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**OUT OF MY LIFE**







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FIELD-MARSHAL VON MACKENSEN



# OUT OF MY LIFE

By  
MARSHAL VON HINDENBURG

Translated by F. A. HOLT

With Frontispiece and Maps

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# OUT OF MY LIFE

## CHAPTER XII

### MY ATTITUDE ON POLITICAL QUESTIONS

#### I

#### *Foreign Policy*

I HAD always felt it my duty to take an interest in the great historical past of our Fatherland. The life histories of its great sons were to me of equal importance with books of devotion. Under no circumstances, not even war, would I neglect these sources of instruction and inward inspiration. And yet it would be perfectly accurate to say that mine is a nonpolitical temperament. It was against my inclination to take any interest in current politics. Perhaps my liking for political criticism is too weak, and possibly my soldierly instincts are too strong. The latter are certainly responsible for my dislike of everything diplomatic. This dislike can be called prejudice or want of understanding. I would not have dis-

avowed the fact, even here, if I had not had to give expression to it so often and so loudly during the war. I had the feeling that the business of diplomacy made unfamiliar demands on us Germans. No doubt this is indeed one of the principal reasons for our backwardness in matters of foreign politics. This backwardness must of course have played a larger part the more we seemed to be becoming a world people as the result of the immense development of our trade and industry and the spread of the German spirit beyond the frontiers of the Fatherland. I never found among German statesmen that sense of political power, silent but self-contained, which was characteristic of the English.

When holding my high posts of command in the East, and even after I was appointed Chief of the General Staff of the Field Army, I had never felt either necessity or inclination to mix myself up in current political questions more than was absolutely necessary. Of course I believed that in a coalition war, with its innumerable and complicated problems that affect the conduct of operations, it was impossible for the military leaders to have absolutely no say in political affairs. Nevertheless, I recognized that the standard which Bismarck had laid down for the relations between military and political leadership in war was thoroughly sound as applied to our case also. Moltke



himself was adopting the Bismarckian point of view when he said: "The commander in his operations has to keep military victory as the goal before his eyes. But what statesmanship does with his victories or defeats is not his province. It is that of the statesman." On the other hand, I should never have been able to account to my conscience if I had not brought forward my own views in all cases in which I was convinced that the efforts of others were leading us on doubtful paths, if I had not applied driving power where I thought I detected inaction or aversion to action, and if I had not made the very strongest representations when the conduct of operations and the future military security of my country were affected or endangered by political measures.

It will be allowed that the border line between politics and the conduct of operations cannot be drawn with exact precision. The statesman and the soldier must have co-operated previously in peace time, as their different spheres unconditionally demand mutual understanding. In war, in which their threads are inextricably intertwined, they have to be mutually complementary the whole time. This complicated relation can never be regulated by definite rules. Even in Bismarck's incisive phraseology the boundaries seem to overlap on both sides. It is not only the problem at issue which decides in these questions, but also the

character and temperament of the men engaged in their solution.

I grant that I have covered many expressions of opinion on political questions with my name and responsibility even when they were only loosely connected with our military situation at the time. In such cases I thrust my views on no one. But whenever anyone asked what I thought, or some question cropped up which awaited, but did not find, a decision or the definition of the German point of view, I saw no reason why I should hold my peace.

One of the first political questions in which I was concerned, shortly after I assumed control of operations, was the future of Poland. In view of the great importance of this question during and after the war I think I ought to treat more fully of the manner in which it was handled.

Until of late I have never had any personal animosity against the Polish people. On the other hand, I should have been entirely lacking in patriotic instincts and the knowledge of historical evolution if I had ignored the serious dangers which the restoration of Poland involved for my country. I never had the slightest doubt that we could not expect a word of thanks from Poland for freeing her from the Russian knout with our sword and blood, as we had received little recognition for the economic and moral advancement of the Prussian

Poles among us. No feeling of gratitude—so far as such a thing exists in politics—would deter a restored, free Poland from seeing *irridenta* in our frontier provinces.

From whatever side a solution of the Polish problem was sought, Prussia—Germany—was bound to be the unhappy party who had to pay the bill. Austro-Hungarian statesmanship appeared to see no dangers to her own existence in the creation of a free, united Poland. Indeed, influential circles in Vienna and Buda-Pesth seemed to think that it would be possible to bind Catholic Poland permanently to the Dual Monarchy. In view of the thoroughly Germanophobe attitude of the Poles, this policy of Austria was pregnant with danger for us. It could not be ignored that it meant that the strength of our alliance would in future be put to a test which could not be borne in the long run. In no circumstances could Main Headquarters, anxious about our future military situation on the Eastern frontier, leave this political point of view out of sight.

In my view all these political and military considerations showed Germany that she should touch the Polish question as little as possible, or at any rate deal with it in a very dilatory fashion, to use an expression employed in such cases. Unfortunately, this was not done on the German side. The reasons why we did not act with the caution

that was required are unknown to me. However that may be, the fact is that in the middle of August, 1916, a compact was made at Vienna between the statesmen of Germany and Austria-Hungary, a compact which provided for the speediest possible announcement of an independent Kingdom of Poland with a hereditary constitutional Monarchy. Both the contracting parties had tried to make this agreement more palatable to us Germans by undertaking not to make over any part of their ancient Polish districts to the new Polish state, and by guaranteeing that Germany should have the right to command the future army of United Poland. I considered both concessions Utopian.

The political situation behind our Eastern Front would have been completely changed by this public announcement. For that reason my predecessor had immediately, and rightly, raised his voice against it. His Majesty the Emperor decided in favor of General von Falkenhayn. However, it was now clear to everyone who knew the conditions in the Danube Monarchy that the compact made in Vienna would not remain a secret. It might be kept an official secret for a short time still, but could not be got rid of altogether. As a matter of fact, it was known everywhere by the end of August. So when I went to Main Headquarters I was faced with a *fait accompli*. Shortly

afterward the Governor-General of Warsaw, who was not officially responsible to me, asked me on behalf of our government to announce the Polish Kingdom as an act which could no longer be postponed. He gave me the choice between difficulties in the country and the certain prospect of a reinforcement of our armies by Polish troops, a reinforcement which would amount to five trained divisions in the spring of 1917 and one million men on the introduction of universal military service. However unfavorable was the opinion I had formed in 1914 and 1915 of the prospects of any Polish contribution to the war against Russia, the Governor-General thought he knew better. He knew how the domestic situation of the conquered country had developed since 1915, and was convinced that the priests would help us with our recruiting.

In our military situation, how could I have taken the responsibility of declining this reinforcement which was promised so definitely? But if I decided to accept it no time must be lost if we were to put fully trained troops into the front lines by the time the next spring battles began. A victorious Germany would be able to settle the Polish question after the peace. At this point, greatly to my surprise, we met with objections on the part of the government. It was about this time that the government thought that they had discovered threads leading to a separate peace with Russia,

and therefore considered it bad policy to compromise the steps they had taken by proclaiming an independent Poland. Political and military views were thus in conflict.

The conclusion of the whole business was that the hopes of a separate peace with Russia broke down, that the manifesto was published in the early days of November, and that the recruiting of Polish volunteers, to which it referred, was entirely without results. Our recruiting appeals not only received no support from the Catholic priesthood, but were openly resisted by them.

As soon as the manifesto was published, the opposition between the interests of Austria and those of Germany in the Polish problem was at once revealed. Our allies were aiming more and more openly at the union of Congress Poland with Galicia, the whole being subject to their own suzerainty. As a reply to these efforts, and failing the ability of our government to bring them to naught, I considered that the least we could ask for was a corresponding ratification of our Eastern frontier from the purely military point of view.

Of course, the fact was that all these questions could only be decided by the result of the war. I therefore sincerely regretted that they took up so much of our time during the operations. But I cannot sufficiently insist that the friction between our allies and ourselves in political matters never

had the slightest influence on our military co-operation.

The role that was played by Poland in our relations with Austria-Hungary was played by the Dobrudja in our political and military dealings with Bulgaria. At bottom the Dobrudja question amounted to whether Bulgaria was to secure possession of the Cernavoda-Constanza railway by her acquisition of the whole province. If she did so, she would control the last and, after the Orient Railway, the most important land route between central Europe and the near Orient. Of course Bulgaria realized that the favorable moment to wring concessions from us in this direction was during the war. Turkey, on the other hand, as the country most immediately affected, asked for our political support against these Bulgarian plans. We gave her that support. Thus began diplomatic guerrilla warfare in military guise, and lasted nearly a year. Put shortly the position was as follows:

The alliance concluded between us and Bulgaria provided, in case of war with Rumania, for a return to our ally of that part of the southern Dobrudja which had been lost in 1912, as well as for frontier adjustments in that region; but it said nothing about the assignment of the whole Rumanian province to Bulgaria. In accordance with this compact, as soon as the Rumanian campaign was virtually over we had handed over the original

Bulgarian portions of the southern Dobrudja to be administered by the Bulgarian government, but established a German administration in the central Dobrudja in agreement with all our allies. As the result of a special economic agreement this German administration worked almost exclusively on behalf of Bulgaria. The northern Dobrudja, being in the military zone, was controlled by the Third Bulgarian Army there. As far as one could see, the matter seemed to have been arranged entirely satisfactorily. However, the satisfaction did not last for long.

The gauntlet was thrown down to us by the Bulgarian Minister-President. Even before the Rumanian campaign was over he had mooted to his Ministers the idea of the cession of the whole of the Dobrudja to Bulgaria, and represented the German General Staff as the obstacle in the way of these ambitions. The result was a strong political agitation against us. At first King Ferdinand had not agreed with the proceedings of his government, but at length he felt himself compelled to yield to the general excitement. In the same way, at the outset the Bulgarian General Staff had not let themselves be drawn into the affair. They fully realized the danger of a new element of unrest being added to the political currents within their army which themselves flowed strongly and diversely. However, before long even General Jekoff felt that



he could resist the pressure of the Minister-President no longer. The Bulgarian government lost control of the movement they had started, and the result was a general political outcry against the German General Staff, an outcry which was mainly the work of irresponsible agitators and had no respect for the relations between brothers in arms. The obstinacy with which certain circles in Bulgaria pursued this goal of their ambitions would have been better devoted to attaining our common aims in the war.

This incident betrayed the consequences of a defective side of our compact with Bulgaria. When that compact was made, we had given the Bulgarians the most far-reaching assurances possible with regard to the aggrandizement of the country and the unification of the Bulgarian race. We should have been able to give effect to those assurances only if we had won a complete victory. Bulgaria, however, was not satisfied with these assurances. She was continually advancing fresh claims without stopping to consider whether such a small state would be able, later on, to manage her new acquisitions politically and economically.

Moreover, there was a direct military danger for us in these excessive ambitions. I have already said what a great military advantage it would have been to us to withdraw our line of defense on the western wing of the Macedonian front to the neigh-

borhood of Prilep. At the very suggestion of such a proceeding from our side, however, all political circles in Bulgaria joined in raising the most serious objections. They immediately feared that they would thus abandon all political claims to areas evacuated for military reasons. They preferred to risk a whole army rather than be responsible to their fellow countrymen for the abandonment of what they called the "old Bulgarian town of Ochrida." We shall see, later on, what our far-reaching concessions to Bulgaria were to involve.

The perplexities of all these innumerable political problems and counterproblems meant hours of thankless work for me, and considerably increased my aversion to politics.

The purport of our compact with Turkey was quite different from that with Bulgaria. As regards the Turkish government, we had only pledged ourselves before the war to maintain Turkey's territorial integrity. Now the Turks had lost an important part of their possessions in Asia during the first two years of the war. A very heavy burden had thus been laid on our treaty obligations. It did not seem impossible that these unhappy failures would have a harmful reaction on the conduct of operations. The Turkish government could base claims in this direction which we should possibly not be in a position to disregard, owing to

political reasons. In these circumstances Enver Pasha's lofty conception of our common purpose and its decisive issues was of the very greatest value. Moreover, for the time being, the political views of the other Turkish statesmen seemed to offer a guaranty that Turkey's previous losses would not involve an excessive overdraft on our military account. We were thus certain that in case peace negotiations were opened the Turkish government would not tie us down to the strict letter of our compact, but would accept the recognition of a more or less formal suzerainty over a large part of the lost territory so long as we succeeded in finding a formula which would preserve the prestige of the present government.

It was thus a very important task, both for our statesmen and our military commanders, to support the existing Ottoman government; it would not be easy to find a substitute for Enver or Talaat Pasha, who were completely and absolutely loyal to us. Of course, this does not mean that we attempted to check political currents in Turkey which had an adverse influence on the military task of the nation within the framework of the combined operations. I am referring here to my previous remarks about the Pan-Islam movement. From the military point of view it always tended to deflect Turkey into wrong paths. After the collapse of Russia, Pan-Islam sought its conquests in

the direction of the Caucasus. Indeed, it cast its eye beyond them to the Transcaspiian region, and finally lost itself in the distant areas of central Asia, inspired by the fantastic ambition of uniting all men of its own culture and faith under the Ottoman sway.

It was obvious that we could not lend military support to such Oriental political dreams, but that we must demand the abandonment of these far-reaching schemes for the sake of existing military realities. Unfortunately, all our efforts failed.

How much more difficult than our efforts to exercise influence on the problems of Turkish foreign policy must be those to obtain some influence on her domestic affairs. And yet we could not refrain from making at least an attempt to acquire such influence. It was not only her primitive economic condition that impelled us. Ordinary human feelings worked in the same direction.

The surprising revival of Ottoman military power and the renaissance of her ancient heroism in this fight for existence also showed up the darkest side of Turkish domination. I mean her attitude to the Armenian portions of her Empire. The Armenian question embodied one of Turkey's most difficult problems. It affected both the Pan-Turkish and the Pan-Islam ideals. The whole world took a deep interest during the war in the methods with which the fanatical Turk attempted

to solve it. Attempts have been made to associate us Germans with the horrible occurrences in the whole Turkish Empire, and, toward the end of the war, even in Armenian Transcaucasia. I therefore feel it my duty to touch on this question here, and indeed have no reason to pass over the part we played in silence. We never hesitated, both verbally and in writing, to exercise a deterrent influence on the savage and licentious methods of warfare which were traditional in the East, thanks to racial hatreds and religious animosities. We received soothing assurances from men high up in the Turkish government, but were not in a position to overcome the passive resistance which was opposed to our intervention. For example, the Turks insisted that the Armenian question was essentially their own domestic concern, and were very sensitive when we referred to it. Even our officers who happened to be on the spot frequently failed in their efforts to secure some moderation in the acts of hatred and vengeance. The awakening of the beast in a man fighting a life - and - death battle, and inspired by political and religious fanaticism, forms one of the blackest chapters in the history of all times and nations.

Moreover, observers of neutral nationalities were agreed in their opinion that from the point of view of massacre, the contending parties, stirred as they were to their inmost depths, were just as

bad as each other. This would be the natural result of the moral notions peculiar to races of this region, notions which seemed to be sanctified by the practice of the vendetta which still prevailed, or had only been out of date for a short time. The harm which was done by these massacres is quite immeasurable. It made itself felt not only in the human and political sphere, but even in economic and military affairs. The number of the best Turkish troops who came to a miserable death by privation in the Caucasian mountain winters during the war, as the result of this policy of massacre of the Armenians, will certainly never be known. The consequence of this wholesale slaughter by every imaginable kind of privation was that another chapter was added to the tragic history of the brave Anatolian soldier, the very backbone of the Ottoman Empire. Is it the last?

## II

## THE PEACE QUESTION

It was in the very middle of our preparations for the Rumanian campaign that the peace question came to my notice. So far as I know, it was first brought up by the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Minister, Baron Burian. Those who know me and my views on war will require no further assurance that my natural human feelings wel-

comed such a step. For the rest, the only motive behind the part I played in this question was the interests of my Emperor and country. I considered it my duty in this matter to strive for such a solution that neither the army nor the homeland should suffer any injury. Main Headquarters had to co-operate in settling the wording of our peace offer. It was a difficult and thankless task to avoid creating an impression of weakness at home and abroad while giving all provocative expressions a wide berth. I was able to see with what a devout sense of duty to God and man my All-Highest War Lord devoted himself to the solution of this peace problem, and I do not think that he regarded a complete failure of this step as probable. On the other hand, my own confidence in its success was quite small from the outset. Our adversaries had vied with one another in putting forward excessive claims, and it appeared to me out of the question that any of the enemy governments could and would voluntarily go back on the promises which they had made to one another and their peoples. However, this view did not in any way affect my honest intention to co-operate in this work for the good of humanity.

On December 12th our readiness to conclude peace was announced to our enemies. Our answer from enemy propaganda, as well as the hostile camps, was only scorn and a rebuff.

Hot on the heels of our own peace step came a similar effort on the part of the President of the United States. Main Headquarters was informed by the Imperial Chancellor of the suggestions which the President had made through the medium of our ambassador in the United States. I myself considered that President Wilson was not exactly suited to the role of an unprejudiced intermediary, as I could not overcome my feeling that the President had strong leanings toward our enemies, and more particularly England. That was indeed a perfectly natural consequence of his Anglo-Saxon origin. Like millions of my countrymen, I could not consider Wilson's previous attitude as neutral, although, possibly, it did not contravene the strict letter of neutrality. In all questions of breaches of international law the President treated England with all possible consideration. In so doing, he had received some very severe rebuffs. On the other hand, in the question of submarine warfare, which was our only reply to England's arbitrary actions, Wilson had shown the greatest touchiness and immediately taken to threats of war. Germany signified her assent to the principle of Wilson's proposals. The reply of our enemies to Wilson was a recital of their demands, which to all intents and purposes comprised the permanent economic and political paralysis of Germany, the dismemberment of Austria-Hungary,



and the destruction of the Ottoman state. To anyone who judged the military situation at that time dispassionately, it must have been obvious that the enemy's war aims had no prospect of acceptance except by a hopelessly defeated foe, and that we had no reason to regard ourselves in that position. In any case, as things were then, I should have regarded it as a crime to my country and a betrayal of our allies if I had taken any other course but absolutely refuse to consider enemy demands of that kind. In view of the military situation at the moment, my convictions and my conscience impelled me to regard no peace as a good peace which did not so secure our position in the world as to make us safe against the same kind of political oppression which had led to the present war, and enable us to offer our allies the support they required against any kind of menace. For me as a soldier it was a secondary matter along what political and geographical lines this purpose was achieved; the main thing was that it should be achieved. Further, I considered that there was no doubt that the German people and its allies would be strong enough to reject the unexampled enemy demands in arms, cost what it might. As a matter of fact, public opinion in our country was absolutely hostile to the enemy's claims. Nor was there at this time any indication of a tendency to give way on the part of Turkey

or Bulgaria. I considered that the vacillation of Austria-Hungary would be overcome. The main thing was that the Austro-Hungarian public should keep before their eyes the fate which the enemy's terms meted out to the Danube Monarchy, and should give a wide berth to the delusion that, for the time being, negotiations with the enemy on fairer lines was possible. We had already discovered, in dealing with Austria-Hungary, that she was capable of far more than she herself believed. Her government must find itself faced with blunt necessity, and would then find itself equal to even greater efforts. For all these reasons it was my opinion that it was a mistake to deal with Austria-Hungary with soft words. Such words do not strengthen and encourage confidence and resolution. This is true of politicians and soldiers alike. All in good time. But when things go hard, firm demands, combined with real resolution on the part of the strong, carry the weak along quick and farther than soft words about better times in the days to come.

In contrast to our view, President Wilson's message of January 22d to the American Senate saw in our enemies' declaration of war aims of January 10th a more suitable basis for peace efforts than our diplomatic note, which merely expounded the principles on which we agreed to the continuation of his steps for peace. This behavior on the part

of the President shook my confidence in his impartiality even further. I should not have refused my approval of the lofty and to a certain extent praiseworthy humanitarian note in his message if I had not searched it in vain for any rejection of the attempt of our enemies to hold us up as men of a lower order. Moreover, the sentence about the restoration of a single free and independent Poland aroused my distrust. It seemed to me to be aimed directly at Austria-Hungary and ourselves, to compel the Danube Monarchy to renounce Galicia, and would mean the loss of territory or suzerainty for Germany as well. In view of that, how could anyone speak of the impartiality toward the Central Powers of Wilson's mediation? For us, the message was a declaration of war rather than a peace proposal. If we had once committed ourselves into the hands of the President we should have found ourselves on a steep slope which threatened in the long run to bring us to a peace which would have meant the renunciation of our whole political, economic, and military position. It seemed to me not impossible that after the first step of consent we should gradually find ourselves politically farther and farther in the depths and end up by being compelled to capitulate in the military sense.

In October, 1918, I learned from certain publications that immediately after his message to the

Senate of January 22, 1917, President Wilson had informed the German ambassador in Washington of his willingness to take official steps for peace. The news had reached Berlin on January 28th. Until the autumn of 1918 I had never heard of this step of Wilson which apparently went pretty far to meet us. I do not know, even to-day, whether mistakes or a chain of adverse circumstances were responsible. In my view, war with America was inevitable at the end of January, 1917. At that time Wilson knew of our intention to start unrestricted U-boat warfare on February 1st. There can be no doubt that, thanks to the English practice of intercepting and deciphering our telegrams on this subject to the German ambassador in Washington, Wilson was as well informed about this matter as about the contents of all our other cables. The message to the Senate of January 22d, and the offer of mediation which accompanied it, were thus branded for what they were at the outset. Disaster was on its way. It could therefore no longer be averted by our declaration of January 29th that we were prepared to stop U-boat warfare out of hand if the President were successful in his efforts to establish a basis for peace negotiations. The events of 1918 and 1919 appear to me to confirm the opinions I then held at all points, opinions which were entirely shared by my First Quartermaster-General.

## III

*Home Politics*

When I was on the active list I had kept away from current questions of domestic politics. Even after my retirement they had interested me solely as a silent onlooker. I was never able to understand how it was that here and there the welfare of the Fatherland had to be sacrificed to mere petty party interests, and from the point of view of political conviction felt myself most at home in the shade of that tree which was firmly rooted in the ethico-political soil of the epoch of our great and venerable Emperor. That epoch, with what I regarded as its wonderful glories, seemed to have become part of me, and I adhered firmly to its ideals and principles. The course of events in the present war have hardly been of a kind to make me particularly enthusiastic about the developments of later times. A powerful, self-contained state in Bismarck's sense was the world in which I preferred my thoughts to move. Discipline and hard work within the Fatherland seemed to me better than cosmopolitan imaginings. Moreover, I fail to see that any citizen has rights on whom equal duties are not imposed.

In war I thought only of war. In my view of the seriousness of our situation all obstacles which prevented us from waging it with all our might should

be ruthlessly removed. Our enemies were doing so and we had to learn from their example. Unfortunately, we did not do so, but pursued the phantom of international justice instead of putting our own national feeling and national strength before everything else in this fight for existence.

During the war Main Headquarters had to take an active interest in several internal problems, especially in the economic sphere. We did not seek these problems; they thrust themselves on our attention much more than we wished. The close relations between the army and industry made it impossible for us to draw a hard-and-fast line between industrial questions at home and the conduct of operations such as we had drawn between the war zones and the homeland.

I take full responsibility for the form of the great industrial program which bears my name. The one principle which I laid down for its working out was that the needs of our fighting troops must be supplied at any cost. I should have regarded any other foundation as a crime against our army and my country. It is true that our demands meant that the figures would reach gigantic proportions compared with what had gone before, but I did not venture to judge whether they could be attained. The program has been reproached, since the war ended, with having been dictated by despair. The inventor of that phrase has been woe-

fully misled about the point of view under the influence of which this program came into existence.

I had devoted myself whole-heartedly to the introduction of the Auxiliary Service law. It was my wish that in the crisis facing our Fatherland not only every man fit to fight, but every man fit to work, and even women, should place themselves or be placed at the disposal of our great cause. I was convinced that by a law of this kind, moral as well as personal forces would be released which we could throw into the scales of war. The final form of the law certainly produced somewhat modest results which indeed differed materially from those we had had in view. Disillusioned as I was, I almost regretted that we had not tried to achieve our purpose by utilizing existing legislation, as had been proposed in other quarters. The idea of presenting the acceptance of the law as a powerful and impressive manifesto by the whole German people had made me overlook the influence of the currents of domestic politics. In the long run, the law was passed, not through the pressure of public opinion, but on the grounds of industrial necessities.

The reproach has been leveled at Main Headquarters that in the Auxiliary Service law and the demands of the so-called "Hindenburg Program" they produced measures, ill considered in a social, financial, and economic sense, the consequences

of which can clearly be traced in our social revolution and even farther. I must leave the decision of this question to some future inquiry which will not be influenced by the present currents of party politics. One thing, however, I must refer to. The absence of an Industrial General Staff, trained for war, made itself very severely felt in the course of the struggle. Experience showed that such a staff could not be procured by magic during the war. Though our military and financial mobilization, if I may use the term, was brilliantly carried out, there was no industrial mobilization at all. What proved essential in this last respect, and therefore had to be introduced, exceeded all previous calculation. As a result of our virtually complete loss of foreign imports and the enormous consumption of material and ammunition as the result of the long duration of the war, we saw ourselves faced with quite new problems which human fancy had hardly ventured even to contemplate in peace time. As a result of the colossal problems which affected both the army and the nation very intimately, the closest co-operation of all the state authorities revealed itself as an absolute necessity if affairs were to be conducted with a minimum of friction. Indeed, it was really vital to create a common central authority, to which all demands should be made and from which all supplies should flow. Some such authority alone would have been



able to take far-seeing economic and military decisions; it would have had to act with an open mind and be assisted by economic experts who were in a position to foresee the consequences of their decisions. There was no such authority. I need not try to explain that only an unusually gifted intelligence and exceptional organizing powers could have been equal to such a task. Even if all these preliminary requirements had been fulfilled, there would still have been considerable friction.

In questions of domestic politics the more I endeavored to avoid getting mixed up in party wrangles, or even being appropriated by one of the existing parties, the greater was my pleasure to lend my support in social questions of a general nature. In particular, I thought it my duty to take a special interest in the question of soldiers' settlements. It was the ethical side of these schemes which more than anything else appealed to me. For I know nothing more agreeable and satisfying than the sight of a little nucleus of culture in the home of a happy man. How many of our brave heroes at the front must have hoped and longed for such a thing in quiet hours? My desire is that large numbers of my loyal comrades may realize those hopes after all their sufferings and strivings!

## CHAPTER XIII

### PREPARATIONS FOR THE COMING CAMPAIGN

#### I

#### *Our Tasks*

WHEN the results of the fighting in the year 1916 could be more or less realized, we had to get some clear idea of how the war was to develop in the year 1917. We had not the slightest doubt about what our enemies would do in the coming year. We had to anticipate a general hostile offensive as soon as their preparations and the weather permitted it. It was to be assumed that, warned by the experiences of the past year, our enemies would endeavor to co-ordinate their attacks on all fronts, if we left them time and opportunity to do so.

Nothing could commend itself more strongly, or be more in accordance with our desires and feelings, than to anticipate this general offensive, and in so doing blow the enemy's plans sky high and secure the initiative at the outset. I can certainly claim that with this end in view I had neglected nothing

in the past campaigning year, as soon as the necessary resources, on a scale at all adequate, had been put at my disposal. Now, however, we had to be careful that this ambition did not cloud our views of the tactical situation.

There was no doubt that, at the end of 1916, the position as regards relative numbers between us and our enemies had developed even more to our disadvantage than had been the case at the beginning of the year. Rumania had joined our enemies, and in spite of her heavy defeat remained a serious factor with which we had still to reckon. Behind the Russian lines the Rumanian army found shelter and time for reorganization, a process for which she could rely on the co-operation of the Entente in the fullest measure.

It was a fateful thing for us that throughout the whole war our High Command never succeeded in forcing even one of our smaller opponents, with the exception of Montenegro, to desert the ranks of our enemies. In 1914 the Belgian army had escaped from Antwerp and was now facing us, though practically inactive, and thus imposing on us a certain wastage which was not unimportant. Our experiences with the Serbian army in 1915 had been only superficially better for us. It had avoided our enveloping movements, though its condition was very pitiful. In the summer of 1916 it reappeared, once more

in fighting trim, in the Macedonian theater, and its units were being continually reinforced and increased from all kinds of countries, of late more particularly by Austro-Hungarian deserters of Slav nationality.

In all three cases—Belgium, Serbia, and Rumania—the fate of the hostile army had hung by a thread. The reasons for their escape were no doubt various, but the effect was always the same. Faced with facts such as these, it is only too easy to ascribe a large role to luck in war. The use of such an expression degrades war from its high place to the level of a game of chance. I have never regarded it as such. In its course and in its results, even when the latter turned to our disadvantage, I have always and everywhere seen the plain consequences of pitiless logic. He who helps himself, and can help himself, secures victory, and he who fails, or is forced to fail, loses.

For the campaign of 1917 we were in considerable doubt as to whether our main danger would come from the West or the East. From the standpoint of numerical superiority only, the danger appeared greater on the Eastern Front. We had to anticipate that in the winter of 1916-17, as in previous years, Russia would succeed in making good her losses and renewing the offensive powers of her armies. No intelligence came through to us which revealed any particularly striking indications of

the disintegration of the Russian army. Besides, experience had taught me to accept reports of this kind with extreme caution, whenever and from whatever source they originated.

Faced with this Russian superiority, we could not regard the condition of the Austro-Hungarian army without anxiety. Reports which we received did not reveal much confidence that the favorable issue of the Rumanian campaign, and the relatively favorable if still tense situation on the Italian front, had had a really uplifting and far-reaching influence on the *morale* of the Austro-Hungarian troops. We had further to anticipate that attacks by the Russians might once again mean the collapse of the Austrian lines. It was in any case impossible to withdraw direct German support from the Austrian front. On the contrary, we had to be ready to send further reinforcements to our allies' front in case of emergency.

It was equally uncertain how things would shape on the Macedonian front. In the course of the last battle a German army group headquarters had taken over the command of the right and center Bulgarian armies—in short, the front from Ochrida to Lake Doiran. Further, two other German commanders from the battles of 1915 and 1916 exercised authority on this front. German officers were occupied in giving the Bulgarian armies the benefit of their wealth of

experience on all our fronts. The result of this work would only be revealed when fighting was resumed. For the time being, it seemed advisable not to pitch our hopes too high. In any case, we had to be ready to send help to the Macedonian front also.

On our Western Front we had to expect that in the coming spring our enemies would reappear in the arena in full strength, in spite of the heavy losses they undoubtedly had suffered in the past year. I use the expression "full strength" in the conditional sense only, for though the troops could be brought up to their old level numerically in the course of a few months, it was not the same with their quality. In this respect the enemy was subject to the same hard laws as ourselves.

The tactical situation on the most important part of this front was much as follows. In a fierce and obstinate conflict on the Somme, which lasted five months, the enemy had pressed us back to a depth of about six miles on a stretch of nearly twenty-five miles. Let these figures be kept in mind for future comparison!

This success, which had been bought at the price of hundreds of thousands of lives, was truly small when compared with the length of our whole front. However, the salient in our lines affected the neighboring fronts north and south. It was urgently necessary that the position should be improved,

otherwise we ran a risk of being enveloped in this salient by enemy attacks there combined with secondary attacks north and south of it. An enveloping attack of our own against the enemy at the point where he had broken through was the most obvious remedy, but in view of our general situation it was almost the most doubtful. Could we venture to devote all our resources to a great attack in the Somme region, alive with enemy troops, while running the risk of a break-through on some other part of the Western Front or the Eastern Front? Once again it was seen that when our leaders, with great plans in mind, cast their gaze to one side, they could not close their eyes to what was going on elsewhere. In this respect the year 1916 spoke a language which made itself heard.

If an improvement in the configuration of the front bequeathed by the Somme battle could not be effected by an attack, it only remained to adopt the necessary alternative and withdraw our lines. We therefore decided to adopt that expedient, and transferred our line of defense, which had been pushed in at Péronne at one point and bulged out to west of Bapaume, Roye, and Noyon at others, to the chord position Arras-St.-Quentin-Soissons. This new line is known as the Siegfried Line.

So it was a case of retreat on the Western Front instead of attack! It was a dreadful disappoint-

ment for the army in the West; worse, perhaps, for the public at home; and worst—as we had good reason to fear—for our allies. Loud rejoicings among our enemies! Could more suitable material for propaganda be imagined? The brilliant, if somewhat belated, visible result of the bloody battle, the collapse of German resistance, the impetuous, unceasing pursuit, the paroxysms about our methods of warfare! We could hear all the stops being drawn out beforehand. What a hail of propagandist literature would now descend on and behind our lines!

Our great retirement began on March 16, 1917. The enemy followed us into the open, generally speaking, with considerable caution. Where this caution was inclined to give place to greater haste our rear guards knew how to cool down the enemy zeal.

The measure we took not only gave us more favorable local conditions on the Western Front, but improved our whole situation. The shortening of our lines in the West made it possible for us to build up strong reserves. We were attracted by the idea of throwing at least a part of those reserves upon the enemy at the very moment when he was following our retreat to the Siegfried position across the open country, where we felt ourselves absolutely superior to him. However, we renounced the idea and kept our powder dry for the future.



