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World War One

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AVIATION CHANGES WARFARE ON THE EASTERN FRONT 1914

Vauban, Napoleon, Firepower and Aeroplanes

THE FIRST FRONT OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

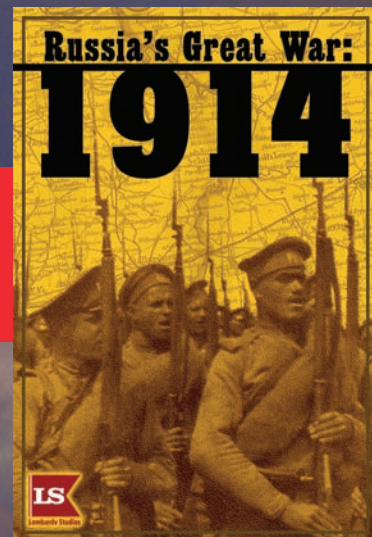
Serbia Defeats Austria-Hungary's
Invasions

CARPATHIAN FROZEN SLAUGHTERHOUSE

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THE UNKNOWN EASTERN FRONT

For English readers, like myself, the Great War on the Eastern Front can seem mystifying—truly terra incognita. To help understand how and why the campaigns in the East were so different—yet equally as bloody as the fighting in the West—this issue of *World War One Illustrated* examines several key aspects of the early fighting of allies Germany and Austro-Hungary against Russia and Serbia.

As with our previous issues, we strive to use sources such as *Österreich-Ungarns letzter Krieg 1914-1918* (Austria-Hungary's Last War) published in seven volumes plus a supplemental volume from 1930-1939. This official history, ironically published after the Austro-Hungarian Empire ceased to exist, includes references from the Serbian official history written by the Serbian general staff and published in Serbian in 1924.

The maps in this issue are based upon maps and sketches published in these official histories, plus Russian maps held in western archives or provided to us by contributors such as Marat Khairulin. Skillfully rendered by our team cartographer, Philip Schwartzberg of Meridian Mapping, our maps provide the most accurate "window" to the Eastern Front yet presented in English.

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ON THE COVER

Aviation artist Ivan Berryman's painting of two Il'ya Muromets show the Veh model with inline engines. The largest fixed wing aircraft in 1914, it could fly 5-hour sorties with plenty of "loiter" time, conducting combined reconnaissance and bombing missions. Sikorsky's brilliant design accommodated a large crew, including cameramen, observers, and intelligence officers enabling quick target assessment and attacks. Able to fly very high, and armed with multiple defensive machineguns, it was nearly invulnerable to enemy aircraft and anti-aircraft gunnery—the Il'ya Muromets could be considered the Predator drone of its day. Ivan's stunning aviation and naval paintings can be viewed here: www.ivanberrymandirect.com

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Aviation Changes Warfare on the Eastern Front

Great War generals carried forward the legacies of Vauban and Napoleon, adjusting for modern firepower and the long-range, rapid information provided by the new aeroplanes

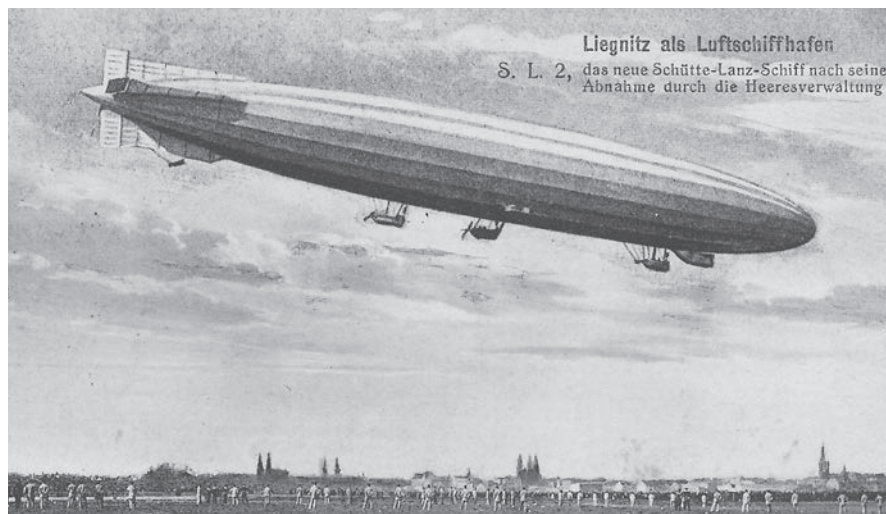
By Terrence Finnegan, Carl Bobrow, and Helmut Jäger with map by Philip Schwartzberg and historical images from the collections of Marat Khairulin and Dana Lombardy

Aviation's reconnaissance potential was immediately realized in 1914 and would be used throughout the Great War to support field commanders. Successes and failures in the opening months of the war in the East often hinged on whether aircraft could fly, where aeroplanes searched, and if their information reached the right people.

At the onset of the Great War, military doctrine in the East still included maintenance of a broad array of fortresses, a legacy from 17th Century French master fortress builder Marshal Sébastien Le Prestre de Vauban. In 1914 Russia had ten major fortresses or fortified areas in a crescent from East Prussia to Galicia, with additional fortresses further east and numerous smaller fortified areas throughout the region. In the years preceding 1914, Germany built five such fortress complexes facing the Russian Polish salient and Austria-Hungary built two in Galicia to bolster its defenses

There were few aviation visionaries before the war.

Despite vast sums spent on fortresses before the war, field commanders in both the East and West in August 1914 hoped to replicate Napoleon Bonaparte's legacy of rapid campaigns of envelopment—as the Prussians had done in their brief and victorious war over France in 1870-71. Warfare in the East in World War One would witness Napoleonic-like maneuvers whereas the Western Front and Italy would unintentionally encompass a new



Schütte-Lanz-Schiff S.L. 2 was one of several German airships used for reconnaissance on the Eastern Front in 1914. This one flew from Liegnitz near Breslau. (Postcard collection of Dana Lombardy)

style of fortification—hundreds of miles of complex trenches—in the tradition of Vauban.

Three years of warfare on the Eastern Front from 1914-1917 incorporated technological advances that included the first aerial platforms. How armies operated would be radically transformed during the Great War and aviation was at the forefront of this revolution. High troop density and massive firepower led to stalemate in the West, whereas the much larger area of operations in the East allowed for maneuver. Over every front aviation

would play a vital role.

There were few aviation visionaries before the war. British advocacy was led by Brigadier-General Sir David Henderson, the first commander of the Royal Flying Corps. Henderson imagined how aerial reconnaissance could aid military field commanders in both his book *The Art of Reconnaissance* (1911) and various pre-war articles in leading aviation journals such as *Flight*. A few leading aviation advocates such as Hauptmann Hermann von der Lieth-Thomsen, a junior General Staff officer working for Ober-



stleutnant Erich Ludendorff, and Captain Petr Nikolaevich Neterov in Russia, later became influential. Thomsen turned into the driving force of the revamped German Military Air Service and his role in its later accomplishments cannot be overemphasized.

Most French and German aeroplanes (as they were initially called) were organized into small units of six flying craft each and assigned to commanders of armies, German

active corps, and fortresses. Britain organized larger squadrons of 15 or more planes but had only four such squadrons in France in 1914.

At the start of the war, the Austro-Hungarian (Imperial) high command controlled fifteen companies of air units, and many of these were assigned to individual field armies. However, Imperial air operations proved to be less effective compared to their German ally's. In the Balkans the forested terrain

often hid Serbian troops and intentions, while in Galicia on 11 August not many of the 42 aeroplanes in the Imperial order of battle were able to fly—and the official Austro-Hungarian history noted very few significant achievements by air reconnaissance over Russian forces despite the open nature of the terrain.

Germany's lone 8th Army in East Prussia included more than 20 aeroplanes, and operations prior to the war enabled German aviators to study the vast area of future operations and practice coordination with ground forces. In the West in August of 1914, the seven German armies had nearly 200 aircraft to scrutinize a 300-mile long front to a depth of 100 to 200 miles. By comparison, the four Austro-Hungarian armies in Galicia had fewer than 30 functioning aircraft to cover an equivalent area.

