M + 14. In 1913, the two allies arrived at a compromise whereby Russia agreed to move as soon after M + 15 as possible. This agreement was fraught with risk for the unsophisticated Russians. When war came, Joffre reacted to the intense pressure placed on his troops in the West by pleading with Russia to move against East Prussia even earlier than the agreed target date. Ever loyal to their ally, the Russian staff acquiesced; General Jilinsky's Northwest Army Group lurched uncertainly westward on August 13, 1914, less than two weeks after the order to mobilize and seven days prior to the more realistic prewar estimate of readiness.[8] The Russian leaders made this decision with full knowledge that while their infantry and cavalry units were nearing full strength—outnumbering the Germans almost 3 to 1—the supporting units were not yet assembled.[9] This was particularly critical since the lines of communication were in wretched condition and could not support the offensive. The opposing German and Austrian armies, while smaller, had their mobilized support base largely in place.

On August 17, the First Russian Army (General Paul V. Rennenkampf) crossed the international border into Germany. Jilinsky's orders prescribed that the Second Army (General Alexander V. Samsonov) was to keep pace with Rennenkampf's advance toward Königsberg. *(See Atlas Map No. 25.)* Samsonov was to cross the frontier in the vicinity of Soldau and pivot northwest to envelop the German Eighth Army; the entire army group was then expected to continue its march toward Berlin. The realities of geography, Russia's military ineptitude, and German's superior generalship would combine to foil this plan and prove the vulnerability of the Russian "steam roller."

Cossacks in Transit to East Prussia

The Tannenberg Campaign: German Superiority Is Established

Control of the Polish Salient had changed hands many times over the centuries. *(See Atlas Map No. 24b.)* German planners viewed the salient as a wedge separating and inhibiting lateral movement between East Prussia and Galicia. To the Russians, the salient was initially viewed as a vulnerable area that could not be easily defended. In the event of major German and Austrian drives from the northwest and southeast (respectively, the vicinities of Thorn and Cracow), the entire salient could easily be pinched off, thereby severing Russia's communications with the industrial centers of Warsaw, Lodz, and Ivangorod.[10] Reflecting this defensive attitude, the Russians intentionally retarded the development of the salient, hoping that any German invasion would be slowed or stalled by the poor roads, a railroad network of different gauge and limited reach, and the paucity of food and forage. This attitude prevailed prior to Russia's agreement to support French offensive plans. Consequently, when war came, the underdeveloped salient favored a Russian defense, but greatly hindered the offensive campaign that Russia now planned to launch.

Forming the northern border of the Polish Salient until it turned north near Lomja, the German-Russian (Polish) frontier ran generally between the Niemen and Narew Rivers. A few kilometers west of the frontier lay the chain of the Masurian Lakes *(See Atlas Map No. 25)*, a series of freshwater obstacles running south from Angerburg to Johannisburg. Patrolled by German craft and guarded by the central fortress of Lötzen, the lakes channelized advancing armies into two avenues of approach—through the 40-mile wide Insterburg gap north of the lakes and through Russian Poland to the south. The northern gap was cut by forests, marshes, and peat bogs that delayed the movement of horses, gun carriages, and wagons. South of the lakes, the second avenue extended from Bialystok to Mlava, northwest of Warsaw, along the edge of the salient.

In 1914, the Masurian Lakes region represented a formidable barrier to movement, very much like a large rock in the center of a mountain stream that divides the stream into two parts until the obstacle has been bypassed. While circumventing the lakes to the north and south, major forces would find contact most difficult, and mutual support against a foe engaging one wing or the other would be virtually impossible.

The Initial Russian Advance

While the German advance through Belgium was gaining momentum—Liège's forts had at last fallen—Rennenkampf's army passed the frontier into East Prussia and at once brought

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psychological pressure to bear on Eighth Army's commander. The Second Army, the left wing of the Northwest Army Group, was still struggling toward the border east of Niedenburg. Preliminary Russian cavalry thrusts had drawn the I German Corps (General Hermann von François) and a cavalry division close to the frontier as Rennenkempf crossed. General Prittwitz, an individual of dubious military reputation who had been appointed to command the Eighth Army over Moltke's protests, endeavored to execute the planned Eastern Front strategy: Germany would trade space for time in East Prussia, while precluding decisive engagement with superior Russian forces until the Western Front had been stabilized and more troops could be spared. In tactical terms, this basic strategy translated into a series of successive delays along such defensible obstacles as the Angerapp, Alle, Passarge, and Vistula Rivers, yielding segments of East Prussia slowly and at great cost to the Russians.

