of being "flanked" or "encircled" in reports. "The enemy operates by night, so as to use darkness to conceal the smallness of his numbers and to frighten us."

And: "The enemy's interest lies in keeping us at firing distance. ... Our interest lies in getting close enough to use the bayonets, when the mere sight of us is bound to overwhelm the enemy's scanty forces." ... Order No. 163 stipulated that defeatists were to be "killed on the spot". Order No. 165 continued: "Those who retreat without orders, after being warned, are to be shot on the spot. The battle-police detachments are to bring deserters before the tribunal without delay." Although an embarrassing and controversial subject to this day, these "battle-police detachments" represented what White reports identified and described as "blocking units".

The Red technique of "blocking" meant that the "battle-police" units machine-gunned friendly forces attempting to retreat before the enemy [The Red Army used the identical procedure in WW II, ¶]. (24)

Scores of improvised Red Guard companies were mobilized in the town itself, adding thousands of heads to the defence. Female battalions were formed, the streets were barricaded with wire and a few armoured cars were paraded, to soothe the fears that had overwhelmed the troops when they had been confronted with the few tanks the NWA had received from the British. But the NWA never entered the town: they did reach the Pulkovo Heights overlooking Petrograd but were stopped by 7th Army's counterattack. The simultaneous attack of 15th Army into their rear areas compelled the NWA's withdrawal to Estonia whence they never returned.

Thus the general situation had taken a sharp turn in favour of the Reds by the end of 1919. The best of the AFSR, its cavalry, had been defeated in the south, the NWA in the west had been neutralized, and after the losses of Chelyabinsk and Petropavlovsk, Kolchak's Siberian forces had been pushed back to the Ishim River. Their principal allies, the Ural Cossacks, had migrated to the borderlands of Persia and Kazakhstan. Trotsky recognized the urgency of regaining the Ukraine, for without its agricultural surplus Russia was destined to starve by the next summer.

After the loss of Kursk in October 1919, the AFSR attempted a concentric retreat southward, centred on Kharkov, where they hoped to establish a new defensive position. The problem they faced was the Bolsheviks' superiority in numbers which allowed them to outflank the Whites over and over. Since not only White troops and their endless supply trains but townspeople and most of the peasant population fled south- or eastward before the advancing Reds, the Donets Basin turned into a gigantic maelstrom of civil and military confusion in which the outbreak of typhus added to the misery; the bane felled over forty thousand White soldiers in this winter. Kharkov was lost on December 11, Kiev five days later, and Tsaritsyn on January 3. The front of the AFSR essentially collapsed in January 1920 and the Caucasian Army withdrew behind Rostov and the Don. Cossack units practically disintegrated, desirous to return home and protect their farms and families. The retreat could not be stopped and turned into a drubbing. By mid-January, Red troops had conquered Taganrog, Novochoerkassk and Rostov, the central towns of the Don Cossacks' ancient voisko, their pale of settlement. The western wing of the AFSR was outflanked and collapsed completely. A smattering of troops escaped westward and were interned by the Poles, a few other ones managed to withdraw southward in the hope to hold the Black Sea coast. Soon, however, they were forced to evacuate from Odessa, whither they had converged, to the Crimea, which became the beacon of rescue for the scattered Whites.

The Caucasian Army enjoyed a few defensive successes along the Don River line in February which occasioned a brief respite, but the glimmer of hope vanished soon. As swiftly as Budenny's Red Cavalry had outflanked the Don position they circumvented a second defensive line in the Kuban steppe and Ekaterinodar, the capital of the Kuban Cossacks fell on March 17. Eventually, the remnants of the White forces congregated in the harbour of Novorossiysk on the Black Sea where they embarked to the Crimea, while the Red army tightened their siege ring around the town and their artillery shelled the port facilities.

In the harbour, the French ship WALDECK ROUSSEAU and the British ship EMPRESS OF INDIA opened counter-battery fire on the Red artillery. Denikin, remaining to the last, witnessed the fires raging and the pall of smoke.

Suddenly, a White destroyer, the PYLKI, dashed back in and with guns blazing rescued a regiment of the Drozhdovsky that had been the final rearguard. As his ship pulled away Denikin reflected: "After this, everything grew quiet. The contours of the city, the shoreline, and mountains became misty as they receded into the distance ... into the past ... the hard and painful past." (25)

After Denikin resigned in early April 1920, Wrangel took over the command of the troops that gathered on the Crimea. He attempted to build a new force from scratch, baptized his formations the 'Russian Army', and continued to evacuate the scattered remnants of White forces from the Black Sea coast to the Crimea. Politically, however, things looked bleak. Wrangel soon found out that the Allies already prepared for a future world without White Russians. The British sort of recognized the White state in the Crimea, on the condition that it was not to attempt to move back to the mainland. Whitehall seemed ready for "REALPOLITIK", to seek an understanding with the winner, i.e. the Bolsheviks, while the French did send little except good advice.

France's diplomatic policy rested on creating alliances with the new nation states in Eastern Europe - Poland, Czechoslovakia and Romania - as a CORDON SANITAIRE against the infection of Bolshevism on the one hand, and as a hedge against German imperialism on the other. French support would be conditional on Wrangel's ability to be useful to this scheme. (26)

The military situation of Wrangel's new "Government of South Russia" on the Crimean Chersonnese was stable enough for the moment. There were only two narrow entries to the peninsula, which could be held with a minimum of troops, and thus the new state was reasonably safe. Politically, Wrangel tried to strike middle ground in the land question by proposing legislation that would affirm the validity of the land seizures of 1917 and 1918 but envisaged generous compensations for the gentry; hence the proposition was designed to gain the support of both parties and nobody could take it seriously. France eventually followed England in officially recognizing Wrangel's regime in June 1920.

The economic situation was less advantageous. The Crimea, while of resplendent beauty, does not produce much grains, potatoes or other basic foodstuffs except fruit, neither is it well suited for pastoral life, the husbanding of animals. All these goods, however, were in abundance only a few miles away, on the rich black earth of the southern Ukraine. Wrangel knew that he risked Great Britain's ire if he were to invade the mainland, but since he had not only to feed the indigenous population of the Crimea but also the perhaps 300,000 mouths of his troops, the new government and the uncounted refugees, he saw no alternative.

His "Russian Army" fielded about 25,000 troops of the former Volunteer Army and circa 10,000 Cossacks. Wrangel was aware that much of the Red Army was at the moment fighting to export the delights of the Red Revolution to Poland, whose troops, unconvinced of the blessings of Bolshevism, resisted fiercely. He could count on the Reds opposing his troops being second-class units, and on June 7, 1920, the reformed 1st Corps under General Kutepov struck at the Bolshevik defences at the Perekop peninsula, between Kherson and Melitopol. The attack was successful, and a week later the opponent, the 13th Red Army, had been pushed back beyond the Dnieper River. A second strike at Melitopol, in the east, similarly prevailed against the Reds and by June 10 the town was in White hands.

A Red counterattack at the end of June allowed Wrangel and his generals the rare opportunity of a Cannae-like double encirclement. The Red assault deployed the 1st Cavalry Corps against Melitopol while the 13th Army was to try to regain the Dnieper line. General Zhloba's Red cavalry was advancing briskly but was unaware of the presence of White infantry in a number of villages they passed. When they, suddenly, allowed themselves to be fixed by a strong infantry position across their line of advancement, their attempt to outflank the machine guns trained at them and thus to escape was thwarted by the White infantry in the villages which blocked any sideways movement. The retreat they now attempted was obstructed by motorized columns from Wrangel's 2nd Corps which had closed the ring behind them. It is said that only a few hundred men from Zhloba's proud 1st Cavalry Corps survived.

This was undeniably a hard blow, but Trotsky managed to send enough reinforcements to the Ukraine to keep Wrangel's units from further advances. The Dnieper was regained in the second week of August and a bridgehead established east of the river at Kahoka. On the Whites' eastern front, at Melitopol, the newly created Red 2nd Horse Army pressed hard against the positions of 1st Corps. Rumours of an impending armistice between Poland and the Bolsheviks

began to circulate in September, which meant that a sudden influx of additional Red troops might be in the offing. Wrangel recognized the need to regroup in anticipation of the event and 1st Army was placed along the Dnieper line between its estuary at Kherson and Aleksandrovsk. The latter town was held by 1st Corps and the Kuban Cossack cavalry, and the right flank was entrusted to 2nd Army and the remainder of the Don Cossacks. Fortunately, General Bredov's eight thousand men formerly interned in Poland had been released pending the armistice and arrived by ship in Sevastopol in late September.

At that time, the "Russian Army" consisted of perhaps 23,000 infantrymen and 12,000 cavalry. An attempt to reduce the Red bridgehead at Kakhovka and outflank the left wing of the opponents had to be abandoned on October 13 and Wrangel began to face a defensive challenge against the Red Army concentrating against him in late October. The armistice with Poland having come into effect on October 12, the Bolsheviks collected all available forces to stamp out the bourgeois danger. Approximately 185,000 Red troops, armed with over 3,000 machine-guns and 600 artillery pieces partook in the general offensive starting on October 25. To avoid having his troops on the eastern side of the Dnieper cut off from escape to the Crimea, Wrangel had to call a retreat to the peninsula on November 2 after a desperate defensive battle.

There he faced the problem of not having enough troops left to defend the four entrances to the peninsula equally, and decided to station larger units at the Perekop isthmus, where the renowned Turkish Wall was expected to withstand all Red attacks, and the Taganach Bridge. Smaller detachments guarded Kerch and the Sivash marshes. It was at the latter place, and with the benevolent participation of the weather, that the decisive battle of the civil war began. The Sivash marshes, lesser known relatives of the great Pripet Marshes that bisect western Russia, were temporarily blown dry by a storm which occurred exactly on the third anniversary of the Revolution, November 7 to 8, 1920. In the darkness of the night, two Red divisions passed the swamp, surprised the blocking force of Kuban Cossacks and gained a bridgehead on the south-eastern end of the Turkish Wall which they had thus outflanked.

An epic battle developed over the next three days. The Red Army swiftly collected its artillery and opened an incessant barrage at the Wall on Perekop. Eventually, it was decided to attack the obstacle and its frontal ditch, about eight metres deep, head on. Tens of thousands of Red infantrymen rushed at the impediment in successive assaults, in rows so deep that flesh touched flesh. Thousands died at every turn. On November 9, the Red Army overran the position and two days later the second White defensive line at the Yushin lakes. General Kutepov, Wrangel's field commander, told his boss that the game was up and the Crimea lost.

The evacuation order was issued the same day, October 11, and from October 14 to 16, almost 150,000 Whites boarded 126 ships that ferried them to Constantinople and exile. The Bolsheviks occupied the peninsula and murdered about 50,000 people that had, for the one or other reason, been left behind. (27) The southern front had ceased to exist, and that rendered Admiral Kolchak's troops in Siberia the sole remaining obstacle to a bright Bolshevik future.

The Siberian Whites had been pushed back east as far as the Ishim River in the fall of 1919, and the crushing of their southern flank, General Below's Southern Army and the Orenburg and Semirechie Cossacks, meant that a defence of Omsk, their present capital, would be difficult. In November 1919 Kolchak decided to give up the town and to establish a new capital at Irkutsk.

All Siberia seemed to be moving with him. Over 300 trains crowded with soldiers, families, Allied officials and military personnel, White sympathizers, businessmen, and members of the administration headed east, ostensibly for Irkutsk and safety.

Thousands, unable to find a place, rode sledges along the ancient highway known as the Sibirsky Trakt. Though exact numbers will never be known, over 150,000 refugees, civilian and military, moved east into the endless forest taiga on a nightmare odyssey that would span four months. Only 70 of the trains would reach Irkutsk.

Immediately behind marched the armed forces: the 1st Army under General Anatoly Pepelyaev in the vanguard, the 2nd and 3rd Armies under Kappel and Voitsekhovskiy acting as rearguard on each side of the

Trans-Siberian. The Red 5th Army maintained steady pressure on the rear and occasionally company or battalion-sized actions broke out. More dangerous, however, were the 80.000 - 100.000 partisans that had become increasingly active since the late summer of 1919.

Conditions worsened in December as temperatures plunged deep below zero. Typhus struck and infected thousands. Trains lurched forward, stopped for hours or days, lurched again, then stopped again. Only trains designated "first priority" by the Czech Legion could continue down the line immediately, "second priority" having to await unfolding events. Trains needing fuel or repairs were shunted to a sideline, indefinitely.

Finally, an immense bottleneck of trains stacked up at Krasnoyarsk [700 miles west of Irkutsk, ¶]. Only a few would ever transit beyond this city, which had become a virtual graveyard of rolling stock. So too had it become a cemetery for the refugees. Forty thousand victims of typhus lay stranded in the rail yards of the ice-bound city. Entire trains rested immobile with their frozen dead. For those yet to die, supplies dwindled until a loaf of bread became priceless - or the supreme gift of love. (28)

The end came quick. On December 23, a putsch of Socialist Revolutionaries in Irkutsk ousted Kolchak, who resigned on January 4, 1920. On his arrival in the town on January 7, the Czechs, who had assumed the responsibility for his safety under the Allied flag, delivered Kolchak to the putschists and stole the imperial gold that the White government had administered. The putschists were unable to remain in power for long under the constant pressure of Red army and partisans and delivered the admiral to a local Bolshevik Revolutionary Committee [REVKOM, ¶] on January 20. They murdered him on February 7, drowning him under the ice of the Angara River.

Meanwhile, Krasnoyarsk was suffering the concerted attacks of 5th Red Army and large bands of plundering partisans. Keppel directed a hopeless defence until he died, of pneumonia, on January 26, and Voitsekhoysky took over the military command. He decided to forego retribution for Kolchak by pillaging Irkutsk and led the remainder of the White armies and its train of refugees, altogether perhaps 35,000 souls, into Manchuria and on to China, where many of them eventually settled in the exile-Russian communities of Harbin and Shanghai. (29)

The success in Siberia meant that the Red Army had neutralized the last military threat to the Bolshevik government and the process of consolidating the new Red empire could begin. In the west, Finland and the Baltic States as well as Poland had to be written off temporarily, but the Caucasus was ruthlessly conquered and Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia were sovietised by the spring of 1921. A greater possible danger for the new paradise of the working class was recognized in internal dissent and all monarchist, bourgeois, Socialist Revolutionary, Anarchist or Menshevik elements and everybody who was suspected of harbouring sympathies was murdered or sent to Siberia, where the first genuine Red industry consisted of building concentration camps. The partisans, no matter how often they had aided the Reds in the civil war, were mostly shot out of hand.

The greatest danger for the regime as of yet was a rebellion of sailors that broke out in Kronstadt, the huge naval base of Petrograd, on February 28, 1921. It was also a most embarrassing affair since the sailors of the Baltic fleet had not only been early protagonists of the Bolshevik October Revolution, but of the attempted revolution of 1905 as well. The somewhat naive sailors directed certain demands at the address of the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party, such as the establishment of civil liberties like the right to assembly or free speech, a new election of soviets, the freedom of forming their own unions, and the release of political prisoners. (30)

Lenin and Trotsky were not amused. The latter ordered civil war hero Mikhail Tukachevsky, who had gone from being a czarist lieutenant to the command of the Red Western Army Group against Poland, to extinguish the rebellion. 60,000 Red Guards were sent against the perhaps 14,000 sailors at the base and after eleven days of slaughter half of the mariners were dead and the rest escaped to Finland. A second insurgence, based on similar demands plus a modicum of agrarian reform, broke out near Tambov in the southeast of Moscow, where in late August 1920 about 50,000 farmers organized themselves militarily under Alexander Antonov and for some months gained the upper hand over the local Reds.

The Central Committee noted the possible beginning of a peasant revolution and decided to set an example. In March 1911, Trotsky sent Tukachevsky to a second killing spree, assisted by 32,000 infantry and 8,000 cavalry troops,

artillery, armoured cars and trains and even aircraft dispersing poison gas. Meanwhile Comrade Stalin directed the building of a few more concentration camps in which eventual survivors of the Tambov revolt would end their days.

The farmers stood no chance against the technological superiority of the Red Army; it is estimated that over 200.000 insubordinates were killed and perhaps the same number of survivors deported to Siberia - forever. Since the Red Army was in the region and the business of cleaning up anyway, the remnants of Makhno's anarchist army were wiped out as well and only 83 men of the approximately 50,000 that had served with Makhno over the years reached Romania and exile. (31) But famine and the dearth of most simple commodities caused smaller protests to erupt essentially all over the new Bolshevik Empire, and the Party had to find an answer.

As long as the war had raged, the Bolshevik economical policy, if one can call it that, existed in a permanent state of crisis and led "to the nationalization of all industries in mid-1918, and to the 'War Communism' by means of which an embattled Bolshevik state organized his life-and-death struggle against counter-revolution and foreign intervention, and tried to raise the resources for it." (32) But no economy can run on a war footing indefinitely; there will come a day when workers and peasants refuse to accept the currency of war, which is backed, essentially, only by the hope for an eventual victory. In post-civil-war Russia, the peasants were increasingly unwilling to give up all their grain to the towns, where the workers suffered from the collapse of industrial production and hence were unable, for a time, to manufacture anything to give in exchange for the grain. The destruction of the Russian industrial base caused a drop in iron and steel production from 4.2 million tons in 1913 to only 200,000 in 1920. (33) What made the decrease so drastic?

The first and most obvious point was that Russia had been dreadfully reduced in strength, more than any of the other Great Powers, by the 1914-1918 conflict and then by the revolution and civil war. Its population had plummeted from 171 million in 1914 to 132 million in 1921.

The loss of Poland, Finland, and the Baltic states removed many of the country's industrial plants, railways, and farms, and the prolonged fighting destroyed much that remained. The stupendous decline in manufacturing - down to 13 percent of its 1913 output by 1920 - concealed the even greater collapse of certain key commodities: "thus only 1.6 percent of the pre-war iron ore was produced, 2.4 percent of the pig iron, 4.0 percent of the steel, and 5 percent of the cotton." Foreign trade had disappeared altogether, the gross yield of crops was less than half the pre-war figure, and per capita national income declined by more than 60 percent to a truly horrendous level. (34)

Lenin realized that even Bolsheviks need bread and in 1921 officially introduced the "New Economic Policy", which was essentially, as far as the agricultural sector was concerned, the reintroduction of private farming - some peasants now owning the land they tilled. By 1926, food production had returned to the level of 1914, but soon evened out, for there "was little that the peasants could buy in the city to tempt them to sell their surplus rather than to eat and drink it in the villages." (35) This attitude much decreased the flow of money into the towns and obstructed industrial growth quite a bit during the 1920s. This hindrance to the pace of development was the reason why Joseph Stalin, de facto dictator of the Soviet Union after Lenin's death in 1924 and Trotsky's emigration in 1929, cancelled the NEP and launched the first Five-Year-Plan [1929-1934], which accelerated Russia's industrialization for the price of countless rural victims - the famine of 1933 killed between two and three million people in the Ukraine alone and starvation remained an occasional guest in the palaces of the Russian proletariat.

What, then, was the bottom line of the revolution and its aftermath? The Red victory had been paid for not only with the depletion of agricultural resources and the collapse of industrial production but with staggering human misery as well.

Between 1918 and 1922, around seven million men had fought in the Russian civil war. Of these, close to 1.5 million had lost their lives as a result of fighting, executions or disease. But that figure probably represents no more than a fifth of the war's victims.

The chaos unleashed in the aftermath of the Revolution led to a severe famine in 1920-21. As malnourished refugees travelled in search of food, they succumbed to and spread contagious diseases, of which cholera and

typhus claimed the most victims. There were also outbreaks of smallpox and plague, to say nothing of an epidemic of venereal disease, which afflicted 12 per cent of the population of Leningrad. The total number of deaths due to epidemics alone may have exceeded eight million.

If this estimate is added to the figures for battlefield casualties, political murders and deaths due to famine, the excess mortality caused by the civil war approaches the global death toll for the First World War. (36)

The termination of the NEP went hand in hand with "dekulakization", the destruction of the "kulaks", the independent peasantry and the reintroduction of forced collectivization. It was another glorious step in the liberation of the working class.

Predictably, the consequence of the systematic annihilation of any farmer suspected of being a kulak was not economic growth but one of the greatest manmade famines in history. As Party functionaries descended on the countryside with orders to abolish private property and "liquidate" anyone who had accumulated more than the average amount of capital, there was chaos. Who exactly was a kulak?

Those who had been better-off before the Revolution or those who had done well since? What exactly did it mean to "exploit" other peasants? Lending them money when they were short of cash? Rather than see their cattle and pigs confiscated, many peasants preferred to slaughter and eat them, so that by 1935 total Soviet livestock was reduced to half of its 1929 level. But the brief orgy of eating was followed by a protracted, agonizing starvation.

Without animal fertilizers, crop yields plummeted - grain output in 1932 was down by a fifth compared with 1930. Grain seizures to feed Russia's cities left entire villages with literally nothing to eat. Starving people ate cats, dogs, field mice, birds, tree bark and even horse manure. Some went into the fields and ate half-ripe ears of corn. There were even cases of cannibalism.

As in 1920-21, typhus followed hard on the heels of dearth. Perhaps as many as eleven million people died in what was a wholly unnatural and unnecessary disaster. In addition, almost 400,000 households, or close to two million people, were deported as 'special exiles' to Siberia and Central Asia. Many of those who resisted collectivization were shot on the spot; perhaps as many as 3.5 million victims of "dekulakization" subsequently died in labour camps.

It was a crime the regime did its utmost to conceal from the world, confining foreign journalists to Moscow and restoring the Tsarist passport system to prevent famine victims fleeing to the cities for relief. Even the 1937 census was suppressed because it revealed a total population of just 156 million, when natural increase would have increased it to 186 million. (37)

To this list of losses one might add most of the educated part of the pre-war citizenry, who sought survival in exile: the artists, artisans and professionals; teachers, musicians, doctors, professors, administrators, scientists and engineers, of whom between two and three million are estimated to have left Russia by 1921. (38)

Against the more famous of the exiles, in particular former White generals, the various subsequent incarnations of the Cheka - MGB, OGPU and NKVD - led a perpetual war of assassins. Generals Dutov, Pokrovsky, Kutepov, Miller, Skoblin and Pepelyaev were murdered in exile or kidnapped and liquidated in Moscow and the slaughter continued until 1947 when Semenov, Shkuro and Krasnov, former Ataman of the Don Cossacks, were captured and executed.

The Red leaders, however, had a similar mortality rate, mostly on account of Stalin's purges. Only two significant Red generals died in battle, Schors and Chapaev, for many others civil life proved unusually lethal. Frunze died in 1925 at a hospital after undergoing surgery "recommended and arranged personally by Stalin," (39) and Blyukher, Tukachevsky, Vatsetis and Egorov were only the most famous names among the hundreds of high officers purged by Stalin in the 1930s. Trotsky, the father of the Red Army, was forced into exile, and was murdered by a Soviet agent in Mexico 1940. As German history since the 17th Century cannot be understood without awareness of the Thirty Years' War, the Fatherland's ultimate

nightmare, so the history of the RODINA, the vast, sad Russian motherland, in the 20th Century cannot be comprehended without taking into account her original sin, revolution and civil war.

But Russia was not the only former Eurasian empire to suffer from unofficial war far beyond the armistice of November 1918. The enmities between the separate peoples, cultures and religions of the former Ottoman Empire, which the Sublime Porte had managed to keep in check through most of the 19th Century, sought violent release. Arabs revolted in Yemen, Christian Druse in Syria, and Kurds in Anatolia. (40) In the process of creating modern Turkey, the nation's new secular leaders engaged in not one but two "ethnic cleanings", on both sides of her new borders, Europe and Asia.

The resulting butcheries were, to a considerable degree, the legacies of the "Young Turks" and their revolutionary "Committee for Union and Progress" (CUP). Under the aegis of Enver Pasha, they putsched their way to power in 1913 and instituted a policy of "Turkification" in western Anatolia. The plan essentially amounted to drive out of the country or kill the local Greek population of dozens of towns on the western coast of the Aegean Sea that had existed as Greek colonies for three-thousand years. After the war, the Greek returned the favour and...

... established a harsh occupation of the Aegean littoral. In pursuit of the goal of the return to Greece of Constantinople and an Anatolian Greek Empire, Greek forces invaded Anatolia, and committed atrocities upon the Turks, burning and looting villages; according to a report to the British parliament, they carried out a "systematic plan of destruction and extinction of the Moslem population."

The Turkish remobilization under the modernizing regime of Mustafa Kemal created a new national movement which, combined with a military offensive, forced the Greek army back to the coast. Greek refugees fled, out of fear of Turkish revenge, or many because they were ordered to flee by the Hellenic Greek commanders who burned Greek villages and homes (in a scorched-earth policy, ¶)...

The culmination of the terror was reached in September 1922, when tens of thousands of refugees crowded into Smyrna, in addition to the resident Greek, Armenian, and Turkish population. When fires broke out (probably laid by the Turks), the panic-stricken population was driven to the harbour, and robbed and beaten on the way by Turkish soldiers. Armenian men and boys were hunted down and killed. Greek estimates ran to 125,000 people killed, but a more realistic total given by the American historian Norman Naimark is 10,000 to 15,000, or fewer.

At any rate, the burning of Smyrna marked the end of the nearly 3,000-year history of the Greek presence on the Aegean coast of Anatolia. Eventually the Treaty of Lausanne of July 1923 provided for the compulsory population transfer of some 1.2 to 1.5 million Greeks from Anatolia and 356,000 Turks from Greece. In fact, by the time of the treaty, more than one million Greeks had already fled Anatolia. (41)

Spatial separation thus subsequently calmed most of the Turco-Grecian issues, but the fate of the Armenian minority turned out different. They had, being Christians, early supported the Young Turks against the Islamism of Sultan Abdul Hamid's government, but "Turkification" made them subject to Turkish chauvinism and, soon enough, Turkish violence. The leadership of the CUP authorized war minister Enver Pasha in March 1915 to "eliminate the internal danger", and in an audience he granted to the German theology professor Johannes Lepsius, Pasha acknowledged that the Armenian problem would be "ended". (42)

The genocide began in Constantinople with the closing of an Armenian newspaper in March 1915 and the arrest in April of 600 Armenian intellectuals, ostensibly because of the threat of a putsch. Only eight of them were released, the rest disappeared without trace. ...

The Armenian population of Zeitun was deported following a series of arrests and the disarming of the population by "Islamic gendarmes" ... starting in March. Armenian members of the Ottoman army were disarmed on the orders of Enver Pasha as from February 25, and Armenian members of labour battalions were being executed probably as from March. The Allied landing at Gallipoli on 25 April confirmed and heightened the Young Turk regime's fears for its existence, but had no causal connection with the genocide.

With these events began the systematic destruction of the Armenian people as from May 1915: the disarming and arrest of men and boys, the beatings, torture, rape, and deportation of the remaining men, women, and children from eastern Anatolia, and after July from western Anatolia and Thrace, to the deserts of Syria beyond the Euphrates. Some were killed on the spot - burned in their houses or drowned in the Black Sea. Most died during the deportation. During the forced marches many were shot or hacked to death, others died from exhaustion, starvation, or disease.

Plentiful testimony was provided by Armenian survivors, American and German diplomats, and by Turkish witnesses at the Istanbul trials held after the war. ... Estimates of the total number of deaths range from 150,000 (the figure given by the Turkish Historical Society) to 1.5 million (Armenian estimate). In March 1919 the Turkish minister of the interior produced the figure of 800,000. At least one million (out of the Ottoman Armenian population of 1.8 million) is the consensus among international scholars. ...

Two books published in 2002 and 2004 by the Turkish Historical Society denied there was any intention to exterminate the Armenians and reiterated the thesis of the Armenian "stab in the back": "Armenian wickedness", "treason", "desertion", and "rebellion" had made deportations a military necessity. (43)

The wisdom of contemporary Turkish law makes it a criminal offense to represent the Armenian genocide in public, or, Allah forbid, in the media; and this offense is punishable with up to three years of imprisonment, a provision which certainly discourages embarrassing investigations.

As we have seen, the armistice of November 11, 1918 was not automatically identical with a general silencing of the arms. It is true that for a few years internal strife replaced open conflict, and the European trend, so to say, went in the direction of establishing nationalist, monarchist or other right-wing dictatorships of various forms and tyrannical degrees. Mussolini's FASCISTI, of course, came to power in 1922, although Italy's sloppiness and carefree anarchy delayed their achieving true political supremacy for a decade. Mustafa Kemal in Turkey established a military government in 1923, and the Albanian president Ahmed Bey Zogu promoted himself, in 1928, to the post of king with dictatorial powers (King Zog I). King Alexander sent the Bulgarian parliament home in 1929, while in Yugoslavia another Alexander and then a prince-regent, Paul, executed unchecked royal powers over their chequered peoples from the same year on. Ioannis Metaxas usurped power in Greece in 1936 but allowed the king to remain the notional head of state, King Carol of Romania took over dictatorial powers in 1938, and, after the elimination of Bela Kun's Hungarian Soviet Republic in 1919, the regent Admiral Horthy presided over a sort of authoritative Hungarian quasi-monarchy. In the Baltic countries, prime ministers and presidents usurped power: in Lithuania Antanas Smetona as early as 1926, in Estonia Konstantin Paets, and in Latvia Karlis Ulmanis in 1934.

Poland became a military dictatorship under General Josef Pilsudski in 1926; Spain, of course, fell to Francesco Franco's paramilitary FALANGE in 1936; Portugal was taken over by its army in 1926, and Austria became a quasi-military state under Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss in 1933. (44)

For about twenty years European political violence remained mostly invisible under the national blankets, quite different from the situation in Asia, where the notional end of the Great War simply did not matter. Japan was the clear winner of the Great War: without any military risk she had inherited the former German possessions of Tsingtao in China and the Marshall, Carolines and Marianas Islands in the Pacific; all for the price of sending a single squadron of destroyers to the Mediterranean Sea, which engaged in convoy duty and never fired a single shot in anger. Japan's timely intervention in the Russian civil war, however, netted her the Kurile Islands.

Then her desires turned to China, the big prize.

The First World War presented Japan with an ideal opportunity not only to expand her production of heavy industrial goods like ships, which she did prodigiously, but also to enlarge her living space in Asia. ... [Under] cover of war, Japan pressed China to make a whole range of economic and political concessions known as the Twenty-one Demands. These included the transfer to Japan of economic rights over the Shandong peninsula [i.e. Tsingtao, ¶], the expansion and extension of Japanese rights in southern Manchuria and eastern

Mongolia, the exclusion of other foreign powers from any future coastal concessions and the granting of various privileges to Japanese-owned railway and mining companies.

The most radical, however, were for the appointment of Japanese advisers to the Chinese government, as well as of Japanese representatives to assist with the 'improvement' of the Chinese police. These last demands the Chinese - with British and American support - refused to accept. But the rest were acceded to with minimal modifications; the alternative, as the Japanese made abundantly clear, was war. ...

The Western powers were under no illusions as to Japan's intentions. ... Admiral Sir John Jellicoe, who had commanded the expedition to relieve Beijing in the Boxer Rebellion, suspected that the Japanese ultimately aimed at creating a "greater Japan which will probably comprise parts of China and the Gateway to the East, the Dutch East Indies, Singapore, and the Malay States." (45)

The admiral's prophecy was on the mark. On September 18, 1931, a Japanese commando blew up a part of the South Manchurian Railway near the town of Mukden, and, blaming terrorists for the region's descent into "anarchy", (46) the Japanese government ordered its Kwantung Army, stationed in Manchuria since the Russo-Japanese War of 1905, to occupy the province. Eventually, the greater part of Manchuria was transformed into the Japanese client-state Manchukuo by 1932 and when the League of Nations condemned Japan for not only its occupation of Chinese land but aerial bombings and widespread slaughter of civilians, Japan simply left the League.

For about five years, Chiang Kai-shek's Kuomintang movement attempted to organize the Chinese response to the continued Japanese attempts at colonization, although it continued to be weakened by internal strife between Nationalists and Communists. Nonetheless, when the Japanese government used the pretext of a small skirmish near Beijing on July 7, 1937, to send five divisions into northern China, to facilitate its addition to a greater Manchukuo, Chiang mobilized his troops in response on July 17, and a month later the Chinese government followed with a general call to arms.

By the end of the year, the Japanese military had deployed 700,000 men in China and began to occupy great parts of southern and eastern China. Alas, the Chinese forces simply retired further west and forced the Japanese to allocate more and more troops to this secondary theatre (by 1940 the equivalent of thirty-eight divisions was stationed there). In December 1937, however, the Japanese closed in on Chiang's capital, Nanking.

The Japanese 10th Army arrived on December 8. The 30,000 battle-weary but still bloodthirsty troops immediately surrounded the city. Chiang Kai-shek had fled weeks earlier, leaving behind him only a poorly equipped force to defend the 500,000 or so people who had not followed his example. They held out for just five days. On December 13 the Japanese breached the city wall at three separate points and marched through. Inside, they found a ready-made slaughterhouse. Tens of thousands of young men were murdered in the weeks that followed, regardless of whether they were in uniform or not. Some were simply lined up in rows and machine-gunned. Others were beheaded, bayoneted or buried alive. One group was sprayed with gunfire and then soaked with gasoline and set on fire. A few were hung by their tongues on metal hooks. (47)

After an orgy of murder had exterminated the men of military age, the violence turned against women. What happened then gave rise to the adage of the 'Rape of Nanking', 1937. The Japanese soldier Todokoro Kozo explained:

"Women suffered most. No matter how young or old, they all could not escape the fate of being raped. We sent out coal trucks ... to the city streets and villages to seize a lot of women. And then each of them was allocated to 15 or 20 soldiers for sexual intercourse and abuse." (48)

Azuma Shiro added:

"At first we used some kinky words like 'Pikankan'. 'Pikankan' means, 'Let's see a woman open up her legs.' Chinese women didn't wear underpants. Instead, they wore trousers tied with a string. There was no belt. As we pulled the strings, the buttocks were exposed. We 'Pikankan'. We looked. After a while we would say something like, 'It's my day to take a path,' and we took turns raping them. It would [have been] all right if

we [had] only raped them. I shouldn't say all right. But we always stabbed them and killed them. Because dead bodies don't talk." (49)

Between 10,000 and 50,000 women were brutally raped and murdered in Nanking between December 1937 and February 1938, a tally to which at least 50,000 soldiers and male civilian victims have to be added. As the ghastly examples collected in this chapter make clear, the armistice of November 1918 brought a temporary reprieve only to the West. In Asia, the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, Conquest, Slaughter, Famine and Death roamed unhindered.

Less than a decade passed between the end of the Russian civil war in 1923 and the beginnings of the Sino-Japanese conflict in 1931. In "The War of the World", Niall Ferguson suggested to identify as the beginning of the Second World War not the Russo-German invasions of Poland in September 1939, but the aforementioned incident on the Marco Polo Bridge near Beijing on July 7, 1937. But the Sino-Japanese conflict had burned, if on a low flame, much earlier, and one might as well go back to the Manchurian railway incident in 1931 in determining the beginning of the Second World War. Perhaps future generations of historians will conceptualize a single, great conflagration lasting from 1914 to 1945, or even 1953, including the Korean War.

For the future development of Asia, however, the most important element seems to have been the diffusion of Marxist philosophy and Leninist revolutionary tactics to China, and from there to French Indochina. The phenomenon added a communist wing to the Kuomintang, which formerly was a solely nationalist-chauvinist movement. It was perhaps the human need to believe in a better future that allowed Soviet-style communism to cloak itself in the mantle of a messianic religion, something quite uncommon for the East. As a quasi-religion, communism had by then its own trinity: God Father Karl Marx, the Holy Spirit of Lenin, his body available for the worship of the pilgrims in a sepulchre at the Kremlin Wall (50), and, everywhere, banners and posters testifying to the leadership of Joseph Stalin, Son of God. The propaganda swiftly found its way to China, where the expectation of a socialist rebuilding of the society, communist rapture, so to say, began to replace the teachings of Confucius. And thus it came that the spectre of communism roamed not solely through Europe but Asia as well.

OBJECTS IN THE MIRROR ARE CLOSER THAN THEY APPEAR

And out of good still to find means of evil.

John Milton "Paradise Lost", Bk. 1, L. 165

*There is a history in all men's lives,
Figuring the nature of the times deceased,
The which observed, a man may prophesy,
With a near aim, of the main chance of things
As yet not come to life, which in their seeds
And weak beginnings lie entreaured.*

William Shakespeare "Henry IV", Part II, Act 3, Sc. 1, L. 80

The cardinal difference between the Great War of 1914 and earlier European wars lay in its objective, which in turn changed its scale. For no longer were wars waged for the gain of a slice of territory somewhere, or like Bismarck's, for specific aims and with limited means: the war of 1914 was for "all or nothing." Germany, it was alleged, challenged Great Britain's status as the dominant power in the world save the Americas, and there was no consolation prize. The totality of a country's resources had to be subordinated to the goal of eventual victory, and in this sense the war of 1914 was the first "Total War", although the phrase itself would not be coined until twenty-nine years later. The winner-takes-all approach also accounts for the extensive lists of "war aims" that the contenders put together for the sake of convincing the public that the prize was worth the slaughter.