In August 1914, German aeroplanes and airships achieved notoriety for flying over enemy territory, conducting aerial reconnaissance, propaganda missions, and the first aerial bombardments of the war. On 2 August, three planes from Feld Flieger Abteilung (FFA) No. 2 flew from East Prussia to Warsaw and dropped propaganda leaflets. Two airships, Z.IV and Z.V, commenced operations from Posen and Königsberg searching for Russian troops near the East Prussian border. At that early stage none were detected.

On 9 August airship Z.V flew over Lodz and reported on Russian positions. On 10 August, airship Z.IV bombed Mlava, with airship Z.V striking Lodz the following day. German aeroplanes and airships flew as far east as the Russian fortress at Kovno (Kaunas). In the critical weeks to come, airship Z.V discovered Russian concentrations near the German XX Corps at Modlin.

Losses occurred. Airship Z.V was shot down by Russian artillery at the end of August with the airship commander killed and the remain-

ing crew captured. However, the precedent was set in the first month of war. If employed and coordinated properly, aerial reconnaissance could greatly benefit the maneuvering armies. In the military parlance of today, despite its limited numbers, aviation rapidly became a serious “force multiplier” for ground operations.

In 1914, friendly fire proved to be one of the greatest dangers to aviators. Leutnant Mahnke remembered German soldiers shooting at their own aeroplanes, despite the clearly marked iron cross emblems on the wings. Austro-Hungary’s 4th Army suffered the loss of three of its own aircraft from friendly infantry fire, prompting the 4th Army command staff to issue a directive that no aeroplane was to be fired upon.

The Russian pilot Georgii Leonidovich Sheremetevsky recalled returning from one aerial reconnaissance sortie where, “we would be fired on by ‘all God-fearing folk.’” One Russian general, Vasilii Gourkoe, surmised that Russian soldiers were shooting down Russian aeroplanes over their own landing ground because his soldiers, “seriously thought that such a cunning idea as an aeroplane could only emanate from, and be used by, a German.”

Even the most exceptional aeroplane in the East at this time, the Sikorsky designed four-engine Il’ya Muromets, had to be wary of friendly fire. The Russian Ninth Army commander warned his troops fighting in Galicia that an Il’ya Muromets was to fly to the southwest to support the front. In doing so, troops were to avoid shooting at “big size, four engines, a platform in front with gun installation, long tail with three rudders in front... aeroplane sparkles in the sun...”

Aerial reconnaissance over the extensive eastern territories became the standard method for discovering enemy troop locations and determining vulnerable open flanks.



Perhaps one of the most recognizable aircraft to appear early in the war, the Austro-Hungarian designed Taube was built by at least 14 companies with a great many variations on the initial design. It proved to be unsuitable for front-line service and was relegated to use in training of new pilots.

This was clearly the case with German forces in the first weeks of the war. I Corps’s FFA 14 reported brigade-strength columns, massive troop movements and long logistic columns moving between Suwalki and the East Prussian frontier.

Lack of vital intelligence from aviation led to operational and strategic mistakes, such as the engagement at Gumbinnen. With insufficient information on Russian forces, the German I and XVII Corps attacked but were routed. This setback so unsettled 8th Army commander Generaloberst Max

von Prittwitz that he considered retreating from East Prussia and defending from behind the Vistula River. As a result, several German corps committed in Belgium were pulled out and sent east, but arrived too late to support the counterattack and victory at Tannenberg. Better coordinated aviation resources, or a better system for obtaining and distributing aviation reconnaissance information, might have prevented these German blunders. In 1914, everyone was learning through trial and error.

The greatest German aerial recon-



The Nieuport IV two-seater reconnaissance aircraft was one of the principal machines used by the Imperial Russian Air Service. Nearly 300 were produced under license in Russia by the Russo-Baltic Wagon Works in St. Petersburg and the Dux Factory in Moscow.



The Albatros B.II was one of the primary German two-seater reconnaissance aircraft. It would eventually be replaced with the updated and armed C.I version.

naissance success in the East in 1914 was in helping to exploit the gap between General Pavel Rennenkampf's Russian First Army and the Russian Second Army under General A. V. Samsonov, leading to the destruction of the Second Army at Tannenberg.

This celebrated victory of the Central Powers was offset by the equally futile and bloody offensive operations attempted by Franz Conrad von Hötzendorf, Austro-Hungarian Chief of Staff, to relieve the Russian siege against the fortress complex at Przemyśl. Relatively few aero-

planes were available to Russian and Imperial planners, but Russian aviators apparently accomplished more for their ground forces. (In fairness to all of the pilots in the East in 1914, unfavorable weather conditions hampered aerial operations much more than in the West.)

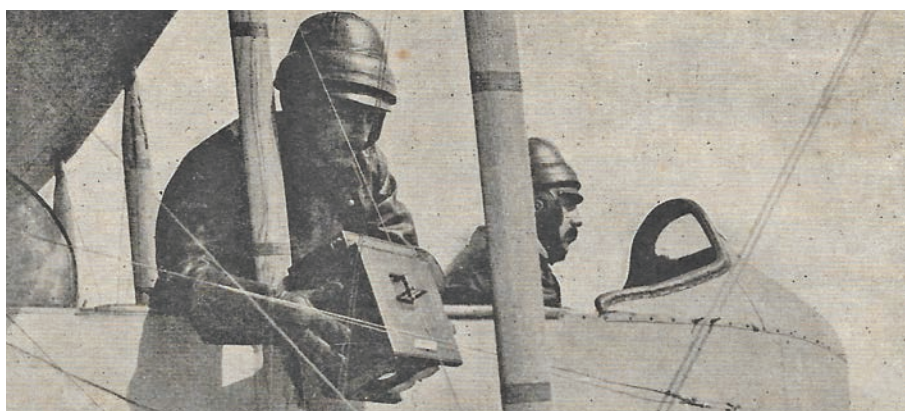
Arguably the best Russian general of the Great War and commander of the Russian Eighth Army in 1914, Alexei Brusilov, recognized aviation's limitations and its potential in 1914. Brusilov explained in his post-war account, "Because of short supply and poor quality of aeroplanes,

aerial reconnaissance was quite weak, nevertheless our information was mainly through this channel."

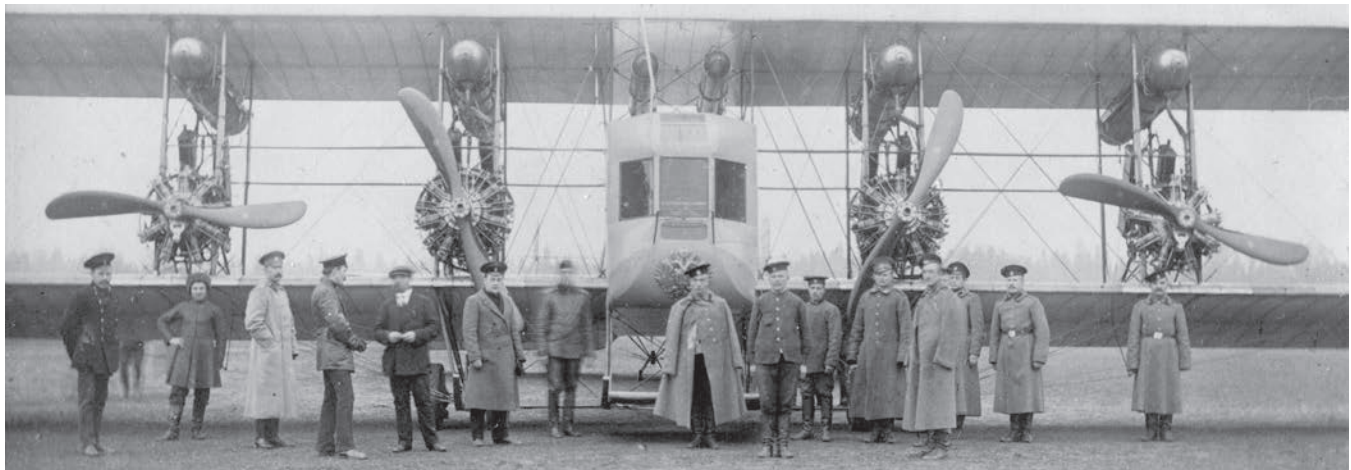
A tribute to early Russian aviation capability came from a post-war memoir by the Austrian Lieutenant Fritz Kreisler. As his platoon marched south of Lemberg (Lvov) a "whizzing of a motor above our heads could be heard and we knew why the enemy's shrapnel had so suddenly found us. It was a Russian aeroplane, which presumably had signaled our approach, together with the range, to the Russian gunners...." Kreisler's is one of the first accounts of aviation in direct support of artillery.