Prittwitz had a difficult task at best. Although his Eighth Army was better trained, better led, better disciplined, and superior in quality of armament and communications, the Russian superiority in numbers was overwhelming. Tales of Russian brutality and disregard for property colored the rumors rife in the German ranks. The Eighth Army was subject to assault from both the east and southeast, with the likelihood that unless its commander kept his wits, his troops were in danger of being pinned against the Masurian Lakes or pushed into the fortress of Königsberg, there by enabling the enemy to march unopposed toward Potsdam. Further, German flank security depended on the tenacity and fighting ability of the Austro-Hungarians, a significant unknown in the equation.[11] Finally, Prittwitz appreciated that his was a secondary theater, and that he could expect little assistance.

General Hermann von François

Prittwitz' problems multiplied when one of his corps commanders decided to undertake an unauthorized offensive. *(See Atlas Map No. 25.)* On August 17, the fractious but patriotic François, in utter disregard of his orders to avoid decisive engagement, threw his corps against the first three Russian corps to cross the frontier, mauling the Russian center but risking encirclement and annihilation at Stallupönen. Eighth Army headquarters was incredulous at this preemptive attack by François; Prittwitz quickly dispatched his chief of staff to order François to break off the action immediately.[12] Although the battle was indecisive militarily, the ferocity of the German assault had a marked psychological effect on Rennenkampf, heightening his sense of caution. Henceforth, he would slow the pace of First Army's advance, thereby contributing significantly to the German victories against Samsonov's Second Army in the days to come.*

As the Russian offensive unfolded, perceptive German officers detected a fatal flaw. The poor state of training in the hastily mobilized Russian divisions and the low literacy level of the peasant soldiers resulted in an inability of Russian signal troops to master the intricate encryption systems required for secure communication over the new wireless radio system. Since they were equally bereft of a good field telephone system, the Russians resorted to broadcasting instructions "in the clear," to the delight of German wireless intercept teams. The net result was that Germany's Eighth Army Headquarters and Russia's subordinates were simultaneously informed of *Stavka's* plans.

Bolstered by this knowledge and by the entreaties of the aggressive François, Prittwitz elected to attack with three corps against the Russians at Gumbinnen on the twentieth. Despite initial German success against the Russian center, Rennenkampf's forces held; by dusk, Prittwitz was faced with the choice of either withdrawing or digging in for the night preparatory to resuming the attack on the following morning. Events elsewhere would influence his decision.

Prittwitz knew that Samsonov's Second Army was tramping across the Polish Salient, but he calculated that its advance

*Rennenkampf was of German ancestry. He was also a personal and professional enemy of the Second Army Commander, Samsonov. There have been serious accusations that he either actively assisted the German side by providing information or passively allowed the enemy to capitalize on his lethargy.[13]

would be slow and that it could not strike his flank for several days. During his attack on Rennenkampf on August 20, however, he had been shocked to discover, through reports from aerial reconnaissance, that Samsonov's columns were approaching Mlava, the southeastern gateway to East Prussia, and advancing west of the Masurian Lakes. Moreover, he was deceived by conflicting intelligence reports into believing that yet a third Russian army was on the march. Presumably, this force could enter the German homeland and emerge at Deutsch-Eylau and Allenstein, well to the rear of Prittwitz' troops in Gumbinnen.[14]

This combination of the threat from the south and the tenuous nature of the situation in the north put Prittwitz in a state of extreme anxiety. His principal staff officers, Chief of Staff General Ernest Grünert and Lieutenant Colonel Max von Hoffman (the operations officer), advised him that the situation did not warrant drastic action and that it would be expedient to allow the situation to develop. Despite these recommendations, Prittwitz panicked and decided that a desperate move was required to avoid destruction by the combined forces of Samsonov and Rennenkampf. Thus, he rang up Moltke's Headquarters in Berlin and reported that he was ordering the Eighth Army to withdraw without delay behind the Vistula, with no guarantees that he could even hold on that line.[15]