The situation which we created for ourselves by the spring of 1917 may perhaps be described as a great strategic "stand to," a stage in which we abandoned the initiative to the enemy for the time being, but from which we could emerge at any time to attack any of the enemy's weak points. In view of the enormously increased scale of everything, historical comparisons cannot be drawn from earlier wars.

In connection with these dispositions I must mention two plans to which we had to devote our attention in the winter of 1916-17. These were proposals for attacks in Italy and Macedonia. In the former case the initiative was taken by General Conrad von Hötzendorff during that winter. He promised himself a far-reaching effect on our entire military and political situation as a result of a great victory over Italy. I could not share that view. As I have already said, I was always of opinion that Italy was far too much under the heel of England, economically and therefore politically, for that country to be forced to make a separate peace, even after a great defeat. What General Conrad mainly had in mind in his proposal was the favorable effect of a successful campaign against Italy on public opinion in Austria-Hungary. He relied on the great relief of the military strain which such a victory would mean for Austria-Hungary. I could readily enough admit the justice

of these points of view. Without strong German help—it was a matter of about twelve German divisions—General Conrad considered he could never again undertake an attack on the Italians from the southern Tyrol. On the other hand, I did not think I could take the responsibility of allowing so many German troops to be locked up for an unlimited time in an enterprise which, in my opinion, lay too far from our Eastern and Western fronts, which were the most important and the most imperiled.

The same considerations applied to the question of an attack on the Entente troops in Macedonia. Bulgaria was toying with this plan, and very naturally from her own point of view, for if we had won a decisive victory it would have compelled the Entente to evacuate this region. By that means Bulgaria would have been practically completely relieved, in a political as well as a military sense. Further, the enterprise was dear to the heart of the nation and its government, for the Bulgarians were always casting greedy eyes at the fine harbor of Salonica which had been so great a bone of contention. I admit that this last point of view had no weight with me, and in my opinion at that time the military relief of Bulgaria would have been of no advantage to our general situation. If we had compelled the Entente forces to withdraw from Macedonia we should have had them on our

necks again on the Western Front. I always regarded it as at least doubtful whether we should have been allowed to employ the Bulgarian troops thus released outside the Balkans. The employment of Bulgarian divisions during the Rumanian campaign north of the Danube, outside the areas in which Bulgaria was directly interested, had previously led to unpleasant friction with these units. I therefore considered that the Bulgarian forces were rendering the greatest service to our joint operations when they were occupied in holding down the Entente armies in Macedonia. Of course this did not mean that I would not have warmly welcomed an independent Bulgarian offensive in Macedonia at any time. In that case its objective would have had to be very much more modest than the expulsion of the Entente from the Balkans or the capture of Salonica. But the Bulgarians considered that they could not embark on an offensive operation without substantial German help—at least six divisions—and in that they were no doubt right.

At the time in which the question of an offensive in Macedonia was being mooted—that is, the winter of 1916-17—news of the development of the political situation in Greece sounded like an enticing siren's song. However, I was absolutely deaf to the siren voices. I very much doubted whether the Hellenic people were very enthusiastic for war,

particularly a war in which they would find themselves shoulder to shoulder with the Bulgarians. Generally speaking, there would have been a recurrence of the events of 1913, and the two victorious partners, after their common victory, would have once more taken each other pro-saically by the hair instead of poetically by the arm.

From all I have said it must be perfectly clear that the strain on the German armies was so great, as a result of the general situation, that we could not allow it to be increased by further undertakings except such as were imperatively required for military and political reasons. Even the most splendid plans, which might offer certain prospects of great military victories, could not be allowed to turn us aside from our most important and immediate military task. This task was the fighting in the East and West, and indeed on both fronts, against overwhelming enemy superiority.

When I think of the later consequences of my attitude of objection to operations in Italy and Macedonia, and ask myself whether I should, and could, have decided otherwise, I am compelled to answer that question even now in the negative. I think I can claim that the subsequent course of events in central Europe had proved that we acted for the best. We dare not, and could not, run the risk of a collapse of our Western or Eastern Front

in the hope of winning cheap laurels in the plains of northern Italy or on the Vardar.

Turkey could be given no special instructions for 1917. Her task was to defend her territorial possessions and keep the armies facing her away from us. If she succeeded in accomplishing this she would be doing all that was required of her within the framework of our combined operations.

With a view to preserving the efficiency of the troops thus employed, in the autumn of 1916 we had suggested to the Turkish General Staff that they should withdraw the bulk of their two Caucasus armies from the sparsely populated and barren Armenian plateau with a view to making it easier for the troops to get through the winter. The necessary orders were issued too late, and as a result large numbers of troops were killed off by hunger and cold, as we had foreseen. It is possible that no epic, no book of heroes, will ever tell their tragic end. So let my modest record be their epitaph.

## II

### *The U-boat Warfare*

Think of seventy million human beings living in semistarvation, thousands of them slowly succumbing to its effects! Think of all the babes in arms who perished because their mothers starved! Think of all the children who were left sick and

weakly for life! And this was not in distant India or China, where a stony-hearted, pitiless Nature had refused her blessed rain, but here, in the very center of Europe, the home of culture and humanity! A semistarvation which was the work of the decrees and power of men who were wont to glory in their civilization! Where is the civilization in that? Do these men stand any higher than those others who shocked the whole civilized world by their savagery against noncombatants in the highlands of Armenia and there came to a miserable end in thousands as a punishment of Fate? No other voice than that of vengeance, certainly not that of pity, has ever spoken to the rough Anatolian peasant.

What was the object of these decrees of the champions of "civilization"? Their plan was clear. They had seen that their military power would never enable them to realize their tyrannical ambitions, that their methods of warfare were useless against their adversary with his nerves of steel. They would therefore destroy those nerves. If it could not be done in battle, man to man, it might be done from behind, by finding a way through the homeland. They would let the wives and children starve! "With God's help," *that* would have its effect on the husbands and fathers at the front, perhaps not at once, but certainly by degrees! Perhaps it would compel

those husbands and fathers to throw down their arms, for otherwise the menace of death would hover over their wives and children; the death—of civilization. There were men who reasoned thus, and indeed prayed thus.

“Our enemies are hurling American shells at us. Why do we not sink the ships in which they come? Have we not the means to do so? A question of right? Where and when has our enemy ever thought about right?”

With these and similar words on their lips, the nation and the army had turned to their leaders, not for the first time on August 29, 1916, but long before. The desire to employ the U-boat weapon in full force, with a view to a speedy delivery of our homeland from its sufferings and the relief of the army in the terrible contest, was in existence before I took over the conduct of operations. In this pitiless battle against our noncombatants at home, it was a question of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Everything else seemed callousness toward our own flesh and blood.

But though we had the weapon and the will to use it, we must not lose sight of the consequences which might flow from the ruthless employment of this destructive instrument. If we need not have any regard for the stony-hearted enemy, we must have regard for the interests of maritime nations which had hitherto remained neutral. As a result

of the employment of this weapon, the nation must not be faced with greater dangers and anxieties than those from which we proposed to deliver it. There was thus a considerable amount of hesitation, a hesitation comprehensible enough, to which ordinary human feelings also contributed.

Such was the situation when I appeared at Main Headquarters. To all the serious crises on land was now added a troublesome and fateful problem at sea. At first sight the decision of this question was the province of the civil government and the Naval Staff. Yet the General Staff was also seriously concerned. It was perfectly obvious that on purely military grounds we should desire the commencement of the U-boat campaign. The advantages which it would bring to our operations on land were plain to every eye. It would have been an immense relief to us if the enemy's manufacture of war material, or its transport oversea, could be materially hampered. It would be equally valuable if we succeeded, at any rate, in partially paralyzing their overseas operations. What an immense relief that would mean not only to Bulgaria and Turkey, but to ourselves! And it would not have cost us a drop of German blood! Further, there would be a chance of restricting the imports of raw material and food into the Entente countries to an intolerable degree, and placing England, if not her allies, before the fateful alternative



either of holding out the hand of reconciliation to us or losing her place in world trade. The U-boat campaign seemed likely to have a decisive effect on the course of the war; indeed, at the beginning of 1917 it appeared to be the only means we could employ to secure a victorious conclusion to the war if we were compelled to fight on.

The connection between the U-boat campaign and the whole military and political situation appears from a memorandum which we addressed to the government at the end of September, 1916. This memorandum was to serve as the basis for instructions to our ambassador in Washington. It ran as follows:

Count Bernstorff should be told, for his personal information, that the intention of the Entente to break through on the Eastern and Western fronts has hitherto miscarried, and will miscarry in the future, as will their operations from Salonica and the Dobrudja. On the other hand, the campaign of the Central Powers against Rumania is making victorious progress. However, it is still doubtful whether we shall achieve successes this year which will end the war. We must therefore reckon that the war will continue for a considerable time longer.

On the other hand, in view of England's economic situation, the Imperial Admiralty promises us that by the ruthless employment of an increased number of U-boats we shall obtain a speedy victory, which will compel our principal enemy, England, to turn to thoughts of peace in a few months. For that reason, the German General Staff is bound to adopt unrestricted U-boat warfare as one of its war measures, because among other things it will relieve the situation on the Somme front by diminishing the imports of

munitions and bring the futility of the Entente's efforts at this point plainly before their eyes. Finally, we could not remain idle spectators while England, realizing all the difficulties with which she has to contend, makes the fullest possible use of neutral Powers in order to improve her military and economic situation to our disadvantage. For all these reasons we must recover the freedom of action which we reserved in the note of May 4th.

Of course the situation would be completely altered if President Wilson, in pursuance of the intention he has indicated, presents a proposal of mediation to the Powers. Such a proposal must, in any case, be without definite suggestions of a territorial nature, since questions of that kind must be one of the objects of the peace negotiations. Any action of this kind must be taken soon. If Wilson wished to wait until after his election, or even shortly before it, he would find that the moment for such a step had practically gone. Nor must the negotiations aim primarily at the conclusion of an armistice. They must be conducted mainly by the contending parties and lead directly to a preliminary peace within a short time. Any considerable delay would make Germany's military position worse and mean that the Powers would make further preparations to continue the war next year, so that there would be an end to the idea of peace for a long time to come.

Count Bernstorff should discuss the affair with Colonel House—the intermediary between himself and the President—and ascertain the intentions of Mr. Wilson. Any action of the President in the direction of peace, which had better seem spontaneous on his part, would receive our very serious consideration, and this in itself would mean a victory for Wilson in his election campaign.

The most difficult question was and remained, "Within what time would U-boat warfare produce decisive results?" On this question the Naval Staff could, of course, make no definite promises. But even what they alleged was an estimate based

on the most conservative calculations was so favorable to us, that I considered that we were entitled to face the risk of finding that we had brought another adversary into the field as the result of employing the new weapon.

But even though the navy was very insistent, political and military considerations demanded that the commencement of the unrestricted U-boat campaign should be postponed over the autumn of 1916. In the critical military situation in which we found ourselves at that time we dared not bring a new opponent into the field. In any case, we had to wait until the Rumanian campaign had ended victoriously. If it did so, we should find ourselves strong enough to prevent any neutral states on our frontiers from joining the ranks of our enemies, to whatever extent England might intensify her economic pressure upon them.

To considerations of a political nature were added others of a military nature. We did not wish to resort to the intensified use of the U-boat weapon until our peace step had proved a complete failure.

When this peace measure collapsed, however, military considerations alone had any weight with me. The development of the military situation, especially in Rumania, in my opinion now permitted the most drastic use of this very effective weapon.

On January 9, 1917, our All-Highest War Lord decided in favor of the proposals of the Naval and General staffs and against the Imperial Chancellor, Von Bethmann. Not one of us was in doubt about the seriousness of the step.

In any case, the adoption of unrestricted U-boat warfare, with its alluring prospects, increased the moral resolution of both the army and nation to continue the war on land for a long time to come.

In view of the fateful conclusion of the war, it has been suggested that the declaration of the unrestricted U-boat campaign was a last desperate throw. That judgment is intended to be a condemnation of our decision on political, military, and even ethical grounds. It ignores the fact that practically all critical decisions, certainly not military decisions only, always involve a heavy risk. Indeed, the greatness of an action is mainly to be appreciated and measured by the question whether much was at stake. When a commander on the battlefield throws in his last reserves he is only doing what his country rightly demands of him. He accepts full responsibility and finds the courage to take the last decisive step without which victory cannot be won. A commander who cannot or will not dare to stake his last resources for the sake of victory is committing a crime toward his own people. If his blow fails, he is

certain to have the curses and scorn of the weaklings and cowards upon his head! That is always the fate of soldiers. To act only on absolutely safe calculations, or win laurels which are not dependent on the courage to take responsibility, is to banish the very elements of greatness. The whole object of our German military training was to breed that courage. We need only point to the outstanding examples in our own history, as well as the greatest achievements of our most dangerous enemies. Could there be a better example of the bold employment of the last resources than when the Great King staked everything at Leuthen and thereby saved his country and its future? Have we not approved Napoleon's decision to send in his last battalions at Waterloo, even though, as Clausewitz says, he then slunk from the battlefield as poor as a beggar? If the Corsican had not had a Blücher against him he would have won, and world history would certainly have taken another course. On the other side, take our much-belauded "Marshal Vorwärts." Did he not stake everything in that decisive conflict? Let us hear what one of our most violent opponents had to say on this subject before the war: "The finest maneuver which I have ever known is the action of old Blücher, who, thrown to the ground and lying under the feet of the horses, sprang up, turned furiously on his beaten men, stopped their flight,

and led them from the defeat of Ligny to the triumph of Waterloo."

I cannot close this section without questioning the view that has been put forward that with the entry of America into the ranks of our enemies our cause was finally lost. But let us first take a glance at the predicament in which we put our enemies, both by our U-boat operations and, at times, by our great successes on land in the spring of 1917. We shall then be in a position to realize that we were several times within an ace of wearing victor's laurels ourselves, and will perhaps appreciate that other than military reasons are responsible for the fact that the war did not end victoriously, or at least tolerably, for us.

### III

#### *Kreuznach*

After the victorious conclusion of the Rumanian campaign and the relief it brought to our situation in the East, the center of gravity of our next operations must be sought in the West. In any case it was here that we must anticipate an early commencement of the fighting in the next campaigning year. We wanted to be close to the battlefield. If we established our headquarters in the West it would be easier and take less time to get into direct personal touch with the headquarters of the army

groups and armies. A further reason was that the Emperor Charles wished to be near the political authorities of his country, and was, moreover, unwilling to dispense with direct personal intercourse with his Commander-in-Chief. Accordingly, in the early months of 1917 the headquarters of the Austro-Hungarian army was transferred to Baden near Vienna. The result was that there was no longer any reason why His Majesty our Emperor and Main Headquarters should remain at Pless. In February we moved our headquarters to Kreuznach.

On leaving Pless I considered it a special duty to thank the prince and his officials for the great hospitality they had shown us in housing all our officers, as well as in private life. Moreover, I myself had particularly grateful memories of plenty of splendid hunting over the estates of Pless and its neighbor Neudeck, on the few free evenings we had.

The district in which we now settled was associated in my mind with memories of my previous activities as Chief of Staff in the Rhine Province. I had made the acquaintance of the town of Kreuznach itself at that time. Its inhabitants now vied with one another in giving us proofs of quiet hospitality. Among other ways this hospitality was shown in the fact that our quarters and common dining room were decorated with fresh-cut flowers every day by young ladies.

I accepted all this as an act of homage to the whole army, of which I was one of the oldest representatives in the war. Shortly after our departure from Pless, General Conrad left the Austro-Hungarian headquarters to take over the command on the South Tyrolese front. I have never known the cause of his transfer. I gather it was due to personal reasons, as there were no professional reasons, so far as I knew. I have loyal and brotherly memories of him. His successor was General von Arz. He had a practical head and sound views, was a splendid soldier, and therefore as valuable a colleague as his predecessor. He always got to the root of things and despised appearances. I believe that he shared my aversion to intervention in political questions. In my opinion General von Arz displayed admirable perseverance and did everything that could be done, in view of the difficult internal situation of the Danube Monarchy to which I have previously referred. He never had any doubt about the magnitude of his task. He deserves all the more gratitude for having faced it with such manly confidence.

At the beginning of October my stay in Kreuznach brought me the celebration of my seventieth birthday.

His Majesty my Emperor, King, and master was gracious enough to be the first to give me his personal congratulations at my house. To me this



was the very consecration of the day! Then the youth of Kreuznach greeted me in the bright autumn sunshine as I went to the office. My colleagues awaited me before the doors of our common workroom, and in the adjacent garden were representatives of the town and its neighborhood, recruits, sick and wounded, convalescing at the various establishments of this health resort, and finally veterans who had fought with me in days long past. The end of the day brought a little military interlude. For some reason I have never been able to fathom it was rumored that a great enemy bombing attack on our headquarters would probably take place this day. It is possible, too, that, as so often happened, some enemy airplane was this evening finding its way from the Saar to the Rhine, or *vice versa*. It was hardly surprising that imagination was rather more vivid than usual, and that at night more was seen and heard between the earth and the shining moon than was actually there. But however that may be, about midnight our anti-aircraft defenses opened a mighty barrage. Thanks to the high rate of fire, the available ammunition supplies were speedily exhausted, so that I could sleep in peace with the thought that I should be disturbed no more. When I reported next day my All-Highest War Lord showed me a large vase filled with fragments of German shells which had been collected in the

garden of his quarters. We had thus been running risks that night, after all!

For the rest, some of the Kreuznach folk had taken the nocturnal shooting for a final military salute in honor of my birthday.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE HOSTILE OFFENSIVE IN THE FIRST HALF OF 1917

#### I

#### *In the West*

AS soon as the best season of the year began, we awaited the opening of the expected general enemy offensive with the greatest anxiety. We had made strategic preparations to meet it by regrouping our armies, but in the course of the winter we had also taken tactical measures to deal with what would in any case be the greatest of all the efforts of our enemies.

Not the least important of these measures were the changes we introduced into our previous system of defense. They were based on our experiences in the earlier battles. In future our defensive positions were no longer to consist of single lines and strong points, but of a network of lines and groups of strong points. In the deep zones thus formed we did not intend to dispose our troops on a rigid and continuous front, but in a complex system of nuclei and distributed in

breadth and depth. The defender had to keep his forces mobile to avoid the destructive effects of the enemy fire during the period of artillery preparation, as well as voluntarily to abandon any parts of the line which could no longer be held, and then to recover by a counterattack all the points which were essential to the maintenance of the whole position. These principles applied in detail as in general.

We thus met the devastating effects of the enemy artillery and trench-mortar fire and their surprise infantry attacks with more and more deeply distributed defensive lines and the mobility of our forces. At the same time we developed the principle of saving men in the forward lines by increasing the number of our machine guns and so economizing troops.

So far-reaching a change in our defensive system undoubtedly involved an element of risk. This element lay primarily in the fact that in the very middle of the war we demanded a break with tactical practices and experiences with which our subordinate commanders and the men had become familiar, and to which many of them naturally ascribed some particular virtue. A change from one tactical method to another provoked a mild crisis even in peace time. On the one hand, it involved a certain amount of exaggeration of the new features, and on the other a very stubborn

adhesion to the old. Even the most carefully worded instructions left room for misunderstandings. Voluntary interpreters had the time of their lives, and the force of inertia in human thought and action was frequently not to be overcome without a tremendous effort.

But it was not for these reasons only that our tactical innovations were a risky step. It was much more difficult to give ourselves an affirmative answer to the question whether, in the middle of war, our army, constituted as it was now, was in a position to adopt the new measures and translate them into the reality of the battlefield.

We could be in no doubt that the military machine with which we were now working was not to be compared with those of 1914 and 1915, or indeed with that of the opening months of 1916. A vast number of our most splendid fighting men had been buried in our cemeteries or sent home with shattered limbs or diseased bodies. It is true that we still had a proud nucleus of our 1914 men, and around them had gathered a mass of young and enthusiastic newcomers prepared for any sacrifice. But an army requires more than that; bodily strength and resolution have to be trained and taught by experience. An army with the moral and intellectual powers and the great traditions of the German army of 1914 retains its intrinsic worth for many years in war, so long as it

receives physical and moral reinforcement from the homeland. But its general average sinks, and indeed, in the natural course of things is bound to sink, even though its value, compared with that of the enemy, who has been just as long in the field, remains relatively at the old level.

Our new defensive system made heavy demands on the moral resolution and capacity of the troops because it abandoned the firm external rigidity of the serried lines of defense, and thereby made the independent action, even of the smallest bodies of troops, the supreme consideration. Tactical co-operation was no longer obtained by defenses that were continuous to the eye, but consisted of the invisible moral bond between the men engaged in such tactical co-operation. It is no exaggeration to say that in these circumstances the adoption of the new principles was the greatest evidence of the confidence which we placed in the moral and mental powers of our army, down to its smallest unit. The immediate future was to prove whether that confidence was misplaced.

The first storm in the West broke just after the beginning of spring. On April 9th the English attack at Arras gave the signal for the opening of the enemy's great spring offensive. The attack was prepared for days with the whole fury of masses of enemy artillery and trench mortars. There was nothing of the surprise tactics which Nivelle

had employed in the October of the previous year. Did not the English believe in these tactics, or did they feel themselves too inexperienced to adopt them? For the moment the reason was immaterial. The fact alone was sufficient and spoke a fearful language. The English attack swept over our first, second, and third lines. Groups of strong points were overwhelmed or silenced after a heroic resistance. Masses of artillery were lost. Our defensive system had apparently failed.

A serious crisis now supervened, one of those situations in which everything appears to be beyond control. "Crises must be avoided," says the layman. The only reply the soldier can make is this, "Then we had better keep out of war from the start, for crises are inevitable." They are of the very nature of war and distinguish it as the domain of peril and the unknown. The art of war is to overcome crises, not to avoid them. He who recoils from the menace of a crisis is binding his own arms, becomes a plaything in the hands of a bolder adversary, and soon goes in a crisis to destruction.

I do not mean to suggest that the crisis on April 9th could not have been avoided after all the preparations which we had been in a position to make. It is certain that we should not have had a crisis on such a scale if we had replied to the enemy break-through with a prompt counter-

attack with reserves brought up for the purpose. Of course, after such infernal artillery preparation as preceded this attack, serious local disasters were only to be expected.

The evening report of this April 9th revealed rather a dark picture. Many shadows—little light. In such cases more light must be sought. A ray appeared, though a tiny, flickering ray. The English did not seem to have known how to exploit the success they had gained to the full. This was a piece of luck for us, as so often before. After the report I pressed the hand of my First Quarter-master-General with the words, "We have lived through more critical times than to-day together." To-day! It was his birthday! My confidence was unshaken. I knew that reinforcements were marching to the battlefield and that trains were hastening that way. The crisis was over. Within me it was certainly over. But the battle raged on.

Another battle picture. After the first weeks of April the French guns were thundering at Soissons, and from there far away eastward to the neighborhood of Rheims. Hundreds of hostile trench mortars were scattering death. Here Nivelle commanded, the reward of the fame he had won at Verdun. Apparently he, too, had not drawn the inferences we expected from his recent experiences at Verdun. The French artillery raged for days, nay weeks. Our defensive zone was to



be converted into a waste of rubble and corpses. All that was lucky enough to escape physical destruction was at any rate to be morally broken. There seemed little doubt that such a consummation would be attained in this fearful conflagration. At length Nivelle supposed our troops to be annihilated, or at any rate sufficiently cowed. On April 16th he sent forward his battalions, pretty confident of victory. Or perhaps it would be better to say that he commissioned his men to gather in the fruits which had ripened in the tropical heat! Then the incredible happened. From the shattered trenches and shell holes rose German manhood, possessed of German strength and resolution, and scattered death and desolation among the advancing ranks and the masses behind them which were already flinching under the storm of our artillery fire and tending to herd together. The German resistance might be overcome at the points where destruction had been fiercest, but in this battle of giants what did the loss of small sectors mean compared with the triumphant resistance of the whole front?

In the very first day it was clear that the French had suffered a downright defeat. The bloody reverse proved the bitterest, indeed the most overwhelming, disappointment to the French leaders and their men.

The battles of Arras, Soissons, and Rheims

raged on for weeks. It revealed only one tactical variation from the conflict on the Somme in the previous year, a variation I must not forget to mention. After the first few days our adversaries won not a single success worth mentioning, and after a few weeks they sank back exhausted on the battlefield and resumed trench warfare. So our defense measures had proved themselves brilliantly, after all.

Now for a third picture. The scene was changed to the heights of Wytschaete and Messines, northwest of Lille and opposite Kemmel Hill. It was June 7th, a moment at which the failure of the battles I have just mentioned was already obvious. The position on the Wytschaete hills, the key to the salient at that point, was very unfavorable for a modern defense. The comparatively restricted back area did not permit the employment of a sufficiently deep defensive zone. Our forward trenches lay on the western slope and were a magnificent target for hostile artillery. The wet soil sank in summer and winter; below ground were mines innumerable, for this method of warfare had been employed earlier on in extremely bitter fighting for the possession of the most important points. Yet it was long since any sounds of underground burrowing had been heard. Our trenches on the heights of St.-Eloi, as well as the corner stone of Wytschaete and Messines, were exposed to

hostile artillery fire not only from the west, but from north and south as well.

The English prepared their attack in the usual way. The defenders suffered heavily, more heavily than ever before. Our anxious question whether it would not be better voluntarily to evacuate the heights had received the manly answer, "We shall hold, so we will stand fast." But when the fateful June 7th dawned the ground rose from beneath the feet of the defenders, their most vital strong-points collapsed, and through the smoke and falling debris of the mines the English storm troops pressed forward over the last remnants of the German defense. Violent attempts on our part to restore the situation by counterattacks failed under the murderous, hostile artillery fire which from all sides converted the back area of the lost position into a veritable inferno. Nevertheless, we again succeeded in bringing the enemy to a halt before he had effected a complete breach in our lines. Our losses in men and war material were heavy. It would have been better to have evacuated the ground voluntarily.

In my judgment the general result of the great enemy offensive in the West had not been unsatisfactory hitherto. We had never been defeated. Even our worst perils had been surmounted. Though gaining a good deal of ground, our enemies had never succeeded in reaching more distant

goals, much less in passing from the break-through battle to open warfare. Once more we were to exploit our successes in the West on other fronts.

## II

*In the Near and Far East*

Even before the wild dance had begun on our Western Front, Sarrail had renewed his attacks in Macedonia with his center of gravity at Monastir. These events, too, commanded our full attention. Once more our enemy had far-reaching objectives. Simultaneously with this onslaught on the Bulgarian front our enemy had instigated a rising in Serbia with a view to menacing our communications with the Balkan peninsula. The rising was suppressed at its critical point, Nish, before it had extended over the whole of Old Serbia, an eventuality which was much feared by government circles in Bulgaria. The fighting on the Macedonian front was marked by great bitterness, but the Bulgarian army succeeded in maintaining its position practically intact without our having to send further German reinforcements. A very satisfactory result for us! Our allies had fought very well. They had plainly realized that the work we had done in their ranks had been brilliantly justified. I felt convinced that the Bulgarian army would remain equal to its task in future, and this

opinion was confirmed when the Entente renewed their attacks in May. Once more their onslaught along the whole front from Monastir to Lake Doiran was an utter failure.

The front on the Armenian plateau had remained inactive. Occasional small raids during the winter seemed to be inspired far more by anxiety to secure booty than by any revival of the offensive spirit on either side. Under the influence of their great supply difficulties, the Russians had withdrawn the bulk of their troops from the wildest and most desolate parts of the mountains to more fertile districts in the interior. The complete pause in the Russian activity was certainly surprising. The Turks sent us no news which could in any way explain it.

On the Irak front the English attacked in February, and were in possession of Bagdad by March 11th. They owed this success to their skillful envelopment of the strong Turkish positions.

In southern Palestine the English attacked at Gaza in great superiority, but purely frontally and with little tactical skill. Their onslaught collapsed completely in front of the Turkish lines. It was only the failure of a Turkish column which had been sent out to envelop their wing that saved the English from utter defeat.

I shall have to deal later with the effect of these events in Asia on our general military situation.

## III

*On the Eastern Front*

Even before the French and English opened their general offensive in the West the foundations of the Russian front were already trembling. Under our mighty blows the framework of the Russian state had begun to go to pieces.

Hitherto the unwieldy Russian Colossus had hung over the whole European and Asiatic world like a nightmare. The interior of the mass now began to swell and stretch. Great cracks appeared on its surface, and through the gaps we soon had glimpses of the fires of political passion and the workings of infernal primitive forces. Tsardom was tottering! Would some new power arise which could extinguish those passions in the icy prisons of Siberia and suffocate those powers of barbarism in living graves?

Russia in revolution! How often had men with a real or pretended knowledge of the country announced that this event was at hand? I had ceased to believe in it. Now that it had materialized, it aroused in me no feeling of political satisfaction, but rather a sense of military relief. But even the latter was slow in coming. I asked myself whether the fall of the Tsar was a victory of the peace or the war party. Had the gravediggers of Tsardom only worked in order to bring to

naught, with the last crowned head, the well-known anxiety for peace of Russian upper circles and the peace longings of great masses of the people?

So long as the behavior of the Russian army provided no clear answer to this question our situation with regard to Russia was, and remained, indefinite. The process of disintegration had undoubtedly begun in the Russian state. If a dictatorship, with powers to be employed as ruthlessly as those which had just been overthrown, did not arise, this process would continue, though perhaps slower than normally in the mighty and ponderous Russian Colossus with its unwieldy movements. From the outset our plan was to leave this process alone. We must, however, take care that it left us alone, and did not, perhaps, destroy us, too. In a situation like this we should remember the lesson of the cannonade of Valmy, which more than a hundred years before had welded together again the cracked and broken structure of French national power and started that great blood-red flood which swept over all Europe. Of course Russia of 1917 no longer had at her disposal the immense untapped sources of man power which France then had. The Tsar's best and finest men were at the front, or lay in graves innumerable before and behind our lines.

For me personally to wait quietly while the

process of Russian disintegration developed was a great sacrifice. If for political reasons I was not allowed to consider an offensive in the East, all my soldierly feelings urged me toward an attack in the West. Could any notion be more obvious than that of bringing all our effective fighting troops from the East to the West and then taking the offensive? I was thinking of the failure of the English attack at Arras and the severe defeat of France between Soissons and Rheims. America was still far away. If she came after the strength of France was broken, she would come too late!

However, the Entente too recognized the peril with which they were menaced, and worked with all their might to prevent the collapse of Russian power, and with it the great relief that collapse would mean to our Eastern Front. Russia must remain in the war, at least until the new armies of America were on French soil; otherwise the military and moral defeat of France was certain. For this reason the Entente sent politicians, agitators, and officers to Russia in the hope of bolstering up the shattered Russian front. Nor did these missions forget to take money with them, for in many parts of Russia money is more effective than political argument.

Once more we were robbed of the brightest prospect of victory by these countermeasures. The Russian front was kept in being, not through



its own strength, but mainly through the work of the agitators whom our enemies sent there, and who achieved their purpose, even against the will of the Russian masses.

Ought we not to have attacked when the first cracks of the Russian edifice began to be revealed? May it not be that political considerations robbed us of the finest fruits of all our great victories?

Our relations to the Russian army on the Eastern Front at first took the form of an ever more obvious approach to an armistice, although there was nothing in writing. By degrees the Russian infantry everywhere declared that they would fight no more. Yet with the apathy of the masses they remained in their trenches. If the relations between the two sides led to too obviously amicable an intercourse, the Russian artillery intervened every now and then. This arm of the service was still in the hands of its leaders, not out of any natural conservative instinct, but because it counted fewer independent heads than its sister arm. The agitators of the Entente and the officers still had great influence with the Russian batteries. It was true that the Russian infantry grumbled about the way in which this long-desired armistice was thus disturbed, and indeed occasionally turned on their artillery sister and openly rejoiced when our shells fell among the gun pits.

But the general situation I have described remained unchanged for months.

The Russian disinclination to fight was most patent on the northern wing. From there it extended to the south. The Rumanians were apparently unaffected by it. After May it appeared that the commanders had got the reins in their hands again, even in the north. Friendly relations between the two trench lines gradually stopped. There was a return to the old method of intercourse, weapon in hand. Before long there was no doubt that in the areas behind the Russian front the work of discipline was being carried on at top pressure. In this way parts, at any rate, of the Russian army were once more made capable of resistance, and indeed capable of attack. The war current had set strongly, and Russia advanced to a great offensive under Kerensky.

Kerensky, not Brussiloff? The latter had been swept from his high post by the streams of blood of his own countrymen which had flowed in Galicia and Wolhynia in 1916, just as Nivelle had been swept away in France in the spring of this year. Even in Russia, with her immense resources in man power, the authorities seemed to have become sensitive about sacrifices in mass. In the great war ledger the page on which the Russian losses were written has been torn out. No one knows the figures. Five or eight millions? We,

too, have no idea. All we know is that sometimes in our battles with the Russians we had to remove the mounds of enemy corpses from before our trenches in order to get a clear field of fire against fresh assaulting waves. Imagination may try to reconstruct the figure of their losses, but an accurate calculation will remain forever a vain thing.