Likewise in Galicia in 1914, General Brusilov recalled a similar experience near Grodsk when aerial reconnaissance alerted his Eighth Army about several large Austro-Hungarian columns attempting to breach his army's center and drive to Lemberg (Lvov). As Brusilov recounted, "This exceptionally important and timely report, which could be ascertained only by aerial reconnaissance, provided me with the opportunity of pulling up all my reserves to the VII and VIII Corps."

Starting in November 1914, aerial cameras became employed, initially utilizing pre-war cameras in armies' inventories. The German 25 cm Handkammer was a sleek design with easy-to-handle pistol grip producing 9 x 12 cm images (also used by the Austro-Hungarian air service). The Russians had two primary aerial cameras throughout the war. The Ulyanin 25cm employed photographic plates best suited for high-resolution photographs of a specific target location. The Potte film camera took 50 exposures of a standard 50-meter film roll—ideal for surveillance of an extensive line of trenches or lengthy deployments. Along with this technology a more advanced approach to aerial reconnaissance grew, including standardized reporting procedures, print development, and distribu-



Built under license, the French Farman two-seat pusher was one of the mainstays of the Imperial Russian Air Service in 1914. The observer is holding an Ul'yanin camera.



Il'ya Muromets factory number 137, one of a group initially sent to the front in 1914 prior to the establishment of the EVK—Eskadra vozdushnykh korablei ("Squadron of Flying Ships"). It is a type Beh, adapted to military use, powered by French-built Salmson 200 hp and 130 hp radial engines. These proved less efficient than the later inline engines due in large part to the frontal drag they produced, and the planes were soon replaced with type Veh's.

tion. This more sophisticated use of aerial reconnaissance started to make its impact in early 1915.

German intercepts of Russian radio communications are often cited as essential to the German high command's ability to achieve a great victory at Tannenberg. While these intercepts (in plain language and not coded) were significant, German aviators provided the tactical

information on Russian troop positions and movements that enabled the German 8th Army to exploit the gaps and vulnerable flanks between widely separated Russian units. Generaloberst Paul von Hindenburg, the new commander of the 8th Army, was said to have declared: "Ohne Flieger kein Tannenberg!" ("Without flyers, no Tannenberg!").

The first major air war in history

was fought in the Great War, and some of the earliest successes of aerial reconnaissance were in the East—exemplary accomplishments for aviation professionals with few resources at their disposal. The legacies of Vauban and Napoleon would be replaced by the new military paradigm of firepower and aviation.



For further reading the authors recommend:

Walter Raleigh, *The War in the Air*, vol. I (Oxford, 1922).

Sebastian Rosenboom, *Im Einsatz über der „vergessenen Front“ – Der Luftkrieg an der Ostfront im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Potsdam, 2013). [Employment Over The "Forgotten Front" – Air War on the Eastern Front During the First World War.]

Österreich-Ungarns letzter Krieg 1914–1918, vol. I (Vienna, 1930). [Austria-Hungary's Last War 1914–1918.]



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Helmut Jäger served 20 years in staff positions and as a pilot in the German Air Force. He then studied history at the University of Hamburg and his research resulted in two published studies on

the development of military photography and the legacy of German aerial pictures from the Western Front in World War One.

Pyotr Nikolayevich Nesterov and the Desperate Tactics of Early Russian Aviation

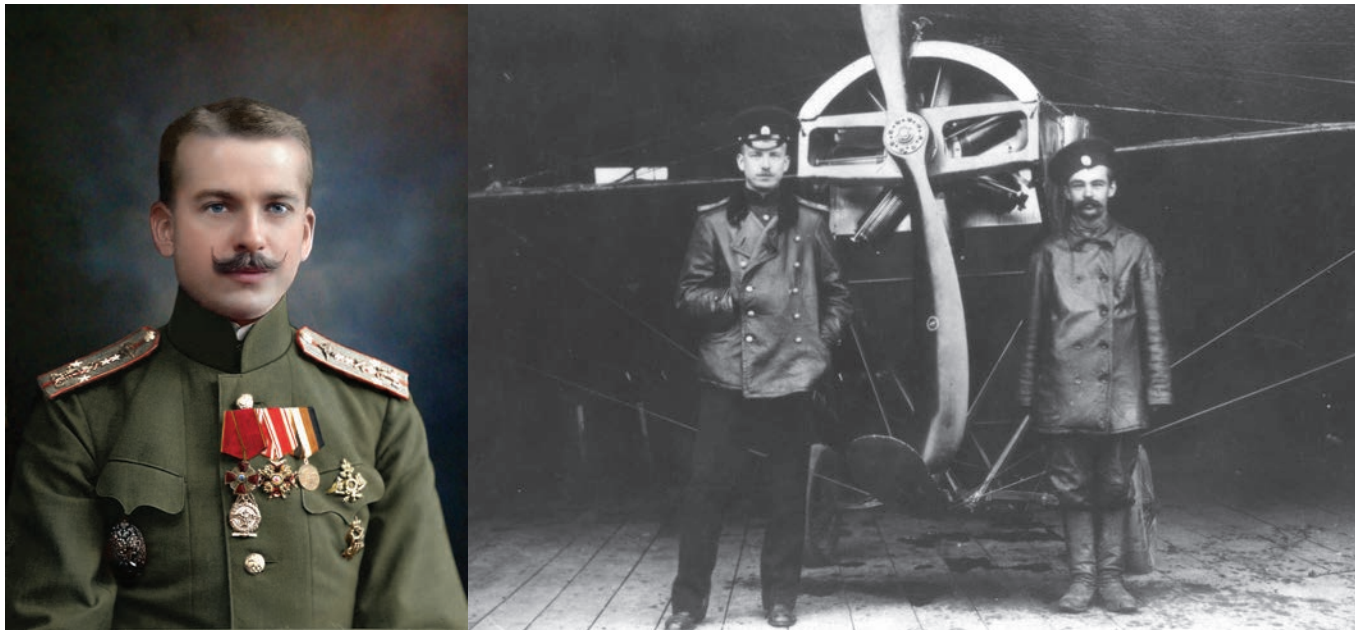
By Carl Bobrow with historical images from the collection of Marat Khairulin

His fellow officers and subordinate enlisted men came to regard Pyotr Nesterov as the model of a voennyi letchik—a military pilot with the “right stuff.” He was perhaps the most exceptional individual produced by the Russian Imperial air services prior to World War One.

In February 1885, the Russian army’s engineering service established the Training Aeronautical Park, which essentially served as the aeronautical division of the Russian army. Lieutenant Aleksandr Matveevich Kovan’ko was appointed to lead the unit. During the 1904-1905 Russo-Japanese War Kovan’ko commanded the 1st Siberian Airship Battalion, which performed some of the first aerial combat reconnaissance activities of the 20th Century, including the vital role of artillery fire correction.

Nesterov ranked at the top of his class at the Officers’ School of Aeronautics (OVSH), but his request to be transferred to the Aviation Section was disregarded, as he did not have the class standing or wealth for such promotion.