To a degree, by going to war the great powers of 1914 ordained the spectre of their own eventual demise. The Russian, Austrian and German empires were rent asunder by revolution, the Ottomans fell, France never recovered from her losses, and "Britain was never the same again after 1918 because the country had ruined its economy by waging a war substantially beyond its resources." (1)

But their fate was still hidden in early 1917. The entry of the United States into the war was to upset the balance, but since the U.S. Army in 1917 was composed of only about 107,000 mostly inexperienced troops, a decisive influx of newly trained units could not be expected before mid-1918. That the USA would not simply write off the credits extended to the Entente was clear: while the United States were well satisfied with the mercantile aspects of war alone, Allied failures on the Western Front in late 1917 and the collapse of Russia made active American participation inevitable.

The Entente by that time really was too big to fail, in the sense of being too big a customer for American exports. By 1916 merchandise exports had risen to 12 percent of US gross domestic product - double the pre-war figure and, indeed, the highest percentage in any year between 1869 and 2004. Around 70 percent of those exports were bound for Europe, going overwhelmingly to Britain and her allies. Even if the German campaigns of unrestricted [U-boat, ¶] warfare had not brought the United States into the war in April 1917,

Britain would surely have been bailed out financially, if not militarily. The alternative - as the American ambassador pointed out on March 5, 1917 - would have been to kill off transatlantic trade, which would be "almost as bad for the United States as for Europe." (2)

As for the German government, the February Revolution in St. Petersburg raised hopes that revolutionary Russia would eventually drop out of the war and Lenin and his comrades, accompanied by millions of Reichsmark, were entrained to St. Petersburg, where their conspirational activities developed, as Richard von Kühlmann of the German Foreign Office noted, "as we intended." (3)

If Russia could be brought to peace, Germany would have a chance to beat the Allies on a single, the Western Front, before US reinforcements could arrive in France. In many a respect it was unexpected that Germany, more impeded than aided by Austria-Hungary, had held out for the war's duration in the first place. In 1913, the key economic figures of the two camps were as follows: (4)

Allies (including USA)	<u>Category</u>	Central Powers
295.5 (392.8)	Population (million)	119.0
18.0 (49.8)	Steel Production (milliontons)	20.2
322.5 (863.5)	Energy Consumption (millions of tons coal equivalent)	236.4
30.3 (62.3)	World Manufacturing (percent)	19.2

One might speculate whether the original Allies, Great Britain, France and Russia, initially underestimated Germany's economic and military endurance based on suchlike figures, which seemed to define the limits of the enemy's capacities. The foremost advantage of the Entente was that they controlled the oceans and were able to impose a naval blockade on the Central Powers. In this war more than in any earlier one, economical factors decided, and Great Britain, as the strongest economical power of the original confederates, was expected to shoulder the heavy burden of providing her allies with money and supplies.

By April 1, 1917, indeed, inter-Allied war credits had risen to \$ 4.3 billion, 88 percent of which was covered by the British government. Although this looked like a repetition of Britain's eighteenth-century role as "banker to the coalition," there was now one critical difference: the sheer size of the trade deficit with the United States, which was supplying billions of dollars' worth of munitions and foodstuffs to the Allies ... yet required few goods in return. Neither the transfer of gold nor the sale of Britain's enormous dollar securities could close this gap; only borrowing on the New York and Chicago money markets, to pay the American suppliers in dollars, would do the trick.

This in turn meant that the Allies became ever more dependent upon U.S. financial aid to sustain their own war effort. In October 1916, the British Chancellor of the Exchequer was warning that "by next June, or earlier, the President of the American Republic would be in a position, if he wishes, to dictate his terms to us." It was an altogether alarming position for "independent" Great Powers to be in.

But what of Germany? Its performance in the war had been staggering. As Professor Northedge points out, "with no considerable assistance from her allies, [it] had held the rest of the world at bay, had beaten Russia, had driven France, the military colossus of Europe for more than two centuries, to the end of her tether, and in 1917, had come within an ace of starving Britain into surrender."

Part of this was due to those advantages outlined above: good inner lines of communication, easily defensible positions in the west, and open space for mobile warfare against less efficient foes in the east. It was also due to the sheer fighting quality of the German forces, which possessed an array of intelligent, probing staff officers who readjusted to the new conditions of combat faster than those in any other army, and who by 1916 had rethought the nature of both defensive and offensive warfare. (5)

These staff officers were quite aware of the essentiality of speed by mid-1917. No amount of bravery could hold out against the practically unlimited forces and supplies the USA could throw into the scales. Not only had the personnel of the German armed forces shrunk by over a quarter million compared to the apex of 5.4 million men in the summer of 1917, the necessity of releasing skilled workers to keep the armaments industries going further decreased the available manpower. (6)

As soon as the armistice with Bolshevik Russia was signed, OHL transferred ten of the better divisions from the east to the west each month, beginning in November 1917. (7) Only divisions of the 2nd and 3rd Reserve remained in the east to occupy the vast territories ceded by the Bolsheviks. The forces sent westwards were trained in the new tactical applications which to overcome the paralysis of trench warfare the German General Staff had developed over the last twelve months. The changes to be implemented concerned the artillery preparation before a battle and the choice of targets by the infantry when approaching the enemy's trenches.

The Western battles of 1917 had pointed out the relative strategic impotence of continuous artillery barrages. Even if a bombardment could be kept up for a week or longer, its value only diminished over time because it necessarily gave away the target for the subsequent offensive and allowed the enemy time to schedule countermeasures.

A German artillery specialist, Colonel Georg Bruchmüller, was given the task of preparing the artillery barrage for the German breakthrough at Riga in September 1917. In the course of his studies, Bruchmüller realized that a concentrated bombardment over a short period of time, executed with precision, might be preferable to a long but indiscriminate shelling, for the enemy would have no time to bring in reserves to the threatened part of the front.

In addition, Bruchmüller insisted on "registering" all artillery pieces and, contrary to Haig's positioning of artillery at Passchendaele, where over 2,000 guns had been directed at a sector of less than five miles of German front, demanded to deploy the artillery for the planned offensive along a front as broad as possible, to further impede the enemy's ability to anticipate where to direct his reserves.



THE MILLIONS OF SHELLS FIRED CREATED EERIE, ALIEN LANDSCAPES ... AS ABOVE DURING THE BRITISH ATTACK AT MESSINES, 1917...

... SO BELOW, FOR THE AUSTRALIANS AT CHATEAU WOOD, YPRES, ALSO IN 1917.



The emphasis of the German attack plan, however, was on speed. Nivelle had hoped, unrealistically, to overcome the German position on the Chemin des Dames the previous year in a few hours. He had lacked the trained troops and weight of artillery to bring his hope to realisation. Ludendorff now had the necessary troops and guns and a realistic plan.

The enemy was to be attacked both on a broad front - fifty miles - and in depth, the depth of the attack to be achieved by concentrating an enormous weight of artillery firing the heaviest possible bombardment at short, medium and long range in a brief but crushing deluge of shells, lasting five hours.

Ludendorff's bombardment force amounted to 6,473 field, medium and heavy guns and 3,532 mortars of varying calibre, for which over a million rounds of ammunition were assembled. All the guns, many of which had been brought from the east, were "registered" beforehand at a specially constructed firing range, producing data of each gun's variance from a theoretical norm which, when combined with detailed meteorological allowance for barometric pressure and wind speed and direction, would ensure, as far as was humanly possible, that all would hit their designated targets, whether enemy trenches or battery positions.

Explosive shell was also to be intermixed with varieties of gas projectiles, lachrymatory [tear gas, ¶] and asphyxiating phosgene, in a combination calculated to outwit the protection offered by enemy gas masks. ... It was with Bruchmüller's verified experiment [in Riga, ¶] in mind that Hindenburg had, at Mons on 11 November 1917, come to the decision to launch an all-or-nothing offensive in the west in the coming year. (8)

The German Staff had also set up teams to study possible tactical improvements for the infantry attack itself. Whether in open clusters, standard German tactic in 1914, or lines, the disastrous British idea of the Somme in 1916, advancing troops were inevitably mauled as soon as they came into the range of the enemy's machine guns. This deadly exposure to reduce was the aim of the new German INFILTRATION tactics.

The new assault technique was based on the following modus operandi: a short but most intensive barrage of artillery was to destroy the foremost Allied trenches and attempt to wreck the enemy's forward observation posts, thus slowing down his tactical intelligence gathering. After the five hours of the initial bombardment, a successive stream of

artillery fire was to creep over the Allied defence lines at a walking man's pace, pinning down the opponents while simultaneously giving the attacking infantry an opportunity to advance and, hopefully, cut the barbed wire barriers. At this point the second change in procedure was to take effect: the infantry pushing ahead was to detour around the enemy's strongholds, machine-gun nests or fortified positions and continue to advance in the direction of the least resistance, which should lead the attack deeper into the enemy's rear.

The old procedure had taught to stop at these points and wait until reinforcements could be brought up from the rear to deal with the problem. The new philosophy, to detour the enemy where he was strong and to attack where he was weak, i.e. in the rear, was expected to reduce casualties by fifty percent or more. The units that were trained in these new tactics soon acquired the appellation of "STORMTROOPERS". If the infiltrators could proceed, essentially unhindered, into the enemy's rearward areas, disrupting communication lines, destroying supplies and threatening command posts, the enemy's order of battle might be compromised enough to allow the attackers to achieve the desired breakthrough into open territory.

A Bavarian officer, Captain Herrmann Geyer, had consolidated the army's thinking on the new concept of "infiltration" - though the word was not one the German army used - and the obvious difficulties in his manual THE ATTACK IN POSITION WARFARE of January 1918, by which Operation Michael [the code-name for the first German offensive in March 1918,1] was to be fought. It stressed rapid advance and disregard for the security of the flanks. (9)

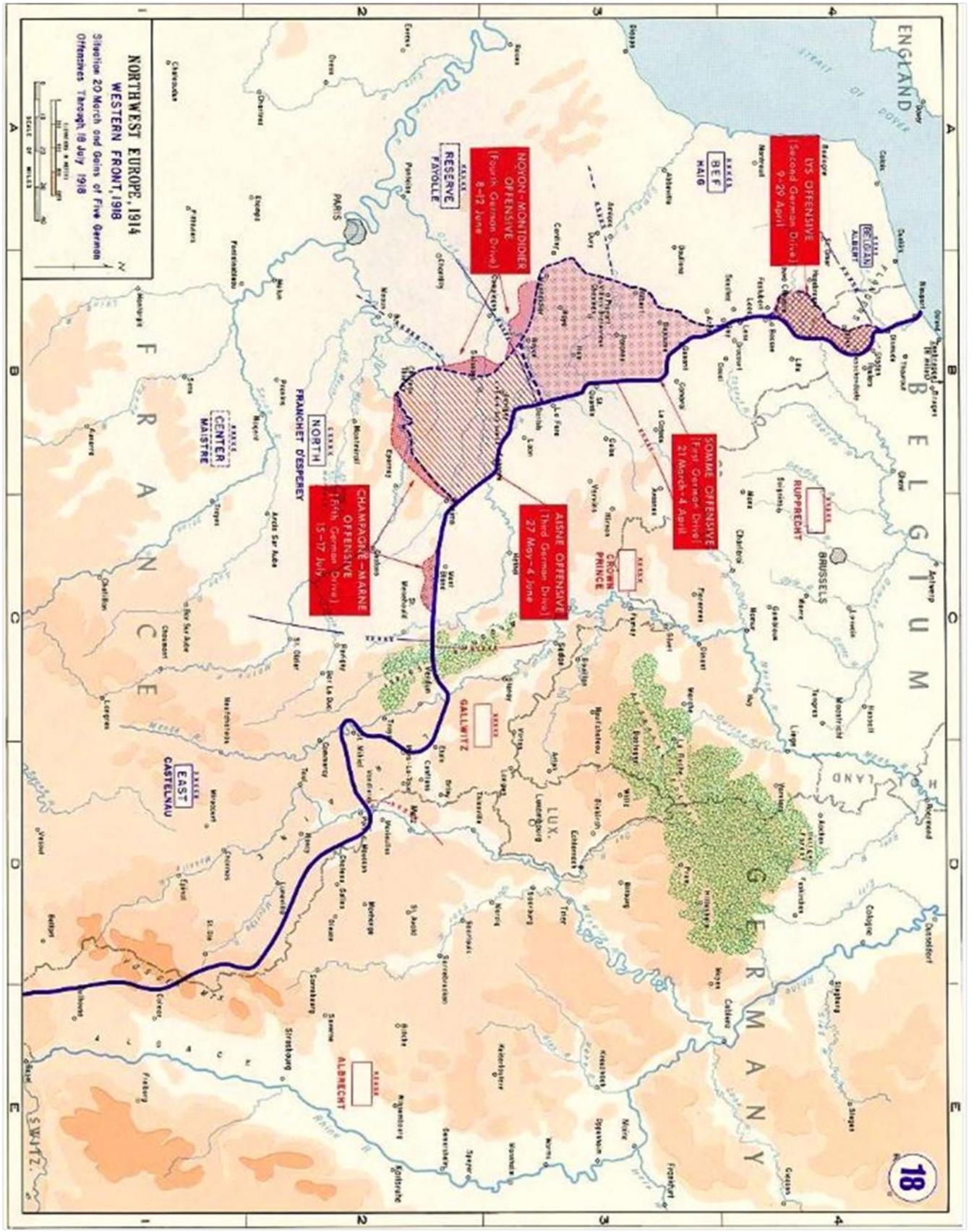
By March 1918, the forces opposite each other in the Western Theatre numbered 192 German against 178 Allied divisions, although OHL counted only 56 of them, the ones better equipped, as "attack divisions". (10) For "MICHAEL", Hindenburg and Ludendorff committed 62 divisions between Lens and La Fère, in the midst of which lay the old battlefield of the Somme 1916. They were opposed by 40 to 50 Allied divisions from the British First, Third and Fifth Armies and the French Third and Sixth, on a front of almost fifty miles.¹ The List Regiment from Bavaria, part of the 6th Bavarian Reserve Division, partook in "MICHAEL" and two further German offensives that followed in the spring and early summer of 1918; Corporal Hitler fought at the Somme, on the Aisne and on the Marne. It was in this time of frequent combat that he laid down the basis for his eventual decoration with the Iron Cross, First Class: the citation mentioned his courage, willingness and dependability.

"MICHAEL" kicked off on the morning of March 21, 1918, directing its main impetus, around St. Quentin, against the divisions of General Herbert Gough's Fifth British Army. Luck played a good part in the selection of the target and the resulting initial success, because Fifth Army had been badly mauled at Passchendaele in late 1917 and was not quite up to its old standards yet. In early 1918, the British army had followed the example of Germany and France and reduced its divisional strength from twelve to nine battalions. The reorganization schedule disbanded 145 battalions and distributed them piecemeal over the rest of the army, and Fifth Army, the most recently established, possessed a great many of these unlucky formations that had to change accommodation. Gough additionally faced a problem in obtaining labour to improve his trench system, which, at its southern end, overlapped with the French entrenchments. These were, alas, in the opinion of the British staff, nothing to write home about. (11)

Although the effectiveness of the German artillery proved somewhat more limited than Colonel Bruchmüller had hoped and British resistance remained motivated, the sheer weight of the assault slowly dented the lines and by the day's evening the British vanguard posts had been lost to an extent of nineteen miles. Losses remained high, though, on both sides, and the new infiltration tactics, while often working, revealed an unintended consequence. By their nature, they progressed in the direction of the enemy's least resistance, but not necessarily in the direction the operation was aimed at. Thus in late March and April, the Germans found themselves going over the old battlefield of the Somme, to Peronne and further west, again, and after having gained another twenty-odd miles along the river in the direction of Amiens, i.e. to the west, the attack ran out of steam.

¹ John Keegan enumerates 76 German against 28 British divisions, but the number of French divisions is not clear. (12)

MAP LXXV: GERMAN OFFENSIVES 1918



TERRITORIAL GAINS ON THE WESTERN FRONT BY THE GERMAN OFFENSIVES 1918

The nearer they approached Amiens, the more deeply did they become entangled in the obstacles of the old Somme battlefield, a wilderness of abandoned trenches, broken roads and shell crater fields left behind by the movement of the front a year earlier. The Somme may not have won the war for the British in 1916 but the obstacle zone it left helped to ensure that in 1918 they did not lose it. (13)

The exploitation of the enemy's least resistance had led the Germans into the wrong direction. Paris was south of Amiens, not west. OHL contemplated the problem and decided to redirect the axis of attack. 2nd and 18th Armies were turned southwest, to Paris, 17th remained aligned westward in the direction of Amiens and was to cut the connection between the British Third Army and the French forces to their south if possible, and 6th Army, on the German right, i.e. northern flank, was to swing northwest, to Arras and the North Sea harbours.

This separation of the German attack forces fatally reminded of Moltke's disastrous splitting up of the German right wing at the Marne in September 1914. Unbeknownst to the enemy, the weakness of "MICHAEL" was that the operation had been laid out, quite untypically, without a definite plan. It was hoped that, if everything went as planned and a few auspicious miracles occurred, the BEF could be rolled up by a flanking move and driven to the coast. In the alternative, if open territory could be reached, the troops could set their sights on Paris, again. "We will punch a hole," Ludendorff pondered. "For the rest, we shall see. We did it this way in Russia." (14) Hence, while each German army was able to, initially, "punch a hole", the progress that should follow was not clearly determined and the German formations found themselves manoeuvring ad hoc, which is, reacting to the enemy instead of dictating events. Although some German troops advanced as far as forty miles into enemy territory, they were outrunning their supply lines and could not form a cohesive advancing front. When the British army was able to launch a counterattack, if with limited objectives, at Amiens, by the Australian Corps on April 4, Ludendorff had to admit that "MICHAEL" had run its course and failed to bring a quick end to the war.

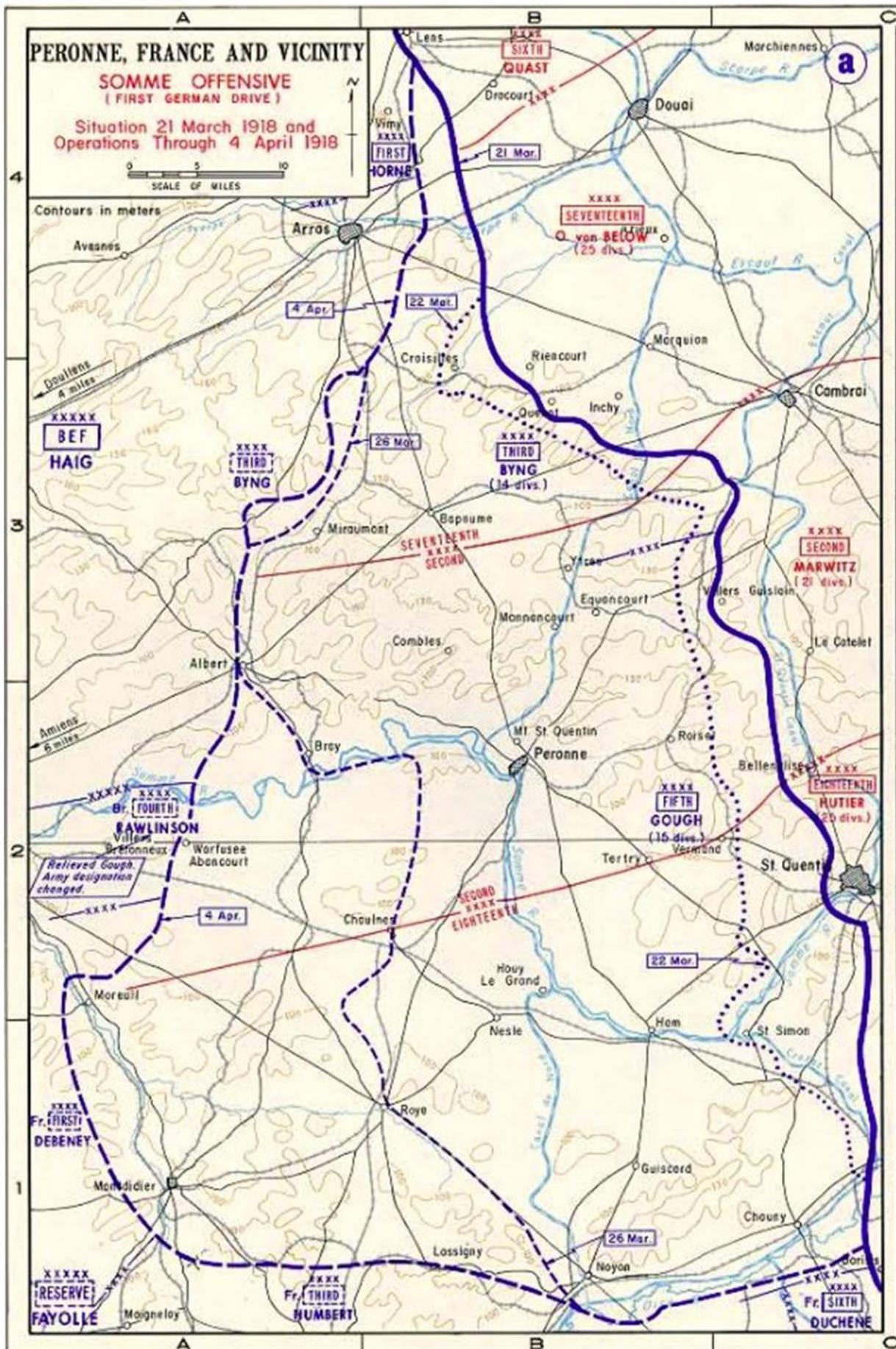
Some younger German staff officers felt that things were not improving. Major Wilhelm von Leeb, who was to become a Field Marshal in World War II, commented that "OHL has changed direction. It has made its decisions according to the size of territorial gain, rather than operational goals." (15) It was true that the initial advance of "MICHAEL" was swift, compared to the British experience at the Somme in 1916, but the German army could not win the war by occupying strategically worthless French terrain. For worse, losses had not diminished to the extent expected "MICHAEL" caused about a quarter of a million casualties on either side - and not only had they occurred among the best troops the German army had left and saved for the last, hopefully decisive, stroke, the Allies could easily refill their ranks with the arrival of 200,000 American troops per month while the Germans could not.

The early success of "MICHAEL" caused a crisis within the Allied staffs. It was resolved that in the face of the German thrust aimed at splitting the British from the French forces, which did indeed threaten to roll up the complete British front from Amiens to the North Sea ports, a single commander had to coordinate the two defending armies and control "the direction of strategic operations". (16) Ferdinand Foch was installed as Allied C-in-C on April 3, just in time to react to a shift in the German offensive.

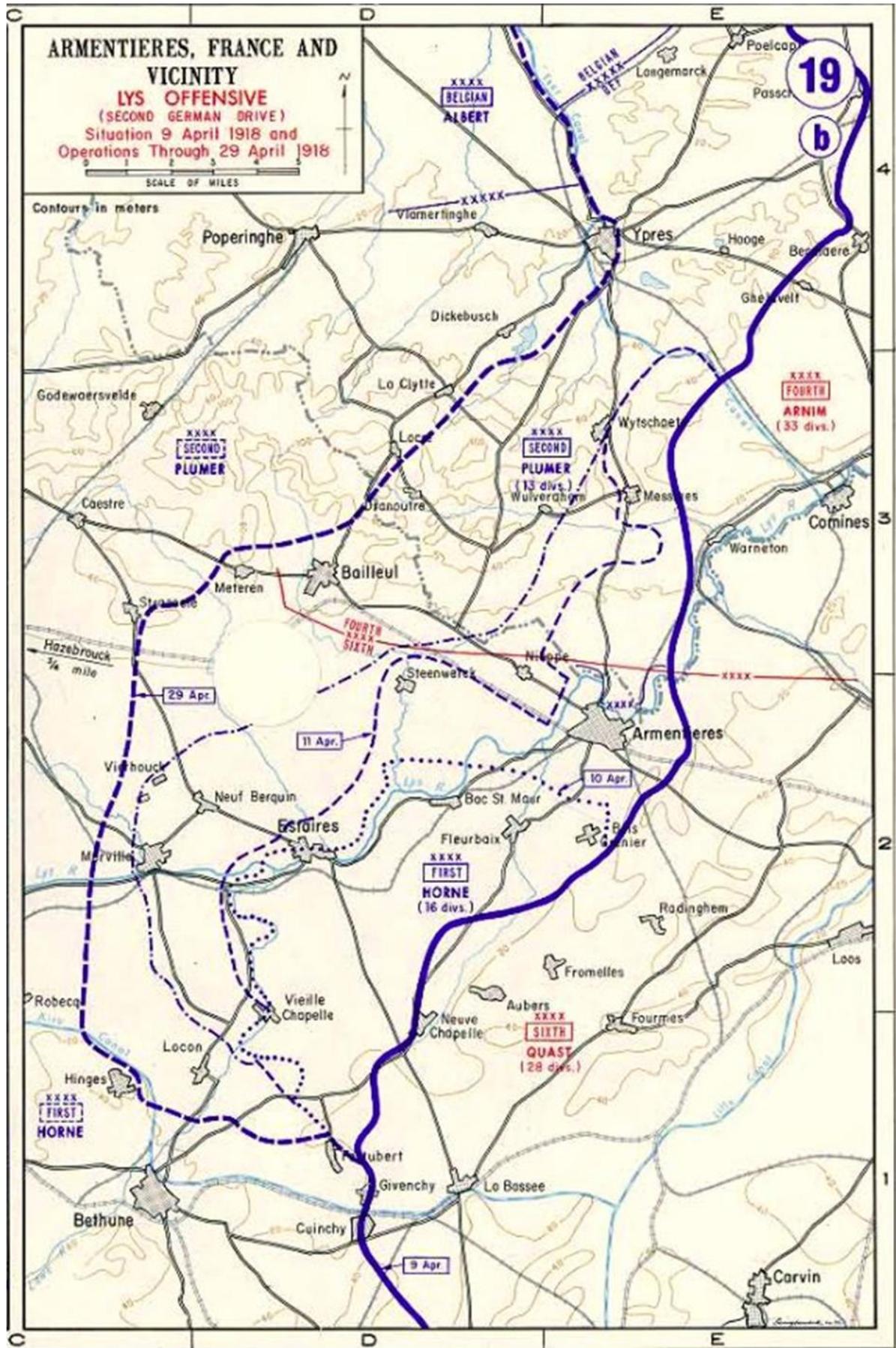
Although the Germans stood only five miles from Amiens on April 5, the makeshift defence set up by General Rawlinson's Fourth Army, which had relieved Gough's much damaged Third, held, and their steadfast resistance eventually compelled Ludendorff to seek out the alternate British target his staff had prepared for. It was Plumer's Second Army along the Lys River, fifty miles north, at Armentieres and Ypres. Operation "George" was to throw Quast's 6th and Arnim's 4th Armies against the lines of Plumer and Horne's First Army, with the objective to break through to the coast and thus envelop the northern half of the BEF.

The assault began on April 9 and, supported by a special artillery barrage à la Bruchmüller, succeeded again in breaking through the enemy's foremost positions. The territorial gains, however, were much more modest than at the Somme, ten or twelve miles at the most, due to the improvement in defence coordination effected by the recently unified Allied command. After having paid too high a price in blood, this second German offensive petered out as well. The medical services counted 303,450 casualties between March 21 and April 10, and the official report admitted that the

MAP LXXVI: FIRST GERMAN DRIVE AT THE SOMME



MAP LXXVII: SECOND GERMAN DRIVE AT THE LYS



attack "had not penetrated to the decisive heights of Cassel and the Mont des Cats, the possession of which would have compelled the [British, ¶] evacuation of the Ypres salient and the Yser position." (17) Again, the Allied forces were able to replace the losses within weeks, the Germans not at all. The offensive power of the German army, as well as the mood at OHL, was in extremis. A third offensive was prepared, this time against the French troops at the Aisne. The Germans still stood upon most of the Chemin des Dames, the ridge above the Aisne which the Nivelle Offensive had failed to conquer a year ago, and, with the advantage of the higher ground, an attack that penetrated into the open territory past the river could lead the German troops straight southwest to Paris, only seventy miles away, through the valley between the Oise river in the north and the Ourcq to the south.

This time a truly gargantuan stock of shells was accumulated for the opening salvos, two million shells for six thousand guns. The preparatory barrage had lasted only four hours before, on the morning of May 27, fifteen divisions of 7th Army descended at the French lines around Craonne, between Rheims and La Fère, opposed by the French Second and Sixth Armies, of Franchet D'Espèrey Northern Army Group. The initial German progress was as orderly as could be hoped for and the flat country afoot the ridge was reached within two days. Here the plan called for an intermediate halt while, to the north of the Chemin des Dames, a second attack was to issue against the British Fifth Army. If things went as planned, the forces between the two jaws of the German vise would be enveloped and destroyed. But the swift pace of the first two days proved too much of a temptation to Ludendorff: he turned 7th Army into the direction of Paris, advancing over the Aisne to Soissons, over the Ourcq to Chateau Thierry. Paris was only fifty miles distant.

In the face of continuous Allied counterstrokes the drive bogged down again: three divisions attacked on May 28, five more on May 29, eight on May 30, four on May 31, five on June 1 and two more on June 3, among them the huge 2nd and 3rd Divisions of the American Expeditionary Force [AEF, ¶]. The Allies were unaware, however, that OHL had already given orders for a temporary freeze of the offensive on June 3, because the vanguard had once again outrun its supply lines as well as its artillery support. Worse was that hitherto the Aisne offensive had caused another 100,000 casualties, a number that told a growing minority of concerned general staff officers that the days of indiscriminate offensives were over. After a short standstill, the German offensive resumed on a more local level on June 9, with a two-pronged attack on the line Montdidier - Noyon - Soissons, along both sides of the Oise river [see Map LXXIII, p. 889]; but it was a strangely indecisive operation from the get-go and subsequently did not accomplish much. (18)

Against mounting opposition, Ludendorff and Hindenburg were still able to insist on a continuation of the offensive, although, or perhaps because, both their own as well as the German government's sense of reality seemed to dwindle. On July 3, a conference including the Kaiser, Hindenburg, Ludendorff and the civil government led by the chancellor, consented to a list of their minimum war aims, without whose acquisition no peace treaty could be discussed. The list not only itemized the retention of all the territories recently acquired in the east, which included Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and the Ukraine, it insisted, in the west, on the annexation of Luxembourg as well as the Belgian and northern French coal and iron fields plus the respective heavy industry belts. (19)



1917 - THE KAISER PRETENDS TO BE IN COMMAND.

The very last offensive strike of the German army in the war began on July 15, 1918, at Mont Blanc, on the eastern part of the Aisne position, aiming for the Marne. The leading edge of the about fifty under strength German divisions attacking succeeded, for the last time, in an initial breakthrough, and the Marne was crossed on the evening of the first day, against initially moderate resistance by the French Second and Fourth Armies.

But for once the Allies had developed accurate strategic intelligence about the German intentions and the divisions of General Boehm's 7th Army leading the assault, having reached Chateau Thierry on July 18, ran into a crushing counterattack the very same day. The salient at Chateau Thierry was surrounded by the French Sixth [General Degoutte], Ninth [Mityr] and Fifth [Berthelot] Armies, which were supported by five gigantic U.S. divisions, which added, at 28,000 men apiece, the equivalent of another army, about 140,000 men, to the scales of the battle. The German vanguard was attacked on both flanks and had to retreat on July 20, to avoid encirclement.

By August 6 the salient between Rheims and Soissons was eliminated and the German troops pushed behind the Aisne and Vesle for the second time after 1914 [see Map LXXVI, below, dashed red line, ¶]. The second failure on the Marne allowed the critical elements in the German General staff to articulate their opposition to further frontal attacks à la Ludendorff.

The field strength of the German army had shrunk from 5.1 million men to 4.2 million between February and July 1918 (20), and the availability of replacements, which, slim enough, could only fill one spot in three, was further decreased by the onset of the catastrophic influenza epidemic that had found its way from Africa to Europe in mid-1918 and, by 1920, was to kill more humans than the Great War had. More than a quarter million soldiers came down with the disease in the summer of 1918 and the serviceable manpower of the German army declined by a further ten per cent.

Again, Allied intelligence painted a quite accurate picture of the German situation and Haig and Foch prepared a vigorous Allied counteroffensive over the old Somme battlefield. Debeney's First French Army and Rawlinson's Fourth British Army, supported by the Canadian and Australian Corps and all the tanks the Allies could muster, 70 French and 530 British ones, (21) were to strike eastward from Amiens.

The assault opened on August 8 between Montdidier and Albert, and, quickly penetrating the improvised German defences, gained about eight miles on the very first day. By September 4, the Allies reached a line just west of Cambrai and St. Quentin, almost exactly where "Michael" had started five months earlier, in March.

Finally, and perhaps not surprisingly, the morale of the German troops diminished in the face of another 100,000 casualties suffered by September 5, and about 15,000 went into Allied captivity the opening day of the battle without offering much resistance. This was the day Ludendorff famously called the "black day of the German army": but given the terrible sacrifices of the German soldiers from 1914 to 1918, up to and including the losses incurred at Ludendorff's ill-designed frontal offensives, the verdict reveals more about the judge than the judged. (22)

At any rate, Colonel Lossberg, now principal operations officer, recommended a retreat to a new defensive line to be established at the Meuse but Ludendorff and his aides would not hear of it and ordered a slow recession to the "Hindenburg Line", a position between Arras and Rheims which they believed could be held for the winter, or until the situation improved. It did not. On August 30, the Western Front saw the initial appearance of the First U.S. Army as an independent unit commanded by General John Pershing. The new formation was deployed southeast of Verdun at St. Mihiel, where a salient created by the meandering Meuse had been held by German troops since August 1914.

The German forces in the St. Mihiel salient had already received their orders to withdraw past the river to the heights between Étain and Vandières, as a part of the withdrawal to the Hindenburg Line and were in the process of evacuation when, on September 12, the Allied offensive struck. The American I and IV Corps, over 100,000 men strong and supported by almost 3,000 artillery pieces, attacked the salient, eliminated it, and succeeded in taking about 14,000 Germans prisoner. The American press delighted in praise for the "doughboys" performance and ignored that the French "ungraciously attributed their success to the fact that they had caught the Germans in the process of retiring." (23)

Pershing did not publicly comment on the French mockeries but prepared, in cooperation with Foch, a second, bigger French-American offensive at Verdun and the Argonne Forest west of the town. The target of the strike was the critical railway junction at Mézières, northwest of Sedan, thirty miles behind the German lines.

On a front of approximately 22 miles, between St. Menehould and the Meuse at Verdun, the French Fourth [Gouraud] and American First [Liggett] Armies deployed about 600,000 troops, supported by 5,000 guns, 500 tanks and the same number of aircraft. The attack opened on September 26 but laboured heavily against four German defence lines. Numbers one and two were negated in a week of fighting, but by October 3, the third defence line had stopped the Allied progress after less than ten miles had been gained. Pershing regrouped, but great success remained elusive and even his best divisions only made very slow headway. On October 12, the assault was halted for a major reorganization. The size of the U.S. divisions allowed the bisection of the AEF into two armies.

The Second U.S. Army, formed that very day and commanded by General Bullard, was deployed on the right wing of the Allied strike, at St. Mihiel. On November 1, the offensive was renewed, and while Bullard only made very modest gains of no more than two miles at the right wing, the First U.S. Army finally succeeded in punching through the last German Argonne defence line at Buzancy by November 3 and gained a line from Dun-Sur-Meuse to Chatillon-Sur-Bar [Map LXXIX, above, dash-dotted red line]. The target of the operation, Mézières, however remained well out of reach. Although German resistance was all but faltering in these last days of the war, American losses of the Meuse-Argonne offensive exceeded the German ones, 120,000 to 100,000, quite possibly due to their inexperience. But the die had been cast: nothing could belie the fact that Germany had lost the war.

Defeat on the western front came as a shock, particularly after the historic victories in the East where vast areas extending as far as the Caucasus had been conquered. Consequently there was a serious drop in morale even among the older soldiers. Disorders on troop and leave trains approached rebellion. Shots were fired from windows. Men disappeared at every station. Officers attempting to maintain discipline were attacked with stones and grenades. Revolutionary slogans such as "We're not fighting for Germany's honour but for the millionaires" were scrawled in chalk on the cars.