It was difficult to say whether Kerensky adopted the idea of an offensive of his own free will, or was induced or compelled to do so by the Entente. In either case it was entirely to the interest of the Entente that Russia should be driven into an offensive once more. In the West they had already offered up in vain a good half of their best fighting troops; perhaps more than half. What other alternative had they but to send in what they had left, as American help was still far away? It was in these very months that the U-boat warfare was encroaching on the margin of existence of our bitterest and most irreconcilable foe to such a degree that it appeared questionable whether shipping would be available for the American reinforcements in the coming year. German troops must therefore be held down fast in the East, and for that reason Kerensky must send Russia's last armies to the attack. It was a venturesome game, and for Russia most venturesome of all! Yet the calculation on which it was based was an accurate one, for if the game suc-

ceeded, not only would the Entente be saved, but a dictatorship in Russia could be created and maintained. Without such a dictatorship Russia would lapse into chaos.

It must be admitted that the prospects of Kerensky's offensive against the German front were hardly more inviting than on previous occasions. Good German divisions might have been sent to the West, but those that were left were sound enough to hold up a Russian onslaught. Our enemy had not the inward resolution to turn his attack into the long-drawn-out storms of 1917. A large number of Russian apostles of freedom were roving the back areas of the army for loot or streaming homeward. Even good elements were leaving the front, inspired by anxiety for their relatives and possessions in view of the internal catastrophe which was threatening. But, on the other hand, the situation on the Austro-Hungarian front gave cause for anxiety. It was to be feared that once more, as in 1916, the Russian onslaught would find weak spots. In the spring of this year a representative of our ally had given us a very grave description of the state of things on this part of the front, and told us his general impression that "the great majority of the Austro-Slav troops would offer even less resistance to a Russian attack than they had in 1916." The fact was that the process of political disintegration was affecting

them simultaneously with the Russian troops. The same authority gave us Kerensky's plan, which had been told him by deserters. It was this: local attacks against the Germans in order to tie them down, while the main blow was dealt at the Austro-Hungarian wall. And that is exactly what happened.

The Russians attacked the German lines at Riga, Dvinsk, and Smorgon and were driven off. The wall in Galicia proved to be stone only where Austro-Hungarian troops were stiffened by German. On the other hand the Austro-Slav wall near Stanislau collapsed under Kerensky's simple tap. But Kerensky's troops were not like Brussiloff's. A year had passed since that last offensive—a year of heavy losses and deep demoralization for the Russian army. So notwithstanding fairly favorable prospects, the Russian offensive did not get right through at Stanislau. The Russian grain was now ripe for reaping. The reaper, too, was ready. It was just the time at which the real harvest was beginning in the fields of our German homeland. The middle of July!

## CHAPTER XV

### OUR COUNTERATTACK IN THE EAST

COUNTERATTACK! No troops, no leader in the field, can ever have received such news with more joyous satisfaction than I felt when I realized that the time for such a measure had at length arrived.

I have previously described our situation before the spring of 1917 as a stage of strategic "stand to." Of course, this does not mean that our reserves were closely concentrated like the masses of Napoleon when he awaited the attack of his foes who were closing in on him from all sides in the autumn of 1813. The immense distances which we had to cover forbade a system of that kind. On the other hand, the capacity of our railways made it possible to collect widely distributed reserves and carry them quickly to a point selected for an offensive.

The defensive battles in the West had been a heavy drain on our available reserves. A comparison of numbers and the difficulties of this front made a counteroffensive there with what

was left out of the question. On the other hand, these reserves seemed sufficient to enable us to turn the situation in the East once and for all in our favor, and thereby precipitate the political collapse of our adversary on that side. Russia's foundations had become rotten. The last manifestations of force of the now Republican army were only the result of an artificially produced wave, a wave which no longer welled up from the depths of the nation. But in a great struggle of nations, when the national army is once in process of decay, complete collapse is inevitable. Such being my conviction, it was my opinion we could now achieve decisive results in Russia even with moderate resources.

It is easy to understand that there were voices which even now warned us against employing our available reserves in an offensive. It must be admitted that this was not so easy a question to decide as may appear now, when we look back upon the course of events. At the time we made the decision we had to face a good many anxieties and risks. It was even then clear that the English attack of June 7th at Wytschaete and Messines was but the prelude to a much greater military drama which, carrying on the work then begun, would have its background in the great stretch of Flanders on the north. We had also to anticipate that France, too, would resume her attack as soon

as her army had recovered from the serious disaster of the spring offensive.

It was undoubtedly a risk to take troops from the West—it was a question of six divisions—but a risk similar to that we had taken in 1916 in our attack on Rumania. On that occasion, of course, it had been a case of imperious necessity. Now we did it of our own free will. But in both cases the venture had been based on our unshakable confidence in our troops. Dissident voices were raised against our plan on other grounds besides that of the general military situation. As a result of the enemy's experiences with our defense, some among us doubted the possibility of a really great offensive victory. I remember how, just before the opening of our counteroffensive on the Galician front, we were warned that with the troops we had concentrated we could not hope for more than a local success—that means the production of a salient in the enemy lines such as our opponents had so often created in their offensives at the first rush. Was that our goal? Then had we not better renounce the whole operation?

Among opinions on this side there was another that was quite plausible: we ought to keep our land forces principally on the defensive and otherwise wait until our U-boats had fulfilled our hopes. There was something very alluring in this idea. According to such reports as we had then re-



ceived, the result of the U-boat warfare had already exceeded all expectations. Its effects must therefore soon make themselves felt. Yet I was not able to give my consent to that proposal. The military and political situation in the East now demanded something more than that we should stand still for months and simply look on. We feared that if our counterblow did not follow hard on the heels of Kerensky's attack, the war party in Russia would once more get the upper hand. There is no need for me to describe the reaction such an event would have on our country and our allies.

While Kerensky strove in vain to get the mass of his still effective troops to break through the Austro-Hungarian lines—which had meanwhile been propped up by German troops—we concentrated a strong force southwest of Brody—that is, on the flank of the Russian break-through—and on July 18th attacked in a southeasterly direction toward Tarnopol. Our operation struck a part of the Russian line which had little capacity for resistance, and, indeed, had been exhausted in the previous attack. The Russian troops were quickly scattered to the winds and Kerensky's whole offensive collapsed at a blow. Nothing but a hasty retreat of the Russian troops on the north, and more particularly on the south, of our point of irruption saved the Russian army from a catas-

trophe. Our whole Eastern Front in Galicia and right south into the Carpathians was soon in movement, pursuing the retreating enemy. By the end of August almost the whole of Galicia and the Bukovina were clear of the foe. It was told that in these following-up actions the Austro-Hungarian field artillery had particularly distinguished itself. With exemplary boldness it had gone on ahead of its own infantry and hard on the heels of the Russians. I had learned to admire this splendid arm at Königgrätz in 1866, and therefore rejoiced doubly at this fresh proof of its fame on our side.

Our offensive came to a standstill on the frontier of Moldavia. No one regretted it more than I did. We were in the most favorable strategic position imaginable to effect the occupation of this last part of Rumania by continuing our advance. Judging by the political situation in Russia at the moment, the Rumanian army would unquestionably have dissolved if we had compelled it to abandon the country altogether. How could a Rumanian king and a royal Rumanian army have remained in existence on revolutionary Russian soil? However, thanks to the destruction of the stations by the retreating Russians, our communications had become so difficult that with a heavy heart we had to renounce the further prosecution of the operations at this point. A later

attempt on our part to shatter the Rumanian army in Moldavia was unsuccessful. We adhered to our decision not to let go of Russia until she had been finally eliminated in a military sense, even though the commencement of the drama in Flanders was claiming our attention and, indeed, filling us with increasing anxiety. If we could not destroy the Russian army in Wolhynia and Moldavia we must do so at some other part of the front. Riga seemed a peculiarly favorable point, a military and politically sensitive point, at which Russia could be hit. At Riga the Russian northern wing formed a mighty flank position, more than forty miles deep and only twenty wide, along the coast to the western bank of the Dvina. It was a position which threatened our whole front, both strategically and tactically. This situation had irritated us in previous years when I was commander-in-chief in the East. Both in 1915 and 1916 we had planned to break through this salient somewhere near its base, and thereby deal a great blow at its defenders.

On paper this seems a simple enough operation, but it was not so simple in practice. The spearhead must be driven northward across the broad Dvina above Riga. It is true that in the course of the war great rivers had certainly not lived up to their imposing reputation as obstacles. Had not General von Mackensen crossed the mighty Danube in full view of the enemy? We could

therefore face the prospect of crossing the smaller Dvina with a light heart; but the great drawback to the operation lay in the fact that the strongly held Russian trenches lay on the far bank, so that the Dvina formed a kind of moat.

However, on September 1st our bold attack succeeded, as the Russians abandoned their trenches on the bank during our artillery preparation. Moreover, the occupants of the great flanking salient west of the river withdrew, marching day and night, through Riga to the east, thus for the most part evading capture.

Our attack at Riga aroused the liveliest fears in Russia for the safety of Petersburg. The capital of the country was in a panic. It felt itself directly threatened by our attack on Riga. Petersburg, still the intellectual center of Russia, fell into a condition of extreme nervous anxiety which made calm and practical thinking impossible. Otherwise the citizens would merely have taken compasses and measured the distances which still separated our victorious troops at Riga from the Russian capital. It was not only in Russia, but also in our own country, that imagination became very vivid about this affair and forgot space and time. Even among us there were great illusions about an advance on Petersburg. It goes without saying that no one would have been more pleased to carry out such an advance than I. I well under-

stood the anxiety of our troops and their leaders to continue our invasion, at least as far as Lake Peipus. But we had to renounce all these ideas, alluring though they undoubtedly were. They would have tied down too many of our troops—and for too long—in a region with which our future plans were not concerned. Our thoughts had now returned from the Gulf of Riga to the coast of the Adriatic. But of that more anon.

But if we could not continue our advance to Petersburg and thereby keep the nerve center of Russia at the highest tension until collapse was inevitable, there was still another way by which we could attain that end—the way of the sea. At our instigation our fleet accepted our suggestion with loyal devotion. Thus originated the decision to capture the island of Oesel lying at the entrance to the Gulf of Riga. From that point we should directly threaten the Russian naval harbor of Reval and intensify our pressure on nervous Petersburg without employing any large forces.

The operation against Oesel stands out in this war as the one completely successful enterprise on either side in which an army and a fleet co-operated. The execution of our plans was rendered so doubtful by bad weather at the outset that we were already thinking of disembarking the troops on board. The arrival of better weather then

enabled us to proceed with the venture. From that point everything went like clockwork. The navy answered to the high demands which we had to make on it in every direction. We succeeded in possessing ourselves of Oesel and the neighboring islands. In Petersburg nerves were more shaken than ever. The structure of the Russian front became ever looser. It became clearer with every day that passed that Russia was too shaken by internal agitation to be capable of any military demonstration within a measurable time. Everything that still held fast in this turmoil was gradually being swept away by the red flood. The pillars of the state were crumbling stone by stone.

Under our last blows the Colossus not only trembled, but split asunder and fell. But we turned to a new task.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE ATTACK ON ITALY

ALTHOUGH the situation in Flanders this autumn was extremely serious, we decided on an offensive against Italy. In view of my previous attitude of aversion to such an enterprise, it may cause surprise that I should now obtain the consent of my All-Highest War Lord to the employment of German troops for an operation from which I promised myself little effect on our general situation. On the contrary, I must maintain that I had not changed my views on this question. In August, 1917, I still considered that even if we won a wholesale success we should not succeed in forcing Italy out of her alliance with our enemies. I believed that it was as inadvisable to draw German troops from our imperiled Western Front, mainly for the glory of a successful campaign against Italy, in the autumn of 1917, as it had been when the year opened. The reasons why I now approved our co-operation in such an operation were to be ascribed to other considerations. Our Austro-Hungarian allies had told us that they no

longer felt themselves strong enough to resist a twelfth Italian attack on the Isonzo front. This news was equally significant to us from the military and political point of view. What was at stake was not only the loss of the line of the Isonzo, but, in fact, the entire collapse of the Austro-Hungarian resistance. The Danube Monarchy was far more sensitive to defeat on the Italian front than to any reverse in the Galician theater. No one in Austria had ever fought with much enthusiasm for Galicia. "He who loses the war will keep Galicia, anyhow," was an Austro-Hungarian joke that was often heard during the campaign. On the other hand, the interest of the Danube Monarchy in the Italian theater was always particularly strong. In Galicia—that is, against Russia—Austria-Hungary was fighting only with her head, whereas against Italy she was fighting with her whole soul. It was very significant that in the war against Italy all the races of the Dual Monarchy cooperated with practically equal devotion. Czecho-Slovak troops which had failed against Russia did excellent work against Italy. The war on this side formed to a certain extent a military bond of unity for the whole monarchy. What would happen if even this bond were severed?

The danger of such an eventuality at the time at which I am writing was great. To begin with, at the end of August Cadorna had gained a con-



siderable amount of ground in the eleventh Isonzo battle. All previous losses of ground had been misfortunes we could survive. Our multifarious experiences had taught us that they were a natural consequence of the destructive effect of offensive weapons against even the strongest defenses. But by now the Austro-Hungarian line of defense had been brought as far back as it could be. If the Italians resumed their artillery preparation and won further ground, Austria-Hungary would not be able to maintain any line in front of Trieste. The threat to Trieste was therefore absolutely critical. But woe betide if that city fell. Like Sebastopol in the Crimean War, Trieste seemed to be the bone of contention between Italy and Austria. For the Danube Monarchy Trieste was not only the symbol of greatness, but of the very highest practical value. The economic independence of the country in the future largely depended on its possession. Trieste must therefore be saved, with German help if not otherwise.

If we succeeded in bringing as much relief to our allies by a joint and far-reaching victory on the Southwestern Front as we had just done on her Eastern Front, as far as we could see Austria-Hungary would be in a position to continue the war by our side. The great battles on the Isonzo front had already been a heavy drain on Austria-Hungary's armies. The bulk of her best troops

had been facing Cadorna and lost very heavily on the Isonzo. Austro-Hungarian heroism had won the greatest human triumphs in those battles, for the defenders on the Isonzo had for years been opposed by a threefold Italian superiority, and, moreover, held positions which for desolation and horror were quite equal to our battlefields on the Western Front, and, indeed, in many respects worse. Nor must we forget what immense demands Alpine warfare in the southern Tyrol had made on the troops engaged in defense there. At many points this warfare was carried on even in the region of eternal ice and snow.

For an operation against Italy the most obvious idea was to break out from the southern Tyrol. From there the bulk of the Italian armies could be destroyed or dissolved in the great caldron of Venetia. On no other of our fronts did the strategic contour of the opposing lines offer such favorable prospects for a mighty victory. Compared with this, every other operation must appear practically an open confession of strategic failure. And yet we had to renounce the idea!

In judging our new plan of campaign we must not leave out of sight the intimate connection between our fighting on the Western Front and the war against Italy. Bearing in mind our position in the West, we could spare for the Italian campaign not more than half the number of divisions

which General Conrad had considered essential for a really decisive attack from the southern Tyrol in the winter of 1916-17. We were quite unable to put stronger forces at the disposal of our ally, even though, as actually happened, we considered it possible that our foes on the Western Front might find themselves compelled by their ally's serious defeat to send a few divisions to Italy, divisions which they could spare in view of their great numerical superiority. Another objection to an operation from the southern Tyrol was the consideration that an early winter might set in before our concentration there was complete. All those reasons compelled us to satisfy ourselves with a more modest objective and to attempt to break through the Italian front on the obviously weak northern wing of the Isonzo army, and then deal an annihilating blow at the main Italian army in the south before it could retire behind the defenses of the Tagliamento. Our attack began in the region of Tolmino on October 24th. Cadorna had great difficulty in getting his southern armies, which were threatened with destruction, into safety behind the Piave, and then only by leaving thousands of prisoners and a vast amount of war material behind. It was only there that the Italians, associated with and supported by French and English divisions which had been rushed up, found themselves strong enough to renew their

resistance. The left wing of the new front clung desperately to the last peaks of the Venetian Alps. We failed in our attempt to capture these heights, which commanded the whole plain of upper Italy, and therefore to insure the collapse of the enemy resistance on the Piave front also. I had to convince myself that our strength was insufficient for the execution of this task. The operation had run itself to a standstill. In face of that fact even the greatest resolution on the part of the commanders and troops on the spot had to lower its arms.

However great was my joy at the victory we had gained in Italy, I could not entirely resist a certain feeling of dissatisfaction. At the last the great victory had not been consummated. It is true that our splendid men returned from this campaign with feelings of justifiable pride. Yet the elation of the rank and file is not always shared by their leaders!

## CHAPTER XVII

### FURTHER HOSTILE ATTACKS IN THE SECOND HALF OF 1917

#### I

#### *In the West*

WHILE we were delivering the final blows against Russia and bringing Italy to the very brink of military collapse, England and France were continuing their attacks on the Western Front. There lay the greatest danger of the whole year's campaign for us.

The Flanders battle flamed up at the end of July. I had a certain feeling of satisfaction when this new battle began, in spite of the extraordinary difficulties it involved for our situation on the Western Front and the danger that any considerable English successes might easily prejudice our operations in the other theaters. As we anticipated, England was now making her supreme effort in a great and decisive attack upon us even before the assistance coming from the United States could in any way make itself felt. I thought

I could detect the effects of the U-boat campaign, which were compelling England to obtain a military decision this year and at any cost.

From the point of view, not of scale, but of the obstinacy which the English displayed and the difficulties of the ground for the defenders, the battles which now began in Flanders put all our battles on the Somme in 1916 completely in the shade. The fighting was now over the marshes and mud of Flanders instead of the hard chalk of the Artois. These actions, too, developed into one of the long-drawn-out battles with which we were already so familiar, and in their general character represented an intensification of the somber scenes peculiar to such battles. It is obvious that these actions kept us in great and continual anxiety. In fact, I may say that with such a cloud hanging over our heads we were seldom able to rejoice whole-heartedly over our victories in Russia and Italy.

It was with a feeling of absolute longing that we waited for the beginning of the wet season. As previous experience had taught us, great stretches of the Flemish flats would then become impassable, and even in firmer places the new shell holes would fill so quickly with ground water that men seeking shelter in them would find themselves faced with the alternative, "Shall we drown or get out of this hole?" This battle, too, must finally stick in

the mud, even though English stubbornness kept it up longer than otherwise.

The flames of battle did not die down until December. As on the Somme, neither of the two adversaries could raise the shout of victory in Flanders.

As the Flanders battle was drawing to a close, a fierce conflict unexpectedly blazed up at a part of the line which had hitherto been relatively inactive. On November 20th we were suddenly surprised by the English near Cambrai. The attack at this point was against a portion of the Siegfried Line which was certainly very strong from the point of view of technical construction, but was held by few troops, and those exhausted in previous battles. With the help of their tanks the enemy broke through our series of obstacles and positions which had been entirely undamaged. English cavalry appeared on the outskirts of Cambrai. At the end of the year, therefore, a breach in our line appeared to be a certainty. At this point a catastrophe was averted by German divisions which had arrived from the East and were more or less worn out by fighting and the long journey. Moreover, after a murderous defensive action lasting several days we succeeded in quickly bringing up comparatively fresh troops, taking the enemy's salient in flank by a counterattack, and almost completely restoring the original situation

at very heavy cost to the enemy. Not only the army headquarters staff on the spot, but the troops themselves and our railways, had performed one of the most brilliant feats of the war.

The first considerable attack on our side in the West since the conduct of operations was intrusted to me had come to a victorious conclusion. Its effect on me personally was as strong and invigorating as on our troops and their leaders. I felt it as a release from a burden which our defensive strategy on the Western Front had placed upon my shoulders. For us, however, the success of our counterattack involved far more than mere satisfaction. The element of surprise which had led to our success contained a lesson for the future.

With the battle of Cambrai the English High Command had departed from what I might call the routine methods which hitherto they had always followed. Higher strategy seemed to have come into its own on this occasion. The pinning down of our main forces in Flanders and on the French front was to be used to facilitate a great surprise blow at Cambrai. It must be admitted that the subordinate commanders on the English side had not been equal to the demands and possibilities of the situation. By neglecting to exploit a brilliant initial success they had let victory be snatched from them, and indeed by troops which were far inferior to their own, both in numbers



and quality. From this point of view our foe at Cambrai deserved his thorough defeat. Moreover, his High Command seemed to have failed to concentrate the resources required to secure the execution of their plans and their exploitation in case of success. Strong bodies of cavalry assembled behind the triumphant leading infantry divisions failed, even on this occasion, to overcome the last line of resistance, weak though it was, which barred the way to the flanks and rear of their opponents. The English cavalry squadrons were not able to conquer the German defense, even with the help of their tanks, and proved unequal to decorating their standards with that victory for which they had striven so honorably and so often.

The English attack at Cambrai for the first time revealed the possibilities of a great surprise attack with tanks. We had had previous experience of this weapon in the spring offensive, when it had not made any particular impression. However, the fact that the tanks had now been raised to such a pitch of technical perfection that they could cross our undamaged trenches and obstacles did not fail to have a marked effect on our troops. The physical effects of fire from machine guns and light ordnance with which the steel Colossus was provided were far less destructive than the moral effect of its comparative invulnerability. The infantryman felt that he could do practically

nothing against its armored sides. As soon as the machine broke through our trench lines the defender felt himself threatened in the rear and left his post. I had no doubt that though our men had had to put up with quite enough already in the defense, they would get on level terms even with this new hostile weapon, and that our technical skill would soon provide the means of fighting tanks, and, moreover, in that mobile form which was so necessary.

As was to be expected, the French did not stand idly by and watch the attacks of their English ally in the summer and autumn. In the second half of August they attacked us at Verdun and on October 22d northeast of Soissons. In both cases they captured a considerable portion of the trench systems of the armies at those points and caused them important losses. But, speaking generally, the French High Command confined themselves to local attacks in the second half of the year. They were undoubtedly compelled to do so by the appalling losses they had suffered in the spring, losses which made it seem inadvisable to subject their troops to any similar disastrous experiences.

## II

### *The Balkans*

Hostile attacks on the Bulgarian front in Macedonia during the later summer months of 1917 had

made no difference to the general situation in that theater. Apparently Sarrail had no considerable objective in these operations. On the contrary, he seemed to have imposed remarkable limits on himself, so much so that from the point of view of the whole war his troops might hardly have been there at all.

It was at this time that Bulgaria watched the Greek mobilization with ever-increasing anxiety. The news we ourselves received from Greece left it doubtful whether Venizelos would succeed in creating an effective force. For a long time even the so-called Venizelist Divisions were nothing more than a collection of supers who preferred the role of hero in the Macedonian theater to the actual battles of heroes. The real, sound heart of the Greek people was always averse to supporting a domestic policy of open disloyalty. Bulgaria's anxieties were based, perhaps, on memories of the events of 1913.

### III

#### *Asia*

I will now turn to the course of events in Asiatic Turkey. To omit them would, in my opinion, be a crime against our brave and loyal ally. Moreover, such an omission would mean an unfinished picture of the mighty drama, the scenes of which extended from the northern seas to the shores of

the Indian Ocean. Here again I will concern myself less with the description of events than with a discussion of their interdependence.

The fancies of our armchair strategists did not confine themselves merely to plans of campaign in central Europe, but were frequently lost in the distances of the Far East. The products of these imaginings frequently came into my own hands. As a rule, in their letters the authors confined themselves to "general principles," in order "not to take up too much of my precious time," and were kind enough to think that the rest could be left to me. But in most cases we were urged to lose no time! One such strategist among our young hopefuls wrote to me one day: "You *must* see that this war will be decided at Kiliz. So send all our armies there." The first business was to find out where Kiliz was. It was at length discovered in the temperate zone north of Aleppo.

However novel this young man's idea may seem, it contained a large element of sound strategic instinct. Perhaps not the course of the whole war, but certainly the fate of our Ottoman ally, would have been settled out of hand if England had secured a decision in that region, or even seriously attempted it. Possession of the country south of the Taurus would have been lost to Turkey at a blow if the English had succeeded in landing in the Gulf of Alexandretta, and from there striking east.

In so doing they would have severed the main artery of all Trans-Taurian Turkey, through which fresh blood and other revitalizing forces flowed to the Syrian, Mesopotamian, and a part of the Caucasian armies. The quantity of blood and the virtue of the forces were small enough, it is true, but they would enable the Ottoman armies to prolong their resistance for a long time yet to the enemy operations and offensives, which were insufficiently prepared and in many cases feebly and inefficiently carried out.

The protection of the Gulf of Alexandretta was intrusted to a Turkish army which contained scarcely a single unit fit to fight. Every man who could be of use in the fighting line was gradually transferred to Syria or Mesopotamia. Moreover, coast protection by artillery at this point was more a figment of the Oriental imagination than a military reality. Enver Pasha exactly described the situation to me in the words, "My only hope is that the enemy has not discovered our weakness at this critical spot."

Was there really any probability that the enemy would not discover this critical weakness at the Gulf of Alexandretta? I did not think so. Nowhere did the hostile Intelligence Service find fewer obstacles and greater possibilities of assistance among the medley of nationalities than in Syria and Asia Minor. It seemed impossible that

the English High Command should not know the true state of the coast defenses in this theater. Moreover, England had no reason to fear that in pushing east from the Gulf of Alexandretta she would be treading on a hornets' nest. There were no hornets. If ever there was a prospect of a brilliant strategic feat, it was here. Such a campaign would have made an enormous impression on the whole world, and unquestionably have had a far-reaching effect on our Turkish ally.

Why did England never make use of her opportunity here? Perhaps her experiences in the Dardanelles had sunk too deeply into her soul. Perhaps there was too great anxiety about our U-boats for anyone on the enemy's side to venture on such an enterprise.

Some day history will perhaps clear up this question also. I say "perhaps," for it is not likely that England will ever clear it up herself. We obtained an insight into the main current of British thought by an expression let fall by a high English naval officer at the time of the Fashoda affair. In reply to a question as to his prospective idea of the role to be played by the English fleet in the Mediterranean in case of an Anglo-French war, he said, "I have the strictest instructions not to stake England's Trafalgar fame."

The fame of Trafalgar is great and well deserved. It is that kind of metaphorical jewel which goes to

make a nation's most priceless treasure. England knew how to preserve this jewel and to keep it ever in the brightest light before the admiring eyes of the whole world. It is true that many shadows have been cast over that jewel in the Great War. The Dardanelles is one example. And further shadows were to follow in the battles against the German navy, the strongest and blackest being Skagerrak. England will never forgive us the eclipse of the fame of Trafalgar!

England renounced the idea of a bold thrust into the heart of her Turkish adversary and proceeded with her costly and tedious efforts to bring about the collapse of Turkish dominion south of the Taurus by gradually driving back the Ottoman armies. The capture of Bagdad at the beginning of the year was the first great and promising step toward the realization of this war aim. On the other hand, the attack at Gaza in the spring had failed, and the English had to begin all over again. But for the time being further military operations were paralyzed under the leaden weight of the summer heat.

The loss of Bagdad was painful for us and, as we well believed, still more painful for all thinking Turkey. How often had the name of the old city of the caliphs been mentioned in Germany in previous years! How many dreams had been associated with it, dreams which it would have

been better to cherish in silence rather than shout all over the world in the impolitic German way!

The general military situation was not further affected by events in Mesopotamia, but the loss of Bagdad was a sore point for German foreign policy. We had guaranteed the Turkish government the territorial integrity of the Empire, and now felt that, in spite of the generous interpretation of this contract, our political account was heavily overdrawn by this new great loss.

Enver Pasha's request for German help in order to recover Bagdad was therefore welcomed by all of us, not the least because the Turkish High Command had always shown itself willing to assist us in the European theater. At Enver's suggestion the conduct of the new campaign was to be put in German hands, not because the assistance of German troops was contemplated on any considerable scale, but because the Turkish generalissimo considered it essential that the military prestige of Germany should preside over the enterprise. But the success of the scheme was inconceivable unless we managed to overcome the enormous difficulties of supply due to the appalling length of the lines of communication. A Turkish commander would have come to grief over this essential preliminary.

On the suggestion of the Turks, His Majesty the Emperor intrusted the conduct of this extraor-



dinarily difficult operation to General von Falkenhayn. In May, 1917, the general, to familiarize himself with the elements of his problem, visited Mesopotamia and Syria, as well as Constantinople. The visit to Syria was necessary because General von Falkenhayn could not possibly operate against Bagdad unless he had an absolute guaranty that the Turkish front in Syria would hold. For there could be no doubt that the Bagdad enterprise would soon be betrayed to England, and that such news must provoke an English attack on Syria.

General von Falkenhayn came to the conclusion that the operation was possible. We therefore met the demands he made upon us. We restored to Turkey all the Ottoman troops which we were still employing in the European theater. The Ottoman Corps in Galicia left the German army just as Kerensky's troops were withdrawing eastward before our counteroffensive. It returned homeward accompanied by expressions of the liveliest gratitude on our part. The Turk had once more revived his ancient military fame in our ranks and proved himself a thoroughly effective instrument of war in our hands. I must, of course, admit that Enver Pasha had given up the very best troops he had available for the Eastern Front and Rumania. The quality of this corps could therefore not be taken as a standard of the efficiency and capacity of the whole Turkish army.

The unsparing work which our army headquarters staff had devoted to the education and training of the Turkish troops, and more particularly their attention to their feeding and health, had borne fruit in fullest measure. How many of these rough children of nature had found friendship and fellow feeling for the first time—and indeed for the last—under German protection.

I had hoped that the Ottoman Corps would form a particularly valuable element in the force embarked for the expedition against Bagdad. Unfortunately, these expectations were not fulfilled. No sooner were these troops out of range of our influence than they went to pieces again, thus proving what little effect our example had had on the Turkish officer. In comparison with the great mass of insufficiently trained and ineffective elements only a few individuals proved particularly brilliant exceptions. The Turkish army would have required complete reorganization if it was really to become capable of the achievements which the sacrifices of the country required. The defects of its present condition were revealed most strikingly in an extremely high rate of wastage. This phenomenon was characteristic of every army which was insufficiently trained and had not been properly prepared for war. A really thorough training of the army saves the man power of a nation in case of war. What enormous propor-

tions the rate of wastage reached in Turkey during the war appears from a piece of intelligence which reached me to the effect that in a single province of Anatolia the villages had been drained of every male inhabitant except boys and old men. This is credible enough when we remember that the defense of the Dardanelles cost the Turks about 200,000 men. How many of them succumbed to hunger and disease is unknown.

Apart from a number of officers who were lent for special employment, the German reinforcements for the Bagdad enterprise comprised the so-called "Asiatic Corps." There has been a certain amount of criticism in our country on the ground that we placed so splendid a corps at the disposal of the Turks for a distant objective instead of using these precious troops in central Europe. However, the corps consisted of only three infantry battalions and a few batteries. The name "Asiatic Corps" was chosen in order to mislead the enemy. We have never known whether it really did so. With regard to this help it was less a question of the material reinforcement of our allies than of giving them moral and intellectual support—that is, resolution and experience. The peculiar character of the help we rendered was hit off exactly in an expression of the Tsar Ferdinand when, after the autumn battles of 1916 in Macedonia, he warned us against withdrawing all the German,

troops from the Bulgarian front: "My Bulgarians like to see spiked helmets, for the sight gives them confidence and a sense of security. They have everything else themselves." This again confirmed the experience which Scharnhorst once put into words when he said that the stronger will of the trained man is the more important for the whole operation than brute force.

The operations against Bagdad never materialized. Before the summer months were over it appeared that the English had completed all their preparations to attack the Turkish forces at Gaza before the wet season set in. General von Falkenhayn, who was permanently stationed in the East, became more and more convinced that the Syrian front would not prove equal to the strain of an English attack, which would doubtless be made in great superiority. Turkish divisions which had been earmarked for the operations against Bagdad had to be diverted to the south. The result of this was that the chance of a successful enterprise in Mesopotamia had vanished. At Enver Pasha's suggestion I accordingly agreed that all available reserves should be sent to Syria with the idea of taking the offensive ourselves before the English attacked. The German command hoped to improve the capacity of the railway and the administration of the Turkish districts to such an extent that a substantially larger number of troops could

be supplied in this theater and provided with all the war material required.

Thanks to both political and military causes of friction, General von Falkenhayn lost a lot of precious time. At the beginning of November the English succeeded in taking the offensive at Beer-sheba and Gaza. The Turkish armies were driven north, and Jerusalem was lost at the beginning of December. It was not until the middle of this month that the Turkish lines were re-established north of the line Jaffa-Jerusalem-Jericho.

Although we had feared that these Turkish defeats, and especially the loss of Jerusalem, would have a regrettable political reaction on the position of the existing government in Constantinople, nothing of the kind happened—at least, not to outward appearance. A remarkable atmosphere of indifference took the place of the agitation we feared.