Recognizing Nesterov’s potential, Kovan’ko used his influence to grant Nesterov special permission to train on airplanes. Nesterov passed the examination for military pilot and would be the only non-engineering officer to graduate from the Aviation Section of the OVSH in 1912.



Pyotr Nesterov and his aircraft mechanic G.M. Nelidov in front of a Nieuport IV. Nesterov realized the value of a competent technical staff and he treated these subordinates with the same regard and dignity he showed his fellow officers.

With its defeat in the Russo-Japanese War, Russia’s military instituted operational reforms and modernization of weapons and tactics. For Nesterov, then an officer in the 9th Siberian Artillery Brigade, this provided an opportunity to direct his youthful enthusiasm into a posting to a Siberian aeronautical company, where he acquired considerable knowledge about the subject.

Nesterov believed that the training of a pilot was a dynamic and evolving enterprise as the initial and conservative patterns of flight dynamics had changed with the evolution of aircraft design. He realized that some of the deaths by experienced pilots were most likely a result of their inability to extricate themselves from a “fatal” maneuver and not necessarily the fault of the machine. He

sought to improve instruction to develop a pilot's abilities in stages from novice to proficient to expert. This last stage would involve tested and practical aerobatics to enable a pilot to resolve difficulties encountered while flying.

On 9 September 1913, Nesterov took off from Syretzk Aerodrome outside Kiev in a Nieuport IV monoplane, with the intention of looping an aircraft for the first time anywhere. This was outside the regulations established for flying and he was subject to ten days of close arrest, with the possibility of more serious charges being leveled against him "for risking government property." Ultimately the punishment was reversed and he was promoted to staff captain for demonstrating this maneuver.

Nesterov helped create new aircraft designs and introduced modifications to enhance performance and safety. His realization that the mechanics and technicians had much to contribute in this area explained in part his relationship with the enlisted men, for he treated the subordinate technical staff with the same respect and dignity he showed his fellow officers—unusual in the hierarchical Imperial Russian Army.

With the outbreak of World War One, Nesterov was assigned to the Southwestern Front and flew his first reconnaissance mission on 10 August 1914. The ability of aircraft and a trained pilot to scout where the traditional horse and rider could not go provided a dramatic change in intelligence gathering as part of the modern warfare then developing in the East.

The early aeroplanes in service in 1914 lacked weapons, but Nesterov wanted to prevent the unhindered aerial reconnaissance flights by the enemy. Seeking to incapacitate or even destroy Austro-Hungarian reconnaissance aircraft, he devised a cutting blade, attached to the tail of his aircraft. When this proved ineffective, Nesterov believed he could ram the upper wing of an enemy aircraft with his landing gear, thus forcing it down. It would be this ramming tactic, known as a *taran*, that would destroy the Albatros B.II of FLIK 11 flown by Franz Malina with Baron Friedrich von Rosenthal as the observer on 7 September 1914. This engagement was witnessed by many including the Third Army's General Mikhail Dmitrievich Bonch-Bruevich and would appear in his memoirs. This was not a rash act of daring, but rather a calculated risk undertaken by one of Russia's premier pilots.

The two aircraft crashed near the village of Zhovkva in the Lvov region. Nesterov's own aircraft, a Morane-Saulnier type G, was severely damaged in this collision, possibly knocking him out of the plane. The Albatros' wings crumpled and folded, then crashed into a swamp. Nesterov's aeroplane fell in



Sketch from the memoir of Mikhail Dmitrievich Bonch-Bruevich, who witnessed the event showing the Taran attack as it happened.

an uncontrolled spiral to the ground a half-mile from the Albatros.

In 1915 Pyotr Nesterov was posthumously awarded the Order of St. George Fourth Class. He was buried on 13 September 1914 at the Askoldova Mogila (Askold's Grave) park in Kiev. Although he was an officer in the Imperial Army the Soviets embraced his courage and humble beginnings and created a hero exemplifying an ideal for Russian pilots to model themselves after.



Russian officers looking at a section of the fuselage of the Austro-Hungarian Albatros B.II of FLIK 11 brought down by Nesterov's Taran maneuver

The First Front of the First World War

Serbia defeats Austro-Hungary's 1914 invasions

By Andrei Pogăciaș with maps by Philip Schwartzberg and photos from the Library of Congress

The assassination of Austro Hungarian Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo on 28 June 1914 created the political basis for starting the Great War. Austria-Hungary, supported by Germany, sent Serbia an ultimatum on 23 July that expired at midnight on the twenty-fifth. The terms were written so that Serbia would find it impossible to accept them. Before Germany invaded Belgium and France, before Russia invaded East Prussia, fighting erupted between Austria-Hungary and Serbia.

On 24 July 1914, the Serbian Army received its mobilization orders, and Vienna withdrew its embassy personnel from Belgrade. The next day, Austrian Emperor Franz Josef signed the order for mobilizing the Imperial Army, with the first attack set for the twenty-eighth, when, at 11:00 a.m., the Austro-Hungarian Empire gave Serbia the official declaration of war. Within a few hours, Austrian monitors from the Danube fleet began shelling Belgrade. Although in a rush to start a war, the Austro-Hungarians were not fully ready for combat.

Once Russia entered the war, Vienna saw its worst nightmare realized: The necessity of fighting on two fronts, requiring the K.u.K. (*Kaiserlich und Königlich*—Imperial and Royal) Army to urgently transfer nearly an entire army (the 2nd) to Galicia, where Imperial forces already there would soon be heavily outnumbered by the building Russian onslaught. The Serbian front was quickly reduced to a secondary front with fewer K.u.K. divisions—a grave mistake.

The Serbian-Austro-Hungarian borders were mainly rivers, with many swamps. In the center of Serbia were mountains difficult to penetrate, and thick woods covered about two-thirds of the future combat area. The train and road infrastructure in Serbia was rudimentary, creating logistical problems for the invaders.

THE OPPOSING ARMIES

The Austro-Hungarian Army

Initially, the Empire had three armies prepared for the invasion of Serbia: the 2nd Army in Syrmia and the Banat, the 5th Army in East-Central Bosnia, and the 6th Army in Northern Bosnia. The supreme commander was Emperor Franz Josef, while the commander-in-chief of the field forces was General of Infantry Baron Franz Conrad von Hötzendorf.

*Once Russia entered
the war, Vienna saw
its worst nightmare
realized....*

The Austro-Hungarian Army was made up of soldiers and officers from at least eleven ethnicities, who spoke as many languages: 44% were Slavs, 28% Austrians, 18% Hungarian, 8% Romanians. The official languages were German across most units and Hungarian for the Hungarian units. Some officers knew both, but soldiers usually spoke their native languages and maybe spoke one of the two official languages if they had studied at a higher level. Communications were therefore often a problem, especially in crisis situations. Also, loyalties were often split, many of the soldiers having ideals of independence for their

provinces (Czechs, Slovaks), or looking to unite with the neighboring national states (Romanians, Serbs).

The army consisted of five different structures: 1. The infantry and cavalry of the regular Imperial Army, plus the War Navy; 2. The Austrian Infantry/*Landwehr*; 3. The infantry and cavalry of the Royal Hungarian Army; 4. The Austrian Territorial Army/*Landsturm*; 5. The Hungarian Territorial Army. The Empire also had a small but important air force—planes, balloons, airships, and naval aviation.

In July 1914, the Empire mobilized 1,800,000 soldiers, with mostly modern weapons and equipment, and commanders with good theoretical knowledge, although without actual combat experience. The economy was healthy, but not prepared for a long war.

The Serbian Army

The Serbian Royal Army (*Srpska Vojska*) was much smaller than its opponent's, but it had recently fought successfully in the two Balkan Wars of 1912-1913. The high command in Belgrade was able to concentrate around 420,000 soldiers in five armies by 30 July 1914, three of these in the north where the greatest threat was perceived.