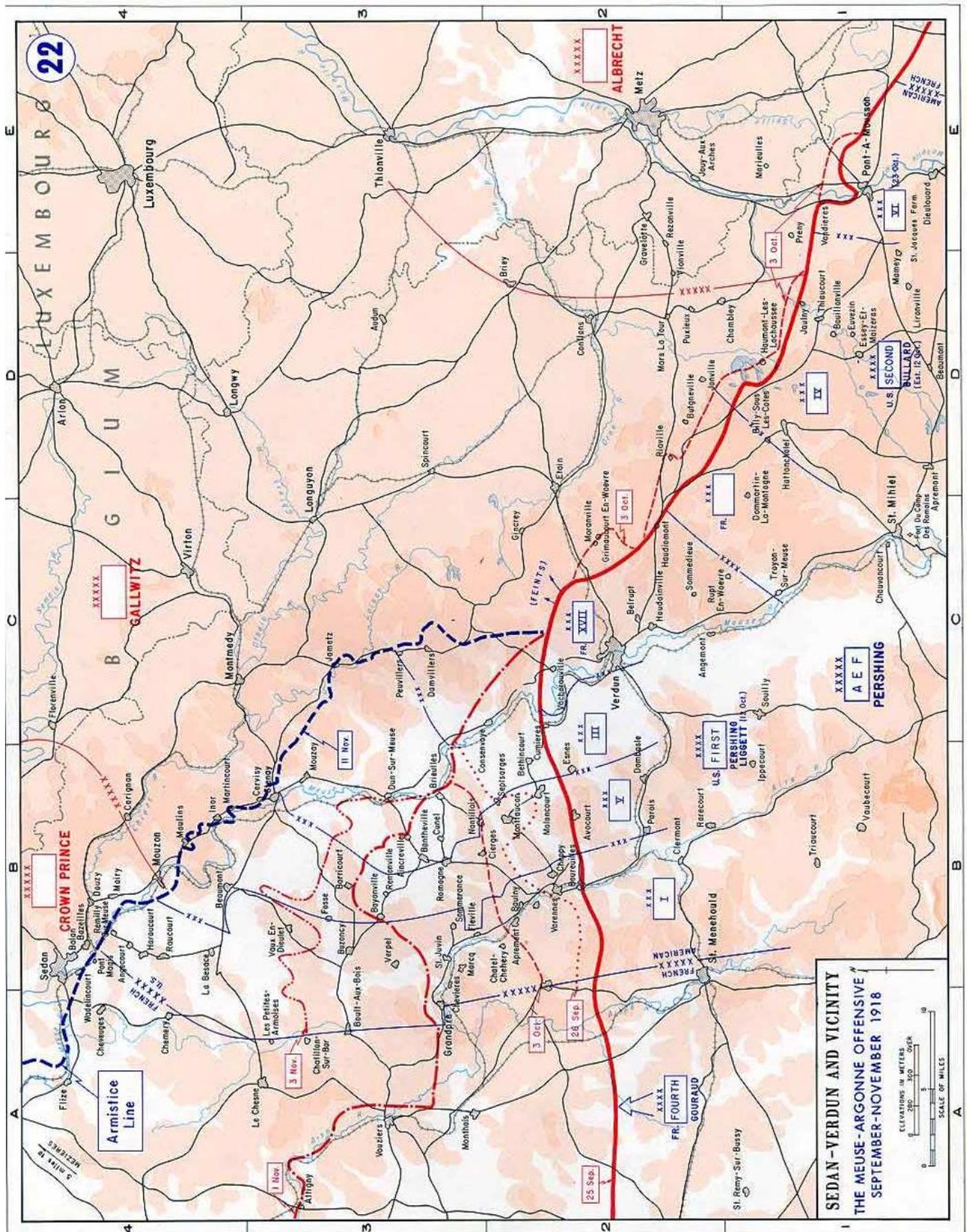
Four days after Hitler received his Iron Cross, an Allied counterattack [of the Australian Corps, ¶] in the dense fog smashed through the German lines at Amiens. Ludendorff sent a staff officer to the front and immediately moved reserves to the breakthrough area. As these fresh troops moved up, those falling back shouted insults: "Blacklegs! You are prolonging the war!" It was, Ludendorff wrote, "the black day of the German army in the history of this war." The Kaiser reacted dejectedly but calmly and remarked, "We must draw only one conclusion: we are at the limit of our capacities. The war must be ended."

A few days later Ludendorff and Hindenburg conferred with Wilhelm at Spa. When the Kaiser ordered his foreign minister to begin peace negotiations, Hindenburg protested that the army still held much enemy territory and Ludendorff excitedly exclaimed that there must be discipline on the home front as well as "more vigorous conscription of the young Jews, hitherto left pretty much alone." (24)

The impressions these developments made on Corporal Hitler, the dedicated soldier, are easily imagined. During his leave of January 1917, he had beheld the strike of the munitions workers in Berlin; now, facing the possibility of revolution and the disintegration of the army, it seems that he began to put the blame on the shoulders of unpatriotic elements, Reds and Jews. He did not yet, as he wrote later in *Mein Kampf*, deliver harangues, but clearly the inner equilibrium of his fanatic patriotism required scapegoats. Discussions in the trenches were in no way restricted to the vocal level; witnesses report that on at least one occasion he did actually beat up a fresh non-com who declared further resistance futile.

It was not yet spoken out, but in these days before the end of the war, the seeds of the deadly legend were planted, that the German army "had never been beaten in the field" but had lost the war due to treason at the home front - that the country was "stabbed in the back" by civilians, by Jews, Communists, Liberals and Freemasons. Moreover, as

MAP LXXX: ALLIED MEUSE - ARGONNE OFFENSIVE



Hitler claimed quite untruthfully later in *Mein Kampf*, these unpatriotic elements had caused the war in the first place and were thus responsible for the loss of the flower of Germany's youth in the trenches. A day of reckoning must come. With the exception of leave for convalescence and a few brief furloughs, Hitler had stuck in the trenches for over four years, and he had changed. The Hitler of 1918 was different from the somewhat dreamy yet excited youth that had stood on the Odeonsplatz in Munich the day the war commenced; the blue-eyed, "rapturous" volunteer was gone. The army had finally provided a home, a place to be, for Hitler, who since his mother died spent a decade in social limbo. Four years of danger, filled with service and the decorations to prove it, had bestowed a hitherto unknown degree of self-confidence on him: he had fought for his true love, Germany, and done well. The few photographs that have survived from this time show little of the juvenile Bohemian he once was, they depict a still somewhat dreamy but determined soldier going into his thirties.

In early 1918, the 16th Regiment was moved back to Flanders for the third time in four years, to the familiar area of Ypres. The troops dug in just south of the town, around the villages of Comines and Warwick, as they had done before. All through the day and night of October 13 to 14, Hitler's company faced a heavy British artillery barrage. At the approach of dawn, the cannoneers changed tactics and substituted gas shells for the common high-explosive rounds.

Soon a yellow-greenish cloud of chlorine gas languished over the German trenches. The gas masks provided only temporary relief for their absorption capacity was limited. After holding out for hours in the gas-infested dugouts, Hitler staggered semi-consciously towards the rear around seven in the morning, bearing the last dispatches of his wartime service, and delivered them to the regimental headquarter before he was transported off the combat area by a triage unit and delivered to an infirmary. He was in a military hospital in Germany two days later.

At the military hospital in Pasewalk in Pomerania there was a small group of German doctors who had studied the effects of chlorine gas and developed suitable techniques for dealing with their gassed patients. The burning pain in the eyeballs soon passed away, and within a week he was able to see dim shapes and outlines. As he lay in his hospital bed, it occurred to him that he would never be able to draw or paint again, and in fact, except for some caricatures and a few sketches, he never seriously practiced his art again.

He wondered what profession he would follow, and came to no conclusions. In front of him stretched only endless years of misery as an unskilled labourer working at a succession of menial jobs. At one time it was customary to assume that his blindness had a hysterical origin, but in fact chlorine gas can produce total blindness. ... Men died in convulsions in a few minutes, coughing up froth and blood from their poisoned lungs. Hitler was one of the lucky few who survived a gas attack without much physical damage.

The worst damage was mental, for he fell into a deep depression characterized by fits of weeping and periods of withdrawal, when he simply turned his face to the wall and spoke to no one, terrified by the thought that he might never see clearly again, that he had lost whatever usefulness he once possessed, and that he had nothing to live for.

The war was coming to an end in total defeat for Germany, and the thought of all the vain sacrifices of countless troops only deepened his depression. (25)

During the weeks Hitler recovered from the effects of the gas attack in Pasewalk, Germany underwent a striking metamorphosis.

Not since the Thirty-Years-War had the home front suffered so much from hunger and other war-related privations as it did from the winter of 1916/17 on. The reasons were twofold: the effects of the British continental blockade and the imbalance of the German war economy. The continental blockade is hardly ever mentioned in Allied historiography; even the index of such a meritorious work as Niall Ferguson's "The War of the World" mentions "Lusitania" (twice) and "submarines" but no "blockade", continental or other. Moreover, while Germany executed the "unrestricted" U-boat warfare, except for an episode in the spring of 1915, not until the spring of 1917, the Allied continental blockade was operative from August 1914 to 1920, far longer than the war. It is true that the U-boat campaign brought Great Britain close to starvation in late 1917, but this was mainly due to the Royal Navy's refusal to protect merchantmen with convoys; a reluctance which much increased the chances of the submerged hunters. It appears, however, that hardly any British

citizens died from malnutrition, a situation altogether different for the civilians of the Central Powers. The continental blockade starved to death approximately half a million, or more, German civilians, mostly women and children, and an unknown number of citizens of Austria-Hungary.

The aforementioned influenza epidemic that began in 1918, however, struck all belligerents and doomed 230,000 Englishmen, about the same number of Germans, and over 160,000 French. Direct effects of the war on the civil population were much the exception, and limited to victims of execution for espionage or sabotage and unlucky people hit by aerial bombs, but the typical number of victims in these categories could still be measured in the hundreds, not in the hundred thousands as in World War II. By 1916, Hindenburg and Ludendorff had taken over Germany in a military quasi-dictatorship and launched an impressive armament plan, the Hindenburg Program.

The announcement of quite fantastic production totals - doubling explosives output, trebling machine-gun output - led to all sorts of bottlenecks as German industry struggled to meet these demands. It required not only many additional workers, but also a massive infrastructural investment, from new blast furnaces to bridges over the Rhine, which further used up labour and resources.

Within a short while, therefore, it became clear that the program could be achieved only if skilled workers were returned from military duty; accordingly, 1.2 million were released in September 1916, and a further 1.9 million in July 1917. Given the serious losses on the western front, and the still considerable casualties in the east, such withdrawals meant that even Germany's large able-bodied male population was being stretched to its limits. In that respect, although Passchendaele was a catastrophe for the British army, it was also viewed as a disaster by Ludendorff, who saw another 400,000 of his troops incapacitated. ...

The final twist in the Hindenburg Program was the chronic neglect of agriculture. Here, even more than in France or Russia, men and horses and fuel were taken from the land and directed towards the needs of the army or the munitions industry -- an insane imbalance, since Germany could not (like France) compensate for such planning errors by obtaining foodstuffs from overseas to make up the difference.

While agricultural production plummeted in Germany, food prices spiralled and people everywhere complained about the scarcity of food supplies. (26)

The German leadership's relation to the military reality still seemed a dubious one, as an improvised conference at the Hotel Britannique in the famous Belgian town of Spa was to prove. Present were Wilhelm, Hindenburg, Ludendorff, Chancellor von Hertling, the young Austrian Emperor Karl and the Prussian Crown Prince. Less than a week after the "Black Day" of Amiens, Ludendorff had reverted to groundless optimism and when Karl clarified that the Austrians were at the end of their tether and unable to continue the war, Ludendorff proposed a stratagem of "gradually paralyzing the enemy's will to fight by a strategic defensive." (27) Once the enemy's fighting spirit was broken, the future peace settlement would allow Germany to retain Belgium, Luxembourg, Poland, the Baltic States and the Ukraine.

To achieve this "strategic defensive," Ludendorff demanded help to bolster the Western Front; Emperor Karl, diverted from his original purpose, found himself promising to send Austrian divisions to France. Hindenburg closed the conference by saying, "I hope that we shall be able to make a stand on French soil and thus in the end impose our will on the enemy."

A different appraisal of the situation came a few days later from army group commander Crown Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria, who wrote to Prince Max von Baden [the Kaiser's cousin, ¶], "By the mistaken operation beyond the Marne and the series of heavy reverses which followed - absolutely fatal both materially and morally - our military situation had deteriorated so rapidly that I no longer believe we can hold out over the winter. It is even possible that a catastrophe will come earlier." Emperor Karl returned to Vienna, and on September 10 - "like lightning out of a clear sky" - reverted to his original intention and addressed an Austrian peace offer to the United States. It did no good; Secretary of State Lansing immediately rejected the note. (28)

Despite the deteriorating situation at the home front - over a million workers had participated in strikes as early as in January 1918, and hundreds of women and children succumbed each day to malnutrition - the German army regained much of its spirit, and the subsequent Allied offensives launched in late September proceeded, "to Foch's irritation," (29) rather slowly. In the centre of the front, a combined Franco-British offensive advanced past the Hindenburg Line by the second week of October, but the attack in Flanders, around Ypres, struggled mightily against continuing resistance of Rupprecht's Bavarians and it took three weeks to capture Lille, only ten miles behind the front. The American offensives around Verdun and the Argonne Forest remained inconsequential for the outcome of the war: while the First U.S. Army was able to make good a few miles in the direction of Sedan, without ever reaching it, the Second U.S. Army made practically no gains at all east of the Meuse against Army Group Gallwitz.

But whatever defensive successes the German army achieved, they could only delay the loss of the war, not avoid it. The numerical strength of the defenders had shrunk to less than 2.5 million men by October, and few replacements were available although the German army continued to draft in fresh recruits until November 6. (30) It seems that on September 28, Ludendorff could no longer defy reality. After a tormented philippic against the Kaiser, the government, the army, the navy, and the universe that conspired against him, he informed Hindenburg that the war was lost and an armistice had to be secured forthwith. On the next day, a second conference was called at Spa; present were Wilhelm, Hindenburg, Ludendorff, Hertling and the new Foreign Secretary Paul von Hintze.

After protracted discussion, it was resolved that, in the face of the virtually unlimited American resources of men and materiel, the war could not be won. Germany's allies were at the brink of disintegration - Bulgaria had already capitulated and Austro-Hungarian as well as Turkish troops refused to fight - and no hope remained to avoid defeat. In these circumstances, the conclave set out to go on a little fishing expedition, to identify the most desirable peace terms that might be obtained. It was remembered that, on January 8, 1918, the President of the United States, Woodrow Wilson, had illustrated his ideas of peace and a new world order to the U.S. Congress and the world press in the famous "Fourteen Points".

The points essentially propounded an international order in which relations between nations must be transparent, colonial peoples should determine how and by whom they would be ruled, the seas would be open, free trade was to prevail, and a world government, a league of nations, would be formed. The Fourteen Points also set the price Germany must pay for peace. It must give up every inch of territory taken in this war as well as Alsace-Lorraine, seized from France nearly half a century before.² (31)

The participants of the conference perused with alacrity Wilson's words regarding the most decisive issues, those of financial consequences and of gain or loss of territories.

There shall be no annexations, no contributions, no punitive damages. ... National aspirations must be respected; peoples may now be dominated and governed only by their own consent. "Self-determination" is ... an imperative principle of action, which statesmen will henceforth ignore at their peril. (32)

Wilson's suggestions were deemed quite acceptable, but the Kaiser and the generals still entertained the hope that Alsace-Lorraine and Poland could be retained. However, as a public demonstration of Germany's instant peacefulness, the Kaiser accepted the resignation of seventy-five years old chancellor Hertling and, on October 3, appointed in his stead his fifty-one year old cousin, Prince Max von Baden.

Most histories depict the new chancellor as a "liberal" because Ludendorff called him that; but Prince Max was a liberal only in the sense that Nero and Caligula were liberals if compared to Attila the Hun. He was, of course, a staunch monarchist and had zero sympathies for liberal or, worse, socialist reforms, but he was not, like his brother-in-law Wilhelm, ignorant of reality. (33) He had, it was true, once served on the committee of the German Red Cross and in 1917 publicly mentioned the possibility of a negotiated peace, and thus he was far less compromised when contacting Wilson than, say, Ludendorff or Wilhelm himself would have been.

² Louis XIV had acquired these German provinces for France at the conclusion of the Thirty-Years-War, in the Peace of Westphalia in 1648.

Prince Max understood the urgency of decorating the German government with a few democratic faces; by yesterday, if possible. He approached the major parties of the Reichstag, and, by appealing to their patriotism, secured the support of the Liberals, the Catholic Centre and, for the first time in history, the SPD, two of whose deputies joined the Baden government. (34) The new administration set out to work on minor democratic changes to the old Imperial constitution and on October 5, von Baden notified the American government, via Switzerland, that Germany sought an armistice based on the Fourteen Points.

The first reply was received on October 8 from Secretary of State Robert Lansing, who imposed, on his president's behalf, the immediate withdrawal of German troops from the occupied parts of Belgium and France as an initial condition for an eventual armistice. Baden promised to fulfill the demand in his reply of October 12, and German evacuations began the next day.

On October 14, a second note, this time by Wilson, demanded the end of the "illegal and inhuman practices," (35) of the German submarines, and Baden managed to shut down the U-boats by October 20, against the bitter resistance of the admiralty. It must be noted, however, that neither Wilson nor any other U.S. representative ever demanded to shut down the, apparently legal and humane, continental blockade imposed by the Royal Navy.

A third note was received on October 16, and it did put the new chancellor into a quandary. Since it seemed to imply his cousin Wilhelm, Prince Max faced an awkward predicament. The memorandum demanded that the "arbitrary powers" which threatened the "peace of the world" were to be disposed of before formal negotiations could be initiated, which von Baden and his cabinet interpreted as demanding the abdication of Kaiser Wilhelm at the very least, perhaps even the abolition of the monarchy and the establishment of a German republic. This diagnosis was supported by another missive that reached Berlin on October 23, and explained that if the United States "must deal with the military masters and monarchical autocrats of Germany, it must demand, not peace negotiations, but surrender." (36)

This clumsy message, quite unprecedented in diplomatic custom, was a political bomb of the biggest magnitude and occasioned consequences greater than perhaps any other diplomatic document of the 20th Century. At the time Wilson penned his note, diplomatic convention regarded the inner affairs of a sovereign country as a taboo which might be commented on, perhaps, in private whispers from ambassador to ambassador at informal functions, but not become the subject of an official note to the head of a government. For every German monarchist or nationalist, and there were still lots of them around, Wilson's note was an insult of epic proportion, an affront to the country's sovereignty and a pique to all those who had lost loved ones in the war. It was, literally, unheard of.

The catastrophic consequences of the note can hardly be exaggerated. Whether President Wilson had composed the missive in blissful American naiveté or in an ill-starred miscue, perhaps merely intending to strengthen the liberal and democratic elements in Germany cannot now be ascertained, but the results of his note provided, as we will see, a fantastic pretext and absolution to the guilty while the future German republic was fatefully tainted from her inception by having to shoulder the burden of a lost war she was not in the least responsible for.

The outcome of Wilson's note, without which the republic could not have been born in the same confused way, facilitated the creation of the two most resilient phantoms of subsequent nationalist, right-wing and finally Nazi propaganda, the myths of the "Stab in the Back" and the legend of the "November Criminals". As soon as the armistice was signed, the men responsible for the disaster disappeared: Wilhelm went to exile in the Netherlands, Ludendorff fled to Denmark, disguised in mufti and a false beard, and Hindenburg and the other prominent generals took to diving stations. The innocent representatives of the new republic which signed the armistice and, eventually, the peace treaty, were vilified as traitors and some of them subsequently murdered.

The unfortunate consequences of Wilson's note not only proved that the USA were "not quite as magnanimous as they had promised," (37) they created arguments which were to lead from the First directly to the Second War. It was uncalled for one state to dictate policy to another: we have seen how much the trifling matter of allowing a few Austrian detectives or not into Serbia to investigate Franz Ferdinand's assassination had become a *raison de guerre*. To make it worse, Wilson's procedures were deceptive and might be called extortionate - certainly not an auspicious start into his golden age of peace, love and understanding. His tactic of negotiation was *mala fide* from the beginning: designed to get

the opponent's most important concessions right from the start, and to get cheaply what otherwise would have to be obtained at great cost: the withdrawal of the German army from France and Belgium and the cessation of the U-boat campaign.

The problem was that Wilson's demands later allowed nationalists, monarchists and militarists alike to claim that the war had not really been lost: that the German army had "never been defeated in the field", since no foreign soldier, with the exception of Rennenkampf's and Samsonov's Russians in East Prussia 1914, had ever set foot on the Fatherland's soil. Hence the armistice was unnecessary and treasonous, as was the subsequent Treaty of Versailles, signed by the "November Criminals", i.e. the government of the German Republic that had stepped in after Wilhelm and his cronies had absquatulated themselves. Thus, the right-wing clamoured, the republic had signed away the nation's honour.

Prince Baden realized that the dismissal of Ludendorff, who, despite his deceptively spurious rank of First Quartermaster General was the real military dictator of the country, was priority number one, especially since the general had brazenly overstepped his authority. The day after Baden received Wilson's calamitous message, Ludendorff sensed an opportunity to prolong the war and hence his own authority. Since, against expectations, the German front had not collapsed after the "Black Day" at Amiens and the military situation had somewhat improved in the meantime, Ludendorff took the opportunity to address his troops in an order of the day. The bulletin defined the Fourteen Points and Baden's request for an armistice based thereon as a hidden "demand for unconditional surrender. It is thus unacceptable to us soldiers. It proves that our enemy's desire for our destruction, which let loose the war in 1914, still exists undiminished. It can thus be nothing for us soldiers but a challenge to continue our resistance with all our strength." (38)

An unknown staff officer moved quickly to suppress the circular, but one copy escaped destruction to reach OBEROST, the Eastern command, where the signal officer on duty, a Social Democrat, secured it and forwarded it to the party's headquarter in Berlin whence it found its way to the press. Ludendorff's unauthorized note was foul play at the very least, perhaps outright treason, and von Baden realized that any basis for peace negotiations would be compromised as long as the quasi-dictator remained in office. The broad support Baden enjoyed in the Reichstag enabled him to call upon the Kaiser and to make it clear that it was either Ludendorff or him. On October 26, Ludendorff and Hindenburg were ordered to Bellevue Palace in Berlin, where Ludendorff was forced to tender his resignation, which the emperor thanklessly accepted. Baden, who knew a double-dealer when he saw one, had prior to the meeting elicited Ludendorff's written admission that no chance remained to win the war by military means and hence could avoid the simultaneous firing of both the leading generals. When Hindenburg offered his own withdrawal from command, Wilhelm ordered him to remain. (39) The story goes, perhaps apocryphal, that when Ludendorff returned to his hotel room in the evening, he told his wife that: "In a fortnight we shall have no Empire and no Emperor left, you will see." (40)

Ludendorff's dismissal was overshadowed, however, by a number of major events that had transpired earlier in the month. Austria-Hungary fell apart. On October 6, the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes announced the establishment of a provisional government for a future state of the Southern Slavs, i.e. "Yugoslavia"; a day later the former German, Austrian and Russian Poles declared the rebirth, after 120 years, of a Polish nation, and on October 28 the Czechs and Slovaks affirmed their intention of forming their own republic. The Austrian Germans, left alone, suggested allegiance to a future greater German state, and, on November 1, Hungary cancelled the "Ausgleich" with Austria and the Habsburgs and declared itself an independent kingdom. (41)

The German army was still slowing down the Allied progress in late October, but, clearly, their stand was the next-to-last act of the drama: something had to give. In the event, it was the Kaiser's favourite toy, the navy.

With the German empire in its death throes, two groups in the German navy, first the admirals, then the seamen, took matters into their own hands. The submarine weapon had been sheathed but the High Seas Fleet remained a powerful force.

Enraged by the U-boat decision, Scheer and the Naval Staff decided to use the surface ships in one last offensive thrust, a bold variation on earlier unsuccessful attempts to lure the Grand Fleet over a U-boat ambush. The difference this time was that the Germans intended to fight a battle whether or not the U-boats had managed to reduce the Grand Fleet's numerical superiority.

Further, the German admirals did not care whether the High Seas Fleet won or lost; they cared only that it inflict heavy damage on the Grand Fleet. Hipper agreed with Scheer that "an honourable battle by the fleet - even if it should be a fight to the death - will sow the seed for a new German fleet of the future." Besides preserving honour, a battle that inflicted severe damage on the Grand Fleet might also influence the peace negotiations in Germany's favour. (42)

Kept secret from the German government, the scheme devised to bring everything that floated to bear against the Royal Navy: eighteen Dreadnought-type battleships, five battle cruisers, twelve light cruisers and seventy-two destroyers. The tactical plan was to tempt the Grand Fleet to pursue the High Seas Fleet over a barricade of mines and U-boats, which would reduce the British numerical superiority enough to allow the Germans to win the day or die in glory. To entice the British admiralty's attention, Hipper, promoted to Fleet Admiral, envisaged raids on British ports and bombardments of coastal cities. A special group of cruisers and destroyers was to rattle the British cage by sailing into the Thames estuary and attacking the local shipping. When the Grand Fleet descended to end the nuisance, the Germans would be ready. Scheer, now naval C-in-C, and Hipper both hoped that "a tactical success might reverse the military position and avert surrender." (43)

This was either remarkable optimism or complete delusion. Scheer approved Hipper's plan on October 27, and twenty-two U-boats headed out to set a trap. The rest of the fleet was called on to assemble in Jade Bay, where their unexpected presence caused ado galore. Instances of desertion had already occurred at Cuxhaven, and continued among the crews of the battleships that arrived in the bay during October 29.

The concentration of all the big ships in one port could not mean anything but an operation being laid on, and the scuttlebutt soon confirmed that the next morning would bring the order to weigh anchor. No sailor had doubts as to for what purpose. The crews of the battleships KÖNIG, KRONPRINZ WILHELM, MARKGRAF, KAISERIN, THÜRINGEN and HELGOLAND hoisted red flags and thus declared their insurrection; "on all these ships, seamen had no interest in 'an honourable death for the glory of the fleet'; they wanted surrender, discharge and permission to go home." (44)

Around 10 pm on October 29, Hipper found most of his fleet inoperative, and when, on the next morning, the mutiny spread to the battleships FRIEDRICH DER GROSSE and KÖNIG ALBERT, the sortie had to be aborted. To quench further insubordination, Hipper ordered the three battleship squadrons to separate and return to their home ports of Wilhelmshaven, Cuxhaven and Kiel. THÜRINGEN and HELGOLAND, however, did not move an inch, and Hipper called on a battalion of loyal marine infantry to have their crews arrested, shackled and imprisoned. (45)

Hipper's attempts at enforcing discipline only stoked the fire, and by dividing the battleship squadrons to three harbours he only succeeded in spreading disobedience further. When the 3rd Squadron arrived at Kiel on November 1, carrying chained seamen by the hundreds, it was greeted by four thousand rebellious mariners and dockhands that had helped themselves to arms by breaking into the well-stocked arsenals and demanded the captives' release. The next day saw the establishment of provisional sailors' and workers' councils, a call for a general strike by the union, and the taking over of port and town by November 4. A troupe of mutineers set out to arrest the commanding admiral, Prince Heinrich of Prussia, Wilhelm's brother, who...

... was forced to flee for his life, hiding behind a set of false whiskers and the red flag flying on his car. Even so, the car was shot at several times, the driver was seriously wounded, and the Prince was forced to take the wheel himself in a mad dash for the Danish frontier at Flensburg. (46)

Soon the mutiny fostered open calls for revolution, and as coastal vessels spread the message to the smaller port towns, the railways spread the germs of revolt over the country. Committees of revolting sailors and soldiers brought their demands to the burghers of any town they entered: an immediate armistice, the abdication of the Kaiser and the formation of a new, democratic and republican government. Still, the news was sketchy in many places, and in an attempt to find out exactly what had happened in Kiel, Prince Baden sent an embassy of two Reichstag deputies to the town: his friend Conrad Haussmann and the former butcher and journalist Gustav Noske, a representative of the Social Democrats. When the emissaries arrived at the town's railway station, they were greeted by a crowd whose apparent revolutionary resilience convinced Noske to hold an improvised speech in which he essentially promised the listeners that their demands were

soon to be met. The same evening he was able to inform Berlin about the details of the revolt, adding that the crowd had elected him to the post of revolutionary governor of Schleswig-Holstein. (47)



ON THE NIGHT OF OCTOBER 29 -30, 1918, THE SAILORS OF THE HIGH SEAS FLEET FIND OUT THE NEWS OF A PLANNED ATTACK UPON THE BRITISH GRAND FLEET - A POSSIBLE DEATH RIDE - AND ERECT THE BANNER OF MUTINY. REVOLUTIONARY SAILORS USE THE RAILWAY TO SPREAD THE NEWS (ABOVE, MUTINOUS SAILORS IN BERLIN), AND SAILORS, SOLDIERS AND CIVILIANS FORM SPONTANEOUS REVOLUTIONARY GUARDS AND COMMITTEES (BELOW).



In the meantime, suffering on the Western Front was much increased by the return of the so-called Spanish Influenza, which, despite the name, seems to have originated at Fort Riley, Kansas. (48) There had been an outbreak of influenza in the summer, subtracting about 400,000 soldiers from the already weakened German lines and perhaps a comparable number from the Allied trenches, but the second outbreak proved both more contagious and lethal. Arriving American troop ships brought the epidemic to the great debarkation ports; the soldiers infected the French, who in turn infected the British, and both their POW's in turn infected the Germans.

Oddly, the disease struck hardest at the fittest, particularly young men in their prime. Troopships laden with men packed closely together became floating pestholes. An American convoy arriving at Brest on October 8 in the midst of the Meuse-Argonne campaign had 4,000 men disabled by the flu, with 200 already buried at sea. Two hundred of the sick carried off the LEVIATHAN died within days. ...

The epidemic posed a dilemma for President Wilson. Since military camps had become hothouses for spreading the infection, orders for 142,000 men scheduled to report for induction late in September were cancelled. Should he, Wilson wondered, also cancel the embarkation of troopships?

On October 8, he met with the army's gruff chief of staff, General Peyton March, to ask his guidance. Both men accepted that to cram soldiers into the ships was to pass a death sentence on thousands of them. But Pershing was pleading desperately for replacements, especially since he had 150,000 men down with the flu. Just two days before Wilson and March met, Prince Max had made his appeal to the president to bring about peace.

Wilson and March recognized that the surest guarantee of defeating the Germans was to continue the deliveries of Americans to France, now swelling to an average of 50,000 weekly. How might the Germans react if they learned that the pressure was off because the American manpower pipeline had shut down?

March told Wilson, "Every such soldier who has died [from influenza] has just as surely played his part as his comrade who has died in France. The shipment of troops should not be stopped for any cause." The troopships continued to sail. (49)

On October 27, Prince Max signalled President Wilson that all his demands were to be met. Technically, it was of course not his decision but his cousin's Wilhelm, but Max had, cautiously, preferred not to inform the Kaiser of the clause in Wilson's demarche of October 23, which seemed to demand the abolishment of the monarchy. He would cross this particular bridge when he met it. When Turkey asked for an armistice on October 30 and Austria on November 4, Germany was alone in the war. The front still held, miraculously, but in the air hung the smell of revolution.

On October 29, Wilhelm left Berlin for the Supreme Command Headquarter at Spa, in the questionable belief that his presence close to the front would improve the soldiers' panache. But it was the absence, not the presence, of the Imperial person that set things in motion, which set free the rebellious entelechy in the capital, causing the final, decisive, and irreparable dissipation of the Ancien Régime.

"Reds are streaming with every train from Hamburg to Berlin," Count Harry Kessler, socialite, diplomat and Social Democrat supporter, recorded in his diary on 6 November. "An uprising is expected here tonight. This morning the Russian Embassy was raided like a disreputable pot-house and Joffe [the ambassador] with his staff, departed. That puts paid to the Bolshevik centre in Berlin. But perhaps we shall yet call these people back." (50)

By the first November week, the mutiny of the sailors had been followed by the insubordination of many garrisons, whose unwillingness to support the failing Prussian state eased the appearance of public uprisings. Local anarchists, Spartakists and Independent Social Democrats proposed various forms of revolution, and councils took over the administration of most big towns. In the first week of November, Red flags were carried through the streets of Hamburg, Bremen, Cologne, Duisburg, Frankfurt and München. But it was a curiously silent rebellion, the reports agree, that pervaded the streets; violence, nay, even overspirited discussion was strangely absent. That was to change soon enough. The Spartakusbund,

German's Bolsheviks in disguise, had quietly concentrated followers in the capital during the first week of November while their leaders, Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, prepared the German revolution.

Liebknecht's Father Wilhelm had been a personal friend of Karl Marx and achieved socialist sainthood by becoming a co-founder of the SPD and editor of its newspaper, VORWÄRTS ["Ahead", ¶]. His son studied law and economy in Leipzig and Berlin before becoming, essentially, a lawyer for the socialist movement. He was elected to the Reichstag for the SPD in 1912 and was the sole member of the socialist camp to vote against war credits in August 1914. When it became clear that the rest of the party would at least temporarily support the government, and hence the war, Liebknecht began to seek sympathizers outside of the party.

For this objective he founded the SPARTAKUSBUND, the League of Spartacists, named, of course, for the Thracian slave Spartacus who had led the uprising against Rome in 72-70 BC. The SPARTAKUSBRIEFE ("Spartacus Letters"), the league's anti-war newspaper, were banned soon enough, and its founder and editor found himself at the Russian front, where he refused to fight and was consequently assigned to a burial detail. Released from service for reasons of health, he went straight back to anti-war propaganda and headed the Socialist Peace Demonstration on May Day 1916 through the streets of Berlin. This time he was charged with high treason and sent to prison for four years, but the sentence was commuted under Prince Baden's amnesty for political prisoners of October 1918. As soon as he was back on the streets, he "resumed his leadership of the Spartacists, in partnership with the Polish activist, Rosa Luxemburg." (51)

Frau Luxemburg was an early apprentice in the business of insurrection; she had been active in the illegal socialist and anti-Czarist movements in pre-war Russia since she was a schoolgirl. (52) Timely escaping the attentions of the Okhrana, she wound up in Switzerland where an affluent lover allowed her to study at the University of Zürich and to subsidize the illegal socialist parties of Poland and Lithuania. She was perhaps the most extreme socialist outside of Russia in these years, advocating global and remorseless revolution. She became a German by marriage in 1903, joined the SPD, and began to throw her weight behind the radical wing. Eventually, she became known as the factotum of the world revolution and was regularly thrown in jail, rescued by her old Swiss flame, and jailed again. She joined Liebknecht immediately after her release by Baden's amnesty and began to organize the revolutionary bureaucracy of the Spartacists.

This poisonous pair, like Lenin and Trotsky in Russia, saw the moderate Socialists of the SPD as their principal enemies. "The party must be recaptured from below," Luxemburg wrote, "by mass rebellion." Their allies were the antiwar left-wingers who had split from the main SPD in 1917 and formed their own Independent Social Democratic Party (USPD), and who were only slightly less extreme than the Spartacists. The moderate Socialists responded by sneering at them in VORWÄRTS, contrasting the "pathological instability" of Spartacus with their own "clearheaded and sensible calm." But while the moderate Socialists were maintaining their sensible calm, the Spartacists were meeting returning troop trains at the rail termini to beg or buy rifles, pistols and machine guns. (53)

Meanwhile, Prince Max faced the problem how to end the war and the monarchy without involuntary nurturing the revolution. He concentrated his final efforts on three decisive issues: the replacement of Ludendorff, the deputation of the executive power to a government able to guide the country peacefully through the many changes that were to follow and, prerequisite for the latter, the abdication of his cousin Wilhelm.

On November 9 he appointed General Wilhelm Groener, son of a NCO from Württemberg and a transportation and supply specialist, to Ludendorff's former post of Chief of Staff and - quite unlawfully - transferred his own office and authority as chancellor of the Reich to the forty-seven year old former saddle maker and chairman of the SPD, Friedrich Ebert. The remaining task was the most difficult. No civil, much less a government led by socialists, could exercise authority with the emperor still in office.