I myself had no doubt that Turkey would never recover possession of Jerusalem and the holy places. This view was shared, though tacitly, at the Golden Horn also. Ottoman eyes were now turned in deeper longing than ever to other regions of Asia, seeking compensation for the lost provinces. Unfortunately, this was premature from the military point of view.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### A GLANCE AT THE INTERNAL SITUATION OF THE STATES AND NATIONS AT THE END OF 1917

THE reader need not fear that, overcoming my aversion to politics, I am about to plunge into the whirlpool of party strife; but if I am not to leave too many gaps in the picture which I am trying to give I cannot very well omit the remarks that follow. Is there anyone, indeed, who could succeed in giving a complete description of the times of which I write? A whole series of further questions suggest themselves after the "Why?" and "How?" There will always be gaps, as so many lips which could have given priceless information are now dumb. Nor can I fill in all the details of my picture. I can only put in a stroke here and there. It is more a character sketch than a finished painting. Arbitrarily, perhaps, I will take the East first.

"Turkey is a cipher." These words can be found in a memorandum dating from pre-war times, and it is a German memorandum, and therefore not inspired by political hatred of Tur-

key. A peculiar cipher, by which the Dardanelles were defended and the victory of Kut-el-Amara gained; a cipher which marched on Egypt and brought the Russian attack in the mountains of Armenia to a standstill! For us it was a valuable cipher, which, as I said before, was now tying down hundreds of thousands of enemy troops, picked troops which were nibbling at the Turkish frontier provinces, and indeed nibbling them away, but without succeeding in devouring the whole body!

What gave this cipher its inward strength? A puzzle even to those who were now living in or had lived long in the land of the Ottoman. The masses seemed apathetic and indifferent, while a great part of the upper classes were selfish and dead to all higher national demands. As far as one could see the state was composed only of classes which were separated by deep gulfs and had no national common life. And yet this state remained in existence and gave proofs of its power. The authority of Constantinople seemed to end at the Taurus. Beyond Asia Minor Turkey seemed to have no real influence, and yet Turkish armies were maintaining themselves in distant Mesopotamia and Syria. The Arabs in those regions hated the Turks, and the Turks the Arabs. And yet Arab battalions were still fighting under Turkish standards, and did not desert in masses to the enemy, even though he not only promised them

mountains of gold, but actually scattered with prodigal hand the gold they so much coveted. Behind the Anglo-Indian army, which, as it thought, was bringing the long-desired freedom to the Arab tribes, downtrodden and oppressed by the Turks, these very tribes rose and turned against their so-called deliverers. There must be some force here which acted as a bond of unity, and indeed a force which was not the resultant of pressure from outside, but of a cohesive influence, a feeling of community of interest within. It could not be solely the authority of those in power in Turkey which supplied this centralizing force. The Arabs could easily have escaped that authority. They had only to raise their arms and walk out of their trenches toward the enemy or rise in revolt behind the Turkish army. And yet they did not do so. Was it their faith, the relic of their ancient faith, which was the unifying influence here? Some said it was, and on good grounds, while others denied it on equally good grounds. Here was a point at which our knowledge of Ottoman psychology seemed to have reached its limits. We must leave the conflict of opinions undecided.

Thus, in spite of the heaviest afflictions, the state could not be altogether moribund. Moreover, we heard of splendid officials who, side by side with others who entirely forgot their duty,



proved themselves men of great ideas and immense energy. I came to know one of them, Ismail Hakki, at Kreuznach. He was a man with many of the drawbacks of his race, who yet possessed a powerful and fertile intellect. It was a great pity that he had not sprung from a healthier soil. It was said that he never wrote anything down, but did everything in his head; and yet he had thousands of things to think about and was inspired by national views which went far beyond the horizon of the war! His principal sphere of work, and that in which he revealed his greatest powers, was the food supply of the army and Constantinople. If Ismail Hakki had been dismissed, the Turkish army would have suffered a shortage of everything; its privations would have even been greater than was inevitable at this stage, and Constantinople would probably have starved. Practically the whole country was going hungry, and this not because food was lacking, but because administration and transport were at a standstill and there was no means of adjusting supply to demand. No one knew how the inhabitants of the larger towns managed to exist at all. We supplied Constantinople with bread, sent corn from the Dobrudja and Rumania, and gave what help we could, in spite of our own shortage. Of course, what we delivered to Constantinople would not have gone far with our millions of mouths. If

we had stopped these deliveries we should have lost Turkey, for a starving Constantinople would have revolted, no matter what autocracy might do. Was there really an autocracy in that country? I have already spoken of the Committee. But there were other influences there working against the strong men; influences which sprang from political and possibly commercial hatreds, such hatreds as create factions. Beneath the externally peaceful surface strong currents were in motion. We could often see the whirlpools when they attempted to suck the present leaders down into the depths.

The army, too, suffered from these currents and, as I have said above, the High Command had to allow for them in their calculations and frequently to give way to them to the prejudice of the general situation. If they had not done so the army, the numerical strength of which was already being frittered away, would have been dissolved internally also. Privations and want of food were to a large extent playing havoc with the troops. The length of the war was also having a serious effect on their establishment, for with the previous wars in the Yemen and Balkans many Turkish soldiers seemed never to have stopped fighting. The longing for their homes, wives, and children—such longings are not unknown even to Islam—drove thousands of men to desertion. Of the complete divisions which were entrained at

Haidar-Pasha only fragments ever reached Syria or Mesopotamia. Men may go on arguing whether the number of Turkish deserters in Asia Minor was 300,000 or 500,000. In any case it was nearly as large as the total number of fighting troops in the Turkish army. It was not an encouraging picture, and yet—Turkey still held on and loyally did her duty without a word of complaint.

Bulgaria also was suffering from scarcity. Scarcity of food in a land which usually produces more than it needs! The harvest had been only moderate, but it could have sufficed if the country had been administered like our own and available supplies could have been properly distributed between districts that had too much and those that had not enough. In reply to a suggestion to this effect a Bulgarian answered, "We don't understand such things!" A simple excuse, or rather self-accusation. The Bulgarians simply folded their hands because they had never learned to use them. We know that as Bulgaria had passed straight from Turkish slavery to complete political freedom, she had never known the educative influence of a strong organizing authority. If I may be allowed to speak as a Prussian, she had never had a King Frederic William I, who raised the pillars of iron on which our state securely rested for so long. Bulgaria did not know what good administration was. But she had plenty of parties.

Most of them were bitterly hostile to the government, not on the ground of its foreign policy, which promised a great future, national unity and the hegemony of the Balkans, but on account of domestic issues around which the contest went on the more fiercely. No methods, however dangerous, were despised. Neither their allies nor their own army was sacred. It was a dangerous game! The Dobrudja was always a favorite subject for party agitation. The government had conjured up menacing specters in order to put pressure on Turkey and ourselves, and now found they could not get rid of these specters which threatened to destroy everything, and for party purposes preached hatred of the allies and their representatives. In the autumn of 1917 it seemed to us best, for the time being, to give way on this Dobrudja question and leave its final solution until after the war. On our part it was a retreat inspired by policy, not by conviction. It was remarkable that as soon as we gave way all interest in the matter vanished in Bulgaria. The word "Dobrudja" had lost its power to excite party passions. Thus ended what had, at any rate, been a bloodless battle so far as we were concerned, but the struggle for power between the political parties continued and ruthlessly thrust a disruptive wedge into the framework of the army, and, indeed, deeper than in peace time.

The troops showed themselves susceptible to these disintegrating influences, for they were badly supplied and already beginning to suffer from scarcity. The lack of organizing energy and ability was revealed at every end and turn. We made many proposals in the direction of far-reaching improvements. The Bulgarians recognized that these proposals were timely, but they had not the energy and disliked the bother of putting them into effect. They confined themselves to grumbling about the Germans who were occupying their country (as a matter of fact, a country which had been conquered by joint operations!), who by the terms of the compact were to be supplied by the Bulgarians themselves because they were fighting on the Macedonian frontier, not for the protection of Germany, but primarily for the protection of Bulgaria. According to the Bulgarians, the Germans ought to feed their own men, and as a matter of fact and for the sake of peace they did so, and sent cattle as well as hay from the homeland to Macedonia. It must be admitted that these unending disputes went on in the lines of communication area behind the common front, and not among the fighting troops, for these still had some self-respect. With the idea of preventing disputes we suggested the exchange of our German troops in Macedonia for Bulgarian divisions which were in Rumania. We were thus offering the Bul-

garians two, or rather three, men for one; but there were immediately loud cries in Sofia about a breach of faith. We therefore confined ourselves to withdrawing only some of our troops and sending a few of our battalions to take over from the Bulgarians in Rumania. Thus the Bulgarian divisions left the northern bank of the Danube, to which they had originally crossed only with extreme reluctance.

Thus the Bulgarian picture also was not without its shadows. But we could rely on her continued loyalty—at any rate, so long as we could and would meet her great political claims. When, however, as a result of expressions in the German press and speeches in the German parliament in the summer of 1917, both Sofia and the Bulgarian army began to have doubts as to whether we would really keep our promises, they listened, holding their breath, and, what is worse, began to suspect us. The parties began to clamor for the resignation of Radoslavoff. His foreign policy was recognized to be far-seeing and all of them still approved it, but it appeared that he was not the man to hold his own with the allies. Moreover, his home policy was disliked in many quarters. New men ought to be put at the helm, for in the opinion of Bulgaria the old had already been in power too long. They might have feathered their own nests. Moreover, everyone who had any connection whatever with Radoslavoff, from the highest official

down to the village mayor, would have to depart with the government, for that alone was consistent with the parliamentary, the so-called "free" system. And this was to be done at once, even in the middle of a war!

I have little to say about Austria-Hungary. Her internal difficulties had not become less. I have already said that the attempt to reconcile the Czech elements, which were intent on the destruction of the state, by the method of toleration had utterly failed. Efforts were now being made to create a bond of unity for the different races of the Empire, or at any rate their most influential circles, by putting forward the power and authority of the Church and giving prominence to religious feeling. But neither did these efforts achieve the hoped-for result. They merely widened the lines of cleavage and provoked mistrust where had previously been devotion. The mutual aversion of the different races was intensified by inequalities in the distribution of food. Vienna was starving while Buda-Pesth had something to spare. German Bohemia was almost dying from exhaustion, while the Czechs lacked practically nothing. As ill luck would have it, the harvest was a partial failure. This intensified the crisis and would continue to do so. As in Turkey, Austria-Hungary was not without the technical resources required to adjust matters between

districts which had too much and those which had not enough. But there was no centralizing power and no all-pervading state authority. Thus the old evil of domestic feuds, with all its destructive consequences, was extended to the domain of food supply. It was hardly surprising that the longing for peace grew and that confidence in a favorable conclusion of the war began to fail. The collapse of Russia made things worse rather than better. The elimination of the danger from that side seemed to have made men indifferent rather than strengthened their resolution. Even the victory in Italy was welcome only to certain classes and circles of the nation. The masses had lost all their pride, for starvation was undoubtedly at work here and there. Moreover, much that still stood for something before the death of the old Emperor had lost its ethical significance. Thousands of Czech and other agitators trampled the honor of the state under foot. It was certain that far stronger nerves than those possessed by the governing authorities would have been required to offer further resistance to the pressure of the masses, which to a certain extent were anxious for peace at any price.

And now to our own country.

In the course of the military events of which I have been writing, far-reaching and fateful changes had been taking place in the domestic circum-



stances of our own Fatherland. The resignation of the Imperial Chancellor, Von Bethmann, showed how critical the situation had become. Although I said originally that we were at one in our views of the situation created by the war, as time went on I was bound to recognize with regret that this was no longer the case. The conduct of military operations had been intrusted to me, and for my task I needed all the resources of the Fatherland. To dissipate these resources by internal friction at a time of extreme tension, instead of concentrating them, could only lead to a diminution of our political and military power. With that in mind I could not take the responsibility of standing by and saying nothing when I saw that the sense of unity which was so essential at the front was being destroyed at home. Convinced as I was that, compared with our enemies, we were falling back in this respect and taking the opposite course to theirs, I, unfortunately, soon saw myself at loggerheads with our government. Our co-operation thereby suffered. For that reason I considered it my duty to ask my All-Highest War Lord for permission to resign, however hard such a step must be for me as a soldier. His Majesty did not approve my request. Simultaneously the Chancellor had requested to be allowed to resign as a result of a declaration of the party leaders in the Reichstag. His wish was granted.

The outward consequences of this retirement were regrettable. There was an end to the appearance of party peace which had hitherto been maintained. A Majority party with a definite tendency toward the Left came into existence. The omissions which were alleged to have distinguished our political development of earlier times were now exploited, even in the middle of a war and under the pressure of the extremely difficult situation in which the Fatherland found itself, to force further concessions from the government in the direction of a so-called parliamentary system. Along such paths our inward unity was bound to be lost. The reins of government gradually fell into the hands of the extreme parties.

Doctor Michaelis was appointed to succeed Bethmann-Hollweg. Within a very short time my relations with him were on a footing of mutual confidence. He had entered upon his difficult office undismayed, but he did not hold it for long. Circumstances were to prove too strong for him, stronger than his own good intentions.

The atmosphere of parliamentary faction was never again improved. The Majority parties inclined more and more to the Left, and as far as deeds were concerned, and in spite of many fine words, began to represent the elements which were intent on the destruction of the ancient political order in the state. It became ever clearer that in

the strife of party interests and party dogmas our homeland was forgetting the real seriousness of our situation, or refusing any longer to realize it. Our enemies publicly rejoiced at this and knew how to add fuel to the party flames. In these circumstances efforts were made to find an Imperial Chancellor who would be able to compose party differences by virtue of his parliamentary past. The choice fell on Count von Hertling. I had met him at Pless in the company of the King of Bavaria. I still have happy recollections of the kindness which he showed when offering me his congratulations on the Grand Cross of the Iron Cross which His Majesty had just awarded me. To me it was both touching and encouraging to see how gladly the old count dedicated the strength of his last years to the service of his Fatherland. His unshakable confidence in our cause and his hopes for our future survived the most critical situations. He handled the parliamentary parties with skill, but, compared with the seriousness of our position, was unable to effect anything really vital. Unhappily, his relations with Main Headquarters suffered from the existence of misunderstandings which were a legacy from earlier times, and this occasionally prejudiced co-operation. My respect for the count was thereby in no way diminished. As is known, he died shortly after he resigned his thankless office.

Even apart from the misfortunes to which I have already referred, everything was far from comfortable in the homeland at the end of 1917. Nothing else could have been expected, for the war and privation were a heavy burden on a large portion of the nation and adversely affected its *morale*. A year of empty, or at any rate unsatisfied, stomachs prejudiced all higher impulses and tended to make men indifferent. Under the effects of insufficient physical nourishment the thoughts of the great mass among us were no better than elsewhere, even though the authority of the state and the moral resolution of the nation permeated our whole life to a greater degree. In such circumstances that life was bound to suffer, especially as no fresh intellectual and moral forces came into existence to revive it. We too lacked a stimulant of that kind. We met with the dangerous view that nothing more could be done against the indifference of the masses even in circles in which other opinions usually prevailed. The representatives of this view simply folded their hands and let things slide. They looked on while parties exploited the exhaustion of the nation as fertile soil for the growth of ideas which aimed at the dissolution of state order, and scattered their destructive seed which took root and flourished more and more. They would not use their hands to pluck up those weeds.

Indifference had the same effect as slothfulness. It prepared the soil for discontent. It infected not only the people at home, but also the soldiers who returned among them.

The soldiers who returned home from the front were in a position to exercise an inspiring and stimulating influence on the public. Most of them did so. But they could also have a depressing influence, and, unfortunately, many of them proved it, though they were not the best from our ranks. These men wanted no more war; they had a bad effect on the already poisoned soil, themselves absorbed the worst elements of that soil, and carried the demoralization of the homeland back with them into the field.

There is much that is gloomy in this picture. Not all of it was an actual consequence of the war, or at any rate need have been such a consequence. War does not only stimulate, it demoralizes. And this war had a more demoralizing influence than any previous war. It destroyed not only bodies, but souls.

The enemy intensified the process of demoralization, not only by his blockade and the semistarvation it involved, but by another method, known as "Propaganda in the Enemy's Camp." This was a new weapon, or rather a weapon which had never been employed on such a scale and so ruthlessly in the past. The enemy used it in Germany

as in Turkey, Austria-Hungary, and Bulgaria. The shower of inflammatory pamphlets fell not only behind our fronts in East and West, but also behind the Turkish fronts in Irak and Syria.

This method of propaganda is known as "Enlightening the Enemy," but it ought to be called "Concealing the Truth," or even "Poisoning the Enemy's Character." It is the result of the adversary's conviction that he is no longer strong enough to defeat his enemy in open and honorable fight and conquer his moral resolution merely by the victory of his triumphant sword.

And now let us try and secure a peep into the heart of the states hostile to us. I say "try" advisedly. For during a war there could be no question of anything more. Not only our economic intercourse, but every other kind of intercourse with foreign countries was cut off by the blockade. The fact that to a certain extent we had neutral states on our frontiers hardly affects this statement at all. Our spy service produced only miserable results. In this sphere even German gold succumbed in the struggle between our enemies and ourselves.

We knew that on the far side of the Western Front a government was in power which was personally inspired by thoughts of hatred and revenge, and incessantly whipped up the inmost passions of the nation. Whenever Clemenceau spoke the

burden of his words was, "Woe to our ancient conqueror." France was bleeding from a thousand wounds. If we had not known it, the public declarations of her Dictator would have told us so. But France was going to fight on. There was not a word, not a suggestion, of concession. The moment a crack appeared in the structure of the state—which was held together with iron chains—the government intervened, and intervened ruthlessly. It achieved its purpose. The majority of the nation may have longed for peace, but if any public expression was given to such a feeling in the land of republican freedom, it was cold-bloodedly stamped into the ground and the nation received a further dose of liberal phrases. Even before the outbreak of war, in the so-called antimilitarist France the words "humanity" and "pacifism" were branded as "dangerous narcotics with which the doctrinaire advocates of peace wished to corrupt the manliness of the nation. Pacifism has proved this at all times. Its proper name is cowardice, and it means the exaggerated self-love of the individual who takes care to avoid every personal risk which does not bring him direct advantage." These were the words of men in "peace-loving France." Was it surprising that the ideals of "France at war" were just as ruthless and that every man who ever dared to speak of peace was branded as a traitor to his country?

We could not doubt that even at the end of 1917 the French nation was better fed than the German. In the first place, Paris received special attention. As far as possible it was spared from scarcity and consoled by every conceivable kind of pleasure. It seemed to us doubtful whether the Gaul would endure the privations of daily life with the same devotion and for so long as his German adversary. But, in any case, we might be certain that even a starving France would have to go on fighting for as long as England wished, even if she thereby succumbed altogether.

The French prisoners certainly told us of the miseries of war and the scarcity which was making itself felt at home. But their own appearance did not indicate any shortage. All of them were longing for the end of the war, but no one thought that it would come so long as "the others wanted to go on fighting."

How was it with England?

The Motherland found her economic and world position faced with an immense peril. But no one there ventured to say so. There was only one way out—Victory! In the course of the last year England had survived a "fit of weakness." For a time it had looked as if the national resolution had begun to crumble and England's war aims to become more modest. The voice of Lord Lansdowne was heard. However, it died away under



the oppressive weight of an autocratic power which held out the prospect of an approaching end of the war. After the economic and political *morale* of the nation had sunk to a low level in the summer, the public had once more scented the air of approaching victory, though until the end of 1917 we did not know why. As we found out later, that air had its origin in the political sink of corruption in central Europe. Thoughts of approaching victory once more restored the unity of the whole nation. It was once again willing to bear the loss of its pleasures and found it easier to give up its old habits and political freedom in the hope of realizing its anticipation that after the successful conclusion of this war every individual Englishman would be richer. The political self-discipline of the Englishman reinforced his commercial selfishness. And so here, too, nothing was said about peace so long as the war did not cost too much. English prisoners at the end of 1917 spoke in the same tone as those of the end of 1914. No one had any stomach for fighting. Yet no one asked any questions in that country. The state demanded, and its demands were satisfied.

The condition of affairs in Italy appeared to be otherwise than in France and England. In the campaign of the previous autumn many thousands of Italian soldiers had laid down their arms without any urgent military necessity, not from a lack of

courage, but from disgust at what seemed to them senseless slaughter. They looked happy enough on their journey into our country and greeted the familiar workshops with German songs. But even if the enthusiasm for the war, both in the army and in the country itself, had dwindled to nothing, the nation was not wholly paralyzed. The people knew that they would otherwise starve and freeze. The will of Italy had still to bow to that of the foreigner. That was her bitter fate from the start, and she only found it tolerable thanks to the prospects of great and alluring booty.

From the United States even fewer voices reached us than from Europe. What we ascertained confirmed our suspicions. Her brilliant, if pitiless, war industry had entered the service of patriotism and had not failed it. Under the compulsion of military necessity a ruthless autocracy was at work, and rightly, even in this land at the portals of which the Statue of Liberty flashes its blinding light across the seas. They understood war. Weaker voices had to be silent until the hard task had been done. Only then might the spirit of freedom make itself heard again for the good of humanity. For the time being it must be silenced for the good of the state. All creeds and races felt themselves at one in this battle for an ideal, and in cases where conviction or the call of the blood did not speak in favor of the poor Anglo-

Saxon on the verge of ruin, gold was thrown into the scale of understanding.

I need say no more about Russia. We could look into her heart as into an open furnace. She would be utterly consumed, perhaps, but in any case she lay prostrate on the ground, and her Rumanian ally had been involved in her fall.

Such was our view of the situation at the end of 1917.

Many a man in those days asked himself the significant question: "How is it that our enemies abate nothing of their ruthless political demands upon us, in spite of their many military failures in the year 1917, the disappearance of Russia as a factor from the war, the unquestionably far-reaching effects of the U-boat warfare, and the corresponding uncertainty as to whether the great American reinforcements could ever be brought to the European theater? How could Wilson, with the approval of the enemy governments, in January, 1918, propose conditions for a peace such as might be dictated to a completely beaten adversary, but which could not be put before a foe who had hitherto been victorious and whose armies were practically everywhere on enemy soil?"

This was my answer then, and it is still my answer:

While we were defeating our enemy's armies their governments and peoples directed their gaze

steadily at the development of the domestic situation of our Fatherland and those of our allies. The weaknesses which I have already described could not be concealed from them. It was those weaknesses which reinforced what seemed to us such incomprehensible hopes and resolution.

It was not only the enemy's Intelligence Service, though it worked under the most favorable circumstances imaginable, which gave the enemy the glance he so much desired at our home situation. Our people and their political representatives did nothing whatever to conceal our domestic troubles from the enemy's eyes. The German proved that he was not yet politically educated to the point of exercising self-control. He had to give utterance to his thoughts, however disastrous the effect might be at the moment. He thought he could only satisfy his vanity by publishing what he knew and felt to the whole world. Thanks to the vague cosmopolitan sentiments by which he was largely swayed, he regarded it as a secondary matter whether this behavior on his part advantaged or injured the Fatherland. He was convinced that what he had said was right and clever, was himself perfectly satisfied in the matter, and assumed that his audience would be so, too. The affair was then closed so far as he was concerned.

This failing has done us even more injury in the great conflict for our national existence than mili-

tary misfortunes. To the lack of the political discipline which is second nature with the Englishman and that patriotism free from cosmopolitan crazes which distinguishes the French, I attribute in the last resource the German "Peace Resolution," which received the approval of the Reichstag on July 19, 1917, the very day on which the military power of Russia palpably received its death blow. I know well enough that beneath the objective reasons which were then put forward as paramount for this Resolution the great disappointment at the course of military events and the visible results of our U-boat campaign played a large part. Different views may be held about the justification for such doubts about our position. As is known, I considered it fairly favorable; but I was convinced that the method of approaching such a step from the parliamentary side was a hopeless mistake. We shouted our longings for peace into the ears of our enemies at the very moment when a proper political attitude on the part of the Germans would perhaps have made them only too glad to be able to detect even the slightest inclination to peace in the pulse of our people. The phraseology in which we tried to clothe the step was much too threadbare to have deceived anyone in the enemy camp. Among us Clemenceau's battle cry, "I make war!" found the echo, "We seek peace!"

I therefore opposed this Peace Resolution not from the standpoint of human feeling, but from that of soldierly instinct. I foresaw what it would cost us and expressed it thus, "Another year of war at least!" Another year of war in the serious situation in which both we and our allies found ourselves!

Part IV

THE FIGHT FOR A DECISION IN THE WEST





## CHAPTER XIX

### THE QUESTION OF AN OFFENSIVE IN THE WEST

#### I

#### *Our Intentions and Prospects for 1918*

IN view of the serious situation which I have described in the last few pages I shall be asked the very natural question for what reason I considered we had prospects of bringing the war to a favorable conclusion by a last great offensive.

For my answer I will get away from political considerations, and speak solely from the standpoint of the soldier as I turn in the first place to the situation of our allies.

In view of the military helplessness of Russia and Rumania, as well as the heavy defeat of Italy, I considered that the burden on Austria-Hungary had been relieved to such an extent that it would not be difficult for the Danube Monarchy to carry on the war on her own fronts by herself. I believed that Bulgaria was in every sense capable of dealing with the armies of the Entente in Macedonia, all the more so as the Bulgarian forces which had

been employed against Russia and Rumania could very shortly be entirely released for Macedonia. Turkey, too, had been immensely relieved in Asia Minor by the collapse of Russia. So far as I could see, the result was that she had sufficient troops at her disposal materially to reinforce her armies in Mesopotamia and Syria.

In my view the further resistance of our allies depended, apart from their own resolution, mainly upon the effective employment of the resources available, which were in any case sufficient for their task. I asked nothing more than that they should hold out. We ourselves would secure a decision in the West. For the purposes of such a decision our armies in the East were now available, or we could, at any rate, hope to have them available by the time the best season began. With the help of these armies we ought to be able to secure a preponderance of numbers in the West. For the first time in the whole war the Germans would have the advantage of numbers on one of their fronts! Of course it could not be as great as that with which England and France had battered our Western Front in vain for more than three years. In particular, even the advent of our forces from the East did not suffice to cancel out the immense superiority of our enemies in artillery and aircraft. But in any case we were now in a position to concentrate an immense force to overwhelm the

enemy's lines at some point of the Western Front without thereby taking too heavy a risk on other parts of that front.

Even with the advantage of numbers on our side, it was not a simple matter to decide on an offensive in the West. It was always doubtful whether we should win a great victory. The course and results of the previous attacks of our enemies seemed to offer little encouragement. What had our enemies achieved in the long run with all their numerical superiority and their millions of shells and trench-mortar bombs, not to mention the hecatombs of corpses? Local gains of ground a few miles in depth were the fruits of months of effort. Of course, we too had suffered heavy losses in the defense, but it was to be assumed that those of the attacker had been materially higher. A decision was not to be reached merely by these so-called "battles of material." We had neither the resources nor the time for battles of that kind, for the moment was coming nearer when America would begin to come on the scene fully equipped. If before that time our U-boats had not succeeded in making the transport of large masses of troops with their supplies highly questionable, our position would become serious.

The question that pressed for an answer was this, What was there that entitled us to hope for one or more real victories such as our enemies had always

failed to secure hitherto? It is easy to give an answer, but difficult to explain it. The answer is the word "confidence." Not confidence in our lucky star or vague hopes, still less confidence in numbers and the outward show of strength. It was that confidence with which the commander sends his troops forward into the enemy fire, convinced that they will face the worst and do the seemingly impossible. It was the same confidence which inspired me in 1916 and 1917 when we had subjected our Western Front to an almost super-human test in order to be able to carry out great attacks elsewhere; the same confidence which had enabled us to keep superior enemy forces in check in all the theaters of war, and even to overthrow them.

Moreover, if the necessary numbers were in existence, it seemed to me that the necessary resolution was everywhere present likewise. I seemed to feel the longing of the troops to get away from the misery and oppression of pure defense. I knew that the German "rabbit"—which one of our bitterest enemies had held up to the derision of the English as "driven from the open into its holes"—would become the German soldier in his steel helmet who would rise from his trenches in great and overwhelming anger to put an end by attack to the years of torment he had suffered in defense.

Moreover, I thought that the summons to attack would have even greater and more far-reaching consequences. I hoped that with our first great victories the public at home would rise above their sullen brooding and pondering over the times, the apparent hopelessness of our struggle and impossibility of ending the war otherwise than by submission to the sentence of tyrannical Powers. Let the sword flash on high and all hearts would rise with it. It had always been thus. Could it be otherwise now? My hopes soared even beyond the frontiers of our homeland. Under the mighty impression of great German military victories, I saw the revival of the fighting spirit in hard-pressed Austria-Hungary, the rekindling of all the political and national hopes of Bulgaria, and the strengthening of the will to hold out even in far-away Turkey.

What a renunciation of my unshakable confidence in the success of our cause it would have meant if in the face of my Fatherland and my conscience I had suggested to my Emperor that we ought to lay down our arms. "Lay down our arms?" Yes, that is what it meant! We must not delude ourselves into the belief that our enemies would not put their claims as high as that. If we once started on the slippery path of surrender, if we once relaxed our efforts to put forth all our strength, no other alternative could be

seen unless we first paralyzed both the enemy's arms and his will. These had been our prospects in 1917, and later events were to show that they were our prospects now. We never had any choice except between fighting for victory or a defeat involving extinction. Did our enemies ever say anything else? No other voice ever reached my ear. If any voice in favor of peace ever made itself heard, it did not get through the atmosphere which separated me from the enemy statesmen. I believed that we had both the strength and the military spirit required to seek a decision in one last great passage of arms.

We had now to make up our minds how and where we should seek it. The "how" might in general be summed up in the words, "We must avoid a deadlock in a so-called battle of material." We must aim at a great and if possible surprise blow. If we did not succeed in breaking the enemy resistance at one stroke, this first blow must be followed by others at different points of the enemy lines until our goal was reached.

Of course from the start the ideal objective for my purposes was a complete break through the enemy lines, a break-through to unlock the gate to open warfare. This gate was to be found in the line Arras-Cambrai-St.-Quentin-La Fère. The choice of this front for attack was not influenced by political considerations. We had no idea of

attacking there merely because we had the English against us at this point. It is true that I still regarded England as the main pillar of the enemy resistance, but at the same time it was clear to me that in France the desire to injure us to the point of annihilation was no less strong than in England.

Moreover, from the military point of view it was of little importance whether we attacked the French or English first. The Englishman was undoubtedly a less skillful opponent than his brother in arms. He did not understand how to control rapid changes in the situation. His methods were too rigid. He had displayed these defects in attack, and I had no reason to think it would be otherwise in defense. Phenomena of that kind are regarded as inevitable by those who have much knowledge of military training. They are due to the lack of appropriate training in peace time. Even a war that lasts years cannot wholly make good the effects of insufficient preparation. But what the Englishman lacked in skill he made up, at any rate partially, by his obstinacy in sticking to his task and his objective; and this was true both of attack and of defense. The English troops were of varying value. The *élite* consisted of men from the colonies—a fact which is undoubtedly to be attributed to the circumstance that the colonial population is mainly agrarian.

The average Frenchman was a more skillful fighter than his English comrade. On the other hand, he was not so obstinate in his defense. Both our leaders and their men regarded the French artillery as their most dangerous opponent, while the prestige of the French infantryman was not very high. But in this respect also the French units varied with the part of the country from which they were recruited. In spite of the apparent lack of close co-operation on the Anglo-French front, it was certainly to be anticipated that either of the Allies would hasten to the help of the other in case of need. I considered it obvious that in this respect the French would act more promptly and ruthlessly than the English, in view of the political dependence of France on the good will of England and our previous experiences in the war.

At the time of our decision to attack, the English army was massed, and had been since the battles in Flanders, mainly on the northern wing of its front, which extended from the sea to south of St.-Quentin. Another and somewhat weaker group appeared to have remained in the neighborhood of Cambrai after the battle there. Apart from that, the English forces were apparently distributed pretty evenly. The least strongly held part of their line was that south of the Cambrai group. The English salient in our lines near this town had been somewhat flattened as the result of our



counterattack on November 30, 1917, but it was marked enough to permit of the application of tactical pincers—to use a phrase in vogue—from north and east. By so doing we should be able to cut off the English troops there. Of course it was always doubtful whether the English would keep their forces distributed in the way to which I have referred until our attack began. This depended very largely on whether we should be able to conceal our intentions. A fateful question! All our experience negatived such a possibility, much more a probability. We ourselves had known of the enemy's preparations in all his attempts to break through our Western Front, and generally long before the battles themselves began. We had been able to prevent the extension of the enemy's attacks to the wings practically every time. His months of preparation had never escaped the eagle eye of our scouting planes. Moreover, our ground reconnaissance had developed an extreme sensitiveness to any changes on the enemy's side. The enemy had patently renounced the element of surprise in his great attacks, in view of the apparent impossibility of concealing his extensive preparations and the concentration of troops. We, on the other hand, believed that quite special importance must be attached to surprise. Our efforts in that direction naturally meant that to a certain extent thorough

technical preparation had to be sacrificed. To what extent it must be sacrificed was left to the tactical instinct of our subordinate commanders and their troops.