The Serbian army troops were divided into three "lines" as follows: the first line were young men aged 21-31, wearing the new *feldgrau* uniforms; the second line was the National Army (*Narodna Vojska*) with men aged



32-37, wearing the old blue uniforms; and the third line comprised men between 38 and 45, most wearing only their own civilian or peasant clothes.

The Territorial Army (*Poskania Odrbrana*), with young men between 18 and 20, and men between 46 and 50, manned garrisons and worked on maintaining lines of communication and other services within the army.

Beside these main field units, Serbia also had militias—the *chetniks*—border troops, aviation, gendarmerie (rural police), and a small Royal Guard at the Royal Palace in Belgrade. With a much smaller population, Serbia was not able to replace military losses as easily as the K.u.K.

The supreme commander of the Serbian army was Crown Prince Alexander, and the commander-in-chief, Field Marshal (*Voivoda*) Radomir Putnik, was a national hero from the Balkan Wars. The Serbs' nationalist fervor and successful combat experience in the two Balkan Wars of 1912-1913 provided an important edge over the invading K.u.K. forces. Serbian artil-

lery was new, and the artillery crews were professionals. Infantry weapons were scarce and old, and ammunition stocks were very low after the Second Balkan War.

The 420,000 Serbian soldiers had to defend 550 kilometers of border with Austria-Hungary. The Serbian Army was divided into three main armies, one guarding Belgrade and the north of the country on the right bank of the Danube, and another the western border, toward Bosnia. Their initial location was the Palanka-Arandelovac-Lazarevac Line—in the east stood the First Army; to the west was the Second Army; and behind the Danube border patrols, the reserves. In the northwest was the Third Army; a reserve unit at Valjevo; militias had been gathered all over the country; in the south of Serbia was the Uzice Group.

The Montenegrin Army

Montenegro was one of the smallest countries in Europe, with a population of only 400,000. The army, around 50,000 strong, had recently been mod-

ernized, after the 1906 reforms, and was commanded by King Nikola I and Prince Danilo.

A royal guard of 100 and a few hundred gendarmes completed the armed forces. There were no cavalry, air force, or navy. There were only 100 Italian-made artillery pieces and discipline was deficient, but the combative spirit was high due to Montenegrin success in the recent Balkan Wars.

In July 1914, after the defensive pact with Serbia, the Montenegrin army entered the war under Serbian command. At the end of July, 35,000 soldiers had been mobilized, with one third guarding the border facing Albania, and the other two thirds in the Pljevlje area, to support the Serbs in a planned operation toward Sarajevo.

THE FIRST BALKAN CAMPAIGN

The Austrian 6th Army commander in Bosnia, General of Artillery Oskar Potiorek, prepared an all-out assault across the Drina River. On 6 August Potiorek also received command of



Field Marshal Radomir Putnik led Serbia to victory in the Balkan Wars. He then skillfully used a combination of delaying tactics, organized withdrawals, and devastating counterattacks to defeat Austria-Hungary's offensives in 1914. (Library of Congress)

the 5th Army, but the Austrian 2nd Army was held back by Conrad and sent to Galicia on the eighteenth.

The Serbs and Montenegrins struck first on 7 August (a week before the French and Russian attacks), advancing into southeastern Bosnia while also bombarding the Austrian Adriatic port city of Kotor (Cattaro).

On 9 August, the Austrians attacked toward Mitrovica-Sabac, and on the twelfth crossed the Drina River. The initial advance succeeded as the Serbs put up little resistance, slowly withdrawing from their enemy. The Austrian rapid invasion had one huge disadvantage—the supply train could not keep pace and fell behind. In addition, the K.u.K. intelligence services had no accurate information on the location of the Serbian field forces, and Austrian air reconnaissance could not see much in the forests in front of the their advancing troops.

On the twelfth, after a powerful artillery barrage, the Austrians crossed the Sava River at Klenak and occupied Šabac, a strategic bridgehead in northwestern Serbia. The Serbs withdrew fighting, while the Austrians moved forward, attacked from time to time by Serbian militias hidden in swamps and forests.

On 14 August, the withdrawing Serbs reorganized their defenses, and, together with the Valjevo group, occupied positions on Cer Mountain, southwest of Šabac.

The Austrians, unknowingly, were



moving from Ljesnica toward hidden Serbian defensive positions. Serbian artillery hit the advancing K.u.K. columns on the road, causing casualties and delaying the Austrian advance. When the armies finally met, violent combat occurred all along the lines, with heavy losses on both sides. The Serbs had to eventually withdraw, in the evening, under very efficient artillery cover, causing further losses to the Austrians.

In the morning, the Serbs attacked the Austrian positions around Šabac from the south and east, rapidly closing in on the city. Reinforcements and fire from Austrian river monitors on the Sava finally stopped the attack. Austrian supply convoys were harassed by militias and even armed

civilians. No K.u.K. direct attack on Belgrade was attempted from across the Danube River, as this was judged to be extremely unwise.

THE FRONT IN MONTENEGRO

The Austrians attacked the Montenegrins on 15 August but were eventually stopped by the delaying tactics of their opponents in the difficult terrain. Again, Austrian supply columns had difficulty reaching the front lines. On 17 August, an Austrian onslaught forced the Montenegrin troops to withdraw from Herzegovina.

THE BATTLE ON THE JADAR, 16-19 AUGUST 1914

The final episode of the summer

campaign in Serbia occurred on the Jadar River, near the Serbian-Bosnian border, south of Cer Mountain. Potiorek was determined to obtain a decisive victory by crushing Serb resistance in the Cer area, breaking through the front to the east of Šabac, and capturing Belgrade. The Austrians obtained limited successes in the south, at Krupanj and toward Valjevo, as the Serbs withdrew to the heights to the east that were easier to defend.

Early on the morning of 18 August, Serbian armies counterattacked along almost the entire length of the front, with battles at Zavlaka, Tekeris and Šabac, among others. The Serbian offensive was unexpected and the Austrian command ordered all troops to begin withdrawing to Bosnia immediately. The Serbs did not pursue the retreating Austrian troops.

On 20-21 August, fighting occurred around Visegrad and Priboj, but the main action was at Šabac. The town was still held by the Austrians, who wished to keep it as a bridgehead for future operations against Serbia. This hope collapsed when the Serbian attack that began on 21 August was followed by a general assault the following day. The Serbs entered the city and fought in the streets, while their artillery pounded the city and the bridge across the Sava. After heavy fighting, the Austro-Hungarians withdrew across the river by the twenty-fourth. The Serbian summer campaign had ended.

Thirteen days before the French counteroffensive known as the Battle of the Marne, Serbia had given its Entente allies the first major victory

of the war.

Potiorek would direct two more Austrian offensives against Serbia in 1914. The K.u.K.'s second offensive in September was stopped by early October, but Potiorek's third offensive, which began in late October, succeeded in capturing Belgrade by 2 December. However, after capturing much of northern Serbia, the K.u.K. forces were exhausted from heavy losses, bad weather, and an overextended supply line. In early December the Serbs launched a massive counterattack that forced Potiorek to order a retreat back across the Sava—"a great and painful setback" according to the frustrated commander. Belgrade was back in Serbian hands by 16 December.

Despite its victory in the 1914 campaign, Serbia suffered huge losses in men and material, and their supplies of ammunition were depleted. Besides the soldiers killed in action, hundreds of civilians accused of espionage and guerrilla activities had been executed by the invading troops. Supplies from its Entente allies were not forthcoming, and thousands of Austro-Hungarian prisoners taken during the fighting had to be housed and fed.

1914 ended with Serbia's morale high as the army waited confidently for future events. The conclusion printed in the Austro-Hungarian official history admitted: "Unfortunately the political and moral effects of the setback..., had a very depressing effect on the self-confidence and esteem of the Monarchy."



For further reading the author recommends:

Österreich-Ungarns letzter Krieg 1914–1918, vol. I (Vienna, 1930).

Dusan Babac, *The Serbian Army in the Great War, 1914–1918* (Helion, 2015).