At this point, Wilhelm was at Spa, the imperial head full of foolish fantasies of how, as soon as an armistice was signed, he would lead his loyal armies back to Germany and restore order. What Prince Max back in Berlin recognized was that, far from a solution, Wilhelm's return was the problem. In Metz, the Allies' next target, 10,000 German soldiers had reportedly mutinied, formed a Soldier's Council, and taken over the city. Similar overthrows of the old order were erupting all over Germany. ... Peace seekers inside Germany

accepted that the only act that would prevent the masses from swinging over to the radicals was removal of the country's discredited monarch. (54)

In the last ten days since his arrival at Spa, Wilhelm had successfully managed to avoid the intrusions of reality and maintained that abdication was out of the question. Not quite used to being contradicted, the Kaiser refused to listen to the explanations of Prince Max's messenger Drews, Prussian Minister of the Interior. He had "no intention of quitting the throne because of a few hundred Jews and a thousand workmen. Tell that to your masters in Berlin." (55)

Baden recognized that he had to talk to his cousin in person. On the evening of November 8, he called Wilhelm on the telephone and tried to cut through the Kaiser's obstinacy by making clear that, in lieu of Wilhelm's abdication, civil war was to ravage the country. The emperor did not believe a word. It was inconceivable, he riposted, that the army would refuse to follow him. In addition, since it was Prince Max who had asked Wilson for an armistice, not Wilhelm himself, he felt quite unconcerned. "You sent out the armistice offer," he said, "you will also have to accept the conditions." (56) On the next morning, November 9, the leadership of the army, Hindenburg and Groener, called at the Hotel Britannique in Spa to pay their sovereign a final, necessary visit.

In Spa, on 9 November, the Emperor met the leaders of his army, the institution through which the Hohenzollern dynasty had risen to power, and to which it had always looked to sustain its dignity and authority. Wilhelm II still believed that, whatever disloyalties were being transacted by civilian politicians in Berlin, whatever affronts to order disturbed the streets, his subjects in field-grey remained true to their oath of military obedience. Even on 9 November he continued to delude himself that the army could be used against the people and the royal house preserved by turning German against German.

His generals knew otherwise. Hindenburg, the wooden titan, heard him out in silence. Groener, the workaday railway transport officer, son of a sergeant, who had replaced Ludendorff, found the sense to speak. He knew, from soundings taken among fifty regimental commanders, that the soldiers now wanted "only one thing - an armistice at the earliest possible moment." The price of that, to the House of Hohenzollern, was the Kaiser's abdication. The Kaiser heard him with continuing incredulity. What about, he asked, the FAHNENEID, the oath on the regimental colours which bound every German soldier to die rather than disobey? Groener uttered the unutterable. "Today," he said, "the FAHNENEID is only a form of words." (57)

In the chancellery in Berlin, unable to follow events in distant Spa, von Baden consulted Ebert on the situation on the streets. Ebert warned that unless the abdication could be effected with speed, a coup d'état by Spartacists and USPD became more likely every hour. Since Prince Max was aware that the monarchy was finished willy-nilly, he dictated, in antecedence of actuality, to an employee of the Wolff Telegraph Office in Berlin a message stating that "The Kaiser and King has resolved to renounce the throne." (58)

When the sensational cable was brought to the attention of the party in Spa within minutes, Wilhelm exploded in a diatribe against all traitors, civilian or military, but was forced to realize that the game was up. At 3:30 pm, on Saturday, November 9, 1918, he relinquished the throne, and the Second Empire had come to its end, forty-seven years and ten months after its inception in the Hall of Mirrors in Versailles. On Hindenburg's advice, Wilhelm left for exile in the early morning hours of November 10, to Castle Amerongen in the Netherlands, seat of Count Godard Bentinck, who would be his host for the next twenty-three years. (59)

Meanwhile events in the capital precipitated head over heels. Philip Scheidemann, vice chairman of the SPD, had rushed from the chancellery to the Reichstag to inform his colleagues of Ebert's appointment. Having a well-deserved lunch in the cafeteria, he was informed that Spartakus and USPD had summoned their followers to the Emperor's town palace, ostensibly for the proclamation of the revolution and the launch of the German Socialist Soviet Republic. Speed was of the essence.

Scheidemann stormed to the terrace outside the Reichstag library where he was cheered by a crowd vacillating between hope and apprehension. Improvising, Scheidemann informed the people about the Ebert appointment and the creation of a new, republican and democratic government, and ended his brief address with the words: "The rotten old

monarchy has collapsed. Long live the new! Long live the German Republic!" (60) Meanwhile, Spartacist delegations had appeared in factories, barracks and caserns and mobilized a crowd of thousands of supporters, who were marched to meet at the Royal Palace. Liebknecht greeted the revolutionary assembly from the balcony of the building, whence formerly the Kaiser had addressed his subjects:

"Comrades!" he cried. "The red flag flies over Berlin! The proletariat is marching. The reign of capitalism which has turned Europe into a graveyard is over. We must summon our strength to build a new government of workers and peasants, to create a new order of peace and happiness and freedom not merely for our brothers in Germany but for the whole world. Whoever is resolved not to cease from the fight until the Free Socialist Republic and the world revolution shall be realised, let him raise his hand and swear!" The crowd roared back "We swear!" But Liebknecht was two hours too late. (61)

Ebert had acted quickly and already persuaded the USPD, Liebknecht's sole possible supporters, to enter into a coalition with the SPD by offering the smaller party an equal share, three of six posts, in the provisional government. The new executive power was named Council of People's Commissars, and was expected to share the administration with the workers' and soldiers' councils of the capital until a national assembly could enact a constitution and subsequently install a legitimate government. Ebert's cautious manoeuvring also persuaded the liberal and Catholic interests in the capital and much of the country to support the formerly dreaded SPD as a mainstay of the new republic, and thus the government had at least the legitimacy of the popular backing.

That was, if the revolution could be kept at bay. This indeed seemed to be the case: except for a few skirmishes on Saturday evening and Sunday, November 10, Berlin remained quiet, and, the issue of a German republic now advanced from the realm of possibility to actuality, the eyes of the nation returned to the Western Front. The war was still going on, and the Allied Supreme Command had already scheduled the next offensive, against Metz, for November 14, and further attacks were planned far into 1915.

Pershing, now commanding close to two million doughboys, seemed to long for an augmentation of his military prestige by the conquest of Sedan, which was by far the most attractive target on the south-eastern part of the front. It was the town where the Prussian army had beaten the French in 1870 and taken Napoleon III and 100,000 poilus prisoners-of-war.

Prince Max had dispatched a delegation for the negotiation of the armistice to the French trenches near Haudroy on November 7. The party was headed by Matthias Erzberger, chairman of the German Catholic Centre Party, which supported von Baden's informal government. He was a known pacifist and the sole well-known face in the German deputation which, except for him, consisted of mid-level functionaries of the Foreign Service, Army and Navy. (62) The embassy was taken, by train, to a railway couch in the Forest of Compiègne, sixty-five kilometres northeast of Paris, and the expected gruff treatment delivered by Foch and General Weygand. The armistice conditions were as follows:

All occupied lands in Belgium, Luxembourg, and France, plus Alsace-Lorraine, held since 1870 by Germany, must be evacuated within fourteen days; the Allies were to occupy Germany west of the Rhine and bridgeheads on the river's east bank thirty kilometres deep; German forces must be withdrawn from Austria-Hungary, Romania and Turkey; Germany was to surrender to neutral or Allied ports 10 battleships, 6 battle cruisers, 8 cruisers, and 160 submarines. She was to be stripped of heavy armament, including 5,000 artillery pieces, 25,000 machine guns, and 2,000 airplanes.

The next demand threw the German delegates into despair. Though their people already faced famine, the Allies intended to paralyse the country's transportation by continuing the naval blockade and confiscating 5,000 locomotives, 150,000 railway cars, and 5,000 trucks. Weygand droned on through thirty-four conditions, the last of which blamed Germany for the war and demanded she pay reparations for all damage caused. (63)

The German delegation was given a seventy-two hours deadline and an opportunity to convey the Allied demands by radio to Berlin. Erzberger realized that the conditions imposed were far too acrimonious to be entrusted to radio, which might

be monitored, and only informed Prince Max that a courier was on the way. Then he asked for a preliminary suspension of combat until a reply was received, pointing out that four thousand lives or more a day could thus be saved. Foch refused, as a favour to Pershing, who, furious that his grand design of conquering Germany was being foiled, insisted on fighting to the last minute; to the greater glory of the American Expeditionary Force and his own command.

The Erzberger mission overnighted in the Forest of Compiègne near Foch's railway coach, drafting letters of protest they hoped might have a moderating influence on the Allied conditions. At 8 pm on November 10, they received a French report of an intercepted message from Berlin which confirmed Erzberger's plenipotentiary powers and authorized him to sign the instrument of truce.

A second message was received, from Hindenburg, verifying the authenticity of the first signal and instructing Erzberger to try to have the naval blockade lifted, for the sake of the starving women and children. At 2 am the next morning, November 11, the German deputation was led back to the railway car for a second round of discussions.

Foch, however, remained intransigent, and the sole moderation of terms Erzberger achieved was that the Allies "would contemplate the provisioning of Germany during the Armistice as shall be found necessary." (64) The cease-fire was signed just after 5 am in the morning, to take effect by 11:00 of the same day, six hours hence, and the meeting was adjourned. All that remained for the soldiers on both sides of the wire was to spend six more hours in their trenches and the slaughter would be over.

That is, for everyone except the AEF, which was directed by Pershing to continue the attacks scheduled for the day without regard of the armistice taking effect at 11:00? Since Foch had informed all Allied commanders, including Pershing, in advance of the conditions of the truce, it was clear that whatever ground could be gained in a last-minute offensive would be ground the German were obliged to give up within two weeks anyway.

Pershing did inform his regimental and division commanders that a ceasefire was to take effect on 11:00, but directed his chief of staff that, between 5:00 and 11:00, the AEF was "to take every advantage of the situation." (65) Nine out of sixteen U.S. division commanders on the Western Front interpreted the absence of specific orders as an incentive to launch the scheduled attacks; seven refrained from further jeopardizing their men lives and limbs.

Thus nine U.S. divisions attacked the enemy on the morning of November 11, and since the Germans were forced to defend themselves whether they wanted or not, almost 11,000 casualties were unnecessarily added to the total of the war's losses. With more than 2700 men dead at the end of these few hours, the last day exceeded the average daily toll of 2,000 dead by far.

Putting these losses into perspective, in the June 6, 1944, D-Day invasion of Normandy, nearly twenty-six years later, the total losses were reported at 10,000 for all sides. Thus the total Armistice Day casualties were nearly 10 percent higher than those on D-Day. There was, however, a vast difference. The men storming the Normandy beaches were fighting for victory. Men dying on Armistice Day were fighting in a war already decided. (66)

At 11:00 on November 11, 1918, the guns ceased fire along the Western Front. But it was only in the aftermath of the great conflict that the members of the old Imperial houses realized for how long, in truth, their relevance had diminished without their notice. For it turned out that the power of the Hohenzollern, Habsburg and Romanov dynasties had not ended in February 1917 or November 1918, but in the summer of 1914 or even earlier - in their driving the old continent into war and pestilence they had, alas, overlooked the shadows of nationalism and socialism lingering in the rear mirror, forces eager to embrace the Imperial inheritance.

Within days the victorious Allied armies repossessed Belgium, invaded Western Germany and advanced to the line of the Rhine River.

BETWEEN THE DEVIL AND THE DEEP BLUE SEA

*It must be a peace
without victory ...
Only a peace between
equals can last.*

Woodrow Wilson, Speech to the
U.S. Senate, January 27, 1917

*The Germans are
going to pay every penny;
they are going to be squeezed
as a lemon is squeezed -
until the pips squeak.*

Eric Geddes, British Politician, in the
Cambridge Daily News, December 11, 1918

The Social Democrats inherited a disorderly and essentially lawless country. The Imperial constitution had perished with Wilhelm's abdication, and the consequence of his demise was that, in lieu of the collapsed federal government, improvisation had to fill the void. A bewildering spectrum of grass-root organization evolved.

The orderly German, so frequently stereotyped and satirized, had become an unruly figure. Miners, hungry and overworked, went on strike demanding a seven-hour day, then a six-and-a-half-hour day. Factory workers gathered in yards and halls and demanded higher pay and recognition of their councils.

Women harassed price-gouging merchants and demanded that city officials and army officers find them the bread that had been promised so many times. Actors, stagehands, and cleanup crews at theatres went on strike and also formed councils. Proclamations were written and read, printing plants seized and the printers ordered to set type for a revolutionary declaration.

Through the winter, the demands became increasingly radical. Workers called for socialization of industry; soldiers demanded that their councils exercise the power of command in the military and that all insignia of rank be abolished. Others demanded the formation of a citizens' militia in place of the regular military. Even agricultural workers went on strike and organized councils. Sometimes, events turned violent -- an officer unceremoniously thrown off a bridge, then shot while attempting to swim ashore; a hated foreman thrown into a wheelbarrow and dumped on a garbage pit or, even worse, down a mine shaft. Middle-class people formed their own paramilitary organizations, determined to protect property and livelihoods. (1)

On top, anxieties reigned supreme: Junkers feared agrarian reform, Krupp and Thyssen feared expropriation, and the nobility dreaded the abolition of titles, demise of authority and confiscation of property. The middle-class, feathers tarred by the deprivations of the war economy, trembled at the prospects of plummeting into the ranks of the proletariat. Three million soldiers were on the way home to families and loved ones, while food was scarcer every day and the sinking temperatures announced the onset of winter. Too much change had come too fast and adaptation was painful.

Instead of the Kaiser and high nobility, in gilded uniform or festive frock, bemedalled and beribboned, a former saddler in a brown suit now held sway over the country. He was a modest man, it was noted not without sympathy, but, in his quiet competence, he cut too simple a figure, and surely was quite less an impressive character than glitzy, grandiloquent Wilhelm. This family man, who had lost two sons in the war, had to steer the shipwrecked nation through the worst disaster since the Thirty-Years-War.

Ebert was aware of the precarious position of his government, which, although being tolerated by the liberals and Catholic Centre Party, was backed only by the industrial workers, and not even all of them. He faced not only rampant obstructionism by the Spartacists on the left but fierce opposition of the nationalist, monarchist, anti-republican Right. Within weeks of the armistice, seemingly in the blink of an eye, the latter had organized itself into a vast reactionary camarilla, united by hate for the republic which they claimed, in their delusions, was responsible for the loss of the war, their powers and prerogatives.

A multitude of monarchist, royalist, revisionist, nationalist and plain old reactionary groups, clubs and associations sprang up and concerted in a denial of responsibility for the war, which, less than fifteen years later, was to propel a nameless former Austrian corporal to the highest offices of the nation. Considering the numbers and power of the anti-Republican cabals threatening him from the left and right, like Scylla and Charybdis, Ebert's governmental basis seemed perilously fragile.

It was the Kaiser and the Imperial Generals, of course, who had lost the war but President Wilson had refused to make an armistice with them, insisting he could deal only with democratic elements. And by forcing the socialists to assume the blame for something they had not brought about, Wilson gave Adolf Hitler a political tool that he was destined to wield with devastating force. (2)

The future Führer was still recuperating from the gas attack. On November 11, the patients of the Pasewalk military hospital were informed of the astonishing events of the last days by the local parish priest on his weekly visiting of the sick. As Hitler reported in MEIN KAMPF six years later, the parson wept, lamenting the passage of the monarchy. He asked the soldiers and the medical personnel to pray for the Hohenzollern family, but also for the blessings of God for the fledging republic. Hitler was dumbfounded: "I could not sit here any longer. Once again everything went black before my eyes, and I tottered and groped my way back to the place where we slept, and buried my burning head in the blankets and pillows." (3)

Ten days later Hitler was discharged from the hospital, pronounced fit for field service and ordered to report back to the replacement battalion of his old regiment, the 16th Reserve Infantry Regiment of the Royal Bavarian Army in München. Alas, when Hitler arrived on November 20, the Royal Bavarian Army had already ceased to exist. For once, developments in Berlin had been outpaced by München and Bavaria.

During the war, the Bavarian socialist movement had split, as in most other German states, into a large moderate wing which retained the name of SPD and a smaller radical group, the USPD. In Bavaria, this split had occurred under the orchestration of a Bavarian delegate to the SPD convention in Gotha in April 1917, Kurt Eisner. At this convention, arguments over the support of the war resulted in schism and when Eisner returned to München, he was elected chairman of the Bavarian USPD. Both parties were represented in the Bavarian Diet, which existed since 1819 but lacked effective legislative authority, which remained with the king. Bavaria was a mostly rural country in the first half of the 19th Century, but with the flourishing of the German industry in the next sixty years, and especially when munitions, vehicle and ironware factories multiplied during the war, so did the influence of the socialist parties. More daringly than their comrades in Berlin, the Bavarian Socialists introduced a reform bill proposing wide-reaching demands in September 1917:

the abolition of the Senate, the parliamentary playground of the nobility, and of nobility itself, the introduction of general suffrage, legislative emancipation of the Diet and the separation of Church and state.

The bill died quick by royal veto, but in the country-wide strikes of January 1918, the Bavarian USPD was able to mobilize the streets to a degree the government judged far too dangerous. The USPD's public faces were subsequently arrested, among them the free spirit of Kurt Eisner.

For most of his working life Eisner had been a drama critic. During the war he founded the Independent Socialist Party in Bavaria, and in January 1918, he took a leading role in the strikes that plagued München. Arrested and thrown into prison, he was released during the last days of the war. His friend Ernst Toller [the playwright, ¶] described him as a man who had been poor, self-sufficient, and detached throughout his life. He was small and slight; gray hair that had once been fair fell in a confused tangle to his coat collar, and an untidy beard straggled over his chest; short-sighted eyes looked out calmly from his deeply lined face. He had a sense of drama, a caustic wit, and was totally without arrogance. (4)

He was accused of being a Bolshevik, which he certainly was not. He was what his party card stated, an independent socialist: less of a follower of stringent doctrine than a man perceiving the incompetent rule of the nobility and a system breaking apart under social injustice and the privations of four years of war. When the right-wing press denounced him of being a Bolshevik activist who had received ten million gold roubles, from Lenin himself, in furtherance of the German revolution, he took the reporters to his bank and presented a copy of his expense account: his out-of-pocket disbursements for the "Bavarian Revolution" amounted to seventeen marks. The annals of man know not a cheaper revolution.

On his way to meet the socialist designs of that remarkable and undeservingly forgotten man, Adolf Hitler passed through Berlin for the second time in his life, after he had been granted a furlough two years ago. On October 2, 1916, Hitler's regiment was sent to the Somme, to be deployed between Bapaume and Le Barque. Three days later, a British shell exploded in the narrow tunnel which served as the duty station of the dispatch runners, and Hitler caught a shell fragment in his left thigh; his first wound after two years in the trenches.

He was quickly expedited to the triage section, transferred to the nearest infirmary at Hermies and sent by train to the Army Hospital Beelitz in Pomerania near Berlin, where he arrived on October 9. He quickly recovered, and as soon as he qualified for the ambulatory list, he received a second furlough and permission to visit Berlin. From this first visit to the capital, he sent a postcard to his regiment, c/o Franz Mayer, the Staff Orderly, on November 4, 1916. (5)

The visit produced mixed feelings. Hitler visited museums and admired the architecture of the city's many neo-classicist buildings, but was dejected by poverty, hunger, and the anxiety on the faces of the people he met. He deplored the pessimism that was painted on the faces of many burghers who openly confessed their desire for peace. To Hitler, desperation and apathy were equivalent to treason. "Hitler could hardly believe his ears," wrote Westenkirchner, "what they said might be true, but it was unworthy and unsoldierly." (6)

He was discharged seven weeks after his arrival at Beelitz and took a train back to the replacement battalion of his regiment in Munich on December 2, 1916, sporting a slight change of his facial hairdo. Having cut off his Kaiser-Wilhelm beard, he emerged at his new post with the tiny square moustache that was, at the time being, all the rage among English officers. In MEIN KAMPF, he wrote eight years later that the cowardice and defeatism he encountered in the reserve battalion caused him to apply for an immediate return to his regiment at the front. He added that the three months he spent in Munich enlightened him about the treasonous role played by the Jews in the war, but we have reason to doubt his word. After the war, none of his regimental comrades could remember Hitler engaging in anti-Semitic tirades. In MEIN KAMPF, however, he wrote about his observations in Munich:

"Nearly every clerk was a Jew and nearly every Jew was a clerk. I was amazed at this plethora of warriors from the chosen people and could not help but compare them with their rare representatives at the front." (7)

This was bunkum. First Lieutenant Friedrich Wiedemann, who was from January 1, 1916, to August 16, 1917 part of the regiment's staff and knew Hitler well, remarked: "I never found out the reason for Hitler's fanatical hate of the Jews.

Experiences with Jewish officers in the war can have hardly played a role. We had several Jewish officers in our regiment." (8) One of the principal arguments of Hitler's future brand of anti-Semitism would be that the German Jews had not only avoided the front but were actually in cahoots with the enemy. The statistics of the army department of personnel, however, contradict Hitler's assertions. Jews were in no way represented much below the average in the numbers of voluntary enlistment or actual deployment; that they were somewhat underrepresented at the beginning of the war was simply a result of their being overwhelmingly an urban people and thus similarly rejected for military service as were industrial workers. Many Jews, as Stefan Zweig described it, had adopted Germany or Austria as their true VATERLAND, and fought with the dash of the recent convert.

There was a problem of perception, though: the mostly aristocratic German officer corps was, in general, as anti-Semitic as Kaiser Wilhelm, and the War Records Office was not always in the mood to correct slanderous reports or acknowledge credit for Jewish soldiers where due. At any rate, Hitler quickly found out that he could not cope with civilian life after so much time in the trenches and volunteered for transfer to the front where he arrived, at his old regiment, on March 5, 1917, and was reunited with his comrades and his dog Fuchsl (Foxy). The unit was soon redeployed to the trenches at La Basse, a few miles north of Vimy Ridge, where the men celebrated Easter 1917 with eggs painted by Hitler.

On April 23, 1917, the regiment received a new commanding officer, Major Freiherr (Baron) Anton von Tubeuf. Somewhat disliked, especially by the lower ranks, for his inclination to enforce discipline, Tubeuf testified to Hitler's qualities as soldier and dispatch runner in a letter written in March 1922 as follows:

In the time between April 1917 and August 1918, Adolf Hitler has served with distinction in the staff of my regiment (Bay.Res.Inf.Reg.16) as orderly. Untiringly helpful and considerate, there was no cause or eventuality in which he did not volunteer for the hardest, complicated and most perilous tasks, always being ready to sacrifice his time and life for the Vaterland. Hitler was also the enlisted man that I have the best memories of having private conversations with, and his patriotism, personal honour and upright opinions frequently delighted me. (9)

But since the regimental promotion board could not identify leadership qualities in Corporal Hitler, he remained at his modest rank. He was not really presentable, in his outworn uniforms and meagre belongings, and would not snap heels or salute when officers were present.

A few months later the regiment returned to the familiar area of Ypres, arriving punctually to the British offensive known as the Third Battle of Ypres. The unit spent weeks in uninterrupted frontline service and took serious casualties before it was withdrawn and sent for a period of Rest & Recreation to Mühlheim, Alsace. There Hitler received word of the Russian October Revolution, whose implicit strategic consequences were immediately clear to him: a Russian breakdown would end the two-front war and allow all German forces to be concentrated on the Western Front for a renewed and hopefully decisive offensive. But nothing of the sort happened until the spring of 1918, when the regiment was called to the front lines again.

The List Regiment was sent up to the line again to fight the same interminable war it had fought from the beginning. In March 1918, it was pulled out of its position at the Oise-Aisne sector and thrown against Montdidier, which was being held by the French.

This time all the orderly procedures of the German army failed disastrously. The ammunition carts and field kitchens were lost somewhere along the road, and the soldiers were in danger of dying from starvation and running out of bullets. They were under heavy bombardment and could move neither forwards nor backwards. Westenkirchner [Ignaz, another dispatch runner and friend of Hitler, ¶] tells how he crawled out of the trench one dark night, accompanied by Hitler, in search of something to eat or drink.

Westenkirchner carried a knife, Hitler an empty gasoline can. After stumbling along the shell holes, Westenkirchner at last found a dead horse that did not have an overpowering smell, and with his knife he carved out a large portion of its quarters, while Hitler filled his can with water from a shell hole. Then they carried the meat and water to the cook.

Westenkirchner depicts a resourceful, abstemious, somewhat fastidious Hitler, who cared deeply for Germany and was obsessed with the thought that the German Government and the High Command were both inept. (10)

The winter of 1917/18 proved the worst one the troops had yet to endure. Although Hitler had recovered well from the thigh wound, he suffered like all his comrades from the British naval blockade strangling the food supplies. Rations, which were poor in protein, vitamins and minerals to begin with, were cut again and again. But while the situation at the front was meagre enough, it was far ahead of the conditions at home. The records of the winter are pitiful: not only were the folks at home forced to eat "roof rabbits", cats and dogs euphemistically so renamed, and sometimes mice and rats, they also feasted on ersatz-bread partially made of sawdust, oats and potato peelings. There was no milk except for babies and no vegetables save turnips. The people of Austria-Hungary suffered even worse because inter-allied trade treaties invariably favoured Germany. Grain supplies in Austria were so low that food riots broke out.

In early January 1918, a few industrial workers in Berlin began to strike for an end of the war, and their protest forced the SPD to reconsider her position somewhat. In the initial enthusiasm of August 1914, the party had accepted Kaiser Wilhelm's appeal for national unity in times of peril and voted for war credits, but the rigors of rationing, the vicissitudes of war production and the growing inflation gnawed at their supporters' loyalty. In many factories, work days of twelve to fourteen hours were the norm, seven days a week. Had the wages been adequate, or, rather, had there been goods to be purchased in the first place, the hardships might have been obliged with more tolerance, but under the trauma of a fourth winter at war, even moderate socialists felt a need for action. Their displeasure at the economic conditions, which were largely the consequence of Hindenburg's and Ludendorff's neglect of the agricultural sector, was shared by the liberal bourgeois parties, which also objected to the arrogance with which the generals ran the country. A mood of protest slowly emanated from the trenches of France and Belgium but soon...

...spread to Germany itself, which had been under a virtual military dictatorship for several months, and on Monday, January 28, 1918, workers throughout Germany went on strike. Peace was their main demand but they also insisted on workers' representation in negotiations with the Allies, increased food rations, the abolition of martial law, and a democratic government throughout Germany. In Munich and Nuremberg only a few thousand workers marched through the streets petitioning for immediate peace without annexation, but in Berlin 400,000 workers walked out of their shops to organize a strike committee.

Within a week they were forced back to work but a spirit of rebellion had come alive in the capital and it seemed only a question of time before full-scale revolution would break out. News of the general strike was received with mixed feelings at the front. Many of the soldiers were as war-weary and disgusted as those back at home but almost as many felt they had been betrayed by their own civilians.

Hitler called it "the biggest piece of chicanery in the whole war." He was incensed at the "slackers and Reds." What was the army fighting for if the homeland itself no longer wanted victory? For whom the immense sacrifices and privations? "The soldier is expected to fight for victory and the homeland goes on strike against it." (11)

Hitler's first visit to Berlin had occurred a few weeks before the strike, and when he paced through the capital for the second time, on November 19, 1918, the commotion of the previous week had already subsided, but the massacre of December 6 was more than two weeks in the future. In this incident, a demonstration by Spartacists turning around a street corner suddenly faced a line of machine guns manned by soldiers from the Maybug barracks, who fired at everything that moved for five minutes before retreating to the safety and anonymity of the garrison and leaving the dead, wounded and dying to their fate. It was never found out who the killers were. (12) Between these revolutionary hiccups, Hitler returned to Munich in safety, but found, to his astonishment, that much had changed since November 7.

King Ludwig III had been aware of the portents of turmoil in the dying days of the war. In a belated attempt to save the monarchy, the king consented to a reform bill which sought a few liberal but largely cosmetic changes. Five days later, on November 7, representatives of the SPD, the Catholic Farmers and the Democratic Party joined the Royal Bavarian government for the first time.



THE DEMONSTRATION AT THERESIENWIESE IN MUNICH, DECEMBER 7, 1918, WHICH MARKED THE BEGINNING OF THE REVOLUTION

Although the Bavarian police had warned of revolutionary conspiracies, the Munich magistrate permitted, on the same afternoon, a joint demonstration of SPD and USPD on the Theresienwiese, the great expanse which accommodates the annual Oktoberfest. The numerous troops of the Munich garrison were believed to be reliably monarchist and patriotic enough so that public safety seemed assured. The event began at 3 pm and soon more than 80,000 listeners filled the great oval. At the conclusion of the occasion, two hours later, the moderates left the grounds to march to the city centre, while the more extreme elements, in particular Kurt Eisner's USPD, remained, joined by many radical soldiers and sailors who had already dumped their imperial cockades. (13)

Eisner recognized an opportunity. His followers were at the northern end of the venue, in proximity to the garrison barracks in the northwest of the town, whither he headed, followed by perhaps 2,000 men. It soon became a revolutionary lindworm, more and more soldiers joining along the way to the major army depots. There was a minute of confusion and shooting at the big casern at the Türkenstraße, but when the majority of the troops stationed there declared for the revolution, Eisner had won. The throng he led back to the town centre was by now perhaps 5,000 men strong.

At 7 pm, revolutionary soldiers appeared at the plaza of the Residence, the Wittelsbach town palace, and an anxious royal family was informed by the War Minister, Philipp von Hellingrath, that, since a large majority, perhaps all, of the Munich garrison troops had declared for the rebellion, no loyal units were available to protect the throne. The Palace Guard had mysteriously disappeared in the early evening, and the King's Own Guard Regiment lingered passively in their barracks despite having been urgently alarmed. At around 10 pm, the king, his family and trusted retainers left the capital, on the advice of Court Minister Ritter von Dandl, to seek refuge at the family castle of Wildenwart at the Chiemsee Lake. A few miles south of the city, the king's car slid off the road and mired itself in a potato field. It was a fitting end for the House of Wittelsbach. (14)



REVOLUTIONARY SOLDIERS AND WORKERS MEET AT THE
ENTRANCE TO THE MATHÄSERBRÄU TAVERN, DECEMBER 7, 1918

Meanwhile, delegations of revolutionary soldiers proceeded to seize the city's strategic assets without encountering resistance: by late evening the central railway station, the telegraph office, the Bavarian army command and other important military and municipal buildings as well as the parliament and the newspaper bureaus were in Red hands. Those units of army and police that had not gone over to the rebels remained passive and allowed the revolution to organize itself by means of mass meetings in the late hours of the day. A preliminary gathering of rebels was held in the Franziskaner beer cellar, but the second, more decisive, meeting took place, in the heart of the city, at the gigantic Mathäserbräu tavern that can seat five thousand guests easily but in this night perhaps saw more than twice that number.

Soldiers and sailors convened on the first floor and elected a council, while the workers met on the ground floor and elected their own representatives. The delegates of both councils then merged and formed a general "Workers', Soldiers' and Farmers' Council," initially chaired by Franz Schmitt of the SPD. At around 10 pm, Eisner, Schmitt and the councillors plus a small armed guard moved over the Isar River to the parliament building. Chairing the improvised meeting, and without formal ado, Eisner took the office of Minister President of Bavaria, and, in the wee hours of the morning of November 8, 1918, proclaimed the FREE BAVARIAN SOCIALIST SOVIET REPUBLIC. A few hours later, the burghers of Munich, who had gone to bed in a kingdom, awoke in a republic, and a socialist one to boot. (15)

In the afternoon of the same day, the parliament building hosted the first session of the temporary National Council, which was to establish a provisional government. The assembly included the councillors, the former members of parliament of the SPD and the Bavarian Farmer Party and three former liberal deputies. (16) The plenum faced initial objections from the delegates of the SPD. The Social Democrats had been loyal, to a degree, to the Ancien Régime and favoured reforms, not revolution; a protracted debate was necessary to convince their members to join and support the provisional government. On the next day, Minister President Eisner and his newly minted ministers took over the executive

power in Bavaria. Not a single act of insubordination occurred: state servants, government employees, police and military acquiesced to the orders of the new government without reserve.

Munich set the standard for the country.

The flames of orderly revolution were igniting spontaneously throughout Germany. In Friedrichshafen workers at the Zeppelin plant formed a council. The factory workers in the Stuttgart area, including the vast Daimler motor works, struck and, led by socialists with views similar to Eisner's, made similar demands. Sailors engineered revolt in Frankfurt am Main. At Kassel, the entire garrison, including a commanding officer, revolted without benefit of bullets.

There were a few shots fired in Cologne when the garrison of 45,000 went Red, but order quickly settled over the city. A civilian revolt in Hanover succeeded even though authorities ordered troops to use force; instead the soldiers joined the rebels. It was the same in Düsseldorf, Leipzig and Magdeburg. Government after government throughout Germany collapsed as workers' and soldiers' councils took control. (17)

Eventually, the eyes of the nation turned to Berlin, in the anticipation that the success or failure of a German socialist republic would be decided there. Unlike in Russia, where Mensheviks and Bolsheviks had split over the question of reform vs. revolution well ahead of the war, the German socialists had not separated until 1917, when the revolutionary wing split off and formed the USPD. Still, even if counting in their cousins of the Spartacus League, they represented probably less than ten per cent of the socialist spectrum, but their clamour portended a schism of the socialist government in Berlin. Potentially worse, countrywide elections giving the women of the nation full suffrage for the first time were scheduled for January 19, 1919, and the radical wing had no illusions of the possible outcome. No, if they wanted power, they had to try the coup d'état.

But things were not quite there yet. In these November days, most of the workers, soldiers and sailors were less interested in dogmatic discussion but in the end of war and hunger, reunion with families and loved ones, and the vagaries of getting a job. Since the Imperial government had collapsed, self-organization was the motto of the moment, and so it came that

Berlin remained in a state of confusion ... with various groups all claiming authority: Ebert's Council of People's Commissars in the Chancellery [the government recognized by the Allies, ¶], the Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils in the Reichstag, the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils of Berlin in the Prussian Landtag building, Eichhorn's [the self-proclaimed (USPD) police commissioner of Berlin, ¶] 3,000 strong "Security Service" in police headquarters on Alexanderplatz, the Revolutionary Shop Stewards and, of course, Liebknecht's and Luxemburg's alternative Spartacist government in the Royal Palace, supported by a volunteer force of about 2,000 Red sailors based in the Royal Stables and calling themselves the Peoples' Naval Division.

There were daily street demonstrations, mass meetings and spasmodic gunfights, and virtually every day until Christmas another returning division from the regular army marched back through the Brandenburg Gate and up the Unter den Linden before dissolving into the crowds. (18)

Irrespective of the political transience of the times, the majority of these bodies went on to implement socialist aspirations they had demanded in vain from the German princes. The workday was limited to eight hours, labour unions were granted unrestricted rights of organization and bargaining, workplace accident coverage was raised, retirement plans expanded, sickness and unemployment insurance premiums lowered or services augmented. Many of these programs were still in their toddler stages, but they became the stepping stones of proletarian emancipation. Political prisoners were released and the censorship of press and theatre abolished. Against the warnings of capitalist Cassandras, of which there were quite a few, it turned out that this could all be paid for, once normality was restored, by enforcing the existing tax code with the proviso that the tax privileges of the Junkers and the nobility were to be revoked. German social legislation became the envy of the workers of the world.

Hitler confessed later that he respected the social reforms, which he considered inevitable in the long run, and some of his ensuing dicta leave us with the strong suspicion that he sympathized considerably with the Social Democrats in these days. "For what I am grateful to the Social Democrats," he said, "is that they got rid of the interests of court and nobility." (19)

But the confused but largely harmless designs of the various socialist governments-to-be and their committees and councils could flourish only as long as true revolutionary groups could be held at bay. Ebert understood that the executive power of his government remained questionable without armed support, and he knew his former comrades who had gone over to the Spartacists too well to believe they would relinquish the revolutionary option, given that they could not hope to win the election. But they had guns, and if they attempted the coup d'état against unarmed opponents, by whom could they be stopped? The only apparent alternative was support from the regular army.

The Social Democrats had always maintained a critical distance to the military, which, after all, had often enough been used in their suppression. Now, that the war had been lost instead of ending in the expected triumph, the mood of the army and their sympathy for socialists could not be hoped to have improved. On December 10, the first returning army units arrived in Berlin, welcomed by Ebert, who had the difficult obligation to explain to the soldiers the changes that had transpired in the meantime. Demobilization in Berlin was the same haphazard affair as everywhere else, perhaps sloppier: many soldiers forgot to turn their guns in, some units even forgot to turn in their machine- or even field guns, or claimed they had been lost in transit. There was no shortage of weapons anywhere in the new republic but the supply in the capital was by far the richest and the Spartacists had been collecting ever since: Ebert was outgunned.