Following his urgent call to Berlin, Prittwitz was eventually calmed by his staff and became more rational. Grünert and Hoffman demonstrated the absurdity of retreat and began to devise a plan whereby the Germans could exploit their superior lateral communications, Samsonov's inability to move rapidly, and Rennenkampf's ignorance of German strengths and dispositions. Prittwitz then consented to the operation that would become known as the "Tannenberg maneuver," and abandoned his plans for a general retreat. However, an irony resulted from his vacillation. Entranced by his staff officers' proposal, the general failed to inform them that he had already called Moltke. Thus, on the evening of the twentieth, when Prittwitz approved of the new operation, the staff did not think to advise Supreme Headquarters that the decision to retreat had been countermanded and that a coordinated German offensive was now being planned. Meanwhile, in Berlin, Moltke was ignorant of Prittwitz' change of heart and had decided to rid the Army of Prittwitz and his Chief of Staff. They were dismissed, and a new commander, General Paul von Beckendorff und Hindenburg, was recalled from retirement. A chief of staff was also chosen—the well respected and competent Major General Erich Ludendorff, newly famous for his role in the capture of Liège. Additionally, to confirm that the situation was not as grim as Prittwitz had originally stated, Moltke's staff officers bypassed the Eighth Army Headquarters and contacted their opposite numbers at corps and division level on the Eastern Front to assure themselves that Prittwitz' panic was not justified.

Hindenburg, Ludendorff, and Hoffman in East Prussia, 1914

The new commander, Hindenburg, had a good reputation as a solid commander in the Franco-Prussian War and provided a strong image of leadership. His Chief of Staff, the energetic Ludendorff, was the personification of German military genius. By virtue of the consistency of their views and mutual affection, the pair, only recently acquainted, soon came to be known as a team—Hindenburg-Ludendorff, or H-L. Arriving by train at the ancient Marienburg Fortress on August 23, they would breathe new life into the efforts of the Central Powers in the East. En route, they had already approved the concept of the southward deployment that Hoffman had initiated. Thus, the new command team entered the field, approving a plan of battle that had already been determined.

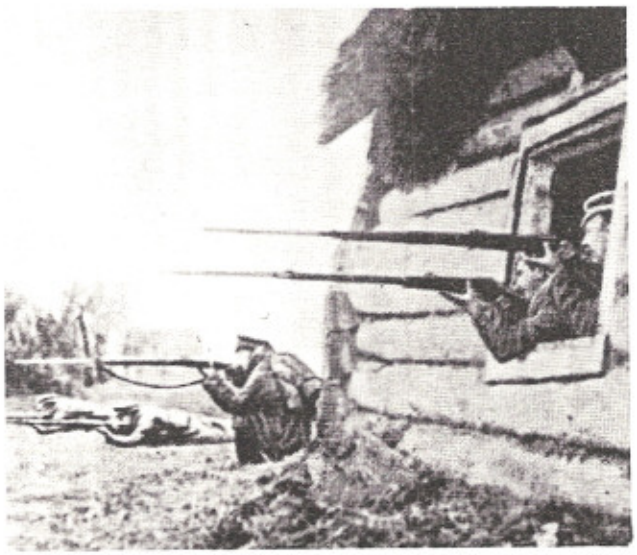
A German Offensive

The essence of the Tannenberg maneuver was to be an amalgam of mass, surprise, and economy of force. Briefly, the scheme formulated by Hoffman and sanctioned by the command team was this: their movements concealed behind the Masurian Lake region, the bulk of the German forces (I, XVII, and I Reserve Corps) were to be transported southward to join the XX Corps near the southern border of East Prussia. A small force (one cavalry division) would remain behind to slow the advance of the Russian First Army into East Prussia.