Peter Jung, *The Austro-Hungarian Forces in World War I, vol. 1* (Osprey, 2003).

Andrei Pogăciaș earned a Ph.D. from the Babeș-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, with a dissertation on the 18th century Austrian-Russo-Turkish Wars. Pogăciaș, an ancient and medieval historic reenactor, is passionate about military history, studying Romanian warfare from the Dacians to World War 2.



INDECISION FORFEITS A POTENTIAL K.U.K. VICTORY



Oskar Potiorek believed that Conrad's strategy was to overrun Serbia before opening the campaign against Russia and he therefore planned his attack accordingly. However, for seven critical days Conrad kept secret from Potiorek that he had decided to transfer the 2nd Army and five of the 16-1/2 K.u.K. divisions in the Balkans—30% of the Imperial field divisions deployed against Serbia—to Galicia to oppose the Russians. Potiorek had to quickly develop an ad hoc offensive operation, but his effort ultimately failed. The K.u.K. official history concluded: "A major defeat at the hands of the small state of Serbia... [had] much greater consequences than at the hands of the overwhelmingly powerful Tsarist Empire. It would tarnish Austrian prestige in the eyes of the whole world, but particularly in the Balkans where success was so greatly needed to gain allies [Bulgaria and perhaps Romania]." (*Österreich-Ungarns letzter Krieg 1914–1918*.)

Carpathian Frozen Slaughterhouse

Decimation of the Habsburg Army

By Graydon A. Tunstall, with maps by Philip Schwartzberg and photos from the Library of Congress

During the opening months of World War One through the fall of 1914, the Austro-Hungarian Empire (also known as the Habsburg Monarchy and Dual Monarchy) suffered numerous defeats at the hands of little Serbia as well as against the numerically superior Russian forces pushing into Galicia and the Carpathian foothills in the northeast corner of Austria-Hungary. Then a bigger disaster enveloped the Habsburg armies over the winter of 1914-15.



Austro-Hungarian forces were unprepared for a winter war in the Carpathian Mountains. Men were inadequately equipped and supplied (note the blankets worn instead of greatcoats). All three Austro-Hungarian offensives were badly coordinated and poorly supported.

In early November 1914, for the second time in as many months, the Russians besieged the venerable Fortress Przemyśl (pronounced Sheh-mih-shuhl), an enormous but obsolete 1854 stronghold on the San River that blocked the northern entrance to the Carpathians. The Russians bottled up the Austro-Hungarian garrison and utilized the region around it as a staging ground to control the vital routes into the heart of Habsburg territory. Their ultimate goal: to drive the Austro-Hungarians out of the war.

Religious souls visualize hell as a blazing inferno with burning embers and intense heat. The soldiers fighting in the Carpathian Mountains that first winter of the war know otherwise.

*—Colonel Georg Veith,
Austro-Hungarian 3rd Army*

With some 130,000 Imperial troops under siege at Przemyśl and fearing a threatened invasion of Hungary, the Dual Monarchy had to take immediate steps to force the Russians from the Carpathian Mountains. In the winter of 1915, they launched three separate and equally ill-conceived offensives to liberate Fortress Przemyśl.

The geography of the Carpathians would play a key role in the military catastrophe to come. The mountains along the contested front formed an arcing barrier roughly 60 to 75 miles wide with a median el-

evation of some 3,600 feet. In 1914–1915, only a handful of poorly constructed roads and a few railroad lines traversed the main passes in that area. The mountains are often rainy in September and usually witness snowfall by November. They can remain covered in deep snow until spring, though sudden rises in temperature can also result in widespread flooding in the valleys.

Mountain warfare presents multiple difficulties for any major military action. Troops need to be specially trained, equipped, and accustomed to higher altitudes and the challenging terrain and weather. The ability to maneuver and maintain a regular supply system in mountain conditions is problematic. Many artillery batteries are confined to lower terrain, an obvious disadvantage for attacking infantry.

Much of the blame for the calamitous winter campaign can be laid at the feet of the Chief of the Austro-Hungarian General Staff, General of Infantry Baron Franz Conrad von Hötzendorf. The Habsburg command had made no contingency plans for a mountain campaign lasting into the winter months—one of its many disastrous failures—because they accepted the “short war illusion.”

Conrad saw in the Carpathian Mountains an opportunity to regain prestige with a (hopefully) swift military victory over the Russians. Like others in the Habsburg hierarchy, he feared that the physical loss of Fortress Przemyśl and its garrison would lead to a crushing morale loss in the army and weaken the credibility of the Dual Monarchy itself. So his main objective became the liberation of the besieged stronghold.

Conrad’s grandiose plan, hatched in December, called for an offensive to be launched along a broad 100-mile forested front in the northern Carpathians by the Habsburg 3rd Army, even though it had not recovered from its costly October-to-De-

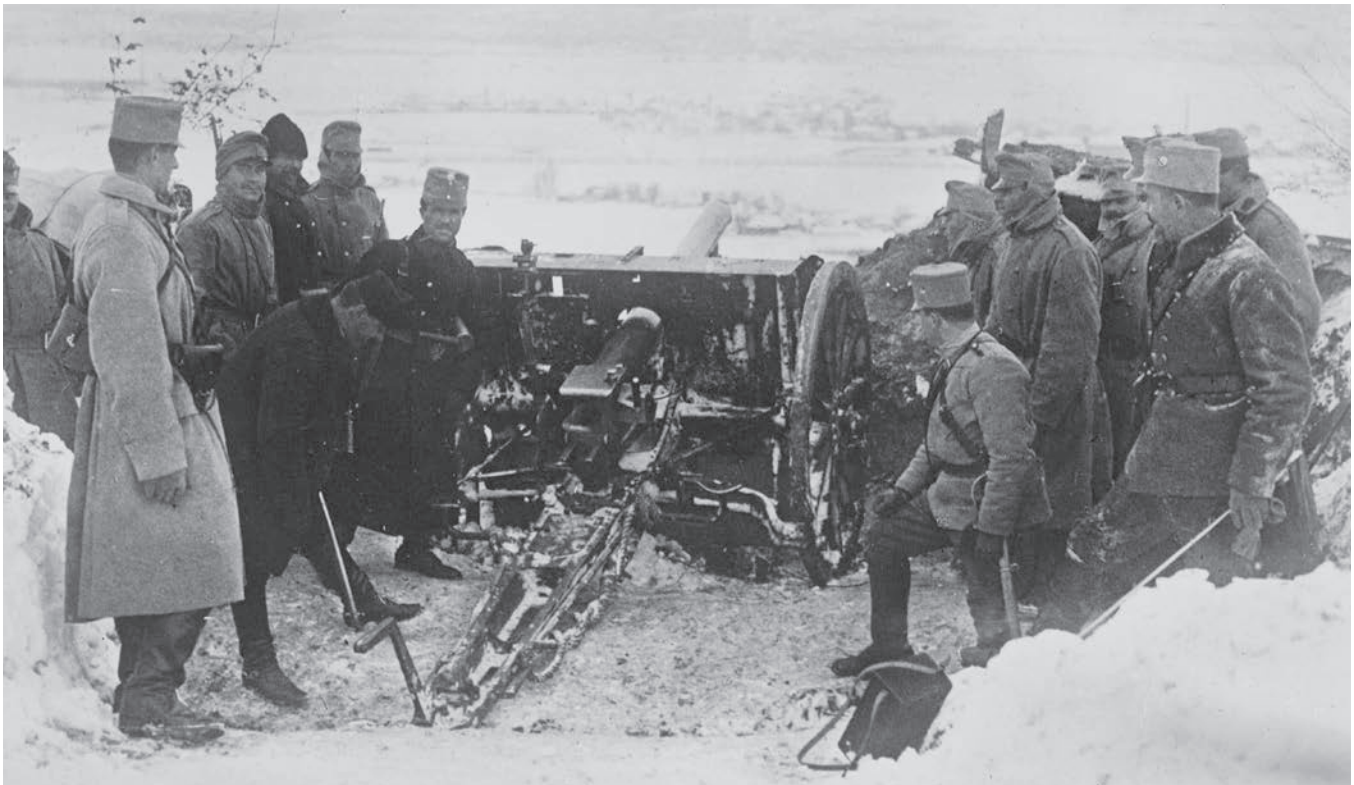


cember defeats. The newly created South Army, composed of three divisions from the German army and the rest—the majority—of Habsburg units, would simultaneously attack the Russians’ extreme left flank. Conrad believed his troops’ capabilities and the element of surprise were critical assets in his plan but that a bit of luck would also be needed for the offensive to succeed.