On the second day of his chancellorship, November 10, he received a telephone call on the direct line from the General staff building. His summoner was Wilhelm Groener, the new Quartermaster General and successor of Ludendorff: in effect the military supremo of the day-old republic. The general knew exactly what was at stake, and offered Ebert that "the Army would put itself at the disposal of his regime, in return for the regime's support for Field Marshal [Hindenburg, ¶] and the officer corps, through the maintenance of order and discipline in the Army." (20) In civil parlance, it meant that the army would support Ebert and the Republic - quite unexpectedly - for the price of keeping the army, in the Prussian tradition, out of politics and to let it govern itself. There was one more condition: "The officer corps demands of the régime a battle against Bolshevism, and is ready for such an engagement." (21)



THE LONG WAY HOME - GERMAN SOLDIERS, MARCHING BACK FROM BELGIUM

Ebert was in a bind, caught between the Spartacist left and the reactionary, military right like Ulysses between Scylla and Charybdis. In the end, he went with Groener, perhaps somewhat duped by a very clever manoeuvre of the general, who had his own plan how to control the councils. Groener knew that loyal troops and officers returning from the front would begin to trickle in from the second week of December, and thus he had to survive the rule of the councils for only about a month. His plan was to give the councils license enough to hang themselves: he ordered that every unit was to elect a council: every platoon, company, battalion, regiment and so forth, a procedure that created the instant chaos that gave Groener the time he needed. Soon the bulk of the army was to return, and while most of the units would demobilize on

trenches became the venue and symbol of a blood-brotherhood that united the Bavarian with the Oldenburger, the sergeant with the private and the captain with the corporal. In the fog, filth and noise of the trench, the myth of the FÜHRER was born, the one to lead the brothers-in-arms, oblivious to death, through the hail of steel.

"To them [the front soldiers, ¶] he was not their commanding officer; he was their Führer! And they were his comrades! They trusted him blindly and would have followed him blindly into hell itself if it were necessary."
(23)

The experiences of the trench bridged the previously separated spheres of officers and men, and the community of fighters came to resemble a meritocratic order of frontline monks. As it has famously been observed, seemingly isolated from the rest of the world, the trenches resembled "monasteries with walls of flames." (24)

The sudden end of the war prompted withdrawal symptoms - civilian life appeared drab, lacklustre, and trivial. Moreover, nothing had prepared this deeply romantic and passionately patriotic brotherhood to find the Vaterland imperilled by a Bolshevik revolution. They had become eternal warriors, in search of a duty to fulfill, and none could be more glorious or important than to recoup the strangely altered homeland from the communist abyss.

The FREIKORPS of 1918 and 1919 were ... freebooting private armies of embittered ex-servicemen, mainly composed of former officers and NCOs who refused to disband, determined to maintain military discipline and organisation in the face of what they saw as the disorder of the soldiers' councils. Steeped in the harsh traditions of the Prussian army, they were fiercely nationalist and violently anti-Bolshevik.

Their formation was encouraged if not actually initiated by Groener, both as a means of keeping alive the ethos of the officer corps during those uncertain times and of providing tough, trained units of loyal troops who could be relied on to fight the revolutionary forces of the extreme left. Their relationship with the army was kept deliberately vague, but they were equipped by it with machine guns, mortars and even field guns as well as rifles and pistols, and there is little doubt that their pay came from army funds. Many of their commanders were regular serving officers.

The Freikorps' first function was to police Germany's eastern frontiers with the new Baltic States and the newly independent and deeply hostile Poland, which after centuries of German, Russian and Austrian oppression could be expected to try and grab as much territory as it could get away with.

Protection against Bolshevism spreading from the east was a secondary consideration in this area, but nonetheless it was a real consideration, especially when Russia went to war with Poland in 1919. In Berlin and the rest of Germany, however, the battle with Bolshevism in all its forms was the Freikorps' very raison d'être.
(25)

When making his offer to Ebert, Groener had recommended that the political supervision of the armed forces should be entrusted to the former SPD MP Gustav Noske, the same man who had shown in Kiel that he could deal with a mob. It was high time to organize troops loyal to Ebert's Council of Peoples' Commissars, because the Spartacists were already mobilizing their own forces in anticipation of the first session of the national Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils. This body, comprising representatives from all parts of the country, was to meet at the Reichstag building beginning Monday, December 16. In support for the confidently expected revolution, Liebknecht and Luxemburg organized a mass demonstration the same day on the plaza in front of the building, and when that failed to impress the delegates, dispatched a crash commando three days later with instructions to hijack the building and take the deputies hostage; a plan that was thwarted in the nick of time by one of Noske's local guard platoons.

The decisions of the congress, clearly wishing to establish a semblance of order as soon as possible, much disappointed the radical Left: for not only did the delegates fail to transfer "all power to the soviets" as per the Spartacists' request, but also confirmed the legitimacy of Ebert's government and resolved to phase out the councils in favour of transferring all further legislative and executive authority to the new National Assembly, the election of which was fixed for January 19, 1919, four weeks in the future. (26)

These setbacks at least gave the Spartacists a deadline, for they needed to seize power before Election Day - for win could they not. On December 23, under the pretext of seeking a Christmas bonus, their Naval Division stormed and occupied the Arsenal (the military HQ) and the chancellery, where they arrested the cabinet. In this situation "Ebert decided that the time had come to call in Groener's promise." (27)

Army HQ in Potsdam sent a battalion of troops as pledged, and on the morning of December 24, a strange hybrid of military and propaganda battles developed around the Royal Palace and the stables. Actual fighting was sporadic if emphatic but was frequently interrupted by negotiations, or Liebknecht's exhortations for revolution addressed to the thousands of spectators, who, after watching the action, proceeded on to the Christmas market or the nearby shopping district where business went on as usual. It was perhaps the lack of attention that led to the battle ending, in early afternoon by the disappearance of both sides' troops in the Christmas crowds. An irate Groener, however, decided that he needed more dependable troops next time and sent the word to the leaders of the nascent Freikorps. (28)

Christmas Day brought the regular Spartacus League demonstration, whose activists seized the building where the SPD-owned newspaper VORWÄRTS was printed and created their own Christmas issue, naturally on red paper. After the police had arrived and the occupiers expelled, VORWÄRTS gave up all remnants of socialist solidarity it had kept until that day and became decisively anti-Spartacist.

Undeterred, Liebknecht ended the year by inviting about a hundred Spartacists to a conference starting on 29 December in the banqueting hall of the Prussian Landtag. After two days of typically fractious argument, they voted to make a complete break with Social Democracy and align themselves unequivocally with Soviet Russia, renaming themselves the Communist Party of Germany (KPD).

Among the guests was Karl Radek, who had been smuggled into Germany to help foment the civil war that was an essential part of a Bolshevik revolution. In a long speech, he denied that the regime in Russia was a reign of terror, and asserted that civil war was not as awful as was sometimes thought: a whole year of civil war in Russia, he claimed, had killed fewer people and destroyed less property than a single day of international war.

"What we are now carrying out in Russia," he declared, "is nothing but the great unperverted teaching of German Communism. The Council of Peoples' Commissars of Europe will yet meet in Berlin. Spartacus will conquer. It is destined to seize power in Germany." Liebknecht responded enthusiastically with a call to arms: "We do not want a lemonade revolution. We have to hasten the internationalisation of civil war." (29)

Groener's and Ebert's spies reported the results immediately to their masters, and, during the eclipse of the year, both sides prepared for the clash they knew was to occur before Election Day, January 19.

The persistent enmity between social democratic, i.e. reformist, and communist parties all over the world in the seventy years between 1919 and 1989, resulted from the split in Berlin and the happenings shortly thereafter. From 1914 to 1918, the SPD had supported the Ancien Régime by approving Wilhelm's war credits in the Reichstag, with the sole exception of Liebknecht, while an outer-parliamentary, grassroots opposition of pacifists shaped up, broadened and finally broke off the mother party in 1917. The offshoot, the USPD, appealed to the international solidarity of the working class, which could render war impossible simply by refusing to produce armaments, and was the only faction in Germany to speak out publicly against the war.

They accused the moderates of treason, of being corrupted by capitalist interests, and when Ebert called in the reactionary Freikorps, he was accused of fratricide and of betraying the legacy of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. From this day on communist parties were to regard social democrats as the worst enemy: while the resistance of capitalists was expected and could be understood, the poison of moderation had destroyed the solidarity of the brotherhood of workmen. In remembrance of the Jacobins, there could be no quarter for the enemies of the revolution.

Meanwhile the government of the Bavarian Socialist Republic was consolidating its power and began to organize the post-war economy. It was perhaps the greatest surprise for Minister President Eisner that the regular Bavarian Army

cooperated without too much ado; while clearly disliking the confusion of council policies, the military realized that order was the demand of the day and the senior officer, General Max Freiherr von Speidel appealed to the troops "to serve the people's state." (30) On November 13, King Ludwig's written declaration of abdication was received in the council, and the same day saw the investiture of Albert Rosshaupter (SPD) as the first-ever civilian Minister of Defense in the history of the country.

Only recently has the research of Ernst Deuerlein, Anton Joachimsthaler and Othmar Plöckinger enabled us to follow the whereabouts of Corporal Hitler in the first days of the Bavarian Soviet Republic. He arrived in Munich on Thursday, November 21, two weeks after the revolution, and was posted to the 7th Company, 1st Replacement Battalion, 2nd Infantry Regiment. The 2nd was the Reserve and/or Replacement Regiment for the men from the 16th Reserve Infantry Regiment, the former Regiment List, and soon Hitler shook hands with his friends Westenkirchner, Amann and Schmidt. (31)

It was perhaps a sign of Bavarian civility that, at least initially, councils and officers attempted to run the army by consent, not competition. Corporal Hitler remained with the 7th Company until, on December 4, two sergeants and one hundred and forty men of the 1st Battalion, among them Hitler and Schmidt, were transferred to guard duty at a small prisoner-of-war camp near Traunstein, about seventy miles east of Munich. The chiefly Russian prisoners were transported out home in two groups on Christmas Day 1918 and January 23, 1919, and thus Hitler found himself surprisingly quick back in Munich, around the end of January. (32)

HITLER IN TRAUNSTEIN, DECEMBER 1918 TO JANUARY 1919 - HITLER LEFT, ERNST SCHMIDT RIGHT CIRCLE



On February 12, the 1st Replacement Battalion was converted to a Demobilization Battalion and Hitler was posted to its 2nd Company for eventual dismissal from service. But since he did not have an occupation he could return to, Hitler remained in the army, and for a few weeks was paid, together with Schmidt, three marks a day for examining old gas masks for functionality. Money was tight, of course, but since food and lodging were free the meagre funds enabled him to a few opera visits, accompanied by Schmidt.

Meanwhile, the Bavarian Soviet Republic had developed in a much less revolutionary way than it had begun. To a degree, Eisner's government regarded itself only as a provisional administration and delayed decisive reforms for the time after the January 12 elections, which they hoped would give them a parliamentary majority and hence an indisputable mandate for the creation of a true socialist state. Thus Eisner's public address on November 15 by and large avoided revolutionary rhetoric: the essential demand of socialization of industry was postponed. There were a few modifications in unemployment aid and the introduction of the eight-hour work day, but nothing was done to replace the employees and

functionaries of the state, who continued to administrate the country in the old-fashioned, monarchical ways. Neither was the economy reformed: industry, banks, and insurances operated as usual. The sole notable change was the secularization of the schools by the abolition of the Catholic Church's supervisory authority.

The election turned out a catastrophe for the Radical Socialists. Winners were the Bavarian People's Party, the successor of the Catholic Centre Party (BVP, 35%, 66 seats) and the SPD (33%, 61 seats). More or less in the expected range came in results for the liberals, the DVP [DPP in the Palatinate], which carried 14% and 25 seats and the right-wing German National People's Party [DNVP, as "MITTELPARTEI" in the Palatinate], which received 6% of the vote and 9 seats.

The losers were the parties of the revolution. The Bavarian Bauernbund, something akin to Russia's Social Revolutionaries, received 9% of the vote and 16 seats, but the results for the USPD were pitiful: 2.5% and three seats. Eisner, however, was not easily persuaded to give up his governmental responsibilities, since, as he pointed out, he was still the president of the Council of Soldiers, Workers and Peasants, which he regarded as the true government of socialist Bavaria. Alas, he had not exactly increased his popularity in recent weeks.

Everyone had a reason to hate him - they said he was a Galician Jew, a Berliner, a café intellectual, a left-wing Socialist, a betrayer of true Socialism, too radical, not radical enough, he was ineffectual and incompetent, the list seemed endless.

Above all, he was blamed for the collapse of the economy - Bavaria was virtually bankrupt, suffering like so many other places from a huge loss of jobs as ammunition production ceased and soldiers were demobilized, and yet he had vastly increased spending on unemployment benefits.

Eisner finally managed to infuriate just about everybody in Bavaria when he attended the first post-war conference of the Second Socialist International in Berne. As the only head of government there, he was held in great respect and listened to with some reverence, particularly when he publicly acknowledged German responsibility for the Great War and named Wilhelm Hohenzollern, the former Kaiser, as the one man most to blame for four and a half year of carnage. Speaking calmly and quietly, he lambasted all aspects of Prussianism, condemned Germany's harsh treatment of French civilians and Allied prisoners of war, and appealed to German prisoners to help rebuild the devastated regions of France and Belgium. All this was well received by the comrades in Berne, but in Munich it was regarded as treason, and he was branded a traitor.
(33)

Meanwhile in Bavaria the rift between revolutionaries and reformers broadened, and SPD leader Erhard Auer used his authority as Eisner's deputy and Eisner's absence to summon the Landtag, the Bavarian parliament, for a constituent session on February 21, 1919, in which a new government backed by a parliamentary majority was to be elected. In expectation of counteraction from the radical wing, Auer had Max Levien, leader of the KPD Schwabing, arrested, and urged Defense Minister Rosshaupter to do everything possible to form a quasi-military Home Defense Army loyal to the future government, which was expected to be the one or other coalition of the SPD with the Catholics and liberals and would easily enjoy the backing of 70% or more of the Landtag deputies.

The Left struck back on February 15, with the ad-hoc creation of the "Revolutionary Workers' Council", an eccentric body composed of the most radical members of USPD, Spartacists and Bolsheviks under the leadership of the anarchists Gustav Landauer and Erich Mühsam. The august body's first resolution directed a mass demonstration of workers and soldiers to occur on the Theresienwiese the very next day, and it is rather likely that Corporal Hitler marched on this day in the ranks of the socialists. The 2nd Infantry Regiment's Order of the Day for February 15 read:

"Tomorrow, Sunday February 16, 1919, a demonstration of the whole workforce and all garrison units will take place. The Regiment, including the Demobilization Battalion, will assemble at 12:15 noon in the casern square of 1st Battalion, on the Oberwiesefeld. The council members will blanket the troops to insure discipline and order. The company commanders will verify that all off-duty personnel participate in the gathering." (34)



PRO-EISNER DEMONSTRATION, FEBRUARY 16, 1919

Hence, around noon on February 16, about 10,000 protesters marched through the streets of Munich. Eisner, back from Berne, Mühsam and Levien, the latter released from jail, addressed the public with demands to establish a Soviet, i.e. Councils' Republic. It turned out that very few Munichers shared this desire, but only three days later, Eisner delivered a defiant gesture. In what became the last session of the Congress of Bavarian Councils, he demanded a second revolution.

"The second revolution will not be plundering and street fighting. The new revolution is the assembling of the masses in city and countryside to carry out what the first revolution has started..... The bourgeois majority is now to implement bourgeois politics. We shall see whether they are capable of ruling. In the meantime the Councils should do their job: to build the new democracy. Then perhaps the new spirit will also arrive in Bavaria. Tomorrow the Landtag begins - tomorrow the activities of the Councils should also begin anew. Then we shall see where are to be found the force and vitality of a society consecrated by death." (35)

Eisner then secured the assembly's declaration that they would not disband or otherwise renounce their authority unless the future Bavarian Constitution expressly acknowledged their prerogatives. This was an obvious attempt to block the formation of the parliamentary government the Landtag was poised to enact the next day. For his cryptic insinuations regarding a Second Revolution, the cabinet later demanded Eisner's resignation.

On this day, February 20, the story goes, Corporal Hitler was commanded to the guard detail of the Central Railway Station, the same building that had greeted his arrival in Munich in 1913. The detachment consisted of two NCOs and thirty-six men, and a photograph - whose validity has recently been doubted - has survived that shows Hitler standing in the midst of seven comrades.



PHOTOGRAPH ALLEGEDLY SHOWING HITLER AT GUARD DETAIL

They were supposedly stationed there on behalf of the council, i.e. in "Red" employment, a fact Hitler failed to report in MEIN KAMPF, or anywhere else, for that matter. In a short time, the post developed a most dreadful reputation. Its task was to secure the station and its surroundings, and the men had the authority to arrest anybody they deemed suspicious in and around the building. It appears that the detail interpreted its orders liberally, for soon complaints turned up that the guard detail had converted the basement into a makeshift torture chamber, where suspects were tormented after their property had been stolen. This was no joke: a commission of inquiry reported to the central council on February 27 that "the reality we discovered was far more dreadful and hair-raisingly horrible than the complaints alleged," (36) and on Saturday, March 8, 1919, after less than three weeks, the detail was replaced by trustworthy troops. Hitler returned to the casern of the 2nd Infantry Regiment and never disclosed this part of his military duties to anyone. (37)

Meanwhile, on the morning of February 21, Kurt Eisner had composed a notice of resignation and a short accompanying speech in his office and made his way, on foot, to deliver his message at the Landtag's opening session. He dismissed his aides and the two armed guards and set out alone.

Typically, he refused to take a different route from his regular one, dismissing his aides' concerns for his safety with a blithe: "They can only shoot me dead once." As he turned the corner into the Promenadenstraße, a young man in a trench coat ran up behind him, pulled out a pistol and shot him at point-blank range in the head and back. The first shot smashed his skull, the second pierced a lung. He fell to the ground dead, amid a spreading pool of blood.

Eisner's assassin was Count Anton Arco-Valley, an aristocrat who had served as a lieutenant in the Bavarian cavalry during the war, and who had, like most returning officers in Munich, suffered the indignity of having his badges of rank torn from his uniform by revolutionaries in the street. His exact reason for killing Eisner was never made clear: he was filled with bitterness at being rejected for membership of the ultra-right Thule Society because his mother was Jewish, his girlfriend had taunted him as a weakling, and he hated the revolution. But why he should have chosen to kill Eisner, at the precise moment when he was stepping down, remains a mystery. (38)

This was only the start of the party. Arco-Valley was gunned down by a bodyguard, but eventually saved by a heroic operation executed by Professor Ernst Sauerbruch, the most eminent surgeon of the world at that time. When the news reached the Landtag in its opening session, it was adjourned, and Erhard Auer, head of the Bavarian SPD, whose erstwhile friendship with Eisner went back decades, began an improvised eulogy. He had not talked five minutes when a member of the aforementioned Revolutionary Workers' Council, the butcher Alois Lindner, broke into the plenum, revealed a rifle that he had hidden under his coat and shot Auer, at close range, in the chest. Then he fired at the BVP delegates, and after killing a guard who tried to disarm him, escaped unhampered. He was replaced by a second shooter in the gallery, who aimed at the same deputies, slaying one man and injuring a few others. The commotion was immense, and an air of South America hung over the venerable Landtag building. (39)

Eisner, intensely disliked by many only hours before his death, was instantly canonized a Socialist saint, and, with the Landtag out of order, the councils quickly filled the legislative and executive void, declared martial law and called in a three-day general strike which - as Anthony Read observed - "fell conveniently over the weekend", (40) as well as a 7 pm curfew. On the following morning, a hastily convened meeting of the councils elected a supreme committee, the "ZENTRALRAT" or "Central Council". Its eleven members, representing a miscellany of socialist beliefs from reformist to revolutionary, included representatives of rural, not only urban councils, and were to govern not only Munich but Bavaria as a whole. The chairmanship of the commission, and thus the office of quasi-Minister President fell to the twenty-eight year-old schoolteacher Ernst Niekisch, who, as a left-wing member of the SPD, was a good compromise candidate for the position.

Niekisch aimed to draw support by calling for socialist unity and the convocation of a Congress of Bavarian Councils, which was to determine the future form of the government: either parliamentary or by councils, i.e. a Soviet Republic. This congress opened on February 25, but was compelled to adjourn on the next day without having accomplished anything for the occasion of Eisner's funeral.

Whatever the citizens of Munich had thought of the living Eisner, his funeral drew 100,000 mourners who followed the coffin as it was solemnly driven through the streets of the town in a former royal carriage. The next day, the radical Left used the public outpouring of sympathy for Eisner to call on the Congress to declare the 'Second Revolution' and announce the establishment of the Soviet Republic. When the motion failed by a large margin, Spartakists, USPD and anarchists left the Zentralrat in order to prepare the beneficial transformation alone. Without leadership, the Congress scattered, and for a few weeks, after so much ado, Bavaria quieted down.

Meanwhile in Berlin, the merger of USPD and Spartakusbund into the new KPD had been completed. In furtherance of its revolutionary designs, the new party's leadership sought to destabilize the political situation by calling on soldiers and sailors to assist the labour unions in a city-wide general strike.

The Revolutionary Shop Stewards had brought out the workers at factories like the giant AEG plant in Moabit and had closed down the gasworks and some power stations, so that thousands of Berliners suffered in cold and darkness. ...

The Executive was more concerned with the coming National Assembly elections on 19 January. Ebert announced his manifesto on New Year's Day, and he and Noske began preparing for the showdown with the Spartacists and Independent Socialists who were determined to wreck the elections.

One of the first things Ebert needed was a reliable police force, something he could never have while Emil Eichhorn ruled as Police President. Several newspapers were already running a campaign against Eichhorn, the former telegrapher at the Russian Embassy who had seized control of the Berlin police and renamed it the Security Service during the first days of the revolution in November. (41)

Eichhorn could not be replaced without difficulty: not only was he backed by his comrades from the USPD, but also by the former Spartacists, now KPD, the radical Shop Stewards and, of course, by his Red police, which, the rumour went, had stocked at police headquarters on Alexanderplatz not only machine guns but grenades and even field artillery. Such a force could only be met by greater force.

Thus it was quite a deliverance for Ebert when Noske took him on January 2 to the military base in Zossen, and introduced him to the first Freikorps unit the world was to lay eyes on, General Märcker's Volunteer Rifles. They were a fully armed, provisioned and disciplined force of 4,000 men, the strength of two regiments; a blunt instrument for smashing Red skulls. On January 4, two days later, the Prussian government, goaded on by Ebert, formally dismissed Eichhorn from his post. To nobody's surprise, Eichhorn did not only refuse to retire but urged on the radical Left for his support, and on the next day perhaps 150,000 denizens of Berlin, mobilized by USPD, communists and trade unions took to the streets, accompanied by brass bands and waving red flags. The centipede took off at the Tiergarten, the Zoo, and crossed the city centre until it arrived at Police Headquarters on Alexanderplatz, Eichhorn's Lair.

There seventy-one choice socialists convened for a meeting in the building, and eventually Liebknecht appeared on the balcony to appeal to the crowds for their support for Eichhorn, which was readily given. Amid roaring applause, he exhorted them to return for an even bigger demonstration the very next day. Witness Harry Kessler could not but draw a comparison to an ominous past: "The wave of Bolshevism surging in from the East resembles somewhat the invasion by Islam in the seventh century. Fanaticism and power in the service of a nebulous fresh hope are faced, far and wide, by nothing more than the fragments of old ideologies. The banner of the prophet waves at the head of Lenin's armies, too." (42)

Sensing, perhaps, the breath of history on their napes, the conclave then elected a "Revolutionary Committee", a fifty-three men vanguard of the socialist age, presided over by Liebknecht for the KPD, George Ledebour for the USPD and Paul Scholze for the Shop Stewards. This presidium then composed the call to arms that would be published the next morning, to electrify the masses.

"Comrades! Workers!

The Ebert-Scheidemann Government has rendered itself impossible. It is hereby declared deposed by the undersigned Revolutionary Committee, the representative of the revolutionary socialist workers and soldiers (Independent Social Democratic Party and Communist Party).

The undersigned Revolutionary Committee has provisionally assumed the conduct of the business of government.

Comrades! Workers!

Support the measures of the Revolutionary Committee, 6 January 1919. The Revolutionary Committee

LEDEBOUR, LIEBKNECHT, SCHOLZE" (43)

It transpired later that the document had sprung from the impetus of the moment; no concrete plans yet existed and the party councils and labour unions had not had an opportunity to discuss the proffered course of action. But the die had been cast, and at dawn communist commandos took hold of the important public buildings, newspaper offices, communication services and transport facilities. The VORWÄRTS was seized, again, and the usurpers produced their own edition for a second time.

But while even more people showed up on the streets than the day before, it turned out soon that the supporters of both sides had emerged, of the radical Left as well as of Ebert's government. At first catcalls flew, but soon ammunition of a more destructive kind, and it was revealed that the moderates had also taken the precaution to have arms at the ready.

The shooting started around 5 p.m., outside Wertheim's, the fashionable department store on Leipziger Platz, and quickly spread to Wilhelmsplatz, Potsdamer Platz and Unter den Linden. Soon, the whole of central Berlin was engulfed in the rattle of rifle and machine-gun fire, the booming of trench mortars and the crash of grenades. Liebknecht toured the city in his open car, surrounded by a ring of trucks with mounted machine guns and flying red flags, constantly orating: "The time for action has come! Make the dream of a Socialist Republic reality! Today is the start of the Socialist revolution that will spread throughout the world!"... That evening it poured with rain, but the shooting continued, and the confusion multiplied.

A general strike was called, twice - once by the government, as a protest against the Spartacus takeover of VORWÄRTS, and once by the Independent Socialists and Revolutionary Shop Stewards against the government.



THE SPARTACUS PUTSCH - THIS PHOTO DEPICTS A STRANGELY MIXED SPARTACIST MACHINE GUN CREW. THE HEADGEAR, PERHAPS INDICATING STATUS, RANGES FROM HOMBURG HAT TO STEEL HELMET AND A WORKER'S CAP.

Rebel unity began to break up, as the Independent Socialists approached Ebert and Scheidemann with an offer of negotiation. The sailors in the palace, to which the Revolutionary Committee had moved on Sunday evening, decided to take no further part in the battle and threw Liebknecht and his partners out, declaring themselves neutral. They were now interested only in getting their pay. Whole sections of Eichhorn's Security Service began defecting, reporting to the Charlottenburg police headquarters for service against the rebels.
(44)



THE PHOTO BELOW SHOWS STREET FIGHTING ON A LITTLE BERLIN SQUARE. THE FREE CORPS SOLDIERS ARE, QUITE OBVIOUSLY, BETTER ARMED THAN THEIR OPPONENTS.

The regular army garrison sent out a few detachments to aid the Ebert government; they deployed one company to secure the Chancellery and Interior Ministry at Wilhelmstrasse and another one to protect the Reichstag building and the Brandenburg Gate. Meanwhile Noske had set up an improvised HQ in Dahlem, in the west of the city, where he began to draw in, arm and deploy the huge number of volunteers that populated his place as soon as the grapevine had told them where to head. He alarmed Märcker's Volunteer Rifles in Zossen as well as regular units stationed at Potsdam, and charged Lieutenant General Freiherr von Lüttwitz with the overall command. (45)

The troops arrived on the morning of Thursday, January 9, and deployed first to the centres of transport and communication. The telegraph offices and railway stations received priority clearing before field artillery detachments were sent to demolish both the communist newspaper ROTE FAHNE ["Red Flag", ¶] offices and the KPD's main building on Friedrichstraße. A Freikorps battalion moved to Belle-Allianz-Platz to reconquer the VORWÄRTS building, which was held by over three hundred of the Spartacists' best. They had no chance, alas, against the mortars, flame-throwers and field artillery of the Freikorps and what happened next was perhaps the best indication for the remorseless character of the fight: the Freikorps continued to fire into the building long after the communists had raised a white flag, and when, after a protracted barrage, they finally took three hundred men, and women, prisoner, they herded them to the barracks of the Dragoon Hosed Guards regiments and shot those that were not beaten to their death with clubs. The remaining objective, the Police HQ at Alexanderplatz, was forced by an ad-hoc formation composed mainly of defectors from Eichhorn's force and the mutinous soldiers from the Maybug casern, who had no interest to leave witnesses of their former deeds alive to talk. Few of Eichhorn's men survived. (46)

Noske declared martial law in northern Germany, and in the course of the next day army and Freikorps cleared out the capital before proceeding to thwart Spartacist uprisings that had meanwhile occurred in other cities. The list comprised Bremen, Hamburg, Braunschweig, Stuttgart, Leipzig, Dresden, Halle, Düsseldorf and other industrial towns, and

in some places along the Rhine the Allied occupation forces, Belgians and British, took the bashing of Red heads upon themselves.

The number of casualties in Berlin through "Spartacus Week" are hard to establish, because at the same time the global influenza epidemic walked through the city and felled about 5,000 citizens in December alone; but it was certainly a four-digit number, 90% of the victims, if not more, from the Left. The KPD leaders, however, had escaped but, mysteriously, were still able to write inflammatory articles for the ROTE FAHNE, which, even more mysteriously, still managed to be printed and published. But something went wrong when Liebknecht, Luxemburg and Wilhelm Pieck [a future president of the GDR, "East Germany", ¶] changed quarters on January 15: a bird chirped a song into some Freikorps ear and the KPD leaders were arrested and brought, for interrogation, to the Freikorps HQ at the Eden Hotel. It seems that the first examination, while humiliating, was not life-threatening, but when the prisoners were subsequently dragged out of the hotel's side entry, a soldier named Runge began to hit them over their heads with his rifle butt. Liebknecht, hardly conscious after Runge's blow, was taken by car to the Tiergarten, where he was found the next morning with a bloody skull and a few bullets in his back, so as to suggest LEY FUGA, "shot while attempting to escape." (47)

In the case of Rosa Luxemburg, it appears that Runge's hit cracked her skull, and a Freikorps Lieutenant named Vogel shot her repeatedly in the back of her head when she was driven to the Tiergarten area in another car. Her body, minus brain, remained missing for three months under the frozen Landwehr canal, only to be revealed when the ice finally melted in May. Wilhelm Pieck escaped unharmed from the Eden Hotel, but never explained how. It is worth to point out that these days were the beginning of a strange kind of criminal justice which the Weimar Republic was to adhere to ever thereafter: political crimes committed by the Left were punished with long prison terms or death, while right-wing criminals got off ridiculously light.

A government inquiry into the deaths of the Spartacus leaders found Private Runge guilty of "leaving his post without being properly relieved", and of "improper use of his weapons". He spent several months in jail before being released. Lieutenant Vogel, diagnosed as "psychopathic", probably as the result of his fine war record, was sentenced to two years in jail - which he never served. He was allowed to escape to Holland, to return a few months later when everything had blown over. (48)

Three days after the murders, the January 19 elections decided over the public appeal of the socialist competition. The result yielded 37.9 per cent of the vote for Ebert's SPD and only 7.6 for the USPD; the KPD had, of course, boycotted the election but it is safe to assume that the communist votes were included in the share of the USPD. Two parties of the extreme right, which were in essence monarchists but could not admit it - given the circumstances - only received fifteen per cent of the vote while the rest, liberal, conservative and Catholic parties, shared another over thirty-five per cent. It was the birthday of the "Weimar Coalition" of SPD, the progressive liberals of the German Democratic Party (DDP) and the Catholic Centre Party; these three "provided the strongest base of support for the republic in its fourteen-year existence." (49)

For fear of Spartacist intervention, the gathering of the Constitutional Assembly was moved from Berlin to the quiet town of Weimar, famous as the home of Goethe, Schiller and Liszt. Although there were Reds to be expelled and Märcker's Volunteer Rifles had to be mobilized to take over the protection of the delegates, (50) by February 6 the first session of the National Assembly was launched in the town that became the Republic's namesake.

The assembly elected Friedrich Ebert to the crucial and powerful office of first President of the Weimar Republic, although his successors henceforth would be chosen by popular vote. The exalted position of the president over the government and the parliament was to create problems in due time. Philip Scheidemann became the first chancellor of the new republic and Gustav "Bloodhound" Noske her first Minister of Defence. To the latter, it was clear that the Spartacist chapter was far from over, as the continuing strikes in the Ruhr area, Germany's industrial heart, proved.

Meanwhile in Munich, the Congress of Bavarian Councils, after dismissing Niekisch's resolution for the "Second Revolution" by 234 against 70 votes on February 28, (51) elected a provisional coalition government of SPD and USPD with Martin Segitz, an SPD veteran of Landtag and Reichstag since 1897, as Minister President. But the events around Eisner's death had much complicated the relations between SPD and USPD in Munich, and legislative and executive quarrels

between the Segitz government and Zentralrat led to paralysis. As an alternative, the SPD formed two days later, on March 3, a new coalition government with BVP and USPD under the leadership of Johannes Hoffmann as Prime Minister. When the Zentralrat denied confirming the new government, the SPD threatened to isolate Munich from the country by governing Bavaria from Bamberg, the old Franconian Episcopal town. The Zentralrat tilted over.

The government of Johannes Hoffmann, who was a bit left of the socialist middle, if there ever was such a thing, and had been Minister for Education in Eisner's cabinet, was confirmed by the Landtag in the session of March 17, but a radical group in the Zentralrat, consisting of playwright Ernst Toiler, journalist Erich Mühsam, anarchist philosopher Gustav Landauer and the professional KPD revolutionaries Max Levien and Eugen Levine, objected. They managed to convince the Munich soldiers' councils to deny the Hoffmann government any support. Once again, the executive power was divided and the vying factions of Hoffmann's government and the Zentralrat for the most part mutually incapacitated each other.

Outside factors complicated Hoffmann's task. Bad weather covered Munich below twenty inches of snow in a return of frost unprecedented in April; coal and fuel were scarce, so was food. The new constitution drafted in Weimar seemed to remove all the perks and prerogatives the Kingdom of Bavaria had enjoyed in the Second Empire, and, worse, would subjugate Bavarian folk to the despised Prussians. When Hoffmann refused to take the stand for Bavaria's interests in Weimar, he lost the support of the patriots and of the BVP and the Catholic Centre parties, because:

There was a strong popular feeling across all classes for secession and a possible link-up with Austria to form a southern Catholic state that would be a counterweight to northern Protestant power. A constituent assembly in Vienna had just voted by a massive 98 per cent in favour of Anschluss, the integration of Austria into the German Reich, and although this had been vetoed by France the vast majority of Bavarians, of every political persuasion, supported it. Hoffmann's authority was seriously damaged. Comparing him with Eisner, the BAYERISCHER KURIER complained that "even the Jew from Berlin" had been a better Bavarian than Hoffmann. (52)

There will be ample opportunity to question the wisdom of certain decisions made by several French post-war governments, but one might as well begin right here and ask: Why not have a good-sized Catholic province as the aforementioned "counterweight" to Prussia in the south of Germany? Nothing, it would seem, would be more dangerous to post-war France than a resurgent Germany, lead in turn by a resurgent, militant Prussia, unless it could be checked by a Catholic opposition, whose establishment would have cost France nothing more than simply accepting the proposal.

Hoffmann's troubles would have been bad enough had not the news from Hungary that reached Munich on March 22 electrified the radical Left all over again. A Bolshevik insurgency presided over by the failed journalist Bela Kun, who had been in and out of Budapest's jails for fomenting rebellion, had succeeded to take power in Hungary in circumstances more on the side of the ridiculous and absurd than on either order or revolution. While the Hungarian Soviet Republic was ultimately to perish after only 133 days, the news of its inception shook the world, seemingly proving that Bolshevism could exist outside of Russia.

It gave the radical Left in Bavaria tremendous momentum and fostered the dreams of a Communist axis Munich-Vienna-Budapest. To turn Bavaria into a Soviet Republic became the demand of the day, and less than two weeks later, on April 4, the soldiers' councils called meetings to determine the future course of the state. Corporal Hitler's 2nd Regiment Order of the Day laid out that:

"All the Councils of the Regiment and collateral troops (R.I.R. 16, R.I.R. 2) shall meet on 4/4/1919 at 3:30 pm in the Casino of 2nd Battalion. The Company Leaders are to be invited. On the calendar:

1. *The Socialisation of Bavaria and Germany.*
2. *The Existence of the Councils."* (53)

Supported in particular by the councils of 1st and 2nd Regiment - the most radical ones in Munich by far - a conference of Zentralrat and council representatives in Augsburg demanded in a joint resolution the immediate establishment of the

dictatorship of the proletariat and the subsequent declaration of the Bavarian Soviet Republic, the formation of a "Red Army", a political alliance with Hungary and Soviet Russia, and the separation of Bavaria from the Weimar Republic.