Our great offensive involved tactical training as well as technical preparation. As for defense in the previous year, new principles were now laid down for attack and issued to the troops in comprehensive pamphlets. In our confidence in the offensive spirit of the troops, the center of gravity of the attack was to be found in thin lines of infantry, the effectiveness of which was intensified by the wholesale employment of machine guns and by the fact that they were directly accompanied by field artillery and battle planes. Of course, the offensive powers of these infantry waves were entirely dependent on the existence of a strong offensive spirit. We were completely renouncing the mass tactics in which the individual soldier finds the driving force in the protection given him by the bodies of the men around him, a form of tactics with which we had become extremely familiar from the practice of the enemy in the East and with which we had to deal occasionally even in the West.

When the enemy press announced German mass attacks in 1918 they were using the expression primarily with a view to satisfying the craving for sensation, but also to make the battle pictures

more vivid to the minds of their readers and simplify the explanation of events. Where on earth should we have found the men for such mass tactics and such holocausts? Besides, we had had quite enough of watching other armies sink down hopelessly before our lines because our reapers with that scythe of the modern battlefield, the machine gun, were able to devote themselves to the bloody harvest with greater zeal the thicker the human corn stood.

What I have said, which is more concerned with the spirit of our battle preparations than their technicalities, must suffice for a general indication of our offensive principles. Of course the German infantryman would still bear the brunt of the battle. His sister arms had the not less glorious and costly task of facilitating his work. The decisive importance of the approaching passage of arms in the West was truly and fully realized by us. We regarded it as an obvious duty to concentrate for our bloody task all effective troops that could in any way be spared from the other theaters of war. Our existing situation and the further developments in the political and economic sphere introduced all kinds of difficulties into the execution of our plans and repeatedly made my personal intervention necessary. I will deal generally with this important question and begin with the East.

On December 15th an armistice had been con-

cluded on the Russian front. In view of the progressive disruption of the Russian army, we had previously made a beginning with the transport of a large number of our troops from that theater. Yet some divisions, effective and suitable for maneuver warfare, had had to remain in Russia and Rumania until we had finally settled with these two countries. Of course it would have entirely corresponded to our military desires if peace bells could have rung in the year 1918 in the East. The place of these bells was taken by the wild, inflammatory speeches of revolutionary doctrinaires with which the conference room in Brest-Litovsk resounded. The great masses of all countries were summoned by these political agitators to shake off the burden of slavery by establishing a reign of terror. Peace on earth was to be insured by the wholesale massacre of the bourgeoisie. The Russian negotiators, especially Trotzky, degraded the conference table, at which the reconciliation of two mighty opponents was to be effected, to the level of a muddle-headed tub thumper's street corner.

In these circumstances it was hardly surprising that the peace negotiations made no progress. It seemed to me that Lenin and Trotzky behaved more like the victors than the vanquished, while trying to sow the seeds of political dissolution in the rear as well as the ranks of our army. As

events were shaping, peace seemed likely to be worse than an armistice. The representatives of our government indulged in a good deal of false optimism in their dealing with the peace question. Main Headquarters can at any rate claim that it recognized the danger and gave warning of it.

However great may have been the difficulties under which our German commission at Brest-Litovsk labored, it was unquestionably my duty to insist that for the sake of our proposed operations in the West peace should be attained in the East at the earliest possible moment. However, affairs only came to a head when on February 10th Trotzky refused to sign the peace treaty, but for the rest declared the state of war at an end. In this attitude of Trotzky, which simply flouted all international principles, I could see nothing but an attempt to keep the situation in the East in a state of perpetual suspense. I cannot say whether this attempt revealed the influence of the Entente. In any case the situation which supervened was intolerable from a military point of view. The Imperial Chancellor, Count von Hertling, agreed with this view of the General Staff. On February 13th His Majesty decided that hostilities should be resumed in the East on the 18th.

Our operations met with practically no resistance anywhere. The Russian government realized the peril with which it was threatened. On March 3d

the treaty of peace between the Quadruple Alliance and Great Russia was signed at Brest-Litovsk. The military power of Russia was thus out of the war in the legal sense also. Great tracts of country and many peoples were separated from the former united Russian organism, and even in the heart of Russia there was a deep cleavage between Great Russia and the Ukraine. The separation of the border states from the old Empire as a result of the peace conditions was in my view mainly a military advantage. It meant that—if I may use the term—a broad forward zone was created against Russia on the far side of our frontiers. From the political point of view I welcomed the liberation of the Baltic provinces, because it was to be assumed that from henceforth the German elements there would be able to develop in greater freedom, and the process of German colonization in that region would be extended.

I need hardly give any assurance that to negotiate with a Russian terrorist government was extremely disagreeable to a man of my political views. However, we had been compelled to come to some final agreement with the authorities that now held sway in Great Russia. In any case, Russia was in a state of the greatest ferment at this time, and personally I did not believe that the reign of terror would last for long.

In spite of the conclusion of peace, it was even

now impossible for us to transfer all our effective troops from the East. We could not simply abandon the occupied territories to fate. It was absolutely necessary for us to leave behind strong German forces in the East, if only to maintain a barrier between the Bolshevist armies and the lands we had liberated. Moreover, our operations in the Ukraine were not yet at an end. We had to penetrate into that country to restore order there. Only when that had been done had we any prospect of securing food from the Ukraine, mainly for Austria-Hungary, but also for our own homeland, as well as raw materials for our war industries and war materials for our armies. In these enterprises political considerations played no part so far as Main Headquarters were concerned.

Of very different import was the military assistance which in the spring of that year we sent to Finland in her war of liberation from Russian domination. The Bolshevik government had not fulfilled the promise it had made us to evacuate this country. We also hoped that by assisting Finland we should get her on our side and thus make it extremely difficult for the Entente to exercise military influence on the further development of events in Great Russia from the vantage points of Murmansk and Archangel. Further, we were thus gaining a foothold at a point which immediately menaced Petersburg, and

this would have great importance if Bolshevik Russia attempted to attack our Eastern Front again. The part played by the small force that was required—it was only a matter of about a division—was a very profitable investment. My frank sympathies with the Finnish nation in its struggle for liberty were, in my opinion, easily reconciled with the demands of the military situation.

The troops which we had left in Rumania were practically wholly available when the government of that country saw itself compelled to come to terms with us as the result of the conclusion of peace with Russia. The rest of our fighting troops which still remained in the East formed the source from which our Western armies could to a certain extent be reinforced in the future.

The transport of the German divisions which we had employed in the campaign against Italy could be begun at once in the course of the winter. I considered that Austria-Hungary was unquestionably in a position to deal with the situation in upper Italy by herself.

One important question was whether we could approach Austria-Hungary with the request to place part of her available forces in the East and Italy at our disposal for the approaching decisive battle. As the result of reports I received, however, I came to the conclusion that these forces would be better employed in Italy than in the



mighty conflict in the West. If by an impressive threat to the whole country Austria-Hungary succeeded in tying down the whole Italian army, and perhaps also the English and French troops in the line in the north, or if she kept these away from the decisive front by a successful attack, the corresponding relief which we in the West would enjoy would perhaps be greater than the advantage of direct assistance. We confined ourselves to securing the transfer of some Austro-Hungarian artillery. For the rest I had no doubt that General von Arz would uphold our requests for greater Austro-Hungarian assistance at any time and to the best of his ability.

About this time the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Minister had announced in a speech that the resources of the Danube Monarchy would be employed for the defense of Strasburg as readily as for that of Trieste. This loyal declaration had my full approval. It was only later that I came to know that these expressions of Count Czernin had aroused the most violent opposition among non-German circles in the Danube Monarchy. This political agitation had, therefore, no influence on my decisions as to the amount of Austro-Hungarian help we should require on our future battlefields in the West.

I regarded it as elementary that we should make an attempt to recover for our Western offensive

all the effective troops which we had hitherto employed in Bulgaria and Asiatic Turkey. I have already shown how violent was the political opposition to such a step in Bulgaria. General Jekoff was too sensible a soldier not to realize the justice of our demands, but apparently he shared his sovereign's opinion that the German spiked helmet was indispensable in Macedonia. Thus the transfer of the German troops from the Macedonian front was a very slow process. It was with great reluctance, and after repeated representations on our part, that General Jekoff decided to relieve them by Bulgarian troops from the Dobrudja. The serious reports about the *morale* and attitude of the Bulgarian troops on the Macedonian front which we received from our German commanders on that front finally compelled us to leave behind the rest of the German infantry, three battalions, and some of our numerous artillery units.

Efforts in the same direction had a similar result in Turkey. In the autumn of 1917 our Asiatic Corps had been transferred to Syria with the Turkish divisions which had originally been earmarked for the campaign against Bagdad. The uncertain position on that front compelled us at the beginning of 1918 to increase that corps to double its size. Most of the troops thus required were taken from our forces in Macedonia. Before

these reinforcements reached their new destination we thought that a material improvement in the position of the Syrian front had taken place, and therefore negotiated with Enver Pasha for the return of all German troops in that theater. Enver approved. Urgent military and political representation on the part of the German commander in Syria, as well as the German government, which had been influenced by that commander, compelled us to cancel the recall.

To sum up, I am entitled to claim that on our side nothing was neglected to concentrate all the fighting forces of Germany for the decision in the West. If we did not manage to get hold of every man the reason must be sought in circumstances of the most varied character, but certainly not in any ignorance of the importance of this question to us. In the winter of 1917-18 we had at last attained the object of three years' strivings and longings. No longer threatened in the rear, we could turn to the great decision in the West and must now address ourselves to this passage of arms. We should perhaps have been spared the trouble if we had only overthrown the Russians once and for all in 1915.

I have already shown how much more difficult our task had become by 1918. France was still a mighty opponent, though she might have bled more than we ourselves. At her side was an

English army of many millions, fully equipped, well trained, and hardened to war. We had a new enemy, economically the most powerful in the world, an enemy possessing everything required for the hostile operations, reviving the hopes of all our foes and saving them from collapse while preparing mighty forces. It was the United States of America, and her advent was perilously near. Would she appear in time to snatch the victor's laurels from our brows? That, and that only, was the decisive question! I believed I could answer it in the negative.

The result of our great offensive in the West has given rise to the question whether we should not have been better advised virtually to adopt the defensive on the Western Front in the year 1918, supporting the armies previously employed there with strong reserves, while we concentrated all our other military and political efforts on the business of restoring order and creating economic stability in the East and assisting our allies in the execution of their military tasks. It would be an error to assume that I had not fully considered such an idea before I adopted the plan of an offensive. I rejected it after mature reflection. Sentiment had no weight with me. How were we to bring the war to a conclusion on such lines? Even though, at the end of 1917, I considered that there was nothing to make me doubt the ability of us Ger-

mans to continue our resistance through the coming year, I could not conceal from myself the regrettable decay of the powers of resistance of our allies. We must devote all our resources to secure a victorious conclusion of the war. That was the more or less express demand of all our allies. It cannot be urged against us that even our opponents had come to the extreme limits of their material and moral efforts. If we did not attack they might prolong the war for years, and if any among them had been unwilling to go on he would simply have been compelled to do so by the others.

A slow death from exhaustion, unless our enemies succumbed to it first, would unquestionably have been our fate. Even when I consider the present misfortunes of my Fatherland I feel an unshakable conviction that the proud consciousness that it devoted its last breath to the preservation of its honor and its existence will do more toward the work of reconstruction than if the war had taken the course of slow paralysis to end in exhaustion. Our country would not thus have escaped its present fate, and the uplifting memories of its incomparable heroism would have been lacking. When I seek for a parallel in history I find that the glory of Preussisch-Eylau shone like a star in the darkness of the years 1807-12, though it could not avert the fate of Old Prussia. Its luster helped so many on the path of reconstruc-

tion and enlightenment. Can the German heart have changed? My Prussian heart beats to that refrain.

## II

*Spa and Avesnes*

Approving our suggestion, His Majesty gave orders that our headquarters were to be transferred to Spa, and the removal was carried out on March 8th. The change had been necessitated by the coming operations in the West. From our new headquarters we could reach the most important parts of our Western Front in far shorter time than we could have done from Kreuznach. As we wished to be in the closest possible touch with coming events, we also selected Avesnes as a kind of advanced headquarters of Main Headquarters. We arrived there on March 19th with the greater part of the General Staff, and found ourselves in the very center of the headquarters of the army groups and armies which were to play the principal parts in the forthcoming battle for a decision.

As regards outward appearance the town was dominated by its mighty but cumbersome old church. The ruins of its old fortifications were a reminder that Avesnes had played a part in military history in days gone by. As far as I remember, units of the Prussian army had occupied the fortresses after the battle of Waterloo in 1815

and from there had marched on Paris. The district was not touched by the war of 1870-71.

The town is a quiet place embedded in the heart of great woods. Even our presence added little to its activity. I found myself, after an interval of forty-one years, among the French population, and this time on a longer visit. Compared with 1870-71 the different types I saw in the streets seemed to me so unchanged that I could easily have forgotten that there ever had been such an interval. Now, as then, the inhabitants sat before their doors, the men usually lost in thought, the women bustling round and monopolizing the conversation, and the children playing and singing on the playground as if the world were quite at peace. Lucky children!

For the rest, our long sojourn at Avesnes confirmed the general experience that the French population submitted with dignity to the hard fate which the long war meant for them. We were never compelled to take any measures to maintain order or secure our own protection. We were able to confine ourselves to securing quiet for our work.

His Majesty did not take up residence in Avesnes, but lived in his special train during the period of the great events which followed. The train was moved about according to the military situation. This residence of several weeks in the

restricted quarters on the train may serve as an example of the simple ways of our war lord. At such a time he lived entirely with his army. Regard for danger, even from enemy airmen, was quite beyond the range of our Emperor's thoughts.

Our stay at Avesnes during the next few months gave me more frequent opportunities than I had previously enjoyed to come into direct personal touch with the commanders of our army groups and armies as well as officers of other higher staffs. I was particularly glad of the chance of seeing regimental officers. Their experiences and stories, which were usually told in touchingly simple language, were of extreme interest to me, not only from the military but from the purely human point of view.

It was a quite peculiar and special pleasure to be able to pay an occasional visit to the Masurian regiment which bore my name, the Guards regiment in which I had served as a young officer through two wars, and the Oldenburg Infantry which I had once commanded. Of course there was little left of the original regiment, but I found the old soldierly spirit in the new men. I was seeing most of the officers and men for the first time—and in many cases the last also. Honor to their memory!



## CHAPTER XX

### OUR THREE GREAT OFFENSIVE BATTLES

#### I

#### *The "Great Battle" in France*

SHORTLY before we left Spa His Majesty issued the order for the first great battle. I will quote the material portion of this order in full to save a detailed description of our plans. By way of explanation I may remark that the preparations for the great battle are indicated by the rubric "Michael," and that the day and hour of the attack were only inserted when we knew for certain that our preparations were complete.

MAIN HEADQUARTERS

10-3-18

BY HIS MAJESTY'S ORDERS:

1. The Michael attack will take place on the 21.3 The first attack on the enemy's lines is fixed for 9.40 A.M.
2. The first great tactical objective of the Crown Prince Rupprecht's army group is to cut off the English in the Cambrai salient and reach the line Croisilles (southeast of Arras) - Bapaume - Péronne. If the attack of the right wing (17th Army) proceeds favorably this army is to press on beyond Croisilles.

The further task of this army group is to push forward in the general direction Arras-Albert, keep its left wing on the Somme at Péronne and intensifying its pressure

on the right wing, compel the retirement of the English front facing the 6th Army also, and release further German troops from trench warfare for the general advance. . . .

3. The German Crown Prince's army group will first gain the line of the Somme south of the Omignon stream (this flows into the Somme south of Péronne) and the Crozat Canal (west of La Fère). By pushing on rapidly the 18th Army (right wing of the Crown Prince's army group) is to secure the crossings of the Somme and the canal. . . .

The tension in which we had left Spa in the evening of March 18th had increased as we arrived at our new headquarters at Avesnes. The beautiful bright weather of early spring which we had been enjoying had changed. Violent rainstorms swept over the country. They did full justice to the nickname which the French had given to Avesnes and its neighborhood. In themselves clouds and rain were by no means unwelcome to us in these days. They would probably shroud our final preparations. But had we really any grounds for hoping that the enemy had not got wind of what we were about? Here and there the hostile artillery had been particularly wide awake and lively. But the firing had then died down. From time to time enemy airmen at night had tried to observe the most important of our roads with the help of light-balls and turned their machine guns on all suspected movements. But all this supplied no definite data on which to answer the question, "Can our surprise succeed?"

The reinforcements earmarked for the attack entered the assembly trenches in the final few nights; the last trench mortars and batteries were brought up. The enemy did not interfere to any appreciable extent! At different points parties volunteered to drag heavy guns right up to our wire and there conceal them in shell holes. We believed that we ought to be venturesome if we could thereby guarantee that the attacking infantry should have artillery support in their passage through the whole enemy defensive system. No hostile countermeasures hindered this preparatory work.

The weather was stormy and rainy almost the whole day on March 20th. The prospects for the 21st were uncertain. Local mist was probable. But at midday we decided definitely that the battle should begin in the morning of the following day.

The early morning hours of March 21st found the whole of northern France, from the coast to the Aisne, shrouded in mist. The higher the sun mounted into the sky the thicker the fog became. At times it limited the range of vision to a few yards. Even the sound waves seemed to be absorbed in the gray veil. In Avesnes we could only hear a distant indefinite roll of thunder coming from the battlefield, on which thousands of guns of every caliber had been belching forth fury since the early hours of the morning.

Unseeing and itself unseen, our artillery had proceeded with its work. It was only our conscientious preparation which offered any guaranty that our batteries were being really effective. The enemy's reply was local, fiftul, and of varying violence. It looked as if he were groping about for an unseen enemy rather than systematically fighting a troublesome foe.

It was therefore still uncertain whether the English were not fully prepared with their defense and expecting our attack. The veil which hid everything did not lift. About 10 A.M. our brave infantry advanced into the very heart of it. At first we received only vague reports, recitals of objectives reached, contradictions of previous reports, recalls. It was only gradually that the atmosphere of uncertainty cleared and we were in a position to realize that we had broken through the enemy's first line at all points. About midday the mist began to dissolve and the sun to triumph.

By the evening hours we were able to piece together a definite picture of what had been accomplished. The armies on the right wing and the center of our battle front were to all intents and purposes held up in front of the enemy's second position. The army on the left had made immense progress beyond St.-Quentin. There was no doubt that the right wing was faced with the stoutest opposition. The English had suspected

the danger which was threatening them from the north and brought up all their available reserves to meet it. On the other hand, the left wing had had relatively the easiest task, apparently as the result of a wholesale surprise. In the north our losses had been larger than we expected; otherwise they were in accordance with anticipation.

The results of the day seemed to me satisfactory. Such was also the opinion of the General Staff officers who had followed the troops and were now returning from the battlefield. Yet only the second day could show whether our attack would now share the fate of all those which the enemy had made upon us for years, the fate of finding itself held up after the first victorious breakthrough.

The evening of the second day saw our right wing in possession of the second enemy position. Our center had even captured the third enemy line, while the army on the left wing was in full career and now miles away to the west. Hundreds of enemy guns, enormous masses of ammunition, and other booty of all kinds were lying behind our lines. Long columns of prisoners were marching eastward. The destruction of the English troops in the Cambrai salient could not be achieved, however, as, contrary to our expectations, our right wing had not pushed on far and quickly enough.

The third day of the battle made no change in the previous impressions of the course of events; the heaviest fighting was on our right wing, where the English defended themselves with the greatest obstinacy and were still maintaining themselves in their third line. On the other hand, we had gained more ground in our center and also on the left wing. This day the Somme had been reached south of Péronne, and indeed crossed at one point.

It was this day, March 23d that the first shells fell into the enemy's capital.

In view of the brilliant sweep of our attack to the west, a sweep which put into the shade everything that had been seen on the Western Front for years, it seemed to me that an advance on Amiens was feasible. Amiens was the nodal point of the most important railway connections between the two war zones of central and northern France (the latter being mainly the English sphere of operations) which had the line of the Somme as a definite boundary. The town was thus of very great strategic importance. If it fell into our hands, or even if we succeeded in getting the town and its neighborhood under effective artillery fire, the enemy's field of operations would be cleft in twain and the tactical break-through would be converted into a strategical wedge, with England on one side and France on the other. It was possible that the strategic and political

interests of the two countries might drift apart as the result of such a success. We will call these interests by the names of Calais and Paris. So forward against Amiens!

We did indeed go forward, and with giant strides. And yet it was not quick enough for active imaginations and glowing wishes. For we had to fear that the enemy also would realize the peril in which he now stood and would do everything in his power to avert it. English reserves from the northern wing, French troops drawn from the whole of central France were hastening to Amiens and its neighborhood. It was also to be expected that the French High Command would take our advance in flank from the south.

The evening of the fourth day saw Bapaume in our hands. Péronne and the line of the Somme south of it was already well behind our leading divisions. We were once more treading the old Somme battlefield. For many of our men it was rich in proud, if serious, memories, and for all who saw it for the first time it spoke straight to the heart with its millions of shell holes, its confused medley of crumbling and overgrown trenches, the majestic silence of its desolate wastes and its thousands of graves.

Whole sections of the English front had been utterly routed and were retiring, apparently out of hand, in the direction of Amiens. It was the

progress of the army on our right wing which was first held up. To get the battle going again at this point we attacked the hills east of Arras. The attempt only partially succeeded and the action was broken off. Meanwhile our center had captured Albert. On the seventh day our left wing, guarding against French attacks from the south, pressed forward through Roye to Montdidier.

The decision was therefore to be sought more and more in the direction of Amiens. But here also we found the resistance stiffening, and our advance became slower and slower. The hopes and wishes which had soared beyond Amiens had to be recalled. Facts must be treated as facts. Human achievements are never more than patchwork. Favorable opportunities had been neglected or had not always been exploited with the same energy, even where a splendid goal was beckoning. We ought to have shouted into the ear of every single man: "Press on to Amiens. Put in your last ounce. Perhaps Amiens means decisive victory. Capture Villers-Brétonneux whatever happens, so that from its heights we can command Amiens with masses of our heavy artillery!" It was in vain; our strength was exhausted.

The enemy fully realized what the loss of Villers-Brétonneux would mean to him. He threw against our advancing columns all the troops



he could lay hands on. The French appeared, and with their massed attacks and skillful artillery saved the situation for their allies and themselves.

With us human nature was urgently voicing its claims. We had to take breath. The infantry needed rest and the artillery ammunition. It was lucky for us that we were able to live to a certain extent on the supplies of the beaten foe; otherwise we should not even have been able to cross the Somme, for the shattered roads in the wide shell-hole area of the first enemy position could only have been made available after days of work. Even now we did not give up all hope of capturing Villers-Brétonneux. On April 4th we made another attempt to drive the enemy from the village. The first reports of the progress of our attack on that day were very promising, but the next day brought a reverse and disillusionment at this point.

Amiens remained in the hands of the enemy and was subjected to a long-range bombardment which certainly disturbed this traffic artery of our foe but could not cut it.

The "Great Battle" in France was over!

## II

### *The Battle on the Lys*

Among the battle proposals for the opening of the 1918 campaign we had contemplated and

worked out an attack on the English positions in Flanders. The fundamental idea behind this plan was that we should attack the great easterly bulge of the English northern wing on both sides of Armentières, and by pressing forward in the general direction of Hazebrouck cause the whole line to collapse. The prospects which opened for us if we made good progress in such an operation were very alluring, but the execution of the attack was faced with most serious obstacles. In the first place, it was clear that we were dealing with the strongest English group at this point. This group, concentrated in a comparatively confined area, was quite in a position to bring our attack to a standstill after it had made but little progress. Such an enterprise would therefore face us with the very danger we were most anxious to avoid. To that must be added the difficulties of the ground on either side of Armentières over which we had to attack. In the first place, there were the low-lying meadows of the Lys, several miles broad, and then the river itself to be crossed. In winter this low-lying area was to a large extent flooded, and in spring it was often nothing but a marsh for weeks on end—a real horror for the troops holding the trenches at this point. North of the Lys the ground gradually rose, and then mounted sharply to the great group of hills which had its mighty pillars at Kemmel and Cassel.

It was perfectly hopeless to think of carrying out such an attack before the valley of the Lys was to some extent passable. In normal circumstances of weather, we could only expect the ground to become dry enough by the middle of April. But we thought we could not wait until then to begin the decisive conflict in the West. We had to keep the prospects of American intervention steadily before our eyes. Notwithstanding these objections to the attack, we had the scheme worked out, at any rate in theory. In this working out we provided for the eventuality that our operation at St.-Quentin would compel the enemy's leaders to withdraw large reserves from the group in Flanders to meet our break-through there.

This eventuality had materialized by the end of March. As soon as we saw that our attack to the west must come to a standstill, we decided to begin our operations on the Lys front. An inquiry addressed to the army group of the Crown Prince Rupprecht elicited the reply that, thanks to the dry spring weather, the attack across the valley of the Lys was already feasible. The enterprise was now taken in hand by the army headquarters staff and the troops with amazing energy.

On April 9th, the anniversary of the great crisis at Arras, our storm troops rose from their muddy trenches on the Lys front from Armentières to La Bassée. Of course they were not disposed in great

waves, but mostly in small detachments and diminutive columns which waded through the morass which had been upheaved by shells and mines, and either picked their way toward the enemy lines between deep shell holes filled with water or took the few firm causeways. Under the protection of our artillery and trench-mortar fire, they succeeded in getting forward quickly in spite of all the natural and artificial obstacles, although apparently neither the English nor the Portuguese, who had been sandwiched in among them, believed it possible. Most of the Portuguese troops left the battlefield in wild flight, and once and for all retired from the fighting in favor of their allies. It must be admitted that our exploitation of the surprise and the Portuguese failure met with the most serious obstacles in the nature of the ground. It was only with the greatest difficulty that a few ammunition wagons were brought forward behind the infantry. Yet the Lys was reached by the evening and even crossed at one point. Here again the decision was to be expected only in the course of the next few days. Our prospects seemed favorable. On April 10th Estaires fell into our hands and we gained more ground northwest of Armentières. On the same day our front of attack was extended to the region of Wytschaete. We again stormed the battered ruins of the much-fought-for Messines.

The next day brought us more successes and fresh hopes. Armentières was evacuated by the enemy and we captured Merville. From the south we approached the first terrace of the great group of hills from which our opponent could see our whole attack and command it with his artillery. From now on progress became slower. It soon came to a stop on our left wing, while our attack in the direction of Hazebrouck was slowly becoming paralyzed. In our center we captured Bailleul and set foot on the hills from the south. Wytschaete fell into our hands, but then this first blow was exhausted.

The difficulties of communication across the Lys Valley which had to be overcome by our troops attacking from the south had been like a chain round our necks. Ammunition could only be brought up in quite inadequate quantities, and it was only thanks to the booty the enemy had left behind on the battlefield that we were able to keep our troops properly fed.

Our infantry had suffered extremely heavily in their fight with the enemy machine-gun nests, and their complete exhaustion threatened unless we paused in our attack for a time. On the other hand, the situation urgently exacted an early decision. We had arrived at one of those crises in which the continuation of the attack is extremely difficult, but when the defense seems to be waver-

ing. The release from such a situation can only come from a further attack and not by merely holding on.

We had to capture Mount Kemmel. It had lain like a great hump before our eyes for years. It was only to be expected that the enemy had made it the key to his positions in Flanders. The photographs of our airmen revealed but a portion of the complicated enemy defense system at this point. We might hope, however, that the external appearance of the hill was more impressive than its real tactical value. We had had experiences of this kind before with other tactical objectives. Picked troops which had displayed their resolution and revealed their powers at the Roten-Turm Pass, and in the fighting in the mountains of Transylvania, Serbian Albania, and the Alps of upper Italy, might once more make possible the seemingly impossible. A condition precedent to the success of our further attacks in Flanders was that the French High Command should be compelled to leave the burden of the defense in that region to their English allies. We therefore first renewed our attacks at Villers-Brétonneux on April 24th, hoping that the French commander's anxiety about Amiens would take precedence of the necessity to help the hard-pressed English friends in Flanders. Unfortunately, this new attack failed. On the other hand, on April 25th

the English defense on Mount Kemmel collapsed at the first blow. The loss of this pillar of the defense shook the whole enemy front in Flanders. Our adversary began to withdraw from the Ypres salient which he had pushed out in months of fighting in 1917. Yet to the last Flemish city he clung as if to a jewel which he was unwilling to lose for political reasons.

But the decision in Flanders was not to be sought at Ypres, but by attacking in the direction of Cassel. If we managed to make progress in that quarter, the whole Anglo-Belgian front in Flanders would have to be withdrawn to the west. Just as our thoughts had soared beyond Amiens in the previous month, our hopes now soared to the Channel coast. I seemed to feel how all England followed the course of the battle in Flanders with bated breath. After that giant bastion, Mount Kemmel, had fallen, we had no reason to flinch from the difficulties of further attacks. It is true that we had received reports about the failure of certain of our units. Mistakes and omissions had occurred on the battlefield. Yet such mistakes and omissions are inherent in human nature. He who makes the fewest will remain master of the battlefield. We were now the master and intended to remain so. Victories such as we had gained at Kemmel not only elate the troops who actually win them, but revitalize the spirits of whole armies.

Therefore on! We must have Cassel at least! From that vantage point the long-range fire of our heaviest guns could reach Boulogne and Calais. Both towns were crammed full with English supplies, and were also the principal points of debarkation of the English armies. The English army had failed in the most surprising fashion in the fight for Kemmel. If we succeeded in getting it to ourselves at this point, we should have a certain prospect of a great victory. If no French help arrived, England would probably be lost in Flanders. Yet in England's dire need this help was once more at hand. French troops came up with bitter anger against the friend who had surrendered Kemmel, and attempted to recover this key position from us. It was in vain. But our own last great onslaught on the new Anglo-French line at the end of April made no headway.

On May 1st we adopted the defensive in Flanders, or rather, as we then hoped, passed to the defensive for the time being.

### III

#### *The Battle of Soissons-Rheims*

After the conclusion of the battles in Flanders, we still adhered to the plans we had chosen for the attainment of our great goal. Of course we intended to proceed with our task of "shaking the



hostile edifice by closely connected partial blows in such a way that sooner or later the whole structure would collapse." Thus were our plans described in a memorandum drawn up at that time. Twice had England been saved by France at a moment of extreme crisis. Perhaps the third time we should succeed in gaining a decisive victory over this adversary. The attack on the English northern wing remained as before the *leit motiv* of our operations. I believed that the war would be decided if this attack were successfully carried through. If we reached the Channel coast we should lay hands directly on England's vital arteries. In so doing we should not only be in the most favorable position conceivable for interrupting her maritime communications, but our heaviest artillery would be able to get a portion of the south coast of Britain under fire. The mysterious marvel of technical science, which was even now sending its shells into the French capital from the region of Laon, could be employed against England also. The marvel need only be a little greater to get the heart of the English commercial and political world within its range from the coast near Calais. That would be a serious prospect for Great Britain, not only for the moment, but for her whole future! These triumphs of the art of Krupp can now be constructed anywhere. Whether they are to be regarded as a guaranty of peace or an incitement

to war the future must decide. England, with her far-seeing views and extreme sensitiveness to the peril threatening her in the future, has already thought this all out. Perhaps, in secret, France too has already drawn the appropriate inference. It is obvious that between friends utterance could not be given to such thoughts. Yet each of them feels the weapon in the pocket of the other!

In May, 1918, it was our immediate business to attempt to separate the two friends in Flanders once more. England was easier to beat when France was far away. If we faced the French with a crisis on their own front, they would withdraw the divisions which were now in line on the English front in Flanders. The greatest possible haste was necessary, or the reinforced enemy might snatch the initiative from us. A dangerous enemy irruption into our defensive fronts, which were not very strong, would have thrown out our calculations and perhaps upset them altogether. The sensitive point of the French front was the direction of Paris. At the time the political atmosphere of Paris seemed to be heavily charged. Our shells and attacks from the air had hitherto not produced the explosion, but we had reason to hope that there would be an explosion if we advanced our lines nearer to the city. From the information at our disposal the French defenses in the region of Soissons were particularly lightly held, yet

here the ground was extremely unfavorable for attack.

When I paid my first visit to Laon at the beginning of the year 1917, I walked on the terrace of the Préfecture, which is in the southern part of this peculiarly sited hill town. The whole region around me was exposed to full view on this splendid spring morning. Bounded by two groups of hills on the west and east, the landscape stretched away to the south and there ended in a mighty wall, the Chemin des Dames. One hundred and three years before, after days of violent fighting south of the Marne, Prussian and Russian forces under the command of Blücher had crossed the heights of the Chemin des Dames from the south and, after the murderous action at Craonne, had been drawn up for battle against the great Corsican in the immediate neighborhood of Laon. In the night of March 9-10, 1814, the battle on the eastern slopes of the steep hills of Laon had been decided in favor of the Allies.