On 23 January 1915, the first offensive began. 3rd Army consisted

of 15 infantry and four and a half cavalry divisions supported by the neighboring South Army’s three infantry and two cavalry divisions. The combined offensive force of 175,000 men quickly proved inadequate to achieve the difficult mission assigned it, which was to secure the communication and rail centers in and around the towns of Medzilaborce, Lisko, Sanok, and Sambir.

The Habsburg forces did win some early minor victories, ad-



Few roads, harsh weather, and unsuitable terrain severely limited the deployment of artillery in the Carpathian Mountains.

vancing into a 24-mile gap in the Russian lines. But that progress was achieved against numerically inferior enemy units. By 26 January, 3rd Army's front extended 60 miles between the vital Dukla and Uzhok Passes. Despite this success, the battle was already turning as the Russians began to launch massive counterattacks.

A sudden, severe shift in the weather further undermined the Habsburg situation. The combination of weather-related and battle casualties rapidly depleted Austro-Hungarian frontline troop strength, reducing many divisions to only regiment- or brigade-size. By early February, the first Carpathian Mountain offensive had all but collapsed. Russian forces continued to hold key passes in the region, including the strategic Dukla Pass.

Following their successful counterattacks, Russian troops poured through the Dukla Pass to threaten important railroad junctions. They

soon outnumbered and stalled the Austro-Hungarian forces some 50 miles from Fortress Przemyśl, eliminating any chance of breaking the siege. By mid-February the Russians had effectively regained the initiative.

Combat exhaustion under winter mountain conditions is incomprehensible to anyone who has not suffered through such an experience. Habsburg troops routinely lacked basic necessities. Food supplies often did not reach the front at all, and when they did, they were usually frozen solid. Heavy rainfall, blinding snowstorms, and icy river crossings left the soldiers' uniforms frozen to their bodies. The men lacked proper winter attire, and most suffered lung ailments and frostbite—many froze to death. What meager equipment the troops did receive proved unsuitable: Boots with cardboard soles, for example, quickly became unusable.

The Habsburg Supreme Com-

mand displayed a profound ignorance of these obvious conditions—an utter failure to recognize the realities of mountain warfare in winter. Many troops were deployed on open terrain with no cover and in subzero temperatures for extended periods, leaving many vulnerable to frostbite. Soldiers struggled to stay awake to avoid freezing. In snow that was often three to six feet deep, movement was especially difficult and exhausting. Tens of thousands of horses—critical to the Habsburg supply chain—also succumbed to overexertion and starvation.

Conditions were especially terrifying at night, with shrieking wind, impenetrable darkness, mysterious mountain sounds, and ice that could cake eyelids shut. Worst of all were the wolves that sometimes made a meal of wounded men.

The situation faced by frontline soldiers was exacerbated by the lack of reserves and reinforcements. The Dual Monarchy was the only



In 1915 Russian field armies suffered from a shortage of artillery shells and rifles—note the second line of men have no weapons.

major power that did not have a reserve army; it failed even to propose the creation of one until much too late. Hundreds of thousands of Habsburg soldiers were forced to occupy their positions until killed, wounded, captured, or listed as missing in action—meaning they had probably frozen to death. No relief was possible.

Another fatal flaw of Conrad's first Carpathian Mountain offensive was the uncoordinated Austro-Hungarian attack efforts. Individual units would attack single enemy positions without communicating with their neighboring units.

The Russians, on the other hand, regularly rehabilitated their front-line regiments, utilizing their shorter and more conveniently located road and railroad connections in the lower mountains. This advantage ended once they advanced farther into the mountains, but at all times they held the advantage of being more accustomed to and pre-

pared for the climate and terrain. In addition, the Russians were tactically superior, better led, and had superior artillery.

The Habsburg 3rd Army suffered immense losses during the first Carpathian offensive. Two weeks after it began, official sources listed 88,900 men as casualties. Its total losses during the offensive exceeded 75 percent, most of them resulting from severe frostbite, exposure, or illness. The 3rd Army commander, Svetozar Boroevic, rightfully claimed that his army had not been prepared for the demands of a mountain winter campaign.

Conrad had little patience for such rationales of defeat. Dissatisfied with the 3rd Army performance, he transferred the more pliable General Eduard von Bohm-Ermolli from the German front to the Carpathian Mountain theater.

A newly formed 2nd Army, initially consisting of 60,000 to 70,000 exhausted 3rd Army right-flank units,

was to deploy between 3rd and South Army positions. A further six and a half infantry divisions would be transferred to the front to support the new 2nd Army offensive. Meanwhile, the Habsburg VIII Corps was transferred from the Balkan front to support the 3rd Army's effort to push the Russians out of the critical Dukla and Uzhok Passes.

As the planned day of attack, 25 February, approached, the combination of falling temperatures and the incessant movement of troops and supplies all but destroyed the few roadways leading toward the front. Moreover, disease was spreading through the ranks as hygiene deteriorated along with physical condition; again, frostbite and sickness claimed entire regiments, diminishing the already inferior Habsburg troop numbers.

Despite attacking on a much smaller, 12-mile front, the results were the same. Conrad's second Carpathian offensive failed com-

UNDERESTIMATING WEATHER, TERRAIN, AND HIS ENEMIES



Although Conrad von Hötzendorf won a victory for the Dual Monarchy at the battle of Limanova-Lapanov in early December 1914, his “shortsightedness and wishful thinking”—plus Russian superior numbers and ability to swiftly and effectively neutralize Conrad’s offensives—led to disastrous losses for the Austro-Hungarian (K.u.K.) Army. Graydon Tunstall summarized the result:

“Much of the blame for the flawed Carpathian Winter War strategy can be placed on [Conrad]. All three campaigns shared common characteristics: there was an obvious lack of preparation and forethought in the planning that resulted in faulty decision making; there was a general failure to concentrate troop mass at the most significant attack points; and insufficient reserve troops were available to maintain momentum if victory occurred....

“...the Carpathian Winter War...provided a stark lesson about the negative effects of inadequate leadership.” (*Blood on the Snow*)

pletely, leaving the Austro-Hungarian army 60 miles short of besieged Przemyśl.

Still, Conrad refused to give up. The 2nd Army’s V Corps, positioned closest to the fortress and somewhat reinforced, received orders for an impossible mission: to liberate Przemyśl between 20 and 23 March. Meanwhile, on the twentieth, the Habsburg forces remaining in the Carpathians had to defend against a series of Russian mass assaults in rapid succession in an effort to hurl the Habsburg 2nd and 3rd Armies back over the mountain ridges. The day before that, on 19 March, the starving soldiers at Przemyśl, who had been living off horse meat and bread fillers for months, had attempted a farcical but extremely bloody breakout. It ended disastrously, and the garrison troops inside the besieged fortress at last surrendered on the twenty-second. Later it became known that the Russians had broken the Austro-Hungarian communication code and thus knew of the planned fortress breakout attempt.

Incredibly, neither the 2nd Army Command nor V Corps was informed of the fortress surrender, so a few days later, V Corps launched its completely pointless offensive. Having no chance of success, this third effort failed—with yet more Habsburg casualties.