A hastily summoned conference of the Bavarian SPD in Nürnberg rejected these demands in toto by a vote of 47 to 6 on April 6. (54) On the same day's evening a makeshift assembly of left-wing groups led by playwright Ernst Toller, chairman of the USPD since Eisner's death, Erich Mühsam and Gustav Landauer, but without the KPD, met in the Residenz, constituted itself as the "Rat der Volksbeauftragten", "Council of Peoples' Commissars", and proclaimed the Bavarian Soviet Republic. Placards informing the denizens of Munich of the important decision were printed hastily and adorned Munich street corners by the dawn of April 7.

On the very same day, the reconstituted Zentralrat reassumed the business of government, dissolved the Landtag, created a "Red Army" and proclaimed martial law, the indispensable ingredient of a proper revolution.

The Hoffmann government, minus the USPD ministers, escaped to Bamberg, but many of the bigger Bavarian towns, among them Aschaffenburg, Fürth, Hof, Kempten, Lindau, Regensburg, Rosenheim, Schweinfurt and Würzburg declared for the Soviet Republic.

The citizens of Munich were quite aware that the members of the new government *were* known better for their artistic or philosophic achievements than their acquaintance with practical governance, and the "RÄTEREPUBLIK" (Soviet Republic) of literary pundits was far and wide ridiculed

Its spiritual leader was Ernst Toller, the poet, and his platform included a demand for new art forms in drama, painting and architecture, so the spirit of mankind could be set free. The Cabinet was a congress of engaging eccentrics; the Commissar for Housing, for instance, ordered that henceforth the living room in all houses must be above the kitchen and bedroom.

But the jewel in this crown of originals was Franz Lipp, selected as Commissar for Foreign Affairs (even though he had spent some time in a mental institution), on the grounds that he was the picture of a diplomat with his neat beard and grey frock coat. Lipp sent an indignant telegram to Moscow charging that Eisner's successor had stolen the keys to the ministry toilet, and declared war on Württemberg and Switzerland "because these dogs have not at once loaned me sixty locomotives." (55)

All in all it was quite an impressive collection of political genius, against which a week later, on Palm Sunday, April 13, the Hoffmann government tried to putsch.

The [Ernst] Toller RÄTEREPUBLIK, immediately dubbed the "Schwabing Soviet" by the residents of Munich after the city's louche artistic quarter, and the "Pseudo Soviet Republic" by the Communists, who refused to take part in it, lasted for just seven chaotic and sometimes comical days. (56)



ABOVE RED GUARDS AT THE MUNICH CENTRAL RAILWAY STATION, APRIL 14, 1919 - BELOW RED DEMONSTRATION, LUDWIG STREET, MUNICH, APRIL 22, 1919



The Hoffmann government had been able to draw a few parts of the Munich garrison to its side plus the remaining loyalists of Hoffmann's former "Republican Defense Guard", and they prepared the counterstroke to be launched on Sunday, April 13, less than a week after the proclamation of the Soviet Republic. The Guard had a few antiquated artillery pieces whose psychological impetus enabled them to conquer and occupy the Residence, where snatch commandos found and arrested Erich Mühsam, Franz Lipp and a couple of other Zentralrat members. The luminaries were brought to the Central Railway Station for safekeeping, in the hope that support troops, promised by Hoffmann to arrive by train from Ingolstadt, were to arrive in time. Then the counterrevolutionaries proceeded to replace the placards of the Räterepublik with their own, freshly printed ones, which informed the populace that the Hoffmann government was back in office. (57)

Said government had hoped that, once the counterrevolution was declared, regular units would come to the aid of their few combatants, but this was not to be. Most of the Munich garrison declared "neutrality", among them even the former King's Own Regiment, while some units, in particular from the 1st Regiment, actually fought for the Toiler regime. The remaining members of the Zentralrat were thus quickly able to mobilize the soldiers' and workers' councils, the workers of the big companies and the trade unions. Soon many thousand demonstrators, who filled the Theresienwiese, were reinforced militarily by units of the aforementioned 1st Regiment and of the "Red Army". The latter had been in the process of clandestine assembly by Military Commissar Rudolf Egelhofer (KPD), a veteran of the Kiel Mutiny, and was now sent on its first mission.

Red troops now marched from the Theresienwiese east, in the direction of the town centre, where they collided with the Hoffmann loyalists, who were still waiting for support from Ingolstadt to arrive at the railway station. The battle began around 6 pm, and three hours and seventeen corpses later the communist troops had successfully conquered the building. Meanwhile the town's councils had been gathering in the famous HOFBRÄUHAUS. The message of the successful defeat of the Hoffmann putsch kindled feelings close to ecstasy, and the new "Communist Bavarian Soviet Union" was proclaimed in situ. The councils declared the dissolution of both the Zentralrat and the Council of Peoples' Commissars, which were replaced by an "Action Committee" of fifteen men, presided over by a four-man "Executive Committee". The Executive Committee in turn was presided over by KPD-professional Eugen Levine, assisted by Max Levien, the second Moscow man, and former sailor Rudolf Egelhofer, who was, three days later, promoted to the command of the "Red Army"; by April 22 a force of perhaps 20,000 men. (58)

The communists were well aware that the Bavarian Right as well as the Ebert/Scheidemann government in Berlin were already planning their demise and undertook the greatest of endeavours to train and arm a force as large as possible. This included the 2nd Regiment, Demobilization Battalion, and thus Corporal Hitler. On April 14, only one day after the proclamation of the Communist Republic, Munich's councils held a plenary session, declaring their unanimous support for the new state and calling a new election of barracks and casern councils for the next day.

The order of the Demobilization Battalion, 2nd I.R., stated that on this day, April 15, 1919, all councils of the Battalion and the Regiment as a whole were to be newly elected, that the election was to take place between the hours of 10 am and 4 pm, and that the results should be forwarded to the regiment staff by 9 am, April 16. The results for the 2nd I.R. were published the very same day, and were interesting enough. "Beside Herrn Johann Blüml, who received 39 votes, Herr Hittler [sic!] was elected, with 19 votes, Deputy Battalion Councillor," and the list published later for the 2nd I.R. specified the election of: "At 2nd Demobilization Company ... Deputy: Corporal Hitler Adolf." (59)

To be sure, the soldiers' councils were elected for the support of, first Hoffmann's Socialist government, and then the Communist Republic and the Red Army, and for all we know Hitler indeed seemed to support the moderate socialists in the spring days of 1919. It is quite understandable that Hitler later lied about this time. In a short biographic abstract of 1921 he "wrote that during the period of Soviet rule he was on the proscribed list, meaning that he would be killed at sight if the Red Guards had found him. This statement seems to belong to the category of compensatory fiction." (60) No proscription lists could ever be unearthed, much less any with Hitler's name on it, and if someone was to look for him, he could easily be found at his battalion barracks. It appears questionable indeed, why Levine and his hard-nosed communist thugs would consider an Austrian corporal, who seemed to sympathize with the Left rather than the Right and was in his spare time sorting out gas masks, a danger great enough for their enterprise to warrant shooting him at first sight. Indeed, the same day Hitler was elected to Deputy Councillor, pamphlets distributed in the barracks read: "Soldiers! The troops of

Munich support the Munich Workers' and Soldiers' Republic. ... The whole garrison, with all its units, and the armed workers are determined to defend the Soviet Republic with all their might!" (61) These were the troops Hitler represented in the council, if only as a deputy. For all it is worth, it might have been a different angle that caught Hitler's attention, although it is quite possible, perhaps likely, that Hitler only conjectured it up a posteriori:

Levien, tall and blond, had met Lenin in Zurich and had served briefly in the German army. He was one of those revolutionaries whose fanaticism leads them inevitably to exasperate the people: almost his first act was to order the Munich cathedral transformed into a revolutionary temple.

Levine, though no less fanatical, was more of the pragmatist. He had fought as a student in the Russian revolution of 1905, had been arrested and banished to a lead mine in Siberia, and was an excellent organizer. Toller, Mühsam, Landauer and Levine were all Jews, a fact that was to have terrible consequences. Hitler, sorting out his gas masks, was wondering whether there was a dark Jewish plot to seize power all over the world. (62)

The leftovers of Hoffmann's putschists, who had in the meantime reassembled near Dachau, a small town ten miles northwest of Munich, tried an imminent reactionary counterstroke against the Communist government on April 15, the same day of the election of the councils. They consisted of approximately four thousand lightly armed volunteers, but were short on combat veterans. That was not the case with the perhaps ten thousand men of the Red Army conscripted and organized by Egelhofer, which met them on the fields south of town.

This day's leader of the Red Army was, confusingly, Toiler, again; he had been imprisoned by the Communists, then released, rode on a borrowed horse out to Dachau, took command, and directed the assault at the contras. Being a humanist first and a socialist second, he ignored Levine's order to shell Dachau. Personally courageous, he led the Red Army to an almost bloodless victory; when his troops proceeded to attack in relatively good order; the nationalists panicked and swiftly retreated. Toiler snatched four officers and thirty-six men, ignored Levine's order to shoot the captives and released them instead. Perhaps it came not as a surprise that he soon found himself back in prison.

But the military victory over an unorganized band of amateur renegades did not buy the communists a lot of time. Levine appealed to Lenin for military assistance, but the Russian civil war rendered the fulfilment of the request impossible. When the victorious Red Army returned to the city, rumours already informed them of what loomed ahead. Hoffmann in Bamberg had accepted Noske's offer of federal aid that he had previously turned down, not exactly wanting to invite too many armed Prussians to Bavaria. But now he acquiesced, and Noske appointed the commander of XXI. Corps, the Prussian Lieutenant General von Oven, to the post of Commander-in-Chief of the Anti-Communist Mission. (63)

The training ground at Ohrdurf in Thüringen, only a few miles from the Bavarian border, was chosen to collect the forces, which eventually comprised 7,500 regulars, about 3,500 Württembergers and circa 20,000 Bavarian volunteers. (64) On April 24, Noske commissioned a Bavarian General, Arnold von Möhl, to the post of Oven's deputy, an appointment designed to placate Bavarian sensibilities about a Prussian invasion. (65) Among the regulars and volunteers were the famous, or notorious, General Franz Ritter von Epp, former commander of the Bavarian Guard and veteran of the massacres of the Boxer rebellion in China and the Herero revolt in German South-West Africa, and the man who would soon become his adjutant, the much-decorated veteran Captain Ernst Röhm, who was to become the first leader of the Nazi SA.

A newly formed Red military commission attempted to organize the defence of Munich and the Communist Republic. On April 28, a ukase of the 2nd I.R. read:

"All Councils of the Reg. Command and 2nd I.R. convene on 29.4.19, afternoon 2 pm in the Casino. On the agenda: 1. The Political Situation. 2. The Red Army. 3. Miscellaneous." (66)

There was a problem: the more experienced soldiers had no illusions about the superior numbers, guns and supplies of their approaching enemies, and enlistment in the Red Army, which was only possible after retirement or dismissal from the regular force, remained low. Levine's frantic appeals for more proletarian volunteers went largely unanswered and the

city was starving so bad that Generalissimo Egelhofer had to send grab commandos to the farms south of the city to seize victuals.

It was in these days that a scene important for the future legend of Hitler at his early anti-Semitic and anti-Socialist best happened, or was composed. Hitler describes it in *MEIN KAMPF*, and Rudolf Schüssler, a comrade, is said to have verified it: one day, the story goes, a delegation of Red Guards, Levine's Stormtroopers, arrives at the barracks to collect volunteers, but Hitler argues against their efforts and berates those companions willing to volunteer: "Comrades, we are not the Revolutionary Guard for a pack of carpet bagging Jews. Sergeant Schüssler is quite correct in suggesting that we stay neutral." (67) Later, Hitler wrote, three members of the Red Guards came to arrest him, but he drove them away with a loaded gun.

Again, we have reason to doubt Hitler's veracity, and Sergeant Schüssler's as well. A glance into Schüssler's biography reveals that not only had he been elected Military Casern Manager for the whole 2nd I.R. on January 2, 1919, and was thus a higher leader of the socialist army cadres, but he became DAP member # 641 in December 1919 and member of the NSDAP on May 1, 1933. He remained a committed Nazi, who was actually decorated with the Golden Party Badge, until 1945. (68) He was not the only Nazi who was Red under the Brown Shirt. In addition, the Red Guards had the habit of shooting dead everybody who threatened them with a gun, loaded or not.

Meanwhile reactionary troops were advancing on Munich. Both camps of the Action Committee, Toller's USPD and Levine's KPD, conceded that a successful defence of the Soviet Republic seemed out of the question, but arrived at different conclusions as to what to do. The USPD harboured hopes to reach an understanding with the Hoffmann government, while the terror experts of the KPD vowed to fight until the bitter end - to send out a revolutionary clarion call to the global proletariat. No consent could be reached, and on April 27 a newly elected Action Committee, without the Communists, extended an offer of negotiation to Hoffmann in Bamberg. The offer was declined; Hoffmann demanded the unconditional surrender of the committee and the councils.

The Freikorps volunteers and von Oven's regulars closed in on the town, easily won a skirmish at Augsburg, forty miles west, and by April 29 had surrounded Munich.

During the last days of the Soviet Republic, while the rightist column fought its way toward Munich, Levine instituted Red Terror. It was mercifully brief and is remembered chiefly for the arrest and execution by Red Sailors of seven¹ prominent members of the Thule Society including its young and beautiful secretary, Countess Hella von Westarp.

Four of the seven were titled, and one of them, Prince Gustav von Thurn and Taxis, bore a title famous throughout Europe. They were stood up against a wall in the courtyard of the Luitpold High School and executed by a firing squad. On the following day the rightist troops entered Munich and the White Terror began. It was far worse than the Red Terror and lasted for many weeks. (69)

On May 1 the troops of General von Oven opened their attack on the city. The detachment of Lieutenant General Friedeburg, consisting of the 2nd Guard Division, the Hessian-Thuringian Freikorps and the Freikorps Görlitz, approached from the northwest, in the direction of the main troop barracks at the Oberwiesenfeld, which they occupied without ado before noon. They proceeded further southeast, into the direction of the Central Railway Station, halfway off which they seized the casern of the 2nd I.R. at Loth- and Infanteriestraße - Corporal Hitler's residency - as well. Except for occasional resistance around the railway station and the Karlsplatz, slightly west of the town centre, and in the workers' quarter of Giesing in the southeast, the troops met no serious opposition and many burghers cheered them on from their windows.

In the Marienplatz [the town centre, ¶] an open-air mass for the troops was held as red flags were hauled down and replaced by the Blue and White of Bavaria.

While Lenin was boasting to a huge May Day crowd in Red Square (Moscow) of the triumphs of Communism ("The liberated working class is celebrating its anniversary freely and openly not only in Soviet Russia, but in

¹Other sources mention ten (10) Thule members.

Soviet Hungary and Soviet Bavaria."), Free Corps troops were ranging through Munich extinguishing nests of resistance and arresting Red leaders. (70)

By May 2 the town was cleared of Red Army units, and by the next day Munich was free - to suffer the Right's revenge. The first business of the new lords was to disarm the Munich garrison and to declare a state of siege, which was lifted only on November 4, six months later. (71)

By May 3 Munich was secured but at the cost of sixty-eight Free Corps lives [other sources count thirty-eight, ¶]. These, of course, had to be avenged. Thirty Catholic workers of the St. Joseph Society were seized at a tavern while making plans to put on a play. They were brought to the cellar of the Wittelsbach Palace where twenty-one of them were shot or bayoneted to death as dangerous reds. Hundreds were shot under similar circumstances and thousands were "chastised" by cruising Free Corps squads.

The repudiation continued with issuance of a series of hard edicts, some almost impossible to obey, such as the one to surrender all arms immediately or be shot. In the name of law and order citizens were routed out, insulted, beaten and murdered. The Free Corps had saved Munich from the iron heel of the Soviet Republic and its excesses but these seemed pale compared to the cure.

"It would require a volume to narrate all the atrocities committed by the Whites," reported the French military attaché in Munich; "organized barbarism was given free reign ... a savage debauchery, an indescribable orgy." But the British officials saw none of this or else approved of what they observed. "The result of the Soviet episode at Munich, so far as at present can be seen," reported the Political Intelligence Department of the British Foreign Office "is to strengthen the cause of law and order throughout Germany and to discredit Spartacism and Bolshevism with the masses."

In all more than a thousand so-called "Reds" were executed by the Free Corps. So many bodies littered Munich in so short a time that they became a health menace and unidentified corpses had to be dumped into shallow ditches. (72)



"Victory Parade" of the Freikorps "Görlitz", May 5, 1919, Ludwigstraße, München

Fifty-two Russian POW's who had nothing in the least to do with the whole affair were murdered at Gräfelfing, a dozen simple workers from Perlach were shot in a beer garden, former sailor and War Commissar Rudolf Egelhofer was murdered at the Stadelheim prison, the same place where Gustav Landauer was kicked to death by Free Korps boots. In the pseudo-legal procedures of summary court-martials more than 2,200 supporters of the Soviet Republic were condemned to death,

as was Eugen Levine, or to long prison terms. The fact that Eisner, Landauer, Levien, Levine, Mühsam and Toiler had all been Jews was used liberally by the reactionary Munich newspapers to denounce socialism in all its shades as a Jewish conspiracy.

Corporal Hitler had been invisible during the battle; a story that he was arrested with other soldiers of the "Red" 2nd I.R. and incarcerated for a few days cannot be verified. But it is also clear that he did not fight against the Soviets, either. Where he does appear, only a good week after the counterrevolution was at a court of inquiry. The new commander of the Munich garrison was wont to weed out Reds and ordered that all soldiers that had before enlistment lived in Munich, and were to be dismissed, were to be investigated for their behaviour during the Soviet Republic and treated accordingly.

"All units have to appoint immediately commissions of inquiry. ... Staff: 1 career officer (judge), 1 non-commissioned officer (career), 1 non-commissioned officer (career) or private. Procedure: All military personnel scheduled for dismissal are to be thoroughly examined whether their conduct during the last revolutionary weeks was acceptable. The result shall be recorded in his Military Bill. All officers, non-commissioned officers and enlisted men who were members of the Red Army or are guilty of Spartacist, bolshevist or communist activities shall be arrested. If necessary, a summary court-martial is to be summoned." (73)

The 2nd I.R. added to the above-referenced Order Ia 4179 the following on May 9:

"The Commission of Inquiry shall assemble at once. Its staff will be announced by Regimental Order; the tribunal will use the former council chamber. The presentation of the discharges with their necessary documents begins daily at 11 am.

The names of any non-commissioned officers and enlisted men whose membership in the Red Army can be established or who are guilty of Spartacist, Bolshevik or Communist activities, shall be forwarded, with a short explanation and under identification of the witness(es), to the commission by May 10." (74)

This was an open invitation for snitches and double-crossers. On the following day, May 10, the Regimental Order detailed:

"The Commission of Inquiry is composed of: First Lieutenant Merklin, Sergeant Kleber, Corporal Hitler." (75)

The genesis of this, for the simple corporal Adolf Hitler quite astonishing career move, which was not unearthed until 1989 by the inquiries of Anton Joachimsthaler, remains mysterious until today. It is possible that he was recommended for the post by the commander of the 2nd I.R., Lieutenant Colonel Karl Buchner, who seemed, like Major von Tubeuf before him, to know and treasure Hitler as an upright patriot, not a socialist sympathizer. (76) At any rate, Max Amann, Hitler's Staff Sergeant in the trenches, testified during his deposition at the Trial of the War Criminals in Nuremberg 1946 that:

"When I was going to get discharged from the Replacement Battalion (2nd I.R.) in early August, I was sent for some supposed canvassing into a room in which, to my surprise, I met the former Corporal Hitler, who told me that he was in charge of a commission which examined whether members of the Replacement Battalion of the 2nd I.R. had participated in the so-called "Council's Putsch". He did not have to examine me, since he knew me well, and just handed me my discharge papers." (77)

For the taste of the Free Corps, far too many troops had at some time supported the socialists, and the tribunals were wont to prosecute to a conclusion on every nasty suspicion. We do not know anything of Hitler's activities in the commission, except that he was a member of it at least until the end of May.

The commanders of both regular military and Free Corps insisted not only on weeding out Reds, but resolved that educative measures would aid in turning possibly socialism-infested troops back into loyal patriots. The job to formulate a plan for the future political education of the forces, rank and file, was given to Captain Karl Mayr, Chief of the Army Section I b/P, the political intelligence bureau. Perhaps Mayr could find a teacher for his soldiers.

THE MEASURE OF A MAN

*Ladybird, ladybird,
Fly away home,
Your house is on fire
And your children all gone;*

*All except one,
And that's little Ann,
And she has crept under
The warming pan.*

Tommy Thumb's Pretty Song Book (ca. 1744)

Ernst Jünger, the literary doyen of the Wandervogel movement, once described what he hoped to discover in a new generation of Germans, who were to fight for the Fatherland's manifest destiny steeled by the experience of war: "This is the New Man, the Storm Soldier, the elite of Middle Europe," he prophesied, leading "a completely new race, cunning, strong and purposeful. New forms must be molded with blood, and power must be seized with a hard fist..." (1) Perhaps he forgot the old adage which advises caution in soliciting heavenly benevolence: the Gods might just grant what one impetuously covets.

One of the "elite of Middle Europe", at least by his own reckoning, was Adolf Hitler. In MEIN KAMPF he wrote: "A few days after the liberation of Munich I was ordered to report to the Commission of Inquiry on the actions of the 2nd Infantry Regiment during the revolution." (2) Ordered? There is reason to doubt his word - why would he be singled out? It appears, and is rather more probable, that he volunteered a trade, information for immunity and a promotion from suspect to prosecutor. We know that he had been, if only as a deputy, a member of his regimental council and therefore, by definition, a socialist functionary. Upon his duties there the newspaper MÜNCHNER POST reported in an article of March 1923:

"After the collapse [of the monarchy, ¶] we find Hitler in the Replacement Battalion of the 2nd I.R. at the Luisen School. The workers' and soldiers' council had opened a propaganda section there, which by the use of graphic and printed matter attempted to educate the soldiers about three major political concepts: the past autocratic line of thought, the democratic conception of state and nation, and Bolshevism. It was its intention to praise the democratic-republican form of the state as the desirable political system.

For these reasons the propaganda section organized a series of informative lectures directed at the workers and soldiers. In this propaganda section of the "Revolutionary Workers' and Soldiers' Council" ... sat Adolf Hitler ... who at this time seemed to think that giving lessons for this propaganda joint about democracy and the republic was in accordance with his own convictions!

It was the same Adolf Hitler from whose lips today the words "November criminals" drop constantly, whom the propaganda section then believed was a majority socialist; he styled himself so, but, as so many others, never formally joined the political organization or trade union. (3)



*Changes in Hitler's face and moustache
1915 - 1921*



The archives upon which the MÜNCHENER POST based this and other articles about Hitler were thoroughly wiped out in 1933,¹ but there are several other indices that he drove on the left side of the road during the revolution. Ernst Toller, Professor Alois Hundhammer and the first Hitler biographer, Konrad Heiden, all report that they met witnesses who told them of Hitler's socialist leanings during the Eisner, Hoffmann and Levine governments.

¹ Ron Rosenbaum remarks on the MÜNCHNER POST: "Until it was sacked by storm trooper mobs in the wake of the Hitler takeover, its reporters and editors jeopardized life and limb to uncover Nazi Party scandals, desperately seeking to warn the world that there was more to Hitler than merely fanatic nationalism

The POST was published by the much maligned German Social Democratic party, a party attacked by both Hitler's Nazis and Stalin's Communists (as "social fascists")." (4)

The fact that he had already been elected "VERTRAUENSMANN" [Trustee, i.e. informer, ¶] of the Demobilization Battalion in February 1919, before he became Deputy Councilman of his battalion on April 15, demonstrates his political, that is, socialist reliability for the political lectures he gave at the propaganda section.

As early as February 7, the Vertrauensmänner of the 2nd I.R. were ordered to obtain the weekly indoctrination sheets every Tuesday from 10 - 12 am at the Propaganda Section in the Luisen School and instruct the rank and file at daily muster. (5) From February to the end of April, Hitler received political schooling, as did all the other trustees of the 2nd I.R., in a variety of socialist theories, more to the middle under the Eisner and Hoffmann governments, more to the left under Toiler and Levine. The fruits of this training, however, he harvested on the other side.

As soon as von Oven's regulars and the Free Corps had recovered Munich, restored the Hoffmann government and instituted their tribunals, Adolf Hitler was on their side. On May 23, while testifying for the commission of inquiry, he assured the court that "the fact ... that several parts of the regiment joined the Red Army can clearly be traced back to the propaganda activities of battalion councilman Seih's." (6) He forgot to mention, alas, that he himself had been Seih's successor as trustee and then his deputy in the battalion council. On the same day, he testified in the case of Georg Dufter, a member of the soldiers' council, chief of the propaganda section of the 2nd I.R. and hence Hitler's direct superior, and, from April 15 on, chairman of the Demobilization Battalion's council:

"Dufter was the worst, the most radical agitator of the regiment and always propagandized for the Soviet Republic. During the public meetings of the regiment he constantly supported the most radical points of view and argued for the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

That some parts of the regiment sided with the Red Army is definitely the result of Dufter's and battalion councillor Seih's indoctrinations. Due to the agitation against government troops, which Dufter continued even on May 7, he prompted a few units of the Regiment, together with the pioneers, to commit hostilities against these government troops this afternoon." (7)

Again, neither at the tribunal nor at any other time does Hitler admit that he was Dufter's subaltern, that he worked in the Propaganda Section, or that he was a deputy councillor. The caution is quite understandable: about ten soldiers of the 2nd I.R. were executed for their Red past, and this fate Hitler clearly tried to avoid. But he could have simply remained silent, as the majority did, unless his willingness to testify means that he had something very important to hide. Socialist indoctrination of the soldiers might qualify.

As mentioned before, the facts of Hitler being first a trustee and then a councilmember during the Räterepublik have been unearthed by the investigations of Anton Joachimsthaler in the 1980's and 1990's. Their correct evaluation, however, is another matter.

In his 2013 book "Unter Soldaten und Agitatoren" ('Amongst Soldiers and Agitators'), Othmar Plöckinger comes to slightly different conclusions. He believes that Hitler "at that time was not only no councilmember, nor even an ordinary trustee - he was merely a short-term replacement, for the elected members of the Soldiers' Council had more important things to do.

All speculations that he was perhaps active as a councilmember as early as February 1919 are hence as unsustainable as corresponding suggestions about eventual political activities of Hitler before mid-April 1919. In fact, Hitler was busy with administrative details, for according to an order dated April 1, 1919, all trustees were instructed to compose an extensive listing of all battalion personnel, itemized by their professions. By virtue of these lists, on April 12 all personnel with farming experience were demobilized." (8) Food was one of the urgent issues after the war, and the fields had to be worked on.

Why then did Hitler stand for the subsequent council election on April 19 and was elected? Plöckinger essentially believes that he did so because the military was split between councils and reactionaries, with the latter receiving much more sympathy from the ordinary soldiers than the radicals, who were loud but few.



THE LEFT:

FIRST ROW: KURT EISNER, FELIX FECHENBACH, ERHARD AUER

SECOND ROW: JOHANNES HOFFMANN, ALBERT ROßHAUPTER, ERNST NIEKISCH

THIRD ROW: GUSTAV LANDAUER, ERNST TOLLER, ERICH MÜHSAM

"The results which became known one day later mirrored the conflicted conditions which also prevailed in Hitler's battalion. At the side of the long-serving MSP² Soldier's Council members August Klumpf and Max Wein now stood incoming newbies like Hitler. They faced radical deputies like Georg Dufter and Josef Alt.... In the relevant literature, Hitler's election as alternate battalion councillor is interpreted as indicating closeness to the 'general situation and political mood', in any case that he 'conducted himself at this time at least neutrally.' Even if disregarding the fact that there was no 'general political mood' amongst either the soldiers or the councils, one must point out that especially during this phase of the Räterepublik, "neutrality" was already considered a hostile act by the radicals. Thus in the action committee of the new communist leadership the greatest of distrust prevailed against the newly elected casern councils - indeed they presumed the existence of 'reactionaries' - 'clever ones.'" (9)³

Yet there are no sources which would substantiate the idea that Hitler aided the other, conservative side. He lived in a soldier's world, but we know that he despised the military leadership and their puppets. Perhaps it comes closest to the truth that he was in "wait-and-see" mode - ready to support an alternative should one present itself.

At any rate, since the government and the Landtag remained in Bamberg until August 28, the executive power was concentrated in the military's provisional "Group Command 4" ['Gruko 4', ¶], headed by Major General Arnold von Möhl. The Württembergers and Prussians of General von Oven left Munich on June 2, 1919 and Gruko 4, which in theory was suborned to Military Minister Schnepfenhorst in Bamberg, but in fact operated on its own authority, quickly usurped all legal and a few illegal powers. As early as May 20, an Order of the Day to the troops directed:

"The main task of the troops stationed in and around Munich is to institute, in cooperation with the police, a more intensive supervision of the population, and anticipation of its mood and expected points of resistance, so that the outbreak of a new rebellion may be recognized early and nipped in the bud.

Hence the following tasks are required: surveillance of the geographical areas attributed to each unit ... examination of the people's moods ... vigilance regarding assemblies or secret meetings of Spartacists ... the search for weapons ... the identification of suspicious persons ... their surveillance ... [et cetera, ¶].

Reports are to be made as soon as possible to the Intelligence Officer of the General Command Oven, Regina-Palast-Hotel, Room 26. Every Friday, 3 pm, all intelligence officers of the regiments and independent battalions as well as of the Free Corps and other detachments assemble at ... [this office]." (10)

The number one priority of the military intelligence departments was the political supervision of the civilians, lest inattentiveness were to allow a renewed socialist insurgency. Gruko 4 quickly installed a "Press Detachment" in the city command post, controlling and censoring the newspapers, and General von Möhl set the ground rules for the army's future political efforts in his order of May 28:

Attn: Propaganda activities of the troops.

1. A growing number of reports indicate renewed Spartacists attempts to organize political indoctrination in the barracks. The rapid establishment of effective and untiring counter-propaganda is thus critically important. ... Comprehensive advice on the creation of propaganda material shall be forthcoming ...

2. All units of company size or bigger shall establish a propaganda department similar to their intelligence departments ... All officers, non-commissioned officers and privates are allowed to serve in the propaganda sections; under certain circumstances the services of the trustees [like Hitler, ¶] may be particularly useful. ...

The tasks of the propaganda details will comprise:

² "Majority Socialist Party", i.e. the Moderate Socialists.

³ It certainly was a rough time. On May 8, 1919, the Town Commander had to order that "Guns and Hand Grenades may not be carried in theatres." (11)

a) *The receipt, study and dispersal of the information material among the comrades. Informal discussion. Invalidation of opposing ideas. Collection and removal of enemy propaganda ...*

(b) *The establishment of proposals regarding the acquisition and distribution of all kinds of printed propaganda matter...*

(c) *The carrying out of propaganda for the idea and mission of the Reichswehr [the new name of the army, ¶] among acquaintances outside of the barracks ...*

3. *All units are hereby summoned to order the leaders of their propaganda sections to an initial conference at room 26, Regina-Palast-Hotel, on Monday June 2, 4:30 pm. ...*

5. *The launch of the first anti-Bolshevik seminar is scheduled for the beginning of next week. Attendance is restricted to officers respectively non-commissioned officers or privates which are already employed in the propaganda section. Details forthcoming ... The establishment of comprehensive lectures at the community college is being prepared.... " (12)*

The following "organizational guidelines" accompanied the ukase:

The young Reichswehr must provide the protection under which alone a sensible restoration of the interior situation of our Fatherland can be achieved. ... The Reichswehr is the pillar which must support both the last remnants of the old as well as the first boughs of our new social, economical and governmental self-determination. ... The political information taught in the armed forces must remain above the political parties; it must be easily understood but scientifically sound. ... Most decisive for the effect of the lecture is the opportunity for the audience to overcome eventual doubts or misunderstandings in a subsequent discussion with the speaker. The Group Command will establish:

a) *Instructional Lectures on Public Speaking: appropriate members of the force shall be trained in the most important general issues so thoroughly that they can become educators for their comrades. The selection of these message-bearers must be exercised with great diligence. Required are maturity of character, decency, and a sharp and healthy mind.*

Under abolition of the so-called class divisions, officers, non-coms and enlisted men shall be placed equally in these courses, and the rank and file may become particularly valuable as future propaganda men. In general, only men who are expected to remain long-term with the service shall be assigned to these lectures. ...

The lessons will address the following issues:

1. *A synopsis of German history since the Reformation, with special regard of the relations between the military and the state.*

2. *The political history of the war.*

3. *Views on life ["Weltanschauung" in the original, ¶] and politics.*

4. *Socialism in theory and practice.*

5. *Capitalism as a financial and political problem.*

6. *Our present economic situation and the conditions of the peace [Treaty of Versailles, ¶].*

7. *The connections of internal and external politics.*

8. *Russia and her history. (13)*

The idea behind the whole arrangement, and the repeated exhortation that in particular privates or non-coms should become carriers of the propaganda message lay in the recognition that the higher officer corps had lost every bit of their former social prestige in the war and that national, monarchist or plain reactionary teachings could be addressed to the burghers, and in particular the lower middle class, far more effective if they were disseminated by messengers more trustworthy than, recently, princes or generals. His apparent sincerity would indeed soon become Adolf Hitler's political trademark.

But we're not there yet. On May 30, 1919, the command over the Military Intelligence Department I b/P was taken over by Captain Karl Mayr. He had served in the General Staff during the war, was intelligent and politically savvy and also a gifted organizer. Prior to his new posting he had been assisting the army guard details and the criminal police of the town as commander of the 6th Battalion of the Munich Watch Regiment. (14)



THIS IS THE SOLE EXISTING PHOTOGRAPH OF HAUPTMANN (CAPTAIN) KARL MAYR IN 1919, STANDING ASIDE OF GUSTAV "BLOODHOUND" NOSKE. THE ORIGINALITY OF THE PHOTO IS NOT PROVEN, BUT GENERALLY ACCEPTED FOR MAYR WAS KNOWN TO BE A VERY SMALL MAN.

Although Mayr would eventually become a prominent member of the SPD in later years, in 1919 he was, as most of his comrades, anti-Republican and, perhaps, anti-Semitic on the side. The fact, however, that he became rapidly one of the key members of Gruko 4, far outreaching his subaltern rank and lowly station, was entirely due to his own abilities. General von Möhl himself knew Mayr well, trusted his judgement and gave him access to considerable funding. On June 2 Mayr had finished the preliminaries for the propaganda lectures, sent a circular to all units, secured room 148 at the university building on Ludwigstrasse and scheduled the first course to begin on June 5, 8 am, the duration of this first seminar being five days between Thursday, June 5, and Thursday, June 12. Among the first lecturers were a leader of the Bauernbund, the Farmers' League, Dr. Horlacher, the journalist and writer Karl Count von Bothmer, and the famous history professor Dr. Karl Alexander von Mueller. (15) A few days later, Mayr's candidate for economy, the Engineer Gottfried Feder, completed the circle of initial teachers for the prospective "propaganda men".

The first group of selectees had to submit short curricula vitae to the regimental staffs not later than June 3. It was long thought that Hitler visited the first course, but Othmar Plöckinger has established that indeed he was sent to Course 3 b, which was held not in the university but in the rooms of the Museum at Palais Porcia under Mayr's direction from July 10 to 19, 1919. Among those recommended by the 2nd I.R. for this course was Corporal Hitler. (16) His prior experience as trustee, deputy councillor and tutor in the socialist propaganda squad testified to his political talents, if not to his political continuity. His detachment to the new anti-Bolshevik propaganda corps also enabled him to remain in the army while the other men of the Demobilization Battalion found themselves discharged by the end of May. In MEIN KAMPF, he later wrote:

"For me, the value of the whole affair was that I now obtained an opportunity of meeting a few like-minded comrades with whom I could thoroughly discuss the situation of the moment. All of us were more or less firmly convinced that Germany could no longer be saved from the impending collapse by the parties of the November crime, the Centre and the Social Democracy, and that the so-called "bourgeois-national" formations, even with the best of intentions, could never repair what has happened." (17)

This is clearly written in retrospect, Hitler building his own myth. In reality, he took in, with little discernment for the important and less patience for details, whatever he thought compatible with his own prejudices from the lectures he attended. In a synopsis of the experiences of the first lectures he gave, Count von Bothmer indicated the breadth and width of the subjects.

The Contents of the Lessons:

The courses are divided into the following parts: a) Historical Instruction, b) the National Economy, c) General Political Education, d) oral and written exercises.

a) Historical Instruction

The study of German history shall enlighten the relation between systems of the mind and the realities of the state; the recognition that the course of history is not determined by material goods alone, but by creative cogitation with respect to human life and the universe: that is, the centrality of ideas to human life shall first be illuminated at the example of German history; the ups and downs of it as related to the good or bad characteristics of one's own people and according to the historical developments.