It was on the heights of the Chemin des Dames that the French spring offensive of 1917 had been brought to naught. Fighting had raged on this position for weeks with varying fortune, and then silence had reigned. In October, 1917, however, the right shoulder of this ridge, northeast of Soissons, had been stormed by the enemy and we were forced to evacuate the Chemin des

Dames and establish our defenses behind the Ailette.

Our troops had now to attack once more over the slopes of the Chemin des Dames. The success of this enterprise depended even more on surprise than had been the case with our previous offensives. If we failed in this respect, our attack would break down on the northern face of the high ridge. However, our surprise completely succeeded.

I will venture to give the peculiar explanation which was put forward to account for our success. An officer who had taken part in the preparations on the Ailette expressed the opinion that the croaking of the frogs in the streams and damp meadows had been so loud that it was impossible to hear the sounds made by the approach of our bridging trains. Others may think what they like about this piece of news, but I can at any rate give the assurance that I had not been previously irritating my informant with chestnuts from my sporting experiences! Another and more illuminating explanation to account for the success with which we concealed the preparations for our attack was given by a captured enemy officer. According to his story, on the day before our attack began a Prussian noncommissioned officer was brought in who had been captured in a raid. In reply to the question whether he could tell anything about a German attack he spoke as follows: "There will

be a tremendous German bombardment in the early morning hours of May 27th. However, it will only be a feint, for the German infantry attack which will follow it will only be carried out by a few volunteer detachments. The *morale* of the German troops has been so shaken by their fearful losses at St.-Quentin and in Flanders that the infantry has openly resisted the orders for a general attack." The officer said quite frankly that this report had seemed to him entirely credible, so that on May 27th he had awaited the development of events with perfect unconcern. Perhaps these reminiscences of mine will come to the knowledge of that brave German soldier. I press his hand in thought and thank him on behalf of the whole army, to which he rendered so priceless a service, and in the name of the many hundreds, perhaps thousands, of his brave comrades whose lives he saved by his presence of mind. The deception of the enemy officer would not, perhaps, have been so complete if hostile propaganda, with its silly exaggeration of our previous losses, had not prepared the ground for belief in the story of the Prussian noncommissioned officer. Thus propagandist lies and exaggerations prove a boomerang from time to time.

The battle began on May 27th, and everything went brilliantly. At the outset we were bound to anticipate that our attack would come to a halt

on the Aisne-Vesle line and would be unable to get beyond that sector. We were therefore not a little surprised when we received a report about midday on the opening day that smoke from German shrapnel could already be seen on the southern bank of the Aisne and that our infantry would cross the same day.

The center of our complete tactical breakthrough reached the Marne from Château-Thierry to Dormans in a few days. Our wings wheeled toward Villers-Cotterêts on the west, and on the east against Rheims and the hilly region south of that city. Our booty was colossal, for the whole area of concentration of the French spring offensive of 1917 was in our hands with its immense supplies of all kinds. The construction of new roads and hutments for thousands of men, as well as much else, furnished a proof of the immense scale on which the French had then prepared their attack in many months of strenuous labor. We had made short work of the affair! It was during these days that I paid a visit to the battlefields of Laon. Since the winter of 1917 life there had certainly lost its almost peaceful character. A few days after our huge guns had opened fire on Paris from the forests of Crépy, west of Laon, enemy batteries in the valley of the Aisne had begun to fire upon the unfortunate town. I do not mean to suggest that the enemy raged against his own flesh and

blood without sound military reasons. They believed that the ammunition required for our batteries which were thus annoying Paris had to pass through Laon, and it was a very natural mistake. As they fired at the station a large number of big shells fell into the town, which was still thickly populated, and, moreover, enemy airmen dropped bombs at all hours of the day. Those of the afflicted inhabitants who could not tear themselves from their homes, threatened with destruction as they were, had to live in cellars or dugouts, and offered a picture of wholesale misery such as we had had to witness for the same reason at other points behind our Western Front without being able to do anything. On the very first day of the attack the enemy long-range guns in the valley of the Aisne had been captured, and with that the bombardment of Laon had come to an end. A member of one of their guns' crews was taken through the town as a prisoner. He requested to be allowed to visit the quarter which had been bombarded, as he was interested to see where the shots from his gun had fallen. What an extraordinary revelation of the depths to which a heart hardened in war can sink!

I must readily admit that the war did not always have that effect, even with our enemies. They too knew what it was to feel the throbbing of a human heart after a hand-to-hand struggle. Of the

examples of which I heard I will give just one. It was on March 21st in St.-Quentin, which was still under heavy English fire. German columns were blocking the bombarded streets which were being shelled. Enemy prisoners coming from the battle and carrying our wounded were forced to halt. They laid their burdens down. A severely wounded German private, far nearer death than life, raised his stiffening arm and groaned to his bearer, who was bending over him, "*Mutter, Mutter.*" The English ear understood the German sound. The Tommy knelt down by the side of the Grenadier, stroked his cold hand, and said: "Mother, yes. Mother is here!"

I myself saw the workings of deep human feeling on these battlefields. In company with a German general I was walking on the heights west of Craonne just after these had been stormed. He bent over all the unburied enemy dead and covered their faces, a tribute to the majesty of death. He looked after the living also, supplied such of the wounded as had remained behind, because they were too weak to move, from his own stock, and arranged for their comfortable transport. I had had an opportunity earlier on to observe the real humanity of this German. In the March of this year, in his company, I was driving past some columns of enemy prisoners on which his serious gaze was fixed in deep thought. When we reached



the head of one of these columns he had a halt called and spoke to the assembled enemy officers a few words of praise of the bravery of their troops, consoling them with the reflection that the bitterest fate—that of capture—was often the lot of those who had showed the greatest courage. His words seemed to produce a great effect, especially on a very tall young officer who, in intense emotion, had been hanging his head as if from shame. The thin form now straightened itself like a young fir tree freed from the weight of snow, and its grateful glance met the eyes—of my Emperor!

With a view to broadening our front of attack we had extended the right wing of our attack west to the Oise even while the battle in the Marne salient was still in progress. The attack was only partially successful. Another which we made from the Montdidier-Noyon line in the direction of Compiègne on June 9th only got halfway to that town. Moreover, our efforts in the direction of Villers-Cotterêts yielded no better results. We were thus led to the conclusion that in the Compiègne-Villers-Cotterêts region we had the main enemy resistance before us, to break which we had not the resources at our disposal.

By way of conclusion, let me sum up my description of the Soissons-Rheims battle with the comment that the fighting had carried us much farther than had originally been intended. Once

more unexpected successes had filled us with fresh hopes and given us fresh objectives. That we had not completely attained these objectives was due to the gradual exhaustion of the troops we employed. It was not in keeping with our general intentions that we should employ more divisions in the operation in the region of the Marne. Our gaze was still directed steadfastly at Flanders.

## IV

*Retrospect and Prospects at the End of June, 1918*

From the military point of view, what we had accomplished in the three great battles completely put in the shade everything that had been done in offensive operations in the West since August, 1914. The greatness of the German victories was clearly shown by the extent of the ground gained, the amount of booty, and the bloody losses inflicted on the enemy. We had shaken the structure of the enemy resistance to its very foundation. Our troops had shown themselves in every respect equal to the great demands we had made upon them. In weeks of offensive fighting the German soldier had proved that the old spirit had not been paralyzed in the years of defense, but that it had risen to the heights of the moral elation of 1914 as soon as the word "Forward" was given. The impetuosity of our infantry had not failed to produce its

effect on the foe. "What an admirable and gallant infantry you have!" said an enemy officer to one of my General Staff officers. In close co-operation with the infantry their sister arms had stood in the front in all situations. A single common impulse had permeated the whole organism, down to the last private on the last ammunition wagon. Had they not all pressed forward to play their part, lend their aid and share the emotions of the great event? How often had we not heard the shouts of triumph, the songs of victory, and the fervent prayers of gratitude? I myself had once more enjoyed on these battlefields that spirit which charmed me like a breath of my far-away youth. The span of a man's life separated me from those days, but my man's heart and my German soldier's instincts had remained unchanged. Our brave boys in the old blue coat had spoken and sung in the camps of Königgrätz and Sedan exactly as our field-grays were now speaking and singing in the great battles for our Fatherland and our existence, our Emperor and our Empire.

Unfortunately, everything we had done had not hitherto been enough to wound our adversaries to death in a military and political sense. There was no sign of surrender on the enemy's part. On the contrary, each military defeat seemed only to strengthen the enemy's lust for our destruction. This impression was in no wise diminished by the

fact that here and there the voice of moderation was heard in the hostile camp. The dictatorial authority of the political organisms against which we were fighting was on the whole in no way injured. They held the wills and the resources of their nations together as if with iron bands, and by more or less autocratic methods suppressed the capacity for harm of all who dared to think differently from the tyrants in power. To me there was something very impressive in the working of these autocratic powers. They kept their own hopes alive and turned the attention of their peoples mainly to the gradual relaxation of our efforts. In their opinion, these efforts were gradually bound to collapse. Hunger in the German homeland, the fighting at the front, the poison of propaganda, bribery, pamphlets from the air, internal dissensions had hitherto failed to bring us to destruction.

Now another factor was at work—the help of America. We had made the acquaintance of her first trained troops at Château-Thierry. They had attacked us there, and had proved themselves clumsily but firmly led. They had taken our weak units by surprise, thanks to their numerical superiority.

With the appearance of the Americans on the battlefield the hopes which the French and English had so long cherished were at length fulfilled. Was it remarkable that the enemy statesmen were

now less inclined than ever for a peaceful compromise with us? The destruction of our political and economic existence had long been decided upon, even though they tried to conceal this intention under threadbare and sophistical professions of moderation. They used such phrases only when it served their propagandist ends, either of making the necessary bloodshed tolerable to their own peoples or of destroying the resolution of our nation. Thus for us the end of the war was not in sight.

In the middle of June the general military situation had materially changed for the worse for the Quadruple Alliance. After a promising beginning the Austro-Hungarian offensive in Italy had failed. Although our adversaries there were not strong enough to turn the failure of the Austro-Hungarian enterprise to greater advantage, the collapse of the offensive was accompanied by consequences which were worse than if it had never been attempted. Our ally's misfortune was also a disaster for us. The enemy knew as well as we did that with this attack Austria-Hungary had thrown her last weight into the scales of war. From now onward the Danube Monarchy ceased to be a danger for Italy. We must certainly anticipate that Italy would now be unable to refuse the urgent solicitations of her allies and would herself send troops to the decisive theater in the

West, not only to prove the existence of a political united front, but to play a really effective part in the coming battle. If we were not to take this fresh burden on our own shoulders, we must make efforts to get Austro-Hungarian divisions sent to our Western Front. For us, this was the main motive for our request for immediate direct reinforcements from Austria-Hungary. We did not expect any great effect from these reinforcements, at any rate at first. The fate of the whole Quadruple Alliance hung more than ever on the strength of Germany.

The question was whether our resources would be sufficient to secure a victorious conclusion of the war. I have already spoken of the brilliant achievements of our troops; before I can answer that question I must turn to another and less pleasing side.

With all my affection for our soldiers and gratitude for what they had done, I could not entirely close my eyes to those defects in the structure of our army which had been revealed in the course of the long war. The lack of a sufficient number of well-trained commanders of the lower ranks had made itself very much felt in our great offensive battles. Battle discipline had occasionally gone to pieces. It was natural enough in itself that a private, finding himself in the middle of plentiful supplies in an enemy depot, should thoroughly

enjoy food and other delicacies which he had not tasted for a very long time. But he should never have been allowed to do so at the wrong time, and thereby neglect his duties. Quite apart from the damaging effect of such behavior on the spirit of the troops, there was also the danger that favorable situations would not be exploited, and indeed would be allowed to turn to our disadvantage.

The battles had made further great gaps in our ranks, gaps that could not be filled up. Many an infantry regiment needed reconstruction from top to bottom. Generally speaking, the material available was no longer of the same value as the old. The weaknesses of the situation at home were frequently mirrored in the *morale* of the recruits who came to us in the field. It is true that public opinion at home had been greatly revitalized in many quarters by the influence of our military victories. The news from the front was followed with the greatest anxiety, and the public hoped for a rapid and successful conclusion of the fearful conflict. Hunger, the loss of life, and the feeling of apprehension seemed not to have been in vain, and much was forgotten or endured with manly stoicism as long as a happy end of the colossal trial seemed to be approaching. Thus the victories of the army made good many of the omissions of our political leadership. But the starting point for the process of demoralization which was

to destroy our whole national organism was provided by the unpatriotic passions of a certain section of the German people who were permeated by political notions which had degenerated as the result of self-interest and self-seeking. These were men whose shaken nerves and moral depravity prompted them to regard the victory of the enemy as the herald of peace and happiness for the Fatherland, men who could see nothing but good in the camp of the enemy and nothing but evil in our own. Trotzky had certainly not wasted his words on the desert air of Brest-Litovsk. His political heresies had swarmed over our frontier posts and found numerous admirers among all classes and from the most varying motives. Enemy propaganda continued its work in public and private. It invaded every department of our activities. Thus the diminution of the will to resist in our people and army threatened to join with the enemy's lust for our destruction to compass our ruin. Military victory seemed to provide the only way out of so critical a situation. To reach a successful end by that means was not only my unshakable resolve, but also my sure hope. For such a triumph it was essential that we should not lose the initiative. That meant we must remain on the offensive. We should find ourselves under the hammer the minute we let it slip from our hands.



We could fight on so long as the homeland gave us the physical and moral forces which were still at her disposal; so long as she retained her courage and her confidence in final victory and so long as our allies did not fail us. Such were my thoughts and sentiments as I turned to the development of our further plans.

## CHAPTER XXI

### OUR ATTACK FAILS

#### I

#### *The Plan of the Rheims Battle*

THE situation in the Marne salient after the June action came to an end gave me the impression of an imperfect and uncompleted task. Although we occupied this salient from the middle of June, we could not remain there permanently. The lines of communication in the mighty semi-circle were defective. They were just good enough for a state of relative inactivity, but threatened serious complications if a great battle lasting any length of time should flame up. We had only one railway, of very slight capacity, at our disposal as the principal line of supply of our great mass of troops to an area which was relatively confined. Moreover, the deep salient obviously invited our enemy to attack it from all sides.

A real improvement of our supply system as well as our tactical situation was only possible if we captured Rheims. In the battles of May and June

we had not managed to get possession of the town. We had then exercised our main pressure principally to the west of it. The capture of Rheims must now be the object of a special operation, but the operation thus required fitted into the general framework of our plans.

I have already emphasized that after we broke off the Lys battle we did not abandon our goal of dealing the English a decisive blow in Flanders. Our offensive at Soissons had been in keeping with that idea, for it had compelled the enemy High Command to withdraw the French reinforcements from the English front in Flanders.

In the interval we had proceeded with our preparations for the new Flanders battle. While the work was proceeding on the future fronts of attack the divisions earmarked for the execution of our plans were billeted in Belgium and northern France for the purpose of rest and training.

I had no fear of any offensive countermeasures on the part of the English. Even though the larger portion of the English army had now had several months in which to recover the fighting qualities which had been so seriously affected, it appeared improbable that the English would venture on an offensive in view of the dangers threatening them in Flanders.

Our former experiences enabled me to hope that we should soon settle with the English main armies

in Flanders when once we had succeeded in keeping the French away from that battlefield for all time. The resumption of the attack at Rheims would therefore serve our greater and further purpose of seeking a decision against the English main armies.

The situation on the French front at the beginning of July was more or less as follows: General Foch kept the bulk of his reserves in the region of Compiègne and Villers-Cotterêts. From a strategical point of view this position was very favorable. They were prepared to meet any further attack of ours in the direction of these two towns, but they were also in a position, thanks to their extraordinarily good railway communications, to be transferred rapidly from their present concentration area to any part of the French and English front. It seemed to me highly improbable that Foch would attempt a great offensive before strong American reinforcements arrived, unless he found himself driven to such a step by a particularly inviting situation or urgent necessity.

There were apparently no large bodies of enemy troops south of the Marne. On the other hand, there was unquestionably a strong hostile group at Rheims and in the hills south of it, a group which comprised English and Italian units as well as French. On the rest of the French front the situation was not materially different from what it had been at the time of our spring offensive. The

position on these fronts was not essentially changed by the perpetual replacement of worn-out divisions by troops from other parts of the line. We were not absolutely clear about the arrival of the American reinforcements, but it was obvious that the American masses would now be poured out uninterruptedly on the soil of France. Our U-boats were unable to hinder or limit these movements, just as they had previously failed to reduce the shipping available to the enemy to a figure which made this mass transport impossible. In view of the urgent necessity of rapid and comprehensive military assistance for France and England, the enemy put on one side considerations of the food supply and economic necessities of their countries. We had to find some way of dealing with this situation. If we worked the intended attack on Rheims in close strategic co-operation with our plans in Flanders we had still to decide the question what extension we should wish and have to give to the operation at Rheims. We had originally intended to be satisfied with the capture of the town. The possession of Rheims would be settled by the occupation of the hilly district between Epernay and Rheims. The main purpose of our attack was the capture of these hills. To facilitate our advance at that point—and that meant to eliminate the danger of a hostile flank attack from the south bank of the Marne—a considerable force

was to cross to the south side of this river on both sides of Dormans, and then also press on to Epernay. The crossing of the river in the teeth of an opponent prepared to dispute it was certainly a bold operation. However, in view of our successive experiences in crossing various rivers and streams, we did not regard such an attempt as too hazardous in this case. Our principal difficulty was not in mastering the river sector, but in proceeding with the action on the far side of the obstacle. Artillery and all war material and supplies for the troops engaged could only be brought up by temporary bridges, which naturally offered easy targets for the long-range guns and bombing squadrons of the enemy. After we had originally decided to limit our operation practically to the capture of Rheims, our plan was extended in the course of various conferences by adding an attack eastward and right into Champagne. On the one hand our motive was an intention to cut off the Rheims salient from the southeast also. On the other we believed that, in view of our recent experiences, we might perhaps reach Châlons-sur-Marne, attracted as we were by the prospect of great captures of prisoners and war material, if an operation on such a scale succeeded. We therefore decided to face the risk of weakening our forces at decisive points for the sake of securing a broad front of attack.

Of course it was of great importance to us that our new operation should begin soon. Thanks to the arrival of American reinforcements, time was working not for, but against us. To find a proper balance between the requirements of preparation and the demands of the general situation was our special problem, and certainly not the easiest element in our decision. Quite apart from purely tactical preparations, such as bringing up and assembling everything required for the attack to the appropriate front, and in spite of the claims of the general situation, we could not ignore the difficulties which the proper rest and recuperation of our troops would put in the way of fresh operations. Thus in the case in question we could not fix the date of the attack for earlier than July 15th.

## II

### *The Rheims Battle*

In the early hours of July 15th our thousand-stringed artillery began to play its battle tune on the new front of attack. It was equally active on our side of the Marne. At the outset the reply of the enemy was not particularly violent, though it gradually became more so. We had noticed nothing which seemed to indicate that the enemy front had been reinforced or special countermeasures taken. Our infantry succeeded in crossing to the

southern bank of the Marne. Enemy machine-gun nests were destroyed; we mounted the heights on the far side of the river and captured a number of guns. The news of this first advance reached us very soon in Avesnes. It relieved our natural anxiety and increased our hopes.

As on the Marne, the battle flamed up in a wide circle round Rheims without actually touching the town itself and its immediate neighborhood. The town was to fall into our hands by being cut off from both sides. In Champagne and away to the Argonne the first enemy defensive system had been destroyed by the fire of our artillery and trench mortars. Behind the enemy's front lines there was a great maze of trenches which were the legacy of earlier battles. No one could say whether we should find them occupied, wholly or partially. In any case they offered the enemy innumerable strong points, and very little work would have been required to make them serviceable again and suitable to play a part in some new defensive scheme. On the other hand, our opponents here in Champagne appeared to be quite unprepared to resist, judging by first impressions. The reply of their artillery was not very strong. It was apparently loosely and remarkably deeply distributed.

After concentrating our heaviest fire on the first enemy lines, as in previous offensive battles, these tightly packed storm clouds began their devastat-



ing march across the hostile defenses. Our infantry followed. The first enemy lines were stormed, practically without resistance, along the whole front. The attack was continued, but as soon as our barrage lifted from the second objective, in order to make way for the infantry, an unexpected and violent resistance on the part of the enemy was encountered. The enemy's artillery fire began to swell mightily. Our troops nevertheless attempted to struggle on. In vain! The infantry guns were brought up. They arrived partly horse-drawn and partly man-handled, for horses were of little use in this wilderness of shell holes. Scarcely were the guns in position before they lay in fragments on the ground. The enemy had obviously used his second position as his principal line of defense. Our most effective artillery preparation had, therefore, been practically without result. A new system of defense against the destructive effects of our massed artillery had been introduced and employed by the enemy—thanks to a German traitor, as the enemy subsequently announced in triumph to the whole world!

The situation in Champagne remained unchanged until the evening of the first day.

Our operations southwest of Rheims and on both sides of the Marne took a more favorable course. South of the river our infantry pressed forward for nearly a league, exercising its main

pressure in the direction of Epernay. By the evening we had got a third of the way, after very severe fighting. North of the river also our attack had made progress in the "Mountain of the Forest of Rheims," greater than the chalk cliffs of the Chemin des Dames, a medley of heights cleft by deep gullies and for the most part crowned with dense forest. The whole district was eminently suited for the most obstinate defense, for it made it extremely difficult for the attacker to concentrate the full fury of his artillery on definite targets. Yet our infantry made progress. For the first time they had met Italian troops on the Western Front, troops who apparently fought with little enthusiasm on French soil.

By the evening of July 15th we had captured about fifty guns on the whole front of attack. Fourteen thousand prisoners were reported. The results certainly did not correspond to our high hopes. But we expected more on the following day. In Champagne the morning of July 16th passed without our troops making definite progress at any point. We were faced with the difficult alternative either of breaking off the attack at this point or renewing our attempts at a decision with our forces, which were not very numerous. We ran the risk of seeing our troops bleed to death in vain, or in the most favorable case suffer such heavy losses that they would hardly be in a condi-

tion thoroughly to exploit the advantages they had gained. Our goal at Châlons had, therefore, vanished into the dim distance. For these reasons I approved the suggestion that we should dig in at this point. On the other hand, we adhered to our plan of continuing our attacks south of the Marne and in the Rheims hills. During the day we were gradually forced to the defensive on the far side of the river. The enemy counterattacked us with strong forces. In the direction of Epernay, however, we gained more ground on both sides of the river. By the evening we were halfway to the town—that is, about six miles off. In the Rheims hills we were approaching the Epernay-Rheims road in spite of desperate counterattacks on the part of the enemy. The fate of Rheims seemed to hang by a thread. Even if all the rest of our plan could now be regarded as a failure, Rheims at least would fall. The town was an important military objective for us, and therefore justified the effort. If we captured it, perhaps a very great impression might be made on the enemy.

On July 17th the battle died down in Champagne. South of the Marne the situation began to change ever more to our disadvantage. It is true that we held the ground we had gained against severe enemy attacks, but our lines were so near to the river, and therefore had so little depth, that a reverse might prove fatal. Moreover, our tem-

porary bridges across the Marne were increasingly in danger from the long-range fire of hostile artillery and French bombing squadrons. We had, therefore, to withdraw to the northern bank, as we could not gain any more ground on the southern. Hard though it was for me, I ordered the withdrawal of our troops to the north bank of the Marne. The movement was carried out in the night of July 20th-21st.

In the Rheims hills the enemy attacks continued with extreme desperation on July 17th. They were beaten off. But for us also further progress was impossible for the time being. It required a fresh and thorough preparation.

We seemed to have very little left of all we had striven for. The operation had apparently failed, and, so far as the French front was concerned, nothing definite had been gained. But it was not impossible that it might prove very valuable for our attack on the Flanders front. The battles had not been in vain if the only result we achieved was to keep the French forces away from the English defenses.

With this thought in mind, General Ludendorff went to visit the army group of Crown Prince Rupprecht on the evening of July 17th in order to discuss the proposed attack on the English northern wing in greater detail.

For the execution of our plans in the region of Rheims it was essential that the western flank of

the great Marne salient between Soissons and Château-Thierry should stand firm. It was to be assumed that our offensive would provoke counter-measures on the part of the French reserves concentrated in the neighborhood of Compiègne and Villers-Cotterêts. If General Foch were in a position to embark on active operations at all, he would have to abandon his previous attitude of passivity as soon as our plan of attack across the Marne and at Rheims was revealed. I have already said that the French commander knew of our plans in time and had plenty of opportunity to make preparations to meet them.

In the case of a French attack from the general direction of Villers-Cotterêts the task of our troops in line between the Aisne and the Marne was, therefore, not a simple one. We had disposed a number of divisions behind our forward lines and believed, consequently, that we could proceed in full confidence to the great attack on Rheims which I have described. It is true that the troops between Soissons and Château-Thierry were not all fresh, but they had fought so brilliantly in the previous battles that I regarded them now as fully equal to their task. The main consideration, in my view, was that every part of our defenses there should keep the probability of a strong enemy attack continuously in mind. Whether there were omissions in this respect on the Soissons-

Château-Thierry front will probably always remain a subject of debate. In view of later information, I myself believe that the initial successes which were gained in our operations on the Marne and near Rheims from July 15th to 17th made some of our troops on the Soissons-Château-Thierry front inclined to ignore the seriousness of the position on their own front. During those days these troops could hear the thunder of the guns on the battlefield. They knew of our crossing of the Marne and the success it promised. Exaggerated accounts of our victories reached them, as happened so often, through irregular channels. There was talk of the capture of Rheims and of great victories in Champagne. However, on their own front everything was quiet for these three days, unnaturally quiet to an expert observer, but agreeably quiet to anyone who liked to enjoy the sensation and had no intimate knowledge of the situation. Phenomena observed in the direction of Villers-Cotterêts, which still had our full attention on July 15th, were deemed less worthy of notice on the 17th. Messages which were transmitted immediately to all our telephone stations when our operation began seemed to get held up at some intermediate station on the third day. Thus touch with the situation was to some extent lost and the first feeling of anxiety had passed off.

On the morning of July 18th some of our troops,

who were not in line at the time, went out on harvest work in the cornfields. Suddenly a violent hail of shells descended upon the back areas. Harassing fire? Our own artillery replied but feebly, apparently because a pretty thick haze veiled everything. The *tat-tat* of machine guns began on a broad front and showed that it was a question of more than harassing fire. Before the situation was definitely ascertained enemy tanks appeared in the high corn. The enemy was undoubtedly attacking on the whole front from the Aisne to the Marne. Our first lines had already been broken through in places. The sector between the Ourcq and Soissons appeared to be the greatest danger point. While what was left of our decimated and isolated troops in the front lines were fighting with the fury of despair, our reserves farther back attempted to form and hold a new line of resistance until the divisions in support could be brought up for a counterattack. Many a heroic deed was done. In parts of the line which were temporarily recovered, our troops found German machine-gun nests in which every single man of the guns' crews lay dead, surrounded by whole circles of fallen opponents. Yet even heroism such as this could no longer save the situation; it could only prevent an utter catastrophe. The enemy had penetrated particularly deeply toward Soissons and farther south—that is, at our

most sensitive point, the western pillar of the Marne salient south of the Aisne. The enemy pressed down from here on the rest of our line of defense as far as Château-Thierry. What was worse, he was approaching the single line of railway communicating with the Marne salient at the point where it turns south from the valley of the Aisne east of Soissons into the center of our great semicircle.

The position was thus serious for us from the very first moment. It threatened to become a real catastrophe unless we succeeded in restoring the original situation or, at any rate, preventing it from getting any worse. It was my desire and intention to take the enemy irruption in flank from the north across the Aisne near Soissons and destroy him where he stood. However, the necessary concentration would have taken too much time, and so I had to accept the counterproposal that we should first completely secure the part of our front which had been attacked, in order to be masters of our own decisions once more. All the reserves which were available were therefore employed to that end. Unfortunately the crisis was not overcome, but only postponed. The enemy broke through at other points and aggravated our situation in the Marne salient. How did it help us that, generally speaking, the enemy onslaught south of the Ourcq was a failure, and more particu-



larly that the strong but unskillfully led American attacks collapsed before our weak lines, especially at Château-Thierry? We could not and must not allow the situation to hang in the balance for any length of time. It would have been madness. We therefore withdrew our left wing from Château-Thierry and at first retired a short distance westward, while still keeping our flank on the Marne.

In conformity with our decision of July 17th we had withdrawn from the southern bank of this river in good time after very severe fighting. The splendid behavior of our troops—thanks to which all the French attacks had failed—had enabled us successfully to overcome the critical situation at that point. The retirement had been carried out even more successfully than we expected. It was only on July 21st that, after powerful artillery preparation, the enemy attacked our evacuated lines—tanks in front and strong columns behind. Our troops watched this little piece of byplay from the northern bank of the Marne.

Owing to the hostile artillery fire from every side, the conduct of operations in the salient, which was still very deep, was extremely difficult. The enemy artillery had the critical section of our railway east of Soissons under fire. A regular hail of enemy airplane bombs descended upon it day and night. We were compelled to detrain the arriving reinforcements and reliefs in the neighbor-)

hood of Laon and far away from the salient. They then proceeded to the battlefield by forced marches which took days. Often enough they reached their destination only just in time to take over the line from their exhausted comrades and save a complete collapse.

The situation could not be allowed to remain thus for long. The battle threatened to consume all our reserves. We must evacuate the salient and say good-bye to the Marne. It was a grievous decision, not from the purely military standpoint, but from that of professional pride. How the enemy would rejoice if the word "Marne" were to mean a revolution in the military situation for the second time! Paris, and indeed all France, would breathe again. What would be the effect of this news on the whole world? We realized how many eyes and hearts would follow us with envy, hatred—and hope.

But at such a time military considerations could alone prevail. Their warning rang out loud and clear, get out of this situation! There was no reason for precipitate action. General Foch might hurl all his armies at us from all sides, but a really deep break-through was a rare occurrence. We could thus retire step by step, save our precious war material from the clutches of the enemy, and withdraw in good order to the new line of defense which nature offered us in the Aisne-Vesle sector.

The movement was completed in the first days of August. It was a masterpiece on the part of both commanders and men. It was not the power of the enemy's arms which forced us out of the Marne salient, but the hopelessness of our situation as the result of the difficult communications in the rear of our troops fighting on three sides. General Foch had thoroughly realized those difficulties. He had a great goal in sight. The magnificent behavior of our men prevented him from reaching it. After the first surprise they had fought brilliantly. They had done everything that human beings could have done. The result was that our infantry left the battlefield in no way with the feeling of having been vanquished. Their sense of pride was partially due to their observation of the fact that their enemies' attacks had largely failed when they had been carried out without the protection or the moral support of tanks.

Where there were no tanks our enemy had sent black waves against us. Waves of black Africans! Woe to us when these waves reached our lines and massacred or, worse, tortured our defenseless men! It is not at the blacks who performed such atrocities that indignant humanity will point an accusing finger, but at those who brought these hordes to the soil of Europe to take part in the so-called struggle for Honor, Freedom, and Justice. The blacks were led to the slaughter in thousands.

Though Englishmen, Americans, Italians, and French, and all their subject races, swarmed round our infantry, when it came to fighting, man against man, our soldier felt and proved himself the lord of the battlefield. Even the feeling of helplessness against the enemy's tanks had to some extent been overcome. Our men had often made audacious attempts to lay low this troublesome foe and had been lustily supported by our own artillery. Once more the French artillery had been responsible for the worst crises with which our men had been faced. The employment for hours, and even days, of this destructive weapon, which was boldly brought out into the open and disdained even the cover of shell holes, had shattered the lines of our infantry and put their nerves to the hardest test. The approach of the enemy storm troops had often been regarded as a release from the menace of inevitable destruction.

Our troops had had to perform prodigies, not only in the fighting itself, but also in unremitting preparation, marching, and the endurance of privations. Their losses had been great and the strain on their nerves even greater. I had several conversations with soldiers who had taken part in the recent fighting. Their homely and straightforward replies and stories were more eloquent than volumes about their experiences and the mighty moral resolution which imbued them. How could

one ever doubt such splendid men! They were tired, of course, needed physical rest and mental relief. We were only too anxious to give them all that, but it was questionable whether the enemy would leave us time to do so.

Although the fighting in the Marne salient had saved us from the annihilation our enemy had intended, we could have no illusion about the far-reaching effects of this battle and our retreat.