Fortress Przemyśl had come to symbolize Austro-Hungarian military prestige. Fearful of losing it to the enemy, Conrad had allowed the fortress to distort his strategy to the point that two Habsburg armies were almost annihilated by the end of the Carpathian Winter War cam-

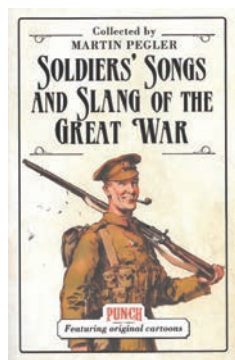
paign. Hundreds of thousands of men lost their lives, with scant gains to show for their sacrifice. Conrad’s flawed planning and battlefield failures also resulted in the German military exerting greater control over the Habsburg command for the rest of the war.

What saved the Dual Monarchy that first winter of the Great War was the Russian strategy of driving through the Carpathian Mountains to deliver a deathblow to Austria-Hungary, which proved equally flawed. The campaign forced the Russians to deploy increasing numbers of troops into the inhospitable mountain terrain, drawing them ever deeper into a region that limited their mobility and dangerously overextended their already strained supply lines. When the Germans launched their successful Gorlice-Tarnow offensive in eastern Poland in May, the Russians were ill prepared, and that offensive gave the Central Powers their greatest victory of the entire war. It helped stabilize the Eastern Front while rescuing Austria-Hungary from certain defeat.

Although the disastrous Carpathian Winter War has received scant attention over the past century, it was critically important to the First World War’s Eastern Front and foreshadowed the more famous “bloodbath” battles of 1916 at Verdun and the Somme in the West. It stands as a lasting reminder of how unimaginably brutal conditions can transform a mountainous battlefield into a frozen hell.



*Graydon A. Tunstall is a Senior Lecturer at the University of South Florida. His book **Blood on the Snow: The Carpathian Winter War of 1915**, received an honorable mention for the 2010 Tomlinson Prize award.*

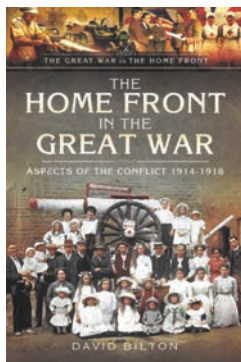


Soldiers' Songs and Slang of the Great War

Collected by Martin Pegler
Osprey Publishing, 2014
382 pages, period posters and cartoons from Punch and Wiper's Times, appendices, select bibliography
ISBN 9781472804150
\$12.95

The Home Front in the Great War: Aspects of the Conflict 1914-1918

By David Bilton
Pen & Sword Books, 2003, reprinted 2013
256 pages, select bibliography, numerous photographs and illustrations
ISBN 9781783461776
\$29.95
Available in the U.S. through Casemate Publishers



Soldiers' Songs and Slang of the Great War is an update and enlargement of a book first published in 1931. The current book includes phrases that were deemed inappropriate in earlier editions. The slang is

both mystifying and well known. For example, a "goo wallah" is the sanitary man. Other items such as a "flapper's delight" for a young officer are self-explanatory even now.

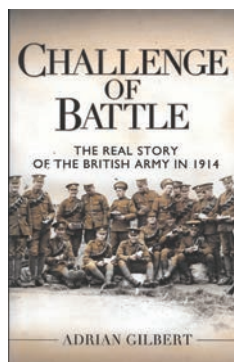
The songs lack any musical notations and only the lyrics are printed. Many use melodies set to well-known tunes—those by Gilbert and Sullivan seem to be popular as are folk melodies from the British countryside. The lyrics are commentaries on life at the front, the memories of home, and patriotic themes. By war's end parodies are widespread. Songs from America and France are included, even "Adieu la Vie" (Chanson of Craonne) which was banned in France until 1974. The English translation is buried in the appendix, but is worth finding. The song is an indictment by the soldiers in the field of their treatment by the French army and government.

The Home Front in the Great War covers the British home front and the Hull area in detail. There is a chronological section at the beginning that provides an overview of events back in "Blighty," followed by short essays on the efforts by groups from the Royals to the YMCA to support of the war effort. The report on the Boy Scouts is especially laudatory.

Both books use a good variety of images and are entertaining to read. Unfortunately, neither book has an index, making it almost impossible to use them for reference purposes.

Anne Merritt

Editor's Note: Dozens of World War One books, DVDs, etc., are listed in Len's Bookshelf, a feature of the World War One Historical Association's website: www.ww1ha.org



Challenge of Battle The Real Story of the British Army in 1914

By Adrian Gilbert
Osprey Publishing, 2013
304 pages, hardbound, index, maps, photos, appendices, source notes, bibliography includes unpublished sources, memoirs and diaries.
ISBN 978149088596
\$25.95

Author Adrian Gilbert's introduction notes that: "British histories of the 1914 campaign typically adopt the emotionally comforting paradigm of the plucky Briton giving the overbearing foreign bully a bloody nose." Gilbert goes on to state "...my intention is to look afresh at the British Army during 1914....My aim is not by any means to belittle the army's many achievements but to provide a more realistic assessment of the army set within a general narrative of the war in 1914."

Gilbert's book succeeds admirably, and not as a revisionist work but rather as a corrective supplement to the controversial *Official History of the First World War* multi-volume series published between 1922 and 1948. Although the 1914 volumes of the *Official History* were not subject to as much debate as later books in the series, Gilbert still found "significant instances of evasion and omission, and, on occasion, outright distortion" in the 1914 volumes of the *Official History*.

For example, Gilbert's research contradicts the official version of the battle of Le Cateau (26 August) as a successful delaying action fought against great odds. The author explains that such misrepresentations are important because the *Official History* was "so influential in defining the outlook of subsequent histories of the war." As an example, Gilbert quotes historian John Terraine who described Le Cateau as "one of the most remarkable British feats of arms of the whole war." *Challenge of Battle* devotes five detailed chapters to the preliminary maneuvers and decisions to fight at Le Cateau, the battle itself, "Failures of Command," and the continuing retreat of the BEF. Gilbert's book clearly proves that Le Cateau was a British tactical defeat, but it remains to be seen whether his new work can overcome well-established myths.

Dana Lombardy, Publisher WWOI

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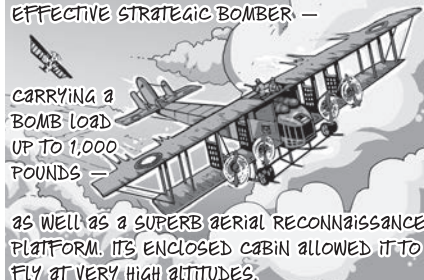
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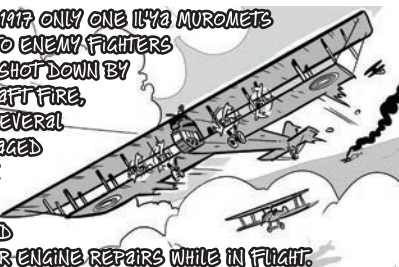


CARRYING A
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POUNDS —

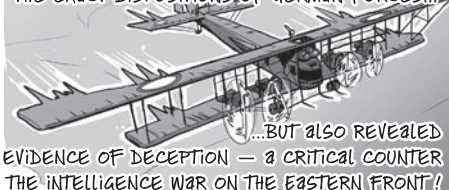
AS WELL AS A SUPERB AERIAL RECONNAISSANCE
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FLY AT VERY HIGH ALTITUDES.

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ANTI-AIRCRAFT FIRE,
ALTHOUGH SEVERAL
WERE DAMAGED
IN COMBAT.

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CREW COULD
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ON 12 APRIL, 1915, A MISSION OVER EAST PRUSSIA
USED MULTIPLE CAMERAS TO DISCOVER NOT ONLY
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...BUT ALSO REVEALED
EVIDENCE OF DECEPTION — A CRITICAL COUNTER
IN THE INTELLIGENCE WAR ON THE EASTERN FRONT!

SOURCES: Il'ya Muromets Bomber: The Pride of Russian Aviation, Marat Khairulin, Eksmo Publishing, 2010.

Special thanks to Terry Finnegan, author of the definitive book on WW1 aerial reconnaissance, Shooting The Front.

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