The great collapse during and after the Thirty Years' War must be discussed particularly thorough, and the powers and factors identified that first led to a local renewal of individual states and then to the restoration of the national supremacy in a reunited Germany, must be explained properly as the expression of the final accomplishment of the German people's self-determination.

In a subsequent analysis the topic of culpability for the Great War shall be addressed, but not in terms of the depraved, self-abasing flagellatism that ignores the greater context of recent European history. The intention shall not be the cleansing of our own people of guilt, which might result in chauvinism of the most dettractive sort, and might plant the seeds of a national vengeance whose beneficiaries would be neither Germany nor the rest of Europe but, again, England alone.

It shall be demonstrated, however, that active imperialism, solely based on the financial interests of plutocracies, remains a characteristic, then and now, of the speculative politics of the world's big corporations, and that German imperialism was of a completely defensive nature.

b) Lectures on Economy

These lessons shall address the problem of the food supply of one's own country by the use of domestic and foreign agricultural regions, knowledge about the deposits of coal globally and in Europe, of mineralogy and metallurgy in general and the importance of domestic raw materials for the economic and politic independence of state and nation.

There shall be a review of the German social politics of the last forty years, about the dissimilarities of German and foreign social legislation, and the peril that all international social legislation faces in the presence of a capitalist imperialism of supranational financial institutions, whose powers cannot be limited or influenced by elections.

The issues of the indebtedness of state and private sector will be addressed in this section as well as the dependence of the state on the present private capital market, and the state's tax powers and its limitations in regard of the fact that the state cannot give what it has not taken away before and thus, in the last consequence, the state is required to be a moral institution, to whose decisions all the activities of the private sector must be subordinated.

c) General Political Enlightenment

This section is to begin with a general explanation of what constitutes politics: that politics is, in the last consequence, the prerequisite of the people's existence, hence that a people cannot live without a state; the demonstration how essential the state is for the people, the basic elements of politics, the creation of common interest and security, the realisation that the economically and social strong need the state much less than especially the simple man, and the labourers in town and country.

The next issue will be a thorough discussion of the characteristics and definitions of 'work' itself; that it is what basically discriminates man from animal, it not being a necessary evil but the source of moral strength, which recognizes 'work' as the emanation of the power that solely brings forth income and property, and the domination of this 'work' over all effortlessly derived gain, 'work' as socializing factor and 'work' as a moral force....

In this context will issue a discussion of Karl Marx, Lenin, Bolsheviks and Communists, the Communist Manifesto and the yearning of the people not to become the dupes of international speculators, of powers not derived from actual work but solely from the greed for power itself. Thence the lectures will turn to the theory of the necessary authority of the state, to the relations between internal and external politics, to the basic right of the self-determination of a people, the question of a people's sovereignty, and the realization that the public expression of a people is the independence of the state, and that the existence and organization of continental or international relations only becomes possible and useful under the retention of national identity.

At the end of these considerations we discuss the state's struggle with the technical advancements of the present age. How the technical means of telephone, telegraph, wireless, the printing press, railway and airplane become factors of political influence behind whom necessarily the interests of anonymous capital providers are hidden, who thus create organizations that dominate and manipulate the people's state and those of other peoples, and thus how one in the last consequence must desire to establish a clear and transparent form of state that serves solely the common good, and in which the interest of work and the community are both secured.

d) Exercises

Short written essays will be demanded, at the beginning of a course and at its end, to compare the results, to determine the value of the course in explaining the issues to the students and to allow them to develop uniform preferences for their personal life and their life in the community.

It has been found at all times that the capacity and understanding of all the students is hardly as low as many believe or say and that they all desire to learn the truth and get a sober grasp of the facts.

But the main part is dedicated to oral exercises, to the discussion of political phrases or expressions and the chain of arguments underlying each single lesson. The exercises occur in discussion between the students themselves or between them and the lecturer. (18)

This was, at least, the intended framework of the courses - but there was no fixed curriculum, each course had a different program. Course 3b, attended by Hitler, had the following lecturers and themes:

Karl Graf von Bothner

"Review of the Erfurt Program" (of the SPD) and "The Correlation of Internal and External Politics"

Michael Horlacher

"The Significance of Bavarian Agriculture"

Walter L. Hausmann (University of Strasbourg)

"Education and Politics" and "Development of the German Economy since 1871"

Gewerberat (Trade Counsellor) Karsch

"Development of German Social Welfare" (19)

Many of the ideas Hitler incorporated later already appear in these first formal political lessons of his life. The "Historical Instruction" starts with a negation of Marxism's doctrine of historical materialism, that not all is "determined by material goods alone"; that political power must be projected by a "reunited Germany", that the German imperialism was of purely "defensive nature" and thus neither the German people nor their government can accept "culpability for the Great War." Sorry, folks.

The lectures on economy evidence that foodstuffs, if needed for the German people, may be obtained from "foreign regions", i.e. other countries, by way of payment, one would assume, or - in a pinch - without. This is, of course, the root for Hitler's future demand for more "Lebensraum" ['Living Space', ¶] for Germany. The socioeconomic peace of the country, however, seems to be threatened by the "capitalist imperialism of supranational financial institutions, whose powers cannot be limited or influenced by elections," which seems to suggest, by extension, that such institutions must be persuaded by force.

The draft for the General Political Enlightenment reads, for all purposes, like an exposé of Social Darwinism for the political neophyte: survival of the fittest among the nations. The Thirty Years' War brought Germany down, but the future "restoration of the national supremacy" Hitler envisions will return the country to its former glory. The following discussion of "work" also shows quite the approach used later by the National Socialists, "work" as an individual's contribution to the state, as an expression of his moral strength and willingness, not a simple entitlement to monetary compensation. Hence all "effortlessly derived gain" is immoral and anti-social and must be confiscated, an idea which will resurface three years later, unchanged, in the "25 Points", the NSDAP's political program.

The most important notion in this geopolitical tutti frutti, however, seems to be addressed in the Exercises, which "allow them [the students] to develop uniform preferences for their personal life and their life in the community". The whole design of the future totalitarian state hides in this apparently innocent phrase. Anton Joachimsthaler points out correctly that the contents of these lessons play a much greater role in the development of Hitler's political ideas than they are usually given credit for. The majority of biographies ascribe the genesis of Hitler's crude juxtaposition of Pan-Germanism and anti-Semitism to the days of his youth, spent in Vienna and Munich before the war, the war itself, and the Red revolution in Bavaria. This is exactly the impression Hitler tries to create in his autobiographical first book of MEIN KAMPF, but it is far from necessarily being true. Contrasting the sparseness of reliable sources to Hitler's nationalism or anti-Semitism before the lecture series of mid-1919 to the innumerable references thereafter, the relation and similarity between the course material and his future opinions seem all too clear.

In early July 1919, Mayr's department I B/P composed its first lists of "propaganda men", and the list dated July 7 features Adolf Hitler of the 2nd I.R. as number 53. (20) About five weeks later, the abilities of the prospective political educators were to be tested on a detachment to the Lechfeld exercise ground, where Hitler and the Regiment List had trained in August 1914. At the time being, Lechfeld was a "Reorientation Camp" for returning POW's whom High Command suspected of Spartacist or Bolshevik sympathies. The poor wretches were to be cured of their treasonous diseases by the twenty-six propaganda men Captain Mayr sent for six days on a trial run to the Lechfeld camp. Their mission would be supervised and evaluated by First Lieutenant Bendt, a company commander of II. Battalion, I.R. 43, whose men were the guinea pigs on which the effectiveness of Mayr's enlightenment corps was to be tested.

From the beginning, the targeted audience was rank and file, not officers, of whom Count Bothmer remarked:

It must be realized, once again and with all resulting consequences, that the greatest part of the officer corps is completely ignorant of and unprepared to deal with political questions: this is the effect of their solely military education, which is aggravated by their restrictive consciousness of status, which makes them ill-suited to understand the political and cognitive issues that are felt among the normal people. (21)

Not only were most of the officers unschooled in political thought, their familiarity with economic principles was scarcely better developed. Hitler, who knew next to nothing of economics himself, became a fascinated auditor of the course of basic economics presented, with a slightly socialist and anti-Semitic touch, by the engineer Gottfried Feder, Professor von Mueller's brother-in-law. Herr Feder lectured on his favourite topic, "The Breaking of the Interest Bondage," his own and somewhat peculiar theory about the necessary separation of stock exchange capital, which is an evil Jewish invention, and national capital, which is not clearly defined but manifestly beneficial. The lecture was a mixture of DAS KAPITAL, Adam Smith's Invisible Hand, and some financial Jew-bashing.

Much of what Hitler heard in these weeks and subsequently read about became the stock of his trade in political prejudice.

[Feder's discourse] ... was a stimulating revelation to Hitler. "Right after listening to Feder's first lecture, the thought ran through my head that I had now found a way to one of the most essential premises for the foundation of a new party." Inspired by Feder's demand to end interest slavery, he restudied Marxism, "and now for the first time really achieved an understanding of the content of the Jew Karl Marx's life effort." At last, his KAPITAL was intelligible.

After one of his lectures Professor von Mueller noticed a small group in lively discussion. "The men seemed spellbound by one of their number who was haranguing them with increasing vehemence in a strange guttural voice. I had the odd feeling that their excitement was his work. I saw a pale, small face under an unsoldierly flowing lock of hair, with close-cropped moustache, and remarkable large light blue eyes that shone fanatically." (22)

The attentive reader will have noticed that Feder did not speak at Course 3b, so we must relegate another of Hitler's claims to the realm of fantasy.

It may well be that in the aftermath of the lessons he first imagined his political knowledge sufficient enough to speak with confidence to people other than his friends of the Mannerheim or the trenches. In addition, his audience at such occasions would have been powerless, whereas the fellow soldiers he spoke to in Munich and Bavaria now were armed and controlled, through the Free Corps, large parts of the country: here was an opportunity to influence the execution of true power.

It was also the time when his voracious reading began to pay off. At first his sermons were little more than regurgitated political or racial slogans but in time he learned to form his preconceptions into a, not very innovative or perceptive, but at least moderately consistent encyclophobia. After he had mastered the psychological challenge of speaking ex tempore before a potentially hostile crowd, he was able to construct arguments based on a variety of his mostly obscure book sources, melting together incompatible theories without fear, perturbing order or logic, and misrepresenting facts with the nonchalance of an American used car salesman. He was able to express absurdities with an open and honest face, emanating an air of absolute assurance. Soon he was able to extemporize on any subject

immediately, using the old politician's trick of turning any question into a subject he was prepared to elaborate about. His wont were abstruse chains of logic, which he formed by turning any matter into a problem of Jewish malevolence or communist agitation.

It is not clear whether the special attention Hitler was soon receiving by Captain Mayr resulted from a recommendation from Professor von Mueller, but it seems quite possible. Mayr was, for a soldier, an educated man, and was clearly interested in an agitator who could speak the language of the common man. The lack of popular speakers had been the bane of the extreme Right for a long time, not only in Bavaria; they could not transubstantiate their longings into a language the common worker or soldier understood. Dr. Karl Lüger in Vienna, whom Hitler greatly admired, had been able to perform the miracle and successfully addressed the reactionary classes of Vienna for years, but no such man had been found in Germany yet.

Someone like this corporal, who had no real social background or certifiable education but instinctively found a way to talk with sincerity and authority in a way the lower and middle classes could understand, might just be the gift from heaven the extreme Right had been waiting for. Hitler could disseminate reactionary propaganda without becoming a risk to his masters in the army, since, without birth, class or education; he could never aspire to their power-craving designs. From the beginning the reactionary German Right underestimated Hitler's talents: he could be used but would disappear, they thought, as soon as the monarchy was restored or an authoritative nationalist government was installed.

Captain Mayr had met Hitler at Course 3b and was impressed. He put Hitler on the list for the trip to Lechfeld and on August 19, 1919, the 2nd I.R.'s "Enlightenment Detachment", so the official name, arrived in the camp for five days of political indoctrination.

In his first report to Captain Mayr at Gruko 4, Department I b/P, of August 21, Lieutenant Bendt wrote:

"The Propaganda Detachment, commanded by Herr Beyschlag, arrived here on Tuesday, May 19 (list with names attached). In coordination with Herr Beyschlag, the activities of the five days were organized as follows: one informational lecture to be presented daily at 9am; and in addition, on one evening, a lecture about Herr B.'s experiences in London, and on a second evening, a lesson about the conditions on the Eastern Front.

The first lecture, given yesterday, discussed the issue "Who is responsible for the War?" The lesson was delivered in an easily understandable manner and was met with great interest by the keen men of the company. Due to supplementary digressions and extemporizations provided by Corporal Hitler, a sound basis for the subsequent discussion was formed, and I hope that if the other members of the detachment contribute to future debates their active participation, the rest of the audience may overcome its passivity and join the conversation." (23)

Another observer noted that Hitler is a "born people's speaker, and he compels the attention of his listeners, and makes them think his way." (24) When Rudolf Beyschlag, the commanding officer of the Propaganda Detachment, posted his resume to Captain Mayr on August 22, 1919, he confessed that, in reality, "only two people did the main work", namely Hitler and himself. (25) In his reports, Beyschlag lists the following lectures presented by Hitler: on Saturday, August 23, 9-11 am, on "Peace Conditions and Rebuilding", on Sunday, August 24, about "Emigration" and on Monday, August 25, 25 pm, on "Social and Economical Maxims". In addition, Hitler spoke about "The Generation of International Capital", and apparently it was in this lecture that he, for the first time on record, digressed into anti-Semitism. First Lieutenant Bendt reported to Captain Mayr on August 25:

"In the aftermath of a very nice, clear and passionate lesson given by Corporal Hitler on capitalism, in which he touched upon the Jewish Question ... it occurred at a later conference with the addressees that differences of opinion arose: whether one should state his opinions clearly and openly, or whether one should proceed with somewhat more discretion.

It was argued that the Detachment was established, by the Group Command Möhl, only for the armed services. If now the Jewish Question was to be addressed in a clear and frank manner, with special attention given to the German point of view on the matter, such a treatment might easily give the Jews an opportunity to complain that the lectures are nothing but Jew-baiting.

Thus I felt compelled to order that the discussion of this problem should be performed as cautiously as possible and that allusions too obviously referring to this race, alien to the German people, should possibly be avoided." (26)

This report is the earliest documented occasion referring to Hitler's special brand of anti-Semitism. That it was special is clear, for only a few weeks later, on September 16, 1919, Captain Mayr asked Hitler to compose a small thesis about the Jewish Question for the instruction cum tutelage of another propaganda man, Adolf Gemlich in Ulm. If the treatise suited the occasion, the text might be used as a sort of blueprint for further anti-Semitic propaganda. Mayr employed Hitler not only for correspondences, but also, as in Lechfeld, for regular political lectures to the troops. In Munich, for example, Hitler spoke to members of II. Battalion, 42nd I.R. at the Lothstraße and Marsstraße caserns and to soldiers of 41st Battalion, 1st I.R. in the Türkenstraße barracks. In Passau he lectured a battalion of 20th I.R., and soon became Captain Mayr's man for special missions.

The clarification Captain Mayr asked Hitler to compose for Gemlich, respectively the whole propaganda corps, shows what Hitler had learned in the university lectures, and how he combined his recent knowledge with the generic anti-Semitism he had been exposed to in Linz and Vienna, to a harangue which, calling for the organization of anti-Semitism, foreshadows the concentration camps. Due to its being Hitler's earliest surviving political text, it shall be quoted in its entirety.

Dear Herr Gemlich!

If the danger which Jewry today constitutes for our people finds its expression in an unquestionable dislike of them by the great majority of our nation, then the causes for this dislike are not to be found in the clear awareness of their systematic acts of corruption, whether conscious or unconscious, committed by the Jews as a whole upon our nation, but instead they are chiefly found in private social intercourse, where they make a poor impression which is nearly always in their disfavour. In this way anti-Semitism very easily acquires the character of a mere manifestation of the emotions. And this is not as it should be. Anti-Semitism, regarded as a political movement, should not and cannot be understood in emotional terms, but only through a knowledge of the facts. The facts are:

First, Jewry definitely describes a race, not a religious community. The Jew never appears as a Jewish German, a Jewish Pole, or even a Jewish American, but always as a German, Polish, or American Jew. The Jew, living in the midst of an alien people, accepts nothing from them but their language. And as little as a German living in France finds himself compelled to use the French language, or the Italian language in Italy, or the Chinese language in China, so little may a Jew living among us be called a German. Even the Mosaic faith, great as its importance for the preservation of their race may be, is not completely decisive in distinguishing a Jew from a non-Jew. There is scarcely a single race whose members belong so exclusively to a single religion.

In general the Jew has preserved his race and character through thousands of years of inbreeding, often within very close family relationships, and he has been more successful in this than most of the people among whom he lives. Thus we are faced with the fact that there lives among us a non-German, alien race which does not want and is not in a position to sacrifice its racial characteristics or to renounce the emotions, ideas and aspirations peculiar to it, yet nevertheless possesses the same political privileges that we do.

The emotions of the Jews remain purely materialistic, and this is even more true of their ideas and aspirations. The dance before the Golden Calf has been transformed into a merciless struggle for precisely those possessions which we, following our innermost feelings, scarcely regard as having the highest importance, nor as the only ones worth striving for.

The value of the individual is no longer measured on the basis of his character and the important services he renders the community, but merely on the basis of the extent of his possessions and his money.

The heights reached by a nation are no longer measured by the sum of its moral and spiritual power, but according to its wealth of material goods.

From these sentiments is derived the thinking and the striving for money, for the power that protects the Jews and permits them to be unscrupulous in the choice of means and pitiless in the pursuit of their aims. In the states ruled by aristocrats they fawn on the majesty of the princes who abuse them, turning them into leeches of their own people.

In the democracies they woo the favour of the masses and crawl before "the majesty of the people." But all they know is the majesty of money.

They corrupt princes with Byzantine flattery. National pride, the vigour of a people, is destroyed by their derision and the shameless inculcation of vice. They use the weapons of public opinion, which is never represented by the press, although the press controls and falsifies it. Their power is the power of money, which in the form of interest endlessly and effortlessly increases, compelling the people to submit to this most dangerous yoke, so that they may learn that glittering gold becomes burdensome and has tragic consequences. All the highest things men strive for, religion or socialism or democracy, are for the Jew only the means to an end, to satisfy his greed for money and power.

The effect is to produce a race-tuberculosis of the Folk.

These consequences follow: Anti-Semitism arising out of purely emotional causes finds its ultimate expression in pogroms. Rational anti-Semitism must be directed toward a methodical legal struggle against them and the elimination of the privileges they possess, which distinguish them from other aliens living among us. (Laws affecting aliens.) The final aim must be the deliberate removal of the Jews. Both are only possible through a government of national strength, not a government of national impotence.

The Republic in Germany owes its origin not to the unified national will of the people, but to the clever use of a series of circumstances which combined to express a profound general discontent. However, these circumstances arose independently of the form of government, and are still present today. Even more than before. A large proportion of our people have already reached the conclusion that [even] if the form of government is changed, the situation will not change, nor will it be improved. Only the rebirth of the moral and spiritual strength of the nation can bring this about.

And this rebirth will not be brought about by an irresponsible majority under the influence of particular party dogmas or an irresponsible press using phrases and catchwords of an international coinage, but only by the ruthless intervention of national personalities possessing leadership and profound inner feelings of responsibility.

These facts, however, rob the Republic of its inner sustaining power, wherein above all lies the essential spiritual strength of the state. The present leaders of the nation are compelled to seek this support from those who draw and continue to draw the exclusive profit from the change of the German situation and those who were the driving forces of the revolution -- the Jews.

Without regard for the known dangers of Jewry (the proofs are to be found in various statements made by the leading personalities of the day) our contemporary leaders are compelled in their own interest to accept Jewish support granted to them willingly, and to deliver the goods demanded in exchange. And this return payment demands that they give every possible assistance to the Jews, and above all prevents the betrayed people from fighting against the betrayers, thus paralyzing the anti-Semitic movement.

Yours respectfully,

ADOLF HITLER (27)

This letter was written in September 1919, four and a half years before Hitler would begin to pen *MEIN KAMPF* in Landsberg prison. But his political arguments against the Jews will not significantly change; they will be expanded and pressed to serve in popular catchwords, but Hitler's central theses will remain the same.

He is outspoken: The Jews are not a religious community which might reasonably ask the state to keep a respectful distance but an alien people, a racial parasite. They enjoy political rights which they, lacking German blood, do not deserve, and use the resulting political power for un-folkish, and hence treasonous, manipulations of capital and markets. Hence no alternative remains but to begin a "methodical legal struggle", which is to lead to the "elimination of the privileges they possess" and, in the consequence, to their "deliberate removal." This removal is, obviously, a matter for the state, which, however, must be led by a "government of national strength", not weakened by democracy or moral scruples, and effected by the "ruthless intervention of national personalities."

Although the letter conjures up pictures from his damp and feverish nightmares of racial oppression, he presents his observations, and interpretations, as the self-evident truth and his conclusions as the obvious reality. The attentive reader will notice a few mistreatments of reason or logic, and phrases like "race-tuberculosis of the Folk" seem to hang, undecidedly, between demented phantasmagoria and malevolent absurdity.

But the chain of racial cause and effect he presents is clear: the sacrifices and losses of the war, famine, economic depression, the unbeloved Republic of this "November Criminals" and the detested Treaty of Versailles are all results of the Jewish domination of German politics. It is interesting that Hitler not yet openly equates Jewry with Marxism; none of the words "Socialist", "Communist" or "Bolshevik" appears in the treatise. But half the monthly rent for a politician is paid by identifying the enemy and alluding to his malevolence in ways the potential follower or voter can relate to, and it is characteristic of Hitler that he refused to change any of his few tenets. Even when the "25 Points", the sole program the DAP⁴ ever devised, showed at length clear signs of being outdated, no revisions were made.

It was the art of telling the people what they want to hear, blatant populism, in which Hitler profited from the lessons learned under Mayr. He did have a natural talent, and much of what was required in addition he picked-up in the few lectures at the university. He told the audience that the current situation was not their fault, and improved the anodyne effect of this acquittal with philippics about Marxists, Freemasons, and Jews. He kept the emotional response of the auditors close to their prevalent feelings of rage and discontent, and enticed their approval to a degree that his audience sooner or later became only too happy to temporarily abandon human compassion, logic or a critical mind; he enticed them to enjoy, for the duration of his speech, the passive luxury of toddlers for whom everything is taken care of. Hate united, as well as mutual misery, and unity attracted.

His theories appealed to the bourgeois sense for law and order prevalent in post-war - and post-revolutionary - Germany to a degree that, apparently, the call for the organized disfranchisement, plundering, and final expulsion of a part of the national population was the most normal thing in the world. Had a comparable Italian, French or Austrian right-wing party attempted to build a platform solely upon such flimsy preoccupations, the endeavour might have earned only ridicule. But Germans do have, sometimes, a propensity for the orderly approach; Germans, Goethe remarked, and included himself, desire order rather than freedom if they have to choose.

Among the many questionable products of literature that were produced and read not only in Germany and Austria but all over the continent, one artefact stood out for its wild popularity if not its merits, the "PROTOCOLS OF THE ELDERS OF ZION". Supposedly a transcript of twenty-four secret meetings of the fictitious "Elders of Zion" in Basel, Switzerland, the treatise records, allegedly verbatim, the discussion of a Jewish conspiracy to conquer and rule the world.

Its origins cast a distinctive glance at the centres of European anti-Semitism in the second half of the 19th Century: the "Protocols" were produced in France, in the years before the Dreyfus affair, by the ghost-writers of the Okhrana, the Czar's secret political police, and first published in Russia at the end of the century, for the purpose of igniting

⁴ The DAP (German Workers' Party) was the predecessor of the NSDAP.

pogroms. From Russia they spread over the continent. They were obvious, simple and stupid forgeries, but they were believed in like gospel by persons as influential as Wilhelm II or Czar Nicholas II. Copies could be bought, for little money, at every newsstand, but their plain ridiculousness failed to win them many readers in Germany. At any rate, as we have seen in Hitler's letter, he is not a friend of pogroms: they are too unspecific and inefficient, far from a "methodical ... struggle" which would lead to the "elimination of the privileges" the Jews possessed in Germany. Which privileges were these, exactly?

As it turned out, nothing fancy. Since 1871, the Jewish citizens of Germany enjoyed nominally the same civil and political rights as everybody else, although in reality they faced insufficient acceptance and little social appreciation, and when Hitler proposes to abolish their legal rights as citizens and humans, criminal intent is only slightly veiled between his lines. It is, of course, questionable whether Hitler's special brand of anti-Semitism would have found a broader audience in Germany had his listeners not desperately sought an explanation for the country's downfall and were willing to blame scapegoats for the losses of the war, the subsequent impoverished existence, the shattered hopes and bleak outlook they faced. Hitler realized that Jews and Socialists were the perfect targets in the plan he began to imagine in the way the elder Moltke had organized the war against France: deadly effective.

But for the time being he had to earn his daily bread. One of the functions of Mayr's Department I b/P was the supervision of the four dozen or so radical political organizations that had sprung up in Munich in the aftermath of revolution and counterrevolution. These mostly small parties were almost evenly divided between the radical Left and Right, and the latter were assured of the army's sympathy. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler reported:

"One day I followed an order from superior authority to check out an obviously spurious political association, that under the name "Deutsche Arbeiterpartei" intended to hold a meeting soon, in which Gottfried Feder was to speak as well - I should have a look at the club and report back. ... I lived at that time still in a small room at the casern of 2. IR, which still reflected the traces of the revolution. During days I was off, usually at IR 47 or at meetings, giving lessons at other troop details and such. Only at night I slept in my little cell." (28)

The attentive reader will not be surprised that - on a close look - the story fails to check out again. Not only wasn't he seconded to IR 47 until the end of October 1919 - it is quite spurious on whose "superior authority's" orders he acted. Mayr sent men regularly out to visit and report on the political scene, and was quite familiar with the DAP.

Not only had Mayr during the Räterepublik worked with the Thule Society, in which Karl Harrer, REICHSVORSITZENDER (Chairman) of the DAP, was a member, his relations to Dietrich Eckart, who had lectured at the Thule Society as well as at DAP functions, were comparably close, as was to be seen in the correspondence regarding (Hitler's) Gemlich Letter.

In turn, Eckert was in touch with Anton Drexler, who had already - in February 1919 - published articles in the Münchner Beobachter, the paper of the Thule Society, and whom Eckart had seconded during a fierce discussion over the "Jewish Question" in August 1919 in his own paper "Auf Gut Deutsch" ('In Good German').

Even tighter was the connection between Mayr and Gottfried Feder, who, like Karl Graf von Bothmer, was a member of the inner circle around Dietrich Eckart. ...

A conversation with Eckart or Feder, who on the actual meeting on September 12, 1919, replaced the ill Eckart as lecturer, would have put Mayr much better in the picture than any report of a visitor could have done. But even that was unnecessary, for Mayr was by then long in direct contact with the DAP, as proven by the well-known list of attendees of the September 12 meeting.

The list contains several little-noticed references, since the main attraction seems to be Hitler's signature. One of these is a list of names on its back featuring names of persons missing, which were obviously invited or expected - among the names are those of Eckart, the folkish editor Ernst Boepple and Captain Mayr. (29)

Hence it seems not truly likely that Mayr sent Hitler to the meeting. If there was an official order, it probably derived from the town's military authorities who kept an eye on political gatherings. (30) The fact that no less than eight soldiers, all

former members of the "Enlightenment Detachment", were among the forty-one people present on September 12 speaks for Mayr's hand behind the curtain. (31)

Yet the fact remains that on September 12, 1919, Adolf Hitler took a tram to the city centre, where the "STERNECKERBRÄU" was located, the inn where the meeting was to take place.

THE MEASURE OF A NATION

You may my glories and my state depose, but not my griefs; still am I king of those.

William Shakespeare "Richard II", Act 4, Sc. 1, L. 192

*The great nations have always acted like gangsters,
and the small nations like prostitutes.*

Stanley Kubrick in the "Guardian", June 5, 1963

Between Hitler's shadowy role in the Commission of Inquiry and his subsequent employment by Captain Mayr, the German nation was shattered by the publication of the conditions and the signing of the Peace Treaty of Versailles in Paris on June 28, 1919, at the Hall of Mirrors in the Palace of Versailles; the same place where the Second Reich had been proclaimed. As the conditions of this compact, and their implied injustice, became something like the Alpha and Omega of monarchist, nationalist and finally National Socialist propaganda of the next twenty years, a closer look at its plain clauses as well as its hidden issues is required.

The German government, at the time still controlled by the Kaiser, Hindenburg and Ludendorff, had asked the U.S. President Wilson in October 1918 to arrange an armistice and subsequent peace treaty on the basis of the well-known and aforementioned "Fourteen Points". How Wilhelm & Co. came to imagine that Wilson's blue-eyed assumptions of international Kiss & Make Up would prevail over the interests of France and, to a lesser degree, Great Britain, seems inexplicable. The Fourteen Points were a remarkably optimistic document which called upon the most honourable distinctions of man: agreements and arrangements between nations should be effected by "open covenants openly arrived at"; the "removal of barriers to trade among nations" was envisioned, and the "adjustment of all colonial claims" was proposed. In addition, a mutual reduction of armaments was suggested, as well as the formation of a "general association of nations", the future League of Nations, which would guard the "principle of self-determination, under which no ethnic group would have to be governed by a nation or state it opposed."

The reader may already suspect that the realization of these noble aims would not be a matter of ease; a peace commensurate with these valiant principles would have been a major achievement indeed. For starters, the traditions of European diplomacy did not actually favour "open covenants openly arrived at", they favoured secrecy. Trade barriers were a subject in which the European nations could tutor the intelligent species of our local galaxy cluster, and the definition of "adjustment of colonial claims" was equated with "addition". "Self-determination" - alas, except for the interests of the victors, the issue was quickly abandoned. Had it not, chances were that Germany emerged bigger after the treaty, not smaller.

During the spring and early summer of 1919, delegates of the nations partaking in the procedures gathered at the conferences, which were held in several suburbs of Paris: the most important, dealing with Germany, took place in the Palace of Versailles. The assembly was dominated by the "Big Four": Prime Minister David Lloyd George for Great Britain, Woodrow Wilson for the USA, George Clemenceau, the new Prime Minister, for France, and Vittorio Orlando for Italy. The latter's appetite for territorial benefits far exceeded his country's wartime contributions, and after Italy had received Southern Tyrolia and Friuli from Austria and a few islands in the Mediterranean Sea, Orlando left.

The conferences were peculiar in the sense that the remaining "Big Three" decided not to complicate proceedings by inviting or consulting the losers, and even the lesser victors like Romania and Serbia were almost totally ignored. It would have been too embarrassing indeed, had the small nations learned that, as early as 1915, the Allied governments of Great Britain, France, Russia, Japan and Italy had entered into a mutual agreement not to honour any promises made to the smaller allies.

It soon turned out that the aims and interests of the remaining "Big Three" diverged too much to be reconciled to a common view of what should be achieved: Wilson called for fairness and moderate punishment of the losers, an idea Clemenceau regarded as insane; but since Wilson's main interest was the League of Nations, irrelevant to the advantages France hoped to gain from the treaty, Clemenceau was prepared to let Wilson play with his toy, offering lip service only.

Lloyd George wanted Germany solvent enough to trade and pay some reasonable reparations, but not solvent enough to make war; how such a delicate equilibrium could be established and maintained, he did not know, neither did anybody else in the Empire. Clemenceau's aim was simple: to incapacitate Germany as much and as long as possible: militarily, economically and territorially. In addition, an eternal military alliance of France, Great Britain and the United States was to keep Germany's armies permanently disabled.

The actual publication of the treaty provisions caused agitation not only on the side of Germany, the loser.

The final draft of the main Peace Treaty was printed and presented to the German delegation in Paris on 7 May. It was highly controversial, even to those on the Allied side: [Herbert] Hoover, [General Jan] Smuts and John Maynard Keynes, who had all received their advance copies at 4 a.m., were so disturbed by its harshness that they left their beds to pace the streets, meeting by chance and walking together to discuss what they had read. They all agreed that they would do whatever they could to modify the terms and point out the dangers.

The printed draft, some two hundred pages long - 440 articles contained in 75,000 words - was the first chance anyone had had to see the results of four months of deliberation.

"While I had known many of the ideas, agreed upon by committees, I had not before envisaged it as a whole," Hoover wrote later. "I was greatly disturbed. In it hate and revenge ran through the political and economic passages. Many provisions had been settled without consideration of how they affected other parts. Conditions were set up upon which Europe could never be rebuilt or peace come to mankind. It seemed to me the economic consequences alone would pull down all Europe and thus injure the United States."

Keynes also disapproved strongly of "reducing Germany to servitude for a generation", which he later declared would be "abhorrent and detestable, even if it did not sow the decay of the whole civilized life of Europe." (1)

The German government asked to be allowed to bring counterproposals, which was granted on May 29. But when its delegation was given, on June 16, a single copy of the revised treaty, nothing decisive had changed. The preamble read:

"In the view of the Allied and Associated Powers, the war which began on the first of August, 1914, was the greatest crime against humanity and the freedom of the peoples that any nation calling itself civilized has ever consciously committed ... Germany's responsibility, however, is not confined to having planned and started the war. She is no less responsible for the savage and inhuman manner in which it was conducted." (2)

This assertion of the Allied and Associated Powers' superior moral standing was followed by an extensive list of German savageries, among which the use of poison gas, aerial bombing and submarine warfare ranked prominent. The conclusion was simple and, apparently, inevitable:

"The conduct of Germany is almost unexampled in human history. The terrible responsibility which lies at her doors can be seen in the fact that not less than seven million dead lie buried in Europe, while more than

twenty million others carry upon them the evidence of wounds and suffering, because Germany saw fit to gratify her lust for tyranny by a resort to war.

The Allied and Associated Powers believe that they will be false to those who have given their all to save the freedom of the world if they consent to treat the war on any other basis than as a crime against humanity and right." (3)¹

As far as post-war recriminations go, this was probably par for the course: the keen observer has long since realized that the winning side always happens to occupy the moral high ground. Had the Central Powers won the war, they might have pointed out that France and Russia, and, to a lesser degree, Great Britain, were responsible for dragging Italy and Romania into the conflict (both of which attacked the Central Powers unprovoked), that the Military Protocol agreed between France and Russia was of purely aggressive character (compelling Russia to launch an attack into Germany at Mobilization Day plus 15), that France actually invaded Germany first, or that France partook in attacking the Ottoman Empire at Gallipoli without provocation, indeed without sharing a border with Turkey.

If historical comparisons were to be discussed, as the treaty seemed to desire, Germany could point out that, under Louis XIII and Louis XIV, France attacked German principalities almost habitually, and that her armies in the Thirty Years' War conducted their operations all over Germany, from the North Sea to the Alps. Was it a fit of Christian compassion that made Cardinal Mazarin order the French army to "Brulez le Palatinate", to burn down the Palatinate, which they obediently did? And, alas, what about the Napoleonic Wars?

When, after a few delays and under the threat of renewed war, the decision of the German government to acquiesce in the Treaty of Versailles was received in Paris on the evening of June 23, 1919, Clemenceau commented, perhaps unaware of the extent of the unmasking, that "We have waited forty-nine years for this moment," (4) that is, forty-nine years since losing the war of 1870/71. It is instructive to recall the origins of this war. It had been declared by France, not Prussia (nor Germany, which then did not exist) - for no better reason than the injured vanity of Napoleon III. When the war was lost, Alsace and Lorraine, acquired in the 17th Century, had to be returned.²

From this day on, as Clemenceau admits, the French military began to plan the day of retribution, revenge for Prussia's audacity to win a war they should, naturally, have lost. In the next forty-nine years, class after class of poilus were trained in the art of the offensive à outrance, the unconditional offensive by which the French general staff hoped to crush "les boches" in a conflagration of national vengeance, and regain not only the military glory without which the republic

¹ In the context of German expansionism as the reason for the war, Dirk Driesang juxtaposes an imaginary address of the Kaiser or some gung-ho admiral with words that have truly been used - but not by a German:

„Deutsche Fabriken stellen mehr her, als das deutsche Volk verbrauchen kann. Schicksal hat unsere Geschichte geschrieben, der Handel der Welt kann und muß unser sein. Und wir werden dies erreichen, wie wir es von England gelernt haben. Wir werden den Ozean mit unserer Handelsflotte bedecken. Wir werden eine Kriegsmarine bauen, die unsere Großartigkeit widerspiegelt. Große Kolonien, sich selbst regierend, aber unsere Fahne tragend entstehen. Sie werden um unsere Häfen herum wachsen, indem sie mit uns Handel treiben. Unsere Einrichtungen werden dem Handel genauso folgen wie deutsches Gesetz, deutsche Ordnung, deutsche Zivilisation und die deutsche Fahne; all dies wird sich von selbst dort pflanzen wo bis dahin blutige und gottverlassene Küsten waren, dort werden fortan die Agenten Gottes für Schönheit und Licht sorgen.“

Translation:

"German factories produce more than the German people can use. Fate has written our history, world trade can and must be ours. And we will achieve this in the way we learnt from England. We will cover the oceans with our merchant marine. We will build a navy that mirrors our greatness. Great colonies, self-governed but under our flag will result. They will grow around our harbours while they trade with us. Our institutions will follow trade as will German law, German order, German civilisation and the German flag, all this will plant itself where only bloody and benighted coasts have been, there the agents of God will bring beauty and light."