From the purely military point of view it was of the greatest and most fateful importance that we had lost the initiative to the enemy and were at first not strong enough to recover it ourselves. We had been compelled to draw upon a large part of the reserves which we intended to use for the attack in Flanders. This meant the end of our hopes of dealing our long-planned decisive blow at the English army. The enemy High Command was thus relieved of the influence which this threatened offensive had had on their dispositions. Moreover, the English armies, thanks to the battle in the Marne salient, were relieved from the moral spell which we had woven about them for months. It was to be expected that resolute generalship on the part of the enemy would exploit this change in the situation, which they could not fail to realize, to the full extent of their available forces. Their prospects were very favorable, as, generally speaking, our defensive fronts were not strong and had

to be held by troops which were not fully effective. Moreover, these fronts had been considerably extended since the spring and were thus strategically more sensitive.

Of course, it was to be assumed that the enemy also had suffered very heavily in the recent fighting. Between July 15th and August 4th, seventy-four hostile divisions, including sixty French, had been suffering losses while the English armies had been practically spared for months. In these circumstances the steady arrival of American reinforcements must be particularly valuable for the enemy. Even if these reinforcements were not yet quite up to the level of modern requirements in a purely military sense, mere numerical superiority had a far greater effect at this stage when our units had suffered so heavily.

The effect of our failure on the country and our allies was even greater, judging by our first impressions. How many hopes, cherished during the last few months, had probably collapsed at one blow! How many calculations had been scattered to the winds!

But if we could only master the situation at the front once more we could certainly rely on the restoration of the political balance.

Part V

BEYOND OUR POWERS





## CHAPTER XXII

### ON THE DEFENSIVE

#### I

*August 8th*

OUR troops had taken up their new line on the Aisne. The last waves of the enemy attack flowed in and flowed out. In places there was desultory fighting from time to time.

Several of our divisions, which had been exhausted in the recent fighting and required rest, were in billets behind our lines. Among other areas they were quartered in the region of Avesnes. I was thus able to see how quickly our soldiers recovered. When they had a day or two of good sleep, regular meals, and rest, they seemed quickly to forget all they had suffered, even their mental torture. Of course, for this purpose the rest had to be real rest, undisturbed by enemy shells and bombs, and, if possible, somewhere where the thunder of the guns could not be heard. But how seldom and how few of our troops had a rest of that kind in the long years of fighting! Swept from one theater of war to another, from battlefield to

battlefield, they were practically subjected to an uninterrupted physical and moral strain. Herein lay the principal difference between the achievements of our men and those of all our opponents.

The roar of battle in the Marne salient had reached us at Avesnes like the rolling thunder of a heavy storm, now sharp and clear, now sullen. For the moment it had practically died down.

On the morning of August 8th this comparative peace was abruptly interrupted. In the southwest the noise of battle could clearly be heard. The first reports, which came from army headquarters in the neighborhood of Péronne, were serious. The enemy, employing large squadrons of tanks, had broken into our lines on both sides of the Amiens-St.-Quentin road. Further details could not be given.

The veil of uncertainty was lifted during the next few hours, though our telephone lines had been broken in many places. There was no doubt that the enemy had penetrated deeply into our positions and that batteries had been lost. We issued an order that they were to be recovered and that the situation must everywhere be restored by an immediate counterattack. We sent officers to ascertain precisely how matters stood, to secure perfect harmony between our plans and the dispositions of the various staffs on the shaken front. What had happened?

In a very thick haze a strong English tank attack had met with immediate success. In their career the tanks had met no special obstacles, natural or—unfortunately—artificial. The troops on this front had certainly been thinking too much about continuing the offensive and not enough of defense.

In any case, it would have cost us heavy losses to dig trenches and construct obstacles when we were in direct contact with the enemy, for as soon as the hostile observers noticed any movement, even if it were a matter of a few individuals, their artillery immediately opened fire. It seemed our best plan to lie quietly in the high corn, without cover against enemy shells, it is true, but at the same time safe from enemy telescopes. In this way we were spared losses for the time being, but ran the risk of suffering even greater losses if the enemy attacked. It was not only that little work had been done on the first line; even less had been done on the support and rear lines. There was nothing available but isolated sections of trenches and scattered strong points. On these so-called quiet fronts the troops were not numerous enough for trench digging on any large scale.

On this August 8th we had to act as we had so often acted in equally menacing situations. Initial successes of the enemy were no new experience for us. We had seen them in 1916 and 1917, at

Verdun, Arras, Wytschaete, and Cambrai. We had only quite recently experienced and mastered another at Soissons. But in the present case the situation was particularly serious. The great tank attack of the enemy had penetrated to a surprising depth. The tanks, which were faster than hitherto, had surprised divisional staffs in their headquarters and torn up the telephone lines which communicated with the battle front. The Higher Command posts were thus isolated and orders could not reach the front line. That was peculiarly unfortunate on this occasion, because the thick mist made supervision and control very difficult. Of course our antitank guns fired in the direction from which the sound of motors and the rattle of chains seemed to come, but they were frequently surprised by the sight of these steel colossi suddenly emerging from some totally different quarter. The wildest rumors began to spread in our lines. It was said that masses of English cavalry were already far in rear of the foremost German infantry lines. Some of the men lost their nerve, left positions from which they had only just beaten off strong enemy attacks, and tried to get in touch with the rear again. Imagination conjured up all kinds of phantoms and translated them into real dangers.

Everything that occurred and was destined to prove our first great disaster is comprehensible

enough from the human point of view. In situations such as these the old war-hardened soldier does not lose his self-possession. He does not imagine; he thinks! Unfortunately, these old soldiers were in a fast vanishing minority, and, moreover, their influence did not always and everywhere prevail. Other influences made themselves felt. Ill humor and disappointment that the war seemed to have no end, in spite of all our victories, had ruined the character of many of our brave men. Dangers and hardships in the field, battle, and turmoil, on top of which came the complaints from home about many real and some imaginary privations! All this gradually had a demoralizing effect, especially as no end seemed to be in sight. In the shower of pamphlets which was scattered by enemy airmen our adversaries said and wrote that they did not think so badly of us; that we must only be reasonable and perhaps here and there renounce something we had conquered. Then everything would soon be right again and we could live together in peace, in perpetual international peace. As regards peace within our own borders, new men and new governments would see to that. What a blessing peace would be after all the fighting! There was, therefore, no point in continuing the struggle.

Such was the purport of what our men read and said. The soldier thought it could not be all

enemy lies, allowed it to poison his mind, and proceeded to poison the minds of others.

On this August 8th our order to counterattack could no longer be carried out. We had not the men, and more particularly the guns, to prepare such an attack, for most of the batteries had been lost on the part of the front which was broken through. Fresh infantry and new artillery units must first be brought up—by rail and motor transport. The enemy realized the outstanding importance which our railways had in this situation. His heavy and heaviest guns fired far into our back areas. Various railway junctions, such as Péronne, received a perfect hail of bombs from enemy aircraft, which swarmed over the town and station in numbers never seen before. But if our foe exploited the difficulties of the situation in our rear, as luck would have it he did not realize the scale of his initial tactical success. He did not thrust forward to the Somme this day, although we should not have been able to put any troops worth mentioning in his way.

A relatively quiet afternoon and an even more quiet night followed the fateful morning of August 8th. During these hours our first reinforcements were on their way.

The position was already too unfavorable for us to be able to expect that the counterattack we had originally ordered would enable us to regain the

old battle front. Our counterthrust would have involved longer preparation and required stronger reserves than we had at our disposal on August 9th. In any case we must not act precipitately. On the battle front itself impatience made men reluctant to wait. They thought that favorable opportunities were being allowed to slip, and proceeded to rush at unsurmountable difficulties. Thus some of the precious fresh infantry units we had brought up were wasted on local successes without advantaging the general situation.

The attack on August 8th had been carried out by the right wing of the English armies. The French troops in touch with them on the south had only taken a small part in the battle. We had to expect, however, that the great British success would now set the French lines also in motion. If the French pushed forward rapidly in the direction of Nesle our position in the great salient projecting far out to the southwest would become critical. We therefore ordered the evacuation of our first lines southwest of Roye, and retired to the neighborhood of that town.

## II

### *The Consequences of August 8th and Further Battles in the West up to the End of September*

I had no illusions about the political effects of our defeat on August 8th. Our battles from July

15th to August 4th could be regarded, both abroad and at home, as the consequence of an unsuccessful but bold stroke, such as may happen in any war. On the other hand, the failure of August 8th was revealed to all eyes as the consequences of an open weakness. To fail in an attack was a very different matter from being vanquished on the defense. The amount of booty which our enemy could publish to the world spoke a clear language. Both the public at home and our allies could only listen in great anxiety. All the more urgent was it that we should keep our presence of mind and face the situation without illusions, but also without exaggerated pessimism.

The military situation had certainly become serious. Of course the position on the part of our front which had been attacked could be restored, the lost war material made good, and fresh reserves brought up. But all this did not exhaust the effects of our defeat. We could only expect that, encouraged by his great victory, our enemy would now open similar attacks at other points. He had now found out that, in comparison with 1917, our present defense lines had many defects. In the first place, from a technical point of view. Generally speaking, our troops had done little work on the trenches we had won in the spring of 1918. In the sector east of Amiens, as on other parts of the front, too much had been said about continuing



our offensive and too little about the requirements of defense. Moreover, the behavior of very many of our troops in the battle must have convinced the enemy that on our defensive fronts the stubborn resolution of 1917 was no longer present at all points. Further, the enemy had learned a good deal from us since the spring. In the last operation he had employed against us those tactics with which we had soundly beaten him time after time. He had fallen upon us suddenly, and not after months of preparation, and had no longer tried to force a decision by driving a wedge into our defenses. He had surprised us in an attack on a broad front. He was able to venture on such tactics now because he realized the weaknesses of our lines. If the enemy repeated these attacks with the same fury, in view of the present constitution of our army, there was at any rate some prospect of our powers of resistance being gradually paralyzed. On the other hand, the fact that the enemy had once more failed to extract all possible advantages from his great initial successes gave me the hope that we should overcome further crises.

This line of reasoning enabled me, when I was summoned on August 13th to a political conference at Spa with the members of the government to discuss the military situation, to affirm that this was certainly serious, but that it must not be

forgotten that we were still standing deep in the enemy's country. I emphasized this point of view to my Emperor also on the following day, when I summarized affairs after a pretty lengthy conference. I agreed with the views of the Imperial Chancellor, Count Hertling, that no official steps in the direction of peace should be taken on our side until there had been some improvement in the existing military situation. This fact alone shows to what an extent we had had to renounce our former political goals.

In the middle of August I did not consider that the time had come for us to despair of a successful conclusion of the war. In spite of certain distressing but isolated occurrences in the last battle, I certainly hoped that the army would be in a position to continue to hold out. I also believed that our public at home would be strong enough to survive even the present crisis. I fully realized what the homeland had already borne in the way of sacrifices and privations and what it would possibly still have to bear. Had not France, on whose soil the war had now been raging for four years, had to suffer and endure far more? Had that country ever been cast down by failure during the whole of that time? Did she despair when our shells fell into her capital? I believed that our own public would keep this in mind even in this serious crisis, and stand firm if only we at the front

continued to stand firm, too. As long as we did so I felt sure that it would have its effect on our allies. Their military tasks, at any rate those of Austria-Hungary and Bulgaria, were simple enough.

In this process of reasoning, mere anxiety to uphold the honor of our arms played no predominant part. In the four years of war our army had laid the foundations of that honor so deeply that the enemy could never remove them, come what might. The main motive for my decisions and proposals was regard for the welfare of my country and that alone. If we could not by victory on the battlefield force our enemies to a peace which gave us everything which once and for all secured Germany's future, we could at any rate make certain that the strength and resolution of our enemies would be paralyzed during the campaign. It was to be assumed that even this would mean a tolerable political existence for the state.

After the battle in the Marne salient came to an end, General Foch had certainly realized that the success he had gained would be wasted if our troops were given time to recover. I felt convinced that the enemy High Command now believed that it must stake everything on one card.

On August 20th the French attacked between the Oise and the Aisne in the direction of Chauny. In three days of fighting they threw us back on that town. On August 21st and the following days

the English extended their front of attack of August 8th to the north as far as northwest of Bapaume. The enemy broke through at several points and compelled us gradually to withdraw our line in this quarter. On August 26th the English hurled themselves at our line in the direction of Cambrai. They broke through, but were finally held. On September 2d a fresh hostile attack overran our lines once and for all on the great Arras-Cambrai road and compelled us to bring the whole front back to the Siegfried Line. For the sake of economizing men we simultaneously evacuated the salient north of the Lys which bulged out beyond Mount Kemmel and Merville. All these were disagreeable decisions which had been carried out by the end of the first week of September. These movements did not ease the situation, as we had hoped. The enemy pressed forward at all points and the crisis continued.

On September 12th fighting flamed up on the hitherto inactive front southeast of Verdun and at Pont-à-Mousson. At this point we were holding lines which had solidified after our attacks in the autumn of 1914. They were a tactical abortion which invited the enemy to attempt a great blow. It is not easy to understand why the French left us alone for years in this great triangle which projected into their front. If they had made a mighty thrust along the line of the base a serious crisis

for us would have been inevitable. It may possibly be made a matter of reproach to us that we had not evacuated this position long before, certainly as soon as our attack on Verdun was broken off. The only point was that it was the very conformation of our lines at this point which had had the most serious effect on the enemy's freedom of movement at Verdun and barred the valley of the Meuse, so important to him, south of the fortress. It was only at the beginning of September, when there seemed to be a certain liveliness on the part of the enemy between the Meuse and the Moselle, that we decided to evacuate this salient and withdraw to the lines we had long prepared along its base. Before the movement had been carried out in its entirety the French and Americans attacked and inflicted a serious defeat upon us.

Generally speaking, however, we managed more or less to hold up the enemy attacks upon our front. The extension of the enemy's attacks to Champagne on September 26th affected the general situation from the coast to the Argonne but little at first. On the other hand, the Americans this day penetrated our line between the Argonne and the Meuse. This was the first occasion on which the power of America, expressed through an independent army, made itself decisively felt on the battlefields of the last phase.

Although as a result of the enemy irruptions our Western Front had to be repeatedly withdrawn, it had not been broken through. It was shaking, but it did not fall. But at this moment a great gap was torn in our common front. Bulgaria collapsed.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE LAST BATTLES OF OUR ALLIES

#### I

#### *The Collapse of Bulgaria*

I N the year 1918 there had been no material change in the domestic situation in Bulgaria. It was still serious, but on the other hand the country's foreign policy seemed to be in no way prejudiced by it. It is true that from time to time news reached us of unauthorized negotiations of certain Bulgarians with the Entente in neutral Switzerland. Moreover, there was no reason to doubt that the American Consulate-General in Sofia was a hotbed of schemes aiming at our ruin. We made a vain attempt to secure the removal of the Americans. Policy demands the use of the velvet glove even in the iron realities of war.

The furious strife between the political parties of Bulgaria continued. The army, too, was compromised ever more deeply. Radoslavoff's enemies had at length managed to secure his overthrow in the spring. The new men assured us of

their loyal adherence to the Alliance, and that was the decisive consideration to us. Meanwhile pacifism was making great headway among the Bulgarian people. The question of food supply was becoming more difficult. The army, in particular, suffered from this cause, or, I should perhaps say, was allowed to suffer from it. At times the soldiers practically starved, and, moreover, were so badly clad that for a time even the most essential things were lacking. Mutinies occurred, though these were generally kept quiet from us. The army was permeated with foreign elements. Men from the occupied territories were forced into it to keep the units up to establishment. The result was that desertion occurred on an amazing scale. Was it surprising that in these circumstances the *morale* of the troops deteriorated? It apparently touched its lowest point in the spring. At that time, at the suggestion of the German Headquarters Staff of the army group, the Bulgarian General Staff had planned an attack in Albania, west of Lake Ochrida. It was hoped that if this operation succeeded it would effectively close the Santa Quaranti-Koritza road, which was so important for the enemy, and, further, had a favorable reaction on the *morale* of the army and the nation. In the end it proved impossible to proceed with this undertaking, as Bulgarian officers declared that the troops would refuse to



attack. An even more serious condition of affairs was revealed when, in May, the Bulgarian troops offered no resistance to the attack of the Greeks and French in the center of the Macedonian front, and abandoned their positions practically without fighting. Most of the divisions told off for the counterattack mutinied.

In the course of the summer the internal condition of the army seemed to have improved. We gave such help as we could, sent food supplies as well as clothing from our own stock. Moreover, our victories on the Western Front at this time aroused intense enthusiasm in the Bulgarian army. It was none the less clear to us that this better spirit would soon vanish again if we ourselves suffered any reverses. Even the more favorable reports which reached us at the end of July could leave us in no doubt about that.

As regards the comparative strength of the opponents on the Macedonian front, there seemed to have been no material change in the course of 1918. After the conclusion of peace with Rumania, Bulgaria was in a position to concentrate all her forces on one front. Compared with this reinforcement, the withdrawal of a few German battalions from Macedonia did not really affect the question of numbers. One English division had been transferred to Syria, the French troops had sent their youngest classes back home, while the so-

called "Royal Greek Divisions," which had just been mobilized, showed little stomach for fighting. It was apparently for this reason that the defense of the Struma sector had been intrusted to these troops. If we could accept the reports of deserters, most of these men were quite ready to join us if German troops were put in line on the Struma front. We therefore sent out to Macedonia a few battalions which could not be used on the decisive fronts in the West. They arrived at their destination at the very moment when the war was decided, so far as Bulgaria was concerned.

In the evening of September 15th we received the first reports of the commencement of the attack of the Entente armies in Macedonia. There was something very striking about this date. Had not Bulgarian soldiers declared in the spring that they would abandon their lines on this day if the war were not previously concluded?

On the other hand, it was not less extraordinary that the enemy should select for his attack a sector in the very center of the rugged mountains in which his advance would have been faced with critical difficulties if the Bulgarian troops and their subordinate commanders had shown any inclination to resist. For this reason we thought we could await the development of this battle with confidence, and continue to expect the serious and decisive effort of the enemy in the valley of

the Vardar. At that point and in the neighborhood of Lake Doiran preparations to attack on the part of the English had been observed for some considerable time. Here again we thought that there could be no danger, in view of the extraordinary strength of the defenses, so long as the Bulgarians took the necessary measures. The Bulgarian High Command certainly had the numbers required at their disposal.

The first reports of the course of the battle on September 15th gave no cause for alarm. The first lines had undoubtedly been lost, but there was nothing unusual in that. The main thing was that the enemy had not succeeded in getting right through on the first day. Later reports were more serious. The Bulgarians had been forced back farther north than had at first been thought. The troops which had first taken part in the battle had apparently made little resistance and shown even less resolution. The reserves which came up, or ought to have come up, displayed little inclination to face the enemy's fire. Apparently they preferred to abandon the battlefield to the enemy, and this at a point which was perilously close to Gradsko, the most important center of all the communications in the Macedonian theater.

If Gradsko fell, or the enemy were able to reach it with his guns, the Bulgarian right-wing army in the neighborhood of Monastir would be deprived

of its most important line of communication, and in the long run it would be impossible to keep it supplied in its present position. Moreover, the Bulgarian army on both sides of the Vardar Valley in the center would find its railway connection with the homeland severed. It seemed incredible that the Bulgarian commanders should not realize the peril that was threatening them and bring up every man they had to avert an appalling catastrophe to their main armies.

In contrast to the behavior of the Bulgarian army south of Gradsko, the Bulgarian troops between the Vardar and Lake Doiran had been fighting very strenuously since September 18th. It was in vain that the English strove to force their way through at this point. Bulgarian courage and obstinacy had never been displayed to better advantage. But how could heroism at Lake Doiran help, if faint-heartedness held the field at Gradsko—indeed, perhaps something worse than faint-heartedness?

Vain were the attempts of the German Staff to save the situation in the center of the Bulgarian army with German troops. What could the small and weak German nucleus do when the Bulgarians were running away on the right and left? Entire Bulgarian regiments streamed past the German battalions which were marching to meet the enemy, and openly refused to fight. It was an

extraordinary scene. Still more extraordinary were the declarations of the Bulgarian troops. They were off home to their wives and children, for they wanted to see their houses and farms again and look after their fields. Most of them bore their officers no ill will. If the officers liked to come back home with them they were welcome, but if they wanted to remain on the field of honor they would have to remain alone. The Bulgarians were ready enough to assist any German who got into difficulties while marching to meet the enemy. They helped to get the German guns over bad bits of road. But for the rest they left the fighting to the Germans. Along these lines Macedonia was certainly lost to Bulgaria. But the Bulgarian peasant told himself that he had quite enough land at home. So he continued on his homeward way and left anxiety and fighting for Macedonia, and the rest of the Great Power business, to others.

Faced with facts such as these, the German Staff, which exercised command from Lake Ochrida to Lake Doiran, found themselves in a desperate position. Anything they could lay hands on in the way of German troops, units on the lines of communication, Landsturm, and recruits, were scraped together to bolster up the Bulgarian center and save Gradsko. The prospects of success became smaller every minute. In view of the speed in retreat shown by the Bulgarian center, the only

possibility of safety was to withdraw the wings of the army. Such a movement would in itself be of small tactical disadvantage, for in Macedonia great defensive positions lay one behind the other, and the farther north the enemy got the more difficult became his communications. It is true that the communications of the Bulgarians also became much worse when the valley of the Vardar was abandoned. However, it seemed likely that this measure would enable us to save the bulk of the army.

The Bulgarian leaders raised the most serious objections to the decision of the German Headquarters Staff of the army group. They believed that their troops would still hold on in their present lines and, indeed, fight. They were also convinced that their armies would dissolve altogether if an order to retreat were issued.

It was a truly desperate position, desperate for all concerned. The Bulgarians complained that there were not enough German troops, and because we had previously withdrawn some of the German troops in this theater. But in any case what could a few more German battalions have done in this general collapse? How many German divisions should we have had to send to defend the Macedonian front? Germany could not seek a decision in the West and send divisions to Macedonia at the same time. The Bulgarians would not realize

that Germany's resources were not inexhaustible. The Bulgarians themselves were far from exhausted. What really was exhausted was their own will to fight.

We at Main Headquarters were also faced with fateful problems. We had to try and save whatever could be saved in Bulgaria. We had to send reinforcements, and indeed at once, however hard it was for us. It was on September 18th that the full meaning of this necessity became clear. Just think how fearfully the battle was raging on our Western Front at this time. Only a few days before, the Americans had gained their great success between the Meuse and the Moselle and we were faced with an extension of the attack. The first reinforcements which we could make available were the troops—a mixed brigade—which had been earmarked for Trans-Caucasia and were even then in process of transport across the Black Sea. They were recalled by wireless and ordered to return by Varna and Sofia. But these troops would not be enough. A few more divisions could certainly be spared from our Eastern Front. We had intended to bring them to a quiet part of the Western Front. But what kind of troops were they? Not a man was under thirty-five, and all the General Service men had already been brought to the West. Could anything very striking be expected of them? They might have the best

intentions in the world, but in this climate and destitute of suitable equipment for fighting in a mountainous country there were limits to their usefulness on the Macedonian front. Yet it had to be, for not only the Bulgarian army, but the Bulgarian government and the Tsar must have German backing in this very critical situation.

We also sent reinforcements from the West. Our Alpine Corps, which had just been engaged in very severe fighting, was entrained for Nish. Austria-Hungary also joined in the attempt to help Bulgaria and made several divisions available. We had thus to renounce the prospect of further Austro-Hungarian reinforcements on our Western Front.

Until these German and Austrian reinforcements arrived the attempt had to be made to save the main Bulgarian armies, at any rate. With that end in view, and in spite of Bulgarian opposition, the German Army Group Headquarters issued the order for retreat to the Bulgarian armies on the right wing and in the center. Their lines on the Belashitza, north of Lake Doiran, were to form the pivot for the entire movement. During the whole of this time the Bulgarian army on the left wing had not been attacked. Its lines on the Belashitza and behind the Struma were extremely strong. A few machine guns and batteries would have been quite enough for their defense. Yet



confusion overtook this army also. Courage and hard thinking went to a discount. Its commander considered his position untenable and begged the Tsar to conclude an armistice at once. The Tsar replied, "Go and die in your present lines." The remark shows that the Tsar was still master of the situation and that I had made no mistake about him.

The Crown Prince Boris also showed himself equal to the situation. He hastened to the front to save everything that could be saved. But where everyone was losing his head and his resolution what could one individual do, even if he had the love of many and the respect of all?

On September 20th the center army began its retreat in accordance with orders. This led to utter dissolution. Confusion was worse compounded by unskillful dispositions. The staffs failed, the army staff worst of all. There was only one man, the commander-in-chief, who retained a clear vision and was inspired by firm resolution.

The right-wing army had a difficult task. Its main line of retreat was through Prilep on Veles. As the enemy was already quite close to Gradsko, this line of retreat was very seriously threatened. Another road farther west led from the region of the lakes and Monastir through the rugged mountains of Albania to Kalkandelen. At Uskub it

met the road through Veles. This tract through the Albanian mountains was safe but very difficult, and it was doubtful whether a large body of troops would find the necessary supplies in that region. In spite of these drawbacks large numbers of troops had to use it. Even larger bodies had to take this route when the enemy captured Gradsko and then pressed forward against the Prilep-Gradsko road from the southeast. Gradsko had fallen as early as September 21st. From being a wretched little village it had become a regular huddled town and its appearance and size reminded one of a brand-new American settlement. An immense quantity of supplies, sufficient for a whole campaign, was stored here. Judging by the depots, there was nothing to account for the fact that the Bulgarian army at the front had had to go short. The whole lot was now either destroyed by the Bulgarians or captured by the enemy. It was not only at Gradsko, but at many other points, that Bulgaria had large depots. Hitherto we had heard nothing about them, as they were guarded by a miserly bureaucracy which in Bulgaria, as in other lands, forms the crust of the national organism in spite of the most liberal laws and a free parliament.

Bulgaria could, therefore, continue the war as long as she did not, or would not, herself regard it as lost. Our plan, which met with the approval

of the Bulgarian High Command, was as follows: The center army was to fall back to the frontier of Old Bulgaria. The army on the right wing was to be concentrated at Uskub or farther north; it would be reinforced by the approaching German and Austrian divisions. These troops would be quite enough to restore the situation at Uskub; indeed, if the Bulgarian units were not hopelessly ineffective, we might anticipate that from Uskub we should be able to embark on an offensive toward the south. It seemed impossible that without rest the enemy would be able to bring his strong columns forward to Uskub and the frontier of Old Bulgaria. How would he cope with his supply difficulties, as we had utterly destroyed the railway and roads? Moreover, we hoped that the energy and sense of responsibility of the Bulgarian troops would revive when they stood on their own soil.

The proposed operation was only possible on the assumption that Uskub could be held until the Bulgarian troops from Kalkandelen arrived. This seemed to be an easy task, as the enemy was coming up from Gradsko with relatively weak forces.

While all these events were in progress, Sofia was remarkably quiet. On their arrival our battalions, which were intended to calm the inhabitants and protect and support the government, found nothing of the atmosphere of agitation they feared. Life was certainly somewhat peculiar,

owing to the mobs of soldiers who had deserted their units and were pouring homeward through the town. The men handed in their arms at the depots, took leave of their comrades and officers, while some of them promised to return as soon as they had had time to look after their fields. It was indeed an odd picture and a remarkable revelation of mentality. Or was the whole thing a question of collusion? We had certainly no reason to think that it was so in the case of the men. It is true that this process of dissolution had not proceeded peacefully at all points, but the rumors of horrible outrages turned out to be exaggerated, generally speaking.

There was no change at the front. The retirement of the Bulgarian masses continued uninterruptedly. It was impossible to stop their career, even though the forces of the pursuing enemy were but weak. It was in vain that we tried to get individual bodies—there was no longer any question of proper formations—to form a front against the enemy and offer a real resistance, at least in places. The moment the enemy approached the Bulgarians fired a few rounds and then left their lines. German troops were no longer able to provide a nucleus for the Bulgarian resistance. Equally impossible was it for German and Bulgarian officers, rifle in hand, to produce by their example any effect on the uncontrollable and indifferent mob.

Thus the enemy approached Uskub before fresh German and Austro-Hungarian troops could arrive there. On September 29th strong bodies of the right wing of the Bulgarian army emerged from the mountain region and reached Kalkandelen. They had only to make for Uskub by a good road. We were told that the troops were thoroughly keen and fit to fight. The worst of the crisis, therefore, seemed to have been overcome. In a military sense that may have been true, but morally the cause was lost once and for all. That was soon to be proved beyond doubt. Weak Serbian units captured Uskub. The troops at Kalkandelen lost heart. They capitulated. In the evening of September 29th Bulgaria concluded an armistice.

## II

### *The Overthrow of Turkish Power in Asia*

The opening of 1918 marked a great revival of the war fever in Turkey. Even before the end of winter, in the highlands of Armenia, Turkey opened an attack on the Russian armies there. Russian power in this region turned out to be simply a phantom. The bulk of the armies had already dissolved. The only resistance the Turks met with in their advance was offered by Armenian bands. The difficulties which the nature of this mountainous country placed in the way of the

Turks at this season proved more formidable than this Armenian opposition. The fact that the advance proceeded successfully was one of those remarkable manifestations of temporary vigor characteristic of the Ottoman Empire. The Turks crossed the frontier of Turkish Armenia into the region of Trans-Caucasia, urged on by various motives; Pan-Islam dreams, thoughts of revenge, hopes of compensation for the territory they had lost, and anticipation of booty. There was yet another reason, the search for man power. The Empire, and more particularly the portion inhabited by the splendid Anatolian, was absolutely exhausted from the point of view of man power. In Trans-Caucasian Adzerbaidjan and among the Mohammedans of the Caucasus new and great sources seemed to be available. Russia had not drawn on these Mohammedans for regular military service, and now they were to fight under the Crescent. The number of the prospective volunteers, as communicated to us, revealed all the wealth of Oriental imagination. Further, if the Turkish reports were to be believed, we had to assume that the Mohammedan peoples of Russia had for long had no more intense longing than to form one great and self-contained Mohammedan nation in the Turkish Empire. But we must not lose sight of the fact that Turkey found fresh resources at her disposal in these regions, and that

England would find herself compelled to devote special attention to the development of these events. On the other hand, it is just as well occasionally to have some regard for sober reality. We therefore attempted to calm the billows of Ottoman hopes and expectations, unfortunately not with the success that we could have wished. It was agreed, from the point of view of the whole war, that Turkey's principal task lay far more in Syria and Mesopotamia than in the Caucasus and on the Caspian. But what was the good of promises and good intentions in Constantinople when the commanders in the outlying theaters went their own way!

We sent troops to Georgia with a view to securing at least a share of the abundant supplies of raw material in Trans-Caucasia to be used in our joint war. We hoped to help the Georgian government with the re-establishment of a proper economic system. However, the Pan-Islam fanatics and profiteers in Constantinople would not rest until Baku was in Turkish hands, and this at a time when the ancient structure of Turkish dominion in Asia was about to collapse.

The idea of exercising a paramount influence in Persia led Turkey even farther east. The Turks intended to use Persia as a starting point for a flank attack on the English operations in Mesopotamia, a plan which was good enough in itself, but re-

quired time for its realization. I was certainly doubtful whether we should be allowed that time. But it was always possible that the first Turkish movement in northern Persia would tie down English troops and therefore save Mesopotamia for Turkey. England appeared to be anxious to influence the course of events in Russia through the Caspian Sea and Baku as much as from the White Sea and Archangel. From that point of view the execution of the Turkish plans in Persia and Trans-Caucasia was in our interests also. The only thing was that defense in Mesopotamia and especially in Syria must not be neglected. The formation of an effective Turkish reserve army in the neighborhood of Aleppo would have been far more useful than great operations in Persia, in view of the strategic possibilities open to the English south of the Taurus.

Judging by the map, the situation in Mesopotamia had remained unchanged since the autumn of 1917; but, as a matter of fact, the Turkish armies south of Mosul had suffered a real catastrophe, and that not in battle. As in the Armenian highlands in the winter of 1916-17, Turkish soldiers succumbed in large numbers on the plains of Mesopotamia in the winter of 1917-18. There was talk of 17,000 men who were starving there or had died as the result of privations. We cannot say whether the figures are accurate. "He who



starves dies a hero's death," as a Turk once assured us, not from cynicism, but from honest inward conviction. Only fragments of the Turkish army in Mesopotamia survived the winter. It is very doubtful whether they could ever have been brought up to effective strength again. The question was, "Why did not the English attack in Mesopotamia, or, rather, why did they not simply advance?" Were these shades of the ancient power of Turkey enough to keep their enemy to his program of a colonial war? The English Staff may put forward all kinds of reasons for the circumspection of their operations, but the strength of their opponents cannot be one of them.

While the Turkish armies were celebrating triumphs in the mountains of Armenia, the Syrian front had not remained inactive. There had been several frontal attacks on the part of the English which had led to no material change in the situation. In the spring of 1918 the English general seemed at length to have grown tired of this unending monotony. He adopted another line of action, and broke out through Jericho into the country east of the Jordan. He supposed that the Arabian tribes in this region were only waiting for the arrival of their liberators from the Turkish yoke to fall on the rear of the Ottoman armies. The enterprise failed pretty ingloriously against the weak resistance of weak German and Turkish

forces, thanks to splendid Turkish generalship. For the summer the position in Syria was thus saved, for during this season inactivity was usually general in these sun-baked regions. It was all the more certain that in the autumn the English would renew their attacks somewhere or other. We believed that the interval would be long enough to enable us to secure this front by bringing up fresh Turkish forces.