The original is from U.S. Senator Beveridge:

„American factories are making more than the American people can use [...]. Fate has written our history [...], the trade of the world must and can be ours. And we shall get it, as our mother England has told us how [...]. We will cover the ocean with our merchant marine. We will build a navy to the measure of our greatness. Great colonies governing themselves, flying our flag and trading with us will grow about our ports of trade. Our institutions will follow [...] and American law, American order, American civilization and the American flag will plant themselves on shores hitherto bloody and benighted by those agents of God henceforth made brightful and bright." (cit. in: Ralph Dietl: „USA und Mittelamerika, Die Außenpolitik von William J. Bryan 1913-1915" Steiner Verlag Stuttgart, 1996, Page 43) (5)

² In 1910, the population of Alsace-Lorraine was 1,874,000, of which 1,634,000, about 87 %, were German-speakers. (6)

suffered of a crisis of self-respect but also the provinces they had come to believe their rightful property. So much for German aggression and French peacefulness.

Yet the blundering politics of Wilhelm II's governments made it easy for France to pretend to be solely occupied with saving the world from the German menace, and hence the motive of revenge went largely unrecognized - to this day. This is perhaps no surprise: dilettante drama critics tend to confuse a role in the background with a role of no importance. The French intentions were completely overlooked by the English-speaking statesmen. Wilson was a neophyte to REALPOLITIK when he was elected, and proudly maintained the incompetence he confused with fairness all through his political career. The Welshman David Lloyd George had a clear aversion against Douglas Haig and regarded all soldiers as dedicated bloodhounds which should be kept on a short leash at all times. In addition, the Irish question had preoccupied Whitehall for the last thirty years, and France's renewed attempt at continental hegemony, 115 years after Napoleon, simply did not register on the Anglo-Saxon radar screen.

But in the end winning the Great War, in a fashion, came with too high a prize, as it became obvious from 1938 on. First France sold her client state Czechoslovakia to Hitler far below margin call, and when she declared war, on September 3, 1939, and the Third Reich could have been ended and Hitler toppled by the attack of two handful of Allied divisions on Germany's almost unprotected western border, nothing happened. The memory of 1914 paralysed the French army, which stared at the enemy beyond the Rhine as if caught by the eyes of the basilisk.

The actual provisions of the treaty fell broadly into three categories: the changing of borders and allocation of former Central Powers terrain between the victors and some newly-to-be-formed national entities, the disarmament of Germany, which was to be the overture to a global demilitarization, and the regulation of reparation payments. The latter issue was simplified in the popular French slogan of "Le Boche payera tout!" ["The German will pay for everything! " ¶]. A review of the peace conditions will demonstrate how they became the sources of countless disputes and how they tended to increase, instead to alleviate, international tensions.

The bulk of the geographical changes occurred in Eastern Europe. All of the entities created in the aftermath of the war carried the burden of significant national minorities, and the red circles on Map LXXX, p. 989, designate the zones in which rivalling ethnicities produced the greatest instabilities.

They are, again from north to south: the Memel area between German East Prussia and Lithuania, which had belonged to Germany before the war; the Wilna area, disputed between Lithuania and Poland; the Polish "Corridor", which separated East Prussia from the German mainland; Upper Silesia, which went to Poland in a doctored plebiscite; the Sudetenland and other German language isles in Czechoslovakia, populated by 3.2 million Germans [there were more Germans in "Czechoslovakia" than Slovaks, 22% to 16% (7), ¶]; the Ukrainian enclave of Eastern Galicia; Southern Tyrolia in northern Italy, which had been Bavarian respectively Austrian terrain for over a thousand years; Southern Carinthia, disputed between Austrians and Slovenes; Ödenburg, between Slovenes and Hungarians; Southern Slovakia, contested by Slovaks and Hungarians; the Banat, where Serbs, Hungarians, Germans and Romanians clashed; Siebenbürgen, the Transylvania of Dracula's Castle, a large German/Hungarian island in the middle of newly expanded Romania; Bessarabia, in north-eastern Romania, another mixture of Germans, Ukrainians, Bulgarians and Hungarians amidst a Romanian majority; Fiume, the former Austrian port in the northern Adriatic Sea, now contested by Italians, Slovenes and Croats; the Southern Dobrudja, disputed between Bulgaria and Romania; and Macedonia, where the Macedonians found themselves governed, in parts, by Greek, Bulgarians and Serbs.

The aforementioned examples are only the major points of conflict. A look at Map LXXXII overleaf confirms that no less than twenty-seven language groups occupied Eastern Europe and that not a single state was free of at least two foreign ethnicities. Hence Wilson's idea of the self-determination of the peoples was firmly rooted in ignorance of the geographical facts - or not: if national minorities were to be extricated from German or Austrian soil, presto, a new state materialized, but if Germans in Austria or Bohemia asked to be united with the Fatherland, self-determination was unavailable. The German-speakers of Alsace, the Lorraine, Silesia, the Sudetenland or West Prussia were not awarded a vote in the disposition of their fate, neither were the Germans, Austrians and Hungarians in Transylvania asked about their inclinations. Perhaps the best example of creating, not solving, problems after the Great War was Yugoslavia, an artificial

MAP LXXXII: ETHNIC MAP OF EASTERN EUROPE AFTER 1918



entity, composed of German Austrians, Slovenes, Croats, Hungarians, Bosnians, Romanians, Bulgarians, Montenegrins, Macedonians and a few Albanians, all under domination of Serbs who still yearned for a Greater Serbian Empire; to complicate matters, Catholic Slovenes and Croats faced Orthodox Serbs, with a huge admixture of Bosnian Muslims between them. Thus did the concords of 1919 fail to resolve the pre-war tensions, but created dozens of new sectarian trouble-spots, and because of this, the Second World War was to a large degree a continuation of the First one, fought over the same battlefields over the same unresolved issues.

About seventy percent of the former Austro-Hungarian territory was used to create two nations which were essentially French client states, designed to halt future German expansion: Czechoslovakia and Poland. Geostrategically, the rump of Czechoslovakia thrusts into the "soft underbelly" of Germany, and a military invasion could quickly cut off the salients formed by eastern Bavaria and south-eastern Silesia, along the Oder River, from the rest of Germany. In the case of Poland, the creation of the "Corridor" had already separated East Prussia completely from the Fatherland.

Map LXXXIII, overleaf, shows the details of the geographic losses of the Weimar Republic compared to the Second Reich. In the northwest, North Schleswig goes to Denmark; somewhat whimsically, it seems, since the two countries had not been at war with each other. In the west, several different provisions applied. The dotted areas mark the extent of the demilitarized zone, in which no military units could be stationed nor fortifications erected. The dotted pink area marks the greatest extent of occupied Rhineland in 1926.

The area of Eupen-Malmedy, southwest of Köln (Cologne) goes to Belgium, Alsace and the Lorraine revert to France, and the heavily industrialized Saar District is put under the authority of the League of Nations. In the east, the small province "Hultschiner Ländchen" goes to Czechoslovakia, while the rich coal fields of the "Oberschlesisches Kohlrevier" as well as the provinces of Posen and Western Prussia go to Poland, and establish the "Polish Corridor", Poland's connection to the Baltic Sea. The town of Danzig and its surroundings is established as a semi-autonomous city-state under the protection of the League of Nations, but was forced into a binding customs union with Poland.

In Eastern Prussia, the province of the Memelland - east of Königsberg - was taken over by the Allies, governed until 1923 by France, and then annexed by Lithuania - without plebiscite.

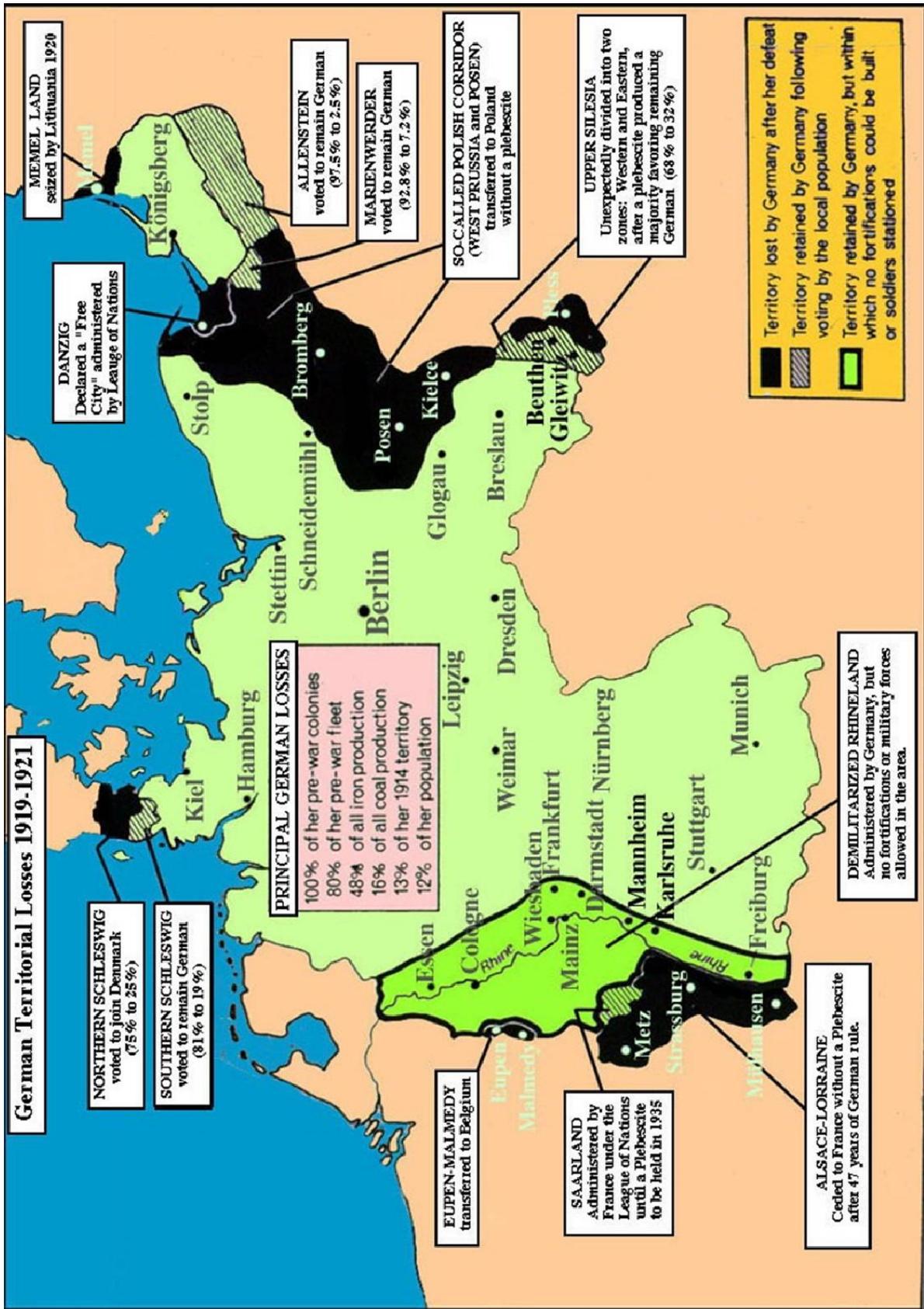
The four great rivers Rhine, Elbe, Oder and Danube were internationalized, depriving Germany of the bulk of her foreign shipping dues. Her colonies were parcelled out, in the guise of League of Nations "Trust Mandates", between the victors. Togo and Cameroon went to France, German South-West Africa, today's Namibia, and German South-East Africa, today's Tanzania, went to Great Britain, and the Asian and Pacific possessions were divided between Japan and the United States.

The second aspect of the treaty concerned Germany's armed forces. To protect France from any future German threat, a number of restrictions were imposed upon the future army of the Republic, which was called the "Reichswehr". The overall number of soldiers was limited to 100,000 men, including 4,000 officers, which yielded seven infantry divisions and a few thousand sailors. For a comparison: the German forces in the Western Theatre before the offensives of Spring 1918 had numbered 192 divisions. The Great General Staff was abolished, and the construction or possession of armoured cars or tanks, heavy guns, warships over 10,000 tons, U-boats, or any kind of air force was proscribed. All the land west of the Rhine, and thirty kilometres east of the stream was to be kept demilitarized and unfortified.

The treaty envisioned that Germany's disarmament was to be followed soon by global demilitarization under the auspices of the League of Nations. The student of history, alas, will not be surprised by the sad news that the attempts of the League to convince other nations of the benefits of military impotence failed completely.

The third main issue of the treaty, and perhaps the most important, was money; lots of it. The treaty demanded recompense for all damages whatsoever their origin; since, unfortunately, the Habsburg Empire had ceased to exist and little could be acquired from Bulgaria or Turkey, Germany was deemed responsible for the bills of her erstwhile confederates as well, since all war damage resulted "from the aggression of Germany and her allies." (8)

MAP LXXXIII - GERMANY AFTER THE TREATY OF VERSAILLES



At the time the treaty was drafted, nobody was able to assess the sum of damages Germany was expected to pay for, and thus the country was forced to sign a blank cheque in June 1919. It took an Allied Commission and two more years, until 1921, to come up with the bottom line of U.S. \$ 33,000,000,000.00, thirty-three billion dollars. In this context, one may

remember that this was the age of the "Gold Standard", when the price for an ounce of gold 999 was officially fixed at twenty Pounds Sterling.

If we were to engage in an estimate of how much this sum would represent today, we would have to begin by multiplying the \$ 33 billion with a factor of, conservatively, fifty, to account for current gold prices. This results in a figure of approximately \$ 1, 650, 000, 000, 000, 00 or \$ 1, 65 trillion, in a time when the global economy amounted to less than 5 per cent of the size of today. Hence in today's terms (multiplied by a factor of twenty), we'd arrive at an amount over \$ 33 trillion; more than twice the debt of the United States in 2010. This sum should be paid by a country of three percent the size and a quarter of the population of the United States.

It was not a very realistic plan, and John Maynard Keynes and other clear-headed economists warned that such figures were simply not practical: even if they could, in fact, be collected, they were to upset the international finance system. The German government had some relatively reasonable objections to the scheme, but France insisted on payment. When Germany defaulted, the Ruhr area, the greatest German industrial zone, was occupied by Allied troops. Since Wilson's other pet project, the abolition of all trade barriers, had floundered almost as quick as the global disarmament drive would, the French confiscation of industrial products took away most of Germany's negotiable assets, such as could be used to buy food.

The reaction of the German people to the treaty conditions was livid, chiefly for three reasons: (1) the German and Austrian government propaganda had succeeded, at the beginning of the war, to convince most people that their country's case was just, because of its allegedly defensive nature; (2) when the reality at the front could no longer remain obscured, the people were still led to expect a relatively lenient treaty, based on Wilson's Fourteen Points; and (3) when the reality could no longer be ignored, it was the easiest, if not most reasonable, reaction to blame those who signed the peace instead of those who had allowed the war.

Even radical German socialist Rosa Luxemburg thought as late as July 28 [1914, ¶] that "Wilhelm II was a factor favouring peace," and her fellow socialist Hugo Haase argued that government officials and Germany's chief industrialists wanted peace not war. (9)

Moreover, when developments turned ominous with the mobilization of the Russian army, which started clandestinely on July 25 but was discovered the next day by the German military intelligence service, the future belligerents' citizens remained certain that their own governments were acting purely in defence. The French pastor Paul Doumerge wrote on July 30 that "there is in our souls ... the clear certitude that France did not want this war that she had hoped for peace until the last minute and had worked for peace." (10) The good priest could not be aware that France could have halted the war carousel any day between July 25 and July 30 by obliging the Russians to end their mobilization. In England, Georgina Lee praised Sir Edward Grey, the Foreign Minister, as "one of the most patient Peacemakers the world has ever known," but knew that Great Britain would only fight "'because we shall have been dragged in' through German aggression against British allies." (11) It would seem that Ms. Lee was aware of British allies whose existence Sir Grey would not admit.

In Berlin, the BERLINER TAGESBLATT knew that "one thing can be said of the German people with absolute certainty. We didn't want a new war and we have done everything in our power to prevent it." (12) The majority of British newspapers shared this opinion: after learning that Wilhelm and Czar Nicholas II had exchanged telegrams, the TIMES lauded the "pacific leanings" of the emperors on July 29, 1914 and two days later, the PALL MALL GAZETTE acknowledged that "the Emperor Wilhelm and his advisers have laboured for peace." (13) And when war did come, most Germans felt that they had, personally, as much to do with the outbreak of hostilities as the average Russian peasant or French poilu, namely nothing. Hence they resented the clauses of the treaty that branded them as the eternal aggressors, solely culpable for the war's devastations, and, on top of it, forced them to alimnt France and her client states for the foreseeable future.

Much of this was a normal expression of frustration after so long and bloody a war to have lost, but the specific circumstances of the German Revolution allowed it the nationalist, reactionary, and finally Nazi propaganda to create and nurture the deadly legends of the "Stab in the Back" of the army, which thus had not "really" lost the war, and the myth of

the "November criminals", socialists of all colours, slaves of the Communist International, traitors who deserved to be shot.

The preoccupation with the Treaty of Versailles was a personalized experience, because essentially all former soldiers believed that they had acted honourably, and in the defence of their country. They could not accept the notorious "war guilt" clause of the treaty, because it literally collided with their perceptions of reality and their self-respect. The resulting feeling of having been betrayed, perhaps by the November criminals, was the weakness that Hitler was able to exploit so efficiently later. The fact that many soldiers could not come up with a reason for their finding themselves on the field of battle in the first place only increased the feeling that inexplicable, and perhaps infamous things were going on. General Brusilov observed that the Russian peasants drawn into the army...

"... had not the slightest notion what the War had to do with them. Time after time I asked my men ... why we were at war; the invariable senseless answer was that a certain Archduke and his wife had been murdered and that consequently the Austrians had tried to humiliate the Serbians.

Practically no one knew who these Serbians were. They were equally doubtful as to what a Slav was. Why Germany should want to make war on us because of these Serbians, no one could say. The result was that the men were led like sheep to the slaughter without knowing why." (14)

Naturally, the peasants had not been informed about the Russian strategy for Constantinople, the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles. The Britishers explained their mission with the ditty: "We're here because we're here because we're here ..." while the lecture of London's newspapers convinced the industrialist F.S. Oliver to write to his brother in Canada that "the ordinary man's belief is ... that Germany has made this war to impose a military supremacy over the whole of Western Europe, including Britain." (15) But being uninformed about the war's mysteries did not undermine the patriotism that made the men fight until the bitter end. But when the soldiers came home and asked the government and the public for belated explanations, none came forward. Except that one Austrian corporal in Munich said he had the answers.

In fairness, one must admit that the Treaty of Versailles was not as pitiless as portrayed; it was far more lenient than the Peace of Brest-Litovsk that a triumphant Germany had forced upon Trotsky and the Bolsheviks on March 3, 1918. But it was, if not outright stupid, as some claimed, clearly inconsiderate. To blame Germany as the sole aggressor misrepresented the realities. Both French - in Alsace - and Russian troops - in East Prussia - had attacked Germany before German forces appeared in their countries (they had attacked Belgium first), and the problem with labelling the Schlieffen Plan - respectively modified Moltke Plan - as pure aggression is that, even without the recent knowledge unearthed by Terence Zuber, for a two-front war, the plan seemed to be the sole practical strategy; no military scholar has proposed an alternative in almost one hundred years of discussion. And Mr. Oliver's theory of an impending German military supremacy over Europe does not correlate with the fact that the Germans in August 1914 did not even have the ninety-four divisions available that Graf von Schlieffen had thought necessary for the Western theatre alone, but only seventy-four at all.

Nonetheless, Hitler seemed to be the only person in Germany to understand that the disillusionment of the war left a void that could be filled with new illusions.

The illusion of a short, victorious war was among the first mirages to vanish; other disillusionments soon followed. The realization that the burdens and even the few benefits of war would not be shared equally struck people harshly as food, fuel, and other resources remained in the hands of a select few. The August rhetoric of shared sacrifice and national unity fell apart quickly as the war continued and governments showed themselves to have no solutions to the dislocations it caused. (16)

Hitler understood that illusions are a business that knows no seasons and was ready to deliver: the university lessons paid off, and the applause of his first audiences in Lechfeld and Munich probably constituted his first real success in life, civil, that is. The economic downturn gave him additional ammunition.

The Berlin government was in a bind; being not only liable to the future reparation payments but also for the repayment of the war bonds, and sought its salvation in the printing press, permitting inflation to take care of the national

debt. The future reparation payments were tied to gold equivalents, but the war loans, in paper marks, were not, and thus the debt was paid back quickly, with worthless bills.

From Austria, where the situation was comparable, reported Stefan Zweig:

Every descent into the town [Salzburg, on the Austro-German border south of Braunau, ¶] at that period was a moving experience; it was my first sight of the yellow and dangerous eyes of famine. The bread crumbled into black particles and tasted like pitch and glue, coffee was a brew of roasted barley, beer like yellow water, chocolate like coloured sand, and the potatoes were frozen. Most people raised rabbits, in order not wholly to forget the taste of meat; a young lad shot squirrels in our garden for his Sunday dinner and well-nourished dogs or cats seldom returned from lengthy prowls.

Such textiles as were for sale were no more than specially treated paper, ersatz for an ersatz; men crept about almost always dressed in old uniforms - even Russian uniforms - which they had obtained from some depot or hospital and in which more than one already died; trousers tailored from old sacks were not uncommon. ...

Out in the country the food situation was better; no peasant-farmer allowed himself to be influenced by the general breakdown of morale to sell his butter, eggs or milk at the legally prescribed "maximum prices". A man would set off with an empty bag or two and go from farm to farm, sometimes even taking the train to particularly productive illicit sources of provision which he would then peddle in town at four or five times the cost price.

In the beginning the peasants gloated over the shower of paper money for which they had sold their butter and eggs, and which made them profiteers. However, when they brought their bursting wallets to town to make purchase, they discovered to their exasperation that while they had merely quintupled normal prices, the scythe, the hammer, the kettle which they had come to buy had meanwhile risen twenty or fifty times in price. Thereafter they sought to exchange only for manufactured goods and demanded substance for substance, merchandise for merchandise; mankind with its trenches having been content to retrogress to cave-dweller times, it now dissolved the thousand-year-old convention of money and reverted to primitive barter. ...

Finally the authorities interfered to stop the subversive trade in the execution of which none but the well-to-do derived benefit; in every province cordons were thrown around key points and illicit goods arriving by train or bicycle were confiscated for the benefit of the municipal food offices. The hoarders responded by organizing nightly deliveries by lorry with Western desperado accompaniment or by bribing inspectors, themselves the fathers of hungry children; sometimes there were real battles with revolvers and knives which these youths, after four years of practice at the front, knew how to use just as well as they knew the approved military way of finding cover when in flight.

The chaos grew from week to week, the population became more excited. The progressive devaluation of money became increasingly manifest. The neighbouring states had substituted their new currency for the old Austrian-Hungarian notes, thus saddling tiny Austria with the main burden, more or less, of redeeming the old Krone [Austrian currency unit, ¶].

The first sign of distrust was the disappearance of hard money, for people tended to value a bit of copper or nickel more highly than mere printed paper. The government did its best to get maximum note production from the printing presses, following Mephistopheles' prescription, but it could not keep pace with the inflation; then every city and town, eventually every village, began to print its own "emergency money" which neighbouring villages could reject and which, for the most part, was recognized to be worthless and thrown away.

An economist who knew to describe graphically all the phases of the inflation which spread from Austria to Germany, would find it unsurpassed material for an exciting novel, for the chaos took on ever more fantastic forms. ...

The most grotesque discrepancy developed with respect to rents, the government having forbidden any rise; thus tenants, the great majority, were protected but property owners were the losers. Before long, a medium-size apartment in Austria cost its tenant less for the whole year than a single dinner; during five or ten years (for the cancellation of leases was forbidden even afterwards) the population of Austria enjoyed more or less free lodgings.

In consequence of this mad disorder the situation became more paradoxical and unmoral from week to week. A man who had been saving for forty years and who, furthermore, had patriotically invested his all in war bonds, became a beggar. A man who had debts became free of them. A man who respected the food rationing system starved; one who disregarded it brazenly could eat his fill. A man schooled in bribery got ahead, if he speculated, he profited. ...

Standards and values disappeared during this melting and evaporation of money; there was but one merit: to be clever, shrewd, unscrupulous, and to mount the racing horse instead of being trampled by it. (17)

Within a year, the situation in Germany matched the Austrian example. At the end of the war, the Reichsmark/Dollar exchange rate had stood at about 8:1; in November 1923, a single U.S. Dollar could be exchanged for 4,000,000,000,000.00 [i.e. four trillion Reichsmark, RM]. Zweig himself once calculated that, at this time, the cost of an egg, four billion marks, represented the approximate pre-war value of the real estate of the Greater Berlin area.

Hyperinflation of such a degree had never happened before, and the most sinister aspect of the monetary devaluation was that it, indeed, punished the "good citizens" worst - their bank accounts as well as their bonds, annuities or stocks swiftly became worthless. Between 1917 and 1924, a good proportion of German families knew hunger; and many of them, desperate, became the easy prey of political extremists. But not only Germany's economy was in decline, the whole continent suffered from the aftermath of the war and the gains that victory was supposed to have brought largely failed to appear. This in itself was enough to be sceptical of the other splendid innovation of the post-war era, the LEAGUE OF NATIONS as conceived by Woodrow Wilson.

This zenith of human political organization was a voluntary association of nations to create and maintain peace. The most desirable end would be spearheaded by the victors of the war, France, Great Britain, the United States, Italy and Japan, who were to engage in a COVENANT, a sort of supranational constitution, fortified by mutual non-aggression pacts. Nations who committed aggression were to be brought to justice by common action of their peers. The League was established in January 1920 and headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland. It existed, theoretically, until April 1946 when it was formally dissolved and replaced by the United Nations, but it had ceased to function, for practical purposes, in September 1939, when Germany and the Soviet Union invaded and partitioned Poland.

The new organization's beginnings were inauspicious. For starters, the United States, in Wilson's plan the main sponsor of the League, declined to join after Henry Cabot Lodge opposed the treaty in the U.S. Senate. This was a fatal weakening of the plan, since the refusal of the United States to accept responsibility crippled the new body from the start. In Wilson's theory, the League and her members were to defend the territories and independence of every nation against infringements by others, but the concept of self-determination quickly proved impractical, the big countries continued with power-politics, and over most other issues the organization remained unable to reach agreement. This was not surprising, because the concepts of the early sponsors what the League should be or not could never be brought to a consensus omnium: for France, the League was in the first place an instrument to keep Germany down; Great Britain regarded the League an interesting forum for discussion but would not commit herself to anything tangible; Italy and Japan soon became aggressors instead of peacekeepers; the Soviet Union, admitted in 1926, saw the League as a place to obstruct the capitalist enslavement of the working class, and Germany was at first conveniently excluded.

Hence the efficiency of the organization was diminished from the get-go: there was no way to compel members to help others, and some of the most aggressive nations like the USA or Japan were either not members from the beginning or, as in the case of Japan, became ex-members soon. Japan left the League in 1933 over critique of her occupation of Manchuria, and Germany, only admitted in 1926, left in the same year. The new chancellor Adolf Hitler wept crocodile tears over the inability of the members to follow Germany's disarmament with their own, and that the failure of all these nations to follow their commitment left him no choice but to declare Germany's withdrawal from the unmindful body.

Initially, the League was better than its reputation, and a few local conflicts were successfully addressed, but it accumulated a lot of bad press when its reactions against Italy's invasion of Ethiopia in the fall of 1935 proved completely ineffective. Italy had attacked the troops of the Negus, whose most modern weapons were muskets inherited from the Turks decades ago, with aeroplanes, tanks, machine-guns and poison gas. In a rare moment of unity the League decided on economic sanctions against Italy: an edict proclaimed that henceforth all members were to stop all importation from Italy and exportation to the evildoer.

The effectiveness of the verdict was humbled by the fact that three of the world's biggest economic powers, Japan, Germany, and the USA, were not members, and thus free to continue trade with Italy unimpeded. The other nations' commerce with Italy was simply rerouted through Switzerland, another non-member of the League.

By May 1936, the Italian army had successfully slaughtered most of the opposing Ethiopians, a feat which was crowned by the League's cancellations of the "economic sanctions" six weeks later. In the meantime the embargo had resulted in a serious trade impediment: a shipment of tennis balls, from a renowned British manufacturer, was officially and successfully stopped from being delivered to Italy; tennis balls being, in the sanctions catalogue, "projectiles" and hence contraband. After the disaster of the Italian Job, the League's remaining prestige evaporated quickly.

The complete failure of the old elites was a chance for the young, who had hitherto been excluded from the business of politics. Stefan Zweig reflected:

Something besides the army had been crushed [in the war]: faith in the infallibility of the authority to which we [the Austrians] had been trained to over-submissiveness in our own youth. But would it have been expected of the Germans to keep on admiring their Kaiser who first swore to fight "to the last breath of horse and man" and then fled across the border under cover of night and mist? Of their military leaders, their politicians, and their old poets who groaned out commonplace patriotic rhymes?

It was only after the smoke of war had lifted that the terrible destruction that resulted became visible. How could an ethical commandment still count as holy which sanctioned murder and robbery under the cloak of heroism and requisition for four long years? How could a people rely on the promises of a state which had annulled all these obligations to its citizens which it could not conveniently fulfill?

It was the same old clique, the so-called men of experience who now surpassed the folly of the war with their bungling of the peace. It is common knowledge today, and a few of us knew it then, that the peace offered one of the greatest, if not the greatest, moral potentialities of history. Wilson knew it. In his comprehensive vision he sketched the plan for a veritable and enduring world agreement.

But the old generals, the old statesmen, the old captains of industry had snipped that great concept to bits and reduced it to worthless paper. The sacred promise to the world that this war would be the last war alone served to buoy up the already half-disappointed, half-exhausted and despairing soldiers, but it was cynically sacrificed to the interests of the merchants of death and to the gambling passion of the politicians who successfully played their old fateful game of negotiations and secret treaties behind the screen of Wilson's wise and human demands.

To the extent that it was wide awake the world knew that it had been cheated. Cheated the mothers who had sacrificed their children, cheated the soldiers who came home as beggars, cheated those who had subscribed patriotically to war loans, cheated all who had placed faith in any promise of the state, cheated those of us

who had dreamed of a new and better-ordered world and who perceived that the same old gamblers were turning the same old trick in which our existence, our happiness, our time, our fortunes were at stake.

Small wonder, then, that the entire youthful generation looked with exasperation and contempt at their fathers who had permitted first victory, then the peace to be taken away from them, who had done everything wrong, had been without prescience and had everywhere miscalculated. (18)

To the loss of trust were added the economic repercussions, which were also laid at the door of the old elites. When the rate of inflation, the perennial indicator for public trust in public money, rose to hundreds and thousands of percent in a year, the outlook regarding the future was necessarily a sorrowful one. But nobody was prepared for the fantastic consequences that arose from the assassination of Germany's successful Foreign Minister Walther Rathenau, the murder of the last trustworthy man of the Republic. Stefan Zweig, again, experienced the beginning of madness on a clear summer day.

On that day, I was already in Westerland [on the holiday island of Sylt, ¶]. Hundreds of holiday-makers were bathing gaily in the surf. Again, as on the day when the assassination of Franz Ferdinand was announced, a band was playing to carefree people when, like white petrels, the newsboys stormed over the boardwalk. "Walther Rathenau assassinated!" A panic broke out and the tremor spread through the whole Reich. Abruptly the mark plunged down, never to stop until it had reached the fantastic figures of madness, the millions, the billions and trillions.

Now the real witches' sabbath of inflation started, against which our Austrian inflation with its absurd enough ratio of 15,000 old to 1 of new currency had been shabby child's play. To describe it in detail, with its incredibilities, would take a whole book, and to readers of today it would seem like a fairy tale. I have known days when I had to pay fifty thousand marks for a newspaper in the morning and a hundred thousand in the evening; whoever had foreign currency to exchange did so from hour to hour, because at four o'clock he would get a better rate than at three, and at five o'clock he would get much more than he had got an hour earlier.

For instance, I sent a manuscript to my publisher on which I had worked for a year; to be on the safe side I asked for an advance payment of royalties on ten thousand copies. By the time the cheque was deposited, it hardly paid the postage I had put on the parcel a week before; on street-cars one paid in millions, lorries carried the paper money from the Reichsbank to the other banks, and a fortnight later one found hundred-thousand-mark notes in the gutter; a beggar had thrown them away contemptuously.

A pair of shoe laces cost more than a shoe had once cost, no, more than a fashionable store with two thousand pair of shoes had cost before; to repair a broken window more than the whole house had formerly cost, a book more than a printer's works with a hundred presses. For twenty Pound Sterling one could buy rows of six-story houses on Kurfürstendamm [the most expensive address in town, ¶], and factories were to be had for the old equivalent of a wheelbarrow. Some adolescent boys who had found a case of soap forgotten in the harbour disported themselves for months in cars and lived like kings, selling a cake every day, while their parents, formerly well-to-do, slunk about like beggars. Messenger boys established foreign exchange businesses and speculated in currencies of all lands.

Towering over all of them was the gigantic figure of the super-profiteer Stinnes. Expanding his credit and exploiting the mark, he bought whatever was for sale, coal mines and ships, factories and stocks, castles and country estates, actually for nothing because every payment, every promise became equal to naught. Soon a quarter of Germany was in his hands and, perversely, the masses, who in Germany always become intoxicated at a success that they can see with their eyes, cheered him as a genius.

The unemployed stood around by the thousands and shook their fists at the profiteers and foreigners in their luxurious cars who bought whole rows of streets like a box of matches; everyone who could read and write traded, speculated and profited and had a secret sense that they were deceiving themselves and were being

deceived by a hidden force which brought about this chaos deliberately in order to liberate the State from his debts and obligations. ...

All values were changed, and not only material ones; the laws of the State were flouted, no tradition, no moral code was respected. Berlin was transformed into the Babylon of the world. Bars, amusement parks, red-light houses sprang up like mushrooms.

What we had seen in Austria proved to be just a mild and shy prologue to this witches' sabbath; for the Germans introduced all their vehemence and methodical organization into the perversion. Along the entire Kurfürstendamm powdered and rouged young men sauntered and they were not all professionals; every high-school boy wanted to earn some money, and in the dimly lit bars one might see government officials and men of the world of finance tenderly courting drunken sailors without any shame. [Homosexuality was technically illegal under § 175 of the Criminal Code, ¶.]

Even the Rome of Suetonius had never known such orgies as the pervert balls of Berlin, where hundreds of men costumed as women and hundreds of women as men danced under the benevolent eyes of the police. In the collapse of all values a kind of madness gained hold particularly in the bourgeois circles which until then had been unshakable in their probity. Young girls bragged proudly of their perversion, to be sixteen and still under suspicion of virginity would have been considered a disgrace in any school of Berlin at that time, every girl wanted to be able to tell of her adventures, and the more exotic the better. ...

Whoever lived through these apocalyptic months, these years, disgusted and embittered, sensed the coming of a counterblow, a horrible reaction. And behind the scenes, smiling, there waited, watch in hand, those same people who had driven the German nation into the chaos: "The worse it is for the country, the better for us."

They knew their power was at hand. Around Ludendorff, more than around the then still powerless Hitler, the counter-revolution was already crystallizing openly; the officers whose epaulettes had been torn off their shoulders organized in secret, the small tradesmen who had been cheated out of their savings silently closed ranks and aligned themselves for any slogan that promised order.

Nothing was as fateful to the German Republic as the idealistic attempt to give liberty not only to the people but even to its enemies. For the German people, a disciplined folk, did not know what to do with their freedom and already looked impatiently toward those who were to take it from them. (19)