The internal difficulties of Turkey continued during the year 1918. The death of the Sultan had at first no visible effect. At home matters began gradually to improve. The new Sultan was apparently a man of action. He displayed a firm resolve to rid himself of the ancient tutelage of the Committee and to set his face against the serious abuses in the state. He selected the men around him from the circles which had old-Turkish leanings.

I had made the acquaintance of the new Padijah at Kreuznach when he was still the presumptive heir, and had had the honor of receiving him as my guest. In view of the difficulties of direct intercourse, as the Sultan spoke no language but Turkish, we conversed through the medium of an interpreter, and our remarks were practically confined to the exchange of formal addresses. The reply of the heir to my speech was of a very friendly and loyal character. His attitude after

he ascended the throne was thoroughly in keeping with it.

One of the Sultan's first resolutions was to exercise personal influence on the organization of the army. He was also anxious to visit the armies in the distant provinces. I am not in a position to say whether such visits would have resulted in material improvements.

The land was completely exhausted by the war. It could hardly give the army anything more. The result was that even during the summer the efforts to improve the situation on the Syrian front were a failure. It is difficult to estimate how much more could have been done in that quarter in view of the positively pitiable communications. The supply of the army was still in a bad way. The troops were not actually starving, but they were practically continuously short of food, physically exhausted, and morally numb.

As I have said earlier, we had had to renounce the idea of withdrawing the German troops from the Syrian front. The German commander there considered that the position could not be regarded as secure unless German help was at hand. It must be admitted that we did not regard the offensive spirit of the Anglo-Indian army as very high, especially judging by the evidence we got from Mohammedan Indian deserters. Moreover, the previous achievements of English generalship

had been so unimpressive that we felt we were justified in hoping that with the small force at our disposal it would, at any rate, be possible to delude the enemy into thinking that we were still capable of offering further resistance. How long we could keep up with the illusion mainly depended on whether the enemy would ever bring himself to embark on a resolute and wholesale operation, and thereby bring down the whole structure of Turkish resistance, with its weak German supports, about our ears.

On September 19th the English opened a surprise attack on the right wing of the Turkish armies in the coast plain. They broke through the lines there practically without opposition. The rapid advance of the Indo-Australian cavalry squadrons sealed the fate of the two Turkish armies on the Syrian front.

It was just at this time that Turkey was robbed of her former land defenses in Europe by the collapse of Bulgaria. Constantinople was thus immediately rendered defenseless on the land side. Of recent times the Turkish troops at the Dardanelles had become steadily worse. The armies in the outlying provinces had drained them of all men who were of any fighting value. Thrace was unprotected except for some weak coast-defense garrisons which were scarcely fit to fight. The fortifications of the far-famed Chataldja lines con-

sisted of collapsed trenches which had been left by the Turkish troops after the battles of 1912-13. The rest of the Turkish army existed only in imagination or was engaged in the execution of plans which were will-o'-the-wisps. Those who are wise after the event may shake their heads over all this, but at bottom it only revealed the firm purpose to employ all the available troops at the decisive outposts. It would indeed have been disastrous if these outer walls had collapsed and the enemy floods had poured into the very heart of the country.

That heart was now threatened by such a flood. As soon as the first reports of the threatening collapse of Bulgaria arrived certain formations were hastily scraped together and sent from Constantinople to man the Chataldja lines. No resistance worth mentioning, however, could have been expected of such troops. For moral rather than practical reasons we ordered the immediate transfer of German Landwehr units from the south of Russia to Constantinople. Turkey also decided to send all the divisions which had been recalled from Trans-Caucasia to Thrace. A considerable time would elapse before any appreciable force could reach Constantinople. Everything which had been published hitherto leaves it uncertain why the enemy did not use this interval to occupy the capital. Once more Turkey found herself

saved from a direct catastrophe. But at the end of September such an eventuality seemed only a matter of days.

### III

#### *Military and Political Issues in Austria-Hungary*

After the failure of the attack of the Austro-Hungarian armies on Italy, it became ever clearer that the Danube Monarchy had employed her last and best resources in that enterprise. It no longer had the numerical and moral forces to be able to repeat such an attack. The plight of the army was revealed to us by the condition of the divisions which were sent to us as reinforcements for our Western Front. Their immediate employment was quite out of the question if we were to get any good work out of them later on. They needed rest, training, and suitable equipment most of all. These facts were admitted by the troops themselves as freely as by the Austro-Hungarian General Staff. In the relatively short time at their disposal all the Austro-Hungarian officers took the greatest pains to train the Austrian troops to be used in the West to the level of their coming task. If they did not achieve their aim, it was certainly not for want of energy and intelligence on the part of the officers. The men also showed themselves extremely willing.

The great losses of the Austro-Hungarian armies

in Italy, their precarious situation as regards drafts, the political unreliability of some parts of the army, and the uncertain domestic situation, unfortunately made a really effective and striking reinforcement of our Western Front impossible. In view of all this General von Arz had to grip the soul—in the most literal sense of the words—of every single division he wanted to send us. He himself was entirely convinced of the great importance of this reinforcement. I cannot say whether all circles in Austria-Hungary were permeated by the same desire to help, or whether everyone felt as grateful to us as General von Arz.

During the summer nothing of any note occurred on the Austro-Hungarian front. The only military event worth mentioning at this time took place in Albania. In that region the opponents had faced one another inactively for years: the Italians in the strength of rather more than an army corps at and east of Valona, and the Austrians in the north of Albania. This theater would have been without any military importance if it had not had a certain connection with the Macedonian front. Bulgaria was always afraid that if the enemy pressed forward west of Lake Ochrida the right flank of their front would be enveloped. From the military point of view it would have been a perfectly simple matter to meet such a move on the part of the enemy by withdrawing the western wing from the region of

Ochrida in a northeasterly direction. As I have said before, it was solely due to considerations of Bulgarian domestic politics at this time that the withdrawal of the Bulgarian troops from this conquered district was impossible. To that must be added Austro-Bulgarian jealousies in Albania, which we had great difficulty in composing.

The question has often been asked why the Austrians never drove their Italian adversary from Valona. The extraordinary importance of this naval base as a second gatepost of the Adriatic, a second point from which this sea could be closed, was obvious enough. However, for such an operation Austria-Hungary lacked the essential preliminary—effective communications with the battle area on the Vojusa. Such an enterprise could not be based on the sea, and there were no land communications through the desolate Albanian mountains before the war. Nor had Austria been able to make good this omission in sufficient measure during the war.

In their operations in Albania the Austro-Hungarians had played the part of a kind of Sleeping Beauty. The sleep had only been disturbed at intervals by raids on both sides, raids which were carried out with small bodies of troops and even less energy. The situation in Albania could be taken more seriously in the summer of 1918, when the Italians took the offensive on a broad



front from the coast to the neighborhood of Lake Ochrida. The weak, and to a certain extent very neglected, Austro-Hungarian detachments were driven north. There was great excitement in Sofia and on the Macedonian frontier immediately, and the Bulgarians demanded our intervention, as having supreme military control. This intervention took the form of a request to the Austro-Hungarian General Staff to reinforce their Albanian front so that they could continue to cover the Macedonian flank. The Austro-Hungarians at once decided on a counterattack in Albania, and the Italians were thrown back again.

It is not easy to say whether this Italian offensive had any ulterior military and political goals. In particular, I must leave it in doubt whether it had any close connection with the subsequent Entente attack against the center of the Macedonian front. In view of the amazing difficulties of the country in the Albanian mountains and the enemy's numerical superiority, the Austrian counterattack represented a very remarkable achievement. It certainly deserved to be regarded as such by our allies.

In the course of the year 1918 the domestic situation in Austria-Hungary had developed along the fateful lines which I have already discussed. The exceptional difficulties with the food supply occasionally threatened Vienna with a real catas-

trophe. It was thus hardly surprising that the Austro-Hungarian authorities, in their anxiety to lay hands on everything available, whether in Rumania or the Ukraine, proceeded to measures which very definitely conflicted with our own interests.

In the dismal political situation in which Austria-Hungary found herself, it was not a matter for wonder that we were informed again and again that it would be quite impossible for the Danube Monarchy to continue the war beyond the year 1918. Anxiety for the conclusion of hostilities found ever more frequent and stronger expression. I will leave undiscussed the question whether, as was alleged, the ambition of playing the part of peacemaker was not the prevailing motive in some quarters.

During the summer Count Czernin resigned the office of Foreign Minister. The reason the count himself gave for this step was that the letters written to Prince Sixtus of Parma had created a gulf between himself and his master which could not be bridged. To me the count was a not un-sympathetic figure, in spite of the fact that his political views and mine were in opposition on many points, and though he expressed them as freely to us as we did ours to him.

To me Count Czernin was the typical representative of Austro-Hungarian foreign policy. He was

clever, fully recognized the difficulties of our joint situation, and was a pointed and ruthless critic of the weaknesses of the political organism he represented. His political plans were directed far more to efforts to avoid disaster than to make full use of our victories. It goes without saying that the count had an open eye and a warm heart for the interests of his country. The one great exception was that in his judgment of the general situation he could only see safety in renunciation. The result of this contrast was that he never ceased to work for an extension of his country's sphere of influence, even when he was asking us Germans to make great sacrifices for the interests of the whole Alliance. Like all Austro-Hungarian statesmen at this time, Count Czernin did not realize of what his country was capable. Otherwise he would never have talked to us in the spring of 1917—shortly after he took office—of the impossibility of going on any longer, although the resources of Austria-Hungary were destined to suffice for a long time yet, and Austria had not died of exhaustion even at the time he resigned. Count Czernin's processes of thought ran to a kind of mania for self-abnegation. It was not easy to ascertain whether the result of this was that he was unable to offer any opposition to the peace efforts of his Emperor, or whether he was in agreement with these at the bottom of his heart. In any case the count did

not ignore the dangers of an exaggerated and much too frequently expressed insistence on our readiness to conclude peace, especially when we were dealing with enemies such as ours. This alone can explain the fact that he lost his composure and suggested the Peace Resolution by the German Reichstag at the very time when our U-boat campaign was beginning to make itself felt, the spring offensive of our enemies had failed, and the political dissolution of Russia was having a serious effect upon them.

It was my opinion that Count Czernin never showed us anything but loyal frankness, even when he was facing us with a good many surprises in the peace negotiations at Brest-Litovsk and Bucharest. There is no doubt that what he then feared was that the Danube Monarchy would never be able to survive the breakdown of these negotiations, and that the cry for bread in Vienna demanded an immediate compact with the Ukraine.

While Czernin was conducting the foreign policy of his country, there was no solution of the Polish problem between us and Austria-Hungary. For reasons which I have already mentioned, the idea of surrendering the whole of Poland to the Dual Monarchy was and remained unacceptable.

I had made the acquaintance at Pless of Count Czernin's successor, Count Burian, when he was Foreign Minister in pre-Czernin times. With

Burian's dilatory methods, which were displayed in all questions of any importance, I could not hope that the Polish problem would be settled within a measurable period. I must also admit that at this time my attention was occupied with matters more important than these wearisome and futile negotiations.

On his recall to the office of Foreign Minister, Count Burian very naturally directed all his efforts to finding a way out of our political dilemma as soon as possible.

It was only human that under the impression of the military situation in the West, which was steadily growing worse, he should display the greatest obstinacy in pressing for peace. Personally, I was convinced that none of the allied states ought to desert their posts on the common political front and make offers of peace to the enemy. It was an error to think that in so doing the state in question could secure substantially better terms for itself or all of us. The Turkish Grand Vizier, who visited us at Spa in the first half of September, shared our opinions entirely. The Tsar Ferdinand also expressed the view at this time that there could be no question of peace efforts for his country outside the framework of the whole Alliance. But perhaps the Tsar suspected even then how little importance Bulgaria had as a factor in the calculations of our enemies.

For these reasons I felt convinced that the Austro-Hungarian attempt to suggest a peaceful compromise with the Entente in the middle of September was unfortunate. In practice the enemy, too, showed strong disinclination toward such a step. They realized our situation at this time too clearly to wish to take the path of a peace by negotiation. To them the question of further sacrifice of life played no part. The enemy's attitude was completely dominated by the fear that we Germans might easily recover if we were allowed a moment's respite, so powerful was the impression which our achievements had made on our foes, and perhaps still make. This may well fill us with a feeling of pride even in the midst of what we are now suffering and will still have to suffer!

## CHAPTER XXIV

### TOWARD THE END

#### I

*September 29th to October 26th*

IN the book of the Great War the chapter on the heroism of the German army may only just have been written, but with regard to the last fearful struggle it is written with the blood of our sons in letters that can never fade. What terrible demands were made in these few weeks on the physical strength and moral resolution of the officers and men of all staffs and formations! The troops had now to be thrown from one battle into another. It was seldom that the so-called days in rest billets were enough to allow us to reorganize the decimated or scattered units and supply them with drafts, or distribute the remains of divisions we had broken up among other formations. Both officers and men were certainly beginning to tire, but they always managed to find a new impulse whenever it was a question of holding up some fresh enemy attack. Officers of all ranks, even up

to the higher staffs, fought in the front lines, sometimes rifle in hand. The only order issued in many cases was simply, "Hold out to the last."

"Hold out!" What a renunciation after so many glorious days of brilliant victories! To me the vision of such deathless heroism can never be clouded by a few cases of despondency and failure. In such a conflict, which meant the renunciation of our hopes and the absence of any feeling of victorious progress, human weaknesses inevitably play a larger part than at other times.

We had not the men to form a continuous line. We could only offer resistance in groups, large and small. It was only successful because the enemy, too, was visibly tiring. He seldom attempted a large operation unless his tanks had opened a way or his artillery had extinguished every sign of German life. He did not storm our lines directly, but gradually slipped through their many gaps. It was on this fact that I based my hope of being able to hold out until the efforts of our enemies were paralyzed.

Unlike the enemy, we had no fresh reserves to throw in. Instead of an inexhaustible America, we had only weary allies who were themselves on the point of collapse.

How long would our front be able to stand this colossal strain? I was faced with the question, the worst of all questions, When must the end be?



If we turn in such cases to history, the great tutor of mankind, what we find is an exhortation to courage, not to caution. When I turned my gaze to the face of our greatest king the answer I received was, "Hold out." Yet times had certainly changed from what they were a hundred and sixty years before. Not a professional army, but the whole nation in arms, was making war, was swallowed up in war, and bled and suffered. But men have remained fundamentally the same, with all their strength and weakness. Calamity would overtake him who showed himself weak when strength was required. I was willing to take responsibility for anything, but never for that.

Thus for us another battle was raging side by side with those in the field. The other battlefield was in our hearts. In this mighty conflict we stood alone. We had nothing to guide us but our own convictions and conscience, nothing to support us but hope and faith. With me they were still strong enough to enable me to support others.

It was on September 28th that this inward battle raged most fiercely. Though German courage on the Western Front still denied our enemies a final break-through, though France and England were visibly tiring and America's oppressive superiority bled in vain a thousand times, our resources were patently diminishing. The worse the news from the Far East, the sooner they would fail altogether.

Who would close the gap if Bulgaria fell out once and for all? We could still do much, but we could not build up a new front. It was true that a new army was in process of formation in Serbia, but how weak these troops were! Our Alpine Corps had scarcely any effective units, and one of the Austro-Hungarian divisions which were on their way was declared to be totally useless. It consisted of Czechs, who would presumably refuse to fight. Although the Syrian theater lay far from a decisive point of the war, the defeat there would undoubtedly cause the collapse of our loyal Turkish comrades, who now saw themselves threatened in Europe again. What would Rumania or the mighty fragments of Russia do? All these thoughts swept over me and forced me to decide to seek an end, though only an honorable end. No one would say it was too soon.

In pursuance of such thoughts, and with his mind already made up, my First Quartermaster-General came to see me in the late afternoon of September 28th. I could see in his face what had brought him to me. As had so often happened since August 22, 1914, our thoughts were at one before they found expression in words. Our hardest resolve was based on convictions we shared in common.

In the afternoon of September 29th we held a conference with the Foreign Secretary. He de-

scribed the situation in a few words. Hitherto all attempts at a friendly compromise with our enemies had failed, and there was no prospect of getting into touch with the leaders of the hostile states through negotiations or mediation on the part of neutral Powers. The Secretary of State then described the internal situation. Revolution was standing at our door and we had the choice of meeting it with a dictatorship or concessions. A parliamentary government seemed to be the best weapon of defense.

Was it really the best? We knew what an immense strain we should put on our country with the steps we took to secure an armistice and peace, steps which would very naturally cause extreme anxiety about the situation at the front and our future. At such a moment, which meant the death of so many hopes, a moment in which bitter disillusionment would go hand in hand with even deeper anger, and every man was looking for some nucleus of stability in the state organism, ought we to let political passions be converted into some more violent agitation?

What direction would that agitation take? Surely not the direction of stability, but that of further chaos! Those who had sown the unholy weeds in our soil would be thinking that the time of harvest had arrived. We were on the slippery path.

Was it possible to believe that by concessions at

home we could make an enemy less exacting who had not yielded to our sword? Ask those of our soldiers who, trusting in the alluring promises of our foes, voluntarily laid down their arms! The enemy's mask fell at the same moment as the Germans lowered their weapons. The German who let himself be deceived was treated not a whit better than his comrade who defended himself to the last gasp.

We had also to fear that the formation of a new government would further postpone a step which we had already delayed as long as possible. As a matter of fact, we had not taken it a moment too soon. Would it come too late as a result of the reorganization of the state?

Such were my anxious thoughts. They were entirely shared by General Ludendorff.

As the result of our conference we placed our proposals for a peace step before His Majesty. It was my duty to describe the military situation, the seriousness of which was realized by the Emperor, to provide a foundation for the necessary political action. His Majesty approved our proposals with a strong and resolute heart.

As before, our anxieties for the army were mingled with cares for the homeland. If the one did not stand firm the other would collapse. The present moment was to prove this truth more clearly than ever before.

My All-Highest War Lord returned home, and I followed him on October 1st. I wanted to be near my Emperor in case he should need me in these days. Nothing was farther from my thoughts than to wish to control political developments. I was ready to explain the whole situation to the new government which was in process of formation and answer their questions to the full extent that I thought possible. I hoped I could fight down pessimism and revive confidence. Unfortunately, the state had already been shaken too greatly for me to achieve my purpose as yet. I myself was still firmly convinced that, in spite of the diminution of our forces, we could prevent our enemy from treading the soil of the Fatherland for many months. If we succeeded in doing so the political situation was not hopeless. Of course it was a tacit condition for this success that our land frontier should not be threatened from the east or south and that the public at home stood firm.

Our peace offer to the President of the United States went forth in the night of October 4th-5th. We accepted the principles he had laid down in January of this year for a "just peace."

Our next concern was with the further operations. The failing energies of the troops, the steady diminution of our numbers, and the repeated irruptions of the enemy compelled us on the West-

ern Front gradually to withdraw our troops to shorter lines. What I told the leaders of the government on October 3d can be put in the following words: As far as possible we are clinging to enemy soil. The operations and actions are of the same character as all others since the middle of August. A diminution of the enemy's offensive capacity is accompanying the deterioration of our own fighting powers. If the enemy delude themselves into believing that we shall collapse, we ourselves may make the mistake of hoping that the foe may become completely paralyzed. Thus there could be only one *finale* unless we succeeded in creating one last reserve from the resources of our people at home. A rising of the nation would not have failed to make an impression on our enemies and on our own army. But had we still enough life left in us for that? Would the mass still possess the spirit of self-sacrifice? In any case our attempt to bring such a reserve to the front was a failure.

The homeland collapsed sooner than the army. In these circumstances we were unable to offer any real resistance to the ever-increasing pressure of the President of the United States. Our government cherished hopes of moderation and justice. The German soldier and the German statesman went different ways. The gulf between them could no longer be bridged. My last effort to

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secure co-operation is revealed in the following letter of October 24, 1918:

I cannot conceal from your Grand-Ducal Highness that in the recent speeches in the Reichstag I missed a warm appeal for good will to the army, and that it caused me much pain. I had hoped that the new government would gather together all the resources of the whole nation for the defense of our Fatherland. That hope has not been realized. On the contrary, with few exceptions they talk only of reconciliation and not of fighting the enemies which threaten the very existence of our country. This has had first a depressing and then a devastating effect on the army. It is proved by serious symptoms.

If the army is to defend the nation, it needs not only men, but the conviction that it is necessary to go on fighting, as well as the moral impetus this great task demands.

Your Grand-Ducal Highness will share my conviction that, realizing the outstanding importance to be attached to the *morale* of the nation in arms, the government and the representatives of the nation must inspire and maintain that spirit in both the army and the public at home.

To your Grand-Ducal Highness, as the head of the new government, I make an earnest appeal to rise to the height of this holy task.

It was too late. Politics demanded a victim. The victim was forthcoming on October 25th.

In the evening of that day I left the capital, whither I had gone with my First Quartermaster-General to confer with our All-Highest War Lord, and returned to Headquarters. I was alone. His Majesty had granted General Ludendorff's request to be allowed to resign and refused my own. Next day I entered what had been our common

office. I felt as if I had returned to my desolate quarters from the graveside of a particularly dear friend. Up to the present moment—I am writing this in September, 1919—I have never again seen my loyal helper and adviser during these four years. In thought I have visited him a thousand times and always found him present in my grateful heart.

## II

*October 26th to November 9th*

At my request my All-Highest War Lord appointed General Gröner as my First Quartermaster-General. The general had become well known to me through holding previous posts during the war. I knew that he possessed a wonderful organizing talent and a thorough knowledge of the domestic situation at home. The time we were now to spend together brought me ample proofs that I was not mistaken in my new colleague.

The problems which faced the general were as difficult as thankless. They demanded ruthless energy, utter self-denial, and renunciation of all glories but that of duty faithfully done, and the gratitude of none but his colleagues for the time being. We all know how great and critical was the work which awaited him. Affairs began to go from worse to worse. I will attempt to describe them in outline only.



In the East the last attempts at resistance of the Ottoman Empire were collapsing; Mosul and Aleppo fell, practically undefended, into the hands of the enemy. The Mesopotamian and Syrian armies had ceased to exist. We had to evacuate Georgia, not under military pressure, but because our economic plans there could not be realized, or at any rate made profitable. The troops which we had sent to help with the defense of Constantinople were withdrawn. The Entente did not attack it from Thrace. Stamboul was not destined to fall by some mighty deed of heroism or impressive manifestation of military power. I do not know the reason. It may lie in certain military considerations which were concealed from our understanding at the time. It is possible, too, that political motives played the dominant role in the decisions of the Entente.

All our other German reinforcements which were in Turkey were drawn in the direction of Constantinople. They left the land we had defended side by side, enjoying the respect of the chivalrous Turk with whom we had fought shoulder to shoulder in his life-and-death struggle. The outburst against us which now took place came from those circles which now saw their plans materializing and hoped by their manifestations of hatred of us to have a first claim on the good feeling of the newcomers. The true Ottoman knew that we

stood ready to help not only in the present conflict, but also with the subsequent reorganization of his country. Enver and Talaat Pasha left the scene of their labors, insulted by their opponents but otherwise without a stain on their character.

Our last troops were withdrawn from Bulgaria also. They were followed by the gratitude and honorable recognition of many, feelings which found their most vivid expression in a letter which the former commander-in-chief of the Bulgarian army wrote to me about this time. I could not resist the impression that the lines expressed something which I had thought I detected so often in the words of this honorable officer, "Had I been politically free, my military actions would have been different." The revelation had come too late in his case, as in many others.

The political structure of Austria-Hungary went to pieces at the same time as her military organization. She not only abandoned her own frontiers, but deserted ours as well. In Hungary rose the specter of Revolution, inspired by hatred of the Germans. Can that be considered surprising? Was not this hatred an ingredient of Magyar pride? During the war the Hungarian had certainly had other sentiments when the Russian was knocking at his frontier. Mighty knocks and many of them! With what joy were the German troops greeted; with what devotion were they

looked after, nay pampered, when it was a question of helping to overthrow Serbia! What an enthusiastic reception we met with when we appeared on the scene to reconquer Transylvania! Gratitude is a rare blossom in human life, even rarer in political.

On the other hand, in Rumania we often met with open expressions of gratitude. The Rumanian appreciated that without the destruction of Russia the free development of his country could never have been realized

If certain circles in Germany now bring up the hatred of our former allies as a reproach against us and a proof of our mistaken political and military principles, they forget that outbursts of hatred against an ally could also be heard in the enemy camp. Had not French soldiers insulted and shaken their fists at their English brothers in arms under our very eyes? Had not Frenchmen shouted to us, "Against you with England to-day; with you against England to-morrow!" In March, 1918, had not an angry French private, pointing to the ruins of the Cathedral of St.-Quentin, cried out to an English soldier who had been taken prisoner at the same time, "*You* did that?"

I can only hope that the expressions of hatred between ourselves and our former allies will gradually die away when the dark clouds lift which now veil the truth, and our former brothers in arms can

once more gaze steadfastly at the scenes of glory we shared together, scenes in which German blood was poured out for the realization of their plans and dreams.

By the end of October the collapse was complete at all points. It was only on the Western Front that we still thought we could avert it. The enemy pressure there was weaker, but weaker was our resistance also. Ever smaller became the number of German troops, ever greater the gaps in our lines of defense. We had only a few fresh German divisions, but great deeds could still have been done. Empty wishes, vain hopes. We were sinking, for the homeland was sinking. It could breathe no new life into us, for its strength was exhausted.

On November 1st General Gröner went to the front. Our immediate concern was the withdrawal of our line of defense to the Antwerp-Meuse position. It was easy to decide, but difficult to carry out the decision. Precious war material was within reach of the enemy in this line, but it was less important to save it than to get away the 80,000 wounded who were in our advance or field hospitals. Thus the execution of our decision was delayed by the feelings of gratitude which we owed to our bleeding comrades. It was plain that this situation could not last. Our armies were too weak and too tired. Moreover, the pressure which

the fresh American masses were putting upon our most sensitive point in the region of the Meuse was too strong. Yet the experiences of these masses will have taught the United States for the future that the business of war cannot be learned in a few months, and that in a crisis lack of this experience costs streams of blood.

The German battle line was then still connected with the lines of communication, the life-nerve which kept it in touch with the homeland. Gloomy pictures were certainly revealed here and there, but generally speaking the situation was still stable. Yet this could not last for long. The strain had become almost intolerable. Convulsions anywhere, whether at home or in the army, would make collapse inevitable.

Such were my impressions in the first days of November.

Our fears of such convulsions began to be realized. There was a mighty upheaval in the homeland. The revolution was beginning. As early as November 5th General Gröner hastened to the capital, foreseeing what must happen if a halt were not called, even at the eleventh hour. He made his way to his Emperor's presence and described the consequences if the army were deprived of its head. In vain! The revolution was now in full career, and it was purely by chance that the general escaped the clutches of the revo-

lutionaries on his way back to Headquarters. This was on the evening of November 6th.

The whole national organism now began to shake with fever. Calm consideration was a thing of the past. No one thought any longer about the consequences to the whole body politic, but only of the satisfaction of his own passions. These passions in turn began to foster the craziest plans. For could there be anything more crazy than the idea of making life impossible for the army? Has a greater crime ever had its origin in human thought and human hatred? The body was now powerless; it could still deal a few blows, but it was dying. Was it surprising that the enemy could do what he liked with such an organism, or that he made his conditions even harder than those he had published?

Nothing more was heard of all the promises which the enemy propaganda had announced. The vision of revenge appeared in all its nakedness. "Woe to the vanquished!" A phrase which springs from fear as well as hatred.

Such was the situation on November 9th. The drama did not conclude on this day, but took on new colors. The revolution was winning. Let us not waste time on discussing the reasons. It first destroyed the very backbone of the army, the German officer. As a foreigner has said, it tore the hard-earned laurels from his brows and pressed

the thorny crown of martyrdom to his bleeding head. The comparison is moving in its truth. May it speak straight to the heart of every German!

The visible sign of the victory of the new powers was the overthrow of the throne. The German Imperial House also fell.

The abdication of the Emperor and King was announced even before he had made his decision. In these days and hours much was done in the dark which will not always evade the fierce light of history.

The suggestion was made that we should use the troops from the front to restore order at home. Yet many of our officers and men, worthy of the highest confidence and capable of long views, declared that our men would unhesitatingly hold the front against the enemy, but would never take the field against the nation.

I was at the side of my All-Highest War Lord during these fateful hours. He intrusted me with the task of bringing the army back home. When I left my Emperor in the afternoon of November 9th, I was never to see him again! He went, to spare his Fatherland further sacrifices and enable it to secure more favorable terms of peace.

In the midst of this mighty military and political upheaval the German army lost its internal cohesion. To hundreds and thousands of loyal officers and men it meant that the very founda-

tions of their thoughts and feelings were tottering. They were faced with the hardest of all inward struggles. I thought that I could help many of the best of them to come to the right decision in that conflict by continuing in the path to which the wish of my Emperor, my love for my Fatherland and army, and my sense of duty pointed me. I remained at my post.



## MY FAREWELL

IT was the end.

Like Siegfried, stricken down by the treacherous spear of savage Hagan, our weary front collapsed. It was in vain that it had tried to drink in new vitality from that fountain in our homeland which had run dry. It was now our task to save what was left of our army for the subsequent reconstruction of our Fatherland. The present was lost. We had only our hope in the future.

So to work!

I can quite understand the desire to leave the country which possessed many of our officers at the sight of the ruin of everything which they held dear. The longing "to have nothing more to do" with a world in which unbridled passions were mutilating the true heart of our nation until it was unrecognizable, was a very human one, and yet—I must say exactly what I think.

Comrades of the German army, once the proud and mighty German army! How can you talk of despondency? Think of the men who gave us a new Fatherland more than a hundred years ago. Their religion was their faith in themselves and

in the sacredness of their cause. They built up a new Fatherland, not on the foundation of doctrines strange to them, but on those of the free development of the individual within the framework of the whole body politic, and on his sense of responsibility to the state. Germany will tread that path once more as soon as she is permitted to do so.

I have an unshakable conviction that, as in those days, our historical continuity with our great and glorious past will be preserved or restored where it has been broken. The old German spirit will descend upon us again, though it may be that we shall first have to go through the purifying fires of passion and suffering. Our enemies well know what that spirit means. They admired and hated it in peace, they feared and were amazed at it on the battlefields of the Great War. They tried to represent our strength to their peoples as the expression of the empty word "organization."

They say nothing about the spirit which created this tenement and lives and works within it. With and through that spirit we will courageously build up our world again.

Germany, the goal and starting point of so much that is inexhaustible in human civilization and culture, will count as naught only so long as she ceases to believe in her great historical mission. My faith is unshakable that the best among us,

with their deep, strong thoughts, will succeed in fusing the ideas of to-day with the precious relics of ancient times and on them set the stamp of eternal qualities which will bring salvation to our Fatherland.

Such is the firm conviction with which I left the bloody battlefields of this War of Nations. I have witnessed the heroic struggle of my Fatherland, and I shall never believe that it was its death struggle.

I have often been asked the question on what I based my hopes of our ultimate victory even in the darkest hours of the war. I could only point to my faith in the justice of our cause and my confidence in our Fatherland and the army.

I passed through the serious crises of this long war and the days that followed it in a state of mind and feeling for which I can find no better expression than the words in which Field-Marshal Herrmann von Boyen, when he was Prussian War Minister in 1811, wrote to his sovereign in the midst of the greatest military and political afflictions of our enslaved Fatherland:

I am not in any way ignorant of the dangers of our situation, but where we have no alternative but subjection or honor, religion gives me the strength to do everything which right and duty demand.

Man can never foresee with certainty the end of the task to which he has set his hand, but he who lives only for duty from inmost conviction has a shield about him which gives

him peace in every situation in life, come what may, and indeed often brings him the success for which he strives.

It is not the ravings of excited fanaticism, but the expression of a religious feeling, when I thank those who taught me long ago to love my King and Fatherland as the most sacred possessions on earth.

For the time being a flood of wild political passions and sounding speeches has overwhelmed the ancient structure of our state, and apparently destroyed all our sacred traditions. Yet this flood will subside again. Then from the tempestuous seas of our national life will once more emerge that rock—the German Imperial House—to which the hopes of our Fathers clung in days of yore, and on which the future of our Fatherland was confidently set, nearly half a century ago, by our own efforts.

When our national ideals and our national conscience have resumed their sway among us, we shall see how moral values have been struggling to birth in our present grievous trials and the Great War on which no nation is entitled to look back with more pride than the German people, so long as it remained true to itself. Then, and then only, will the blood of all those who fell believing in the greatness of Germany have been poured out not in vain.

In that hope I lay down my pen and firmly build on you—Young Germany!

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