(See Atlas Map No. 25.) The objective was to envelop Samsonov's Second Army and defeat it quickly, before Rennenkampf could react or accelerate his progress. If this phase were successful, the German Eighth Army could reconcentrate in the Insterburg gap and defeat the Russian First Army in turn. It was a hazardous plan in which the German advantages of excellent lateral communications and well-trained forces would be balanced against Russia's numerical superiority. The high command gambled on several assumptions: that Rennenkampf would not hasten his western advance and thereby discover that only a cavalry division lay to his front; that, upon learning of Samsonov's plight, Rennenkampf could not or would not react quickly enough to come to the Second Army's relief;* that the crude state of Russian electronic communications would continue to give the Germans timely knowledge of Russian plans and dispositions; and that a rapid and bold attack in the south would catch Russian leaders by surprise. Although they would prove to be correct—or lucky—on all counts, neither Hindenburg nor Ludendorff could be certain that any of the premises would hold, thus adding to the audacity of the stroke. The decision making process, however, was not as instantaneous as many accounts might suggest.

Before the arrival of H-L in the theater, Hoffman had already issued to the corps commanders the movement plans for the envelopment of the unsuspecting Samsonov, who was then advancing along the northern edge of the Polish Salient.

*Hoffman had knowledge of a fist fight that had occurred between Samsonov and Rennenkampf in the Russo-Japanese War on the station platform at Mukden. He surmised that this enmity had persisted for 10 years and that Rennenkampf would not be inclined to rush to Samsonov's assistance.[16]



Russian Sharpshooters in Action Against Germans in East Prussia

(Shortly, the Russians intended to swing to the north toward Allenstein in order to envelop the German Eighth Army.) On August 21, François' I Corps was to use the circuitous but excellent railroad to move from Insterburg to Marienburg and Deutsch-Eylau. It would then march southeast, taking positions on the right flank of General Friedrich von Scholtz' XX Corps by August 25. While a partial solution to Germany's problem, this maneuver could not accomplish the destruction of an entire Russian army. As the locomotives transported François' veteran troops south, Ludendorff pondered the wisdom of also sending XVII Corps (General August von Mackensen) and I Reserve (General Otto von Below) southward, as planned, to oppose the Russians at Bischofsburg. On the twenty-fourth, he opted for this bolder course, and the regiments of those two units began a forced march to the south, leaving Rennenkampf's army unattended save for the aforementioned cavalry division.

The Battle of Tannenberg

An early morning interception of Russian radio traffic indicated that Ludendorff's decision had been correct, for it disclosed that Rennenkampf intended to continue eastward at a very slow rate; indeed, he had already taken one day off on the twentieth to rest his troops. Thus, the plan of maneuver began to take shape: I Corps, supplemented by *Landwehr* troops, would be on the German right, in position for a thrust at the Russian left flank; XX Corps would slowly withdraw into the German center to lure the Russian XV and XXIII Corps deeper northeastward in search of a quick and easy victory; I Reserve and XVII Corps would descend from the north, the latter sideslipping to the east to form the German left, thus creating an inverted "U" around Samsonov's army. In the next phase, as opportunity permitted, the German flank units would maneuver to encircle the Russians and annihilate them. An attack was ordered by Ludendorff for August 26, when all units would be in position. *(See Atlas Map No. 26.)*

After François had delayed the initial assault—again in violation of written orders—to permit his artillery to detrain and move into position, I Corps began the action. Despite the delay, François took Seeben, the corps' objective, by 1:00 p.m. Although ordered to proceed eastward that day and take Usdau, he again defied his superiors and delayed the assault until the twenty-seventh,* allowing his corps time to consolidate. Scholtz' XX Corps held its own on the twenty-sixth, when it hesitantly committed only one division. This tentative maneuver caused Scholtz to miss an opportunity to take the

*In his account of the battle, Hoffman suggests that this was a wise decision. Had the ordered attack failed, Samsonov could have extricated his army, nullifying the German victory of the ensuing days.[17]

advancing Russian XV Corps in the flank. To the north, I Reserve and XVII Corps sent Samsonov's VI Corps fleeing southeastward, and moved ominously toward the Russian XIII Corps. Although H-L had now cast the die, Moltke was apprehensive about the outcome and worried that Rennenkampf would turn southwest behind the lakes. He therefore ordered Colonel von Tappen to telephone Ludendorff at his field headquarters, offering reinforcements from the Western Front. Ludendorff protested that added troops were not required and that, if sent, would arrive too late. In any event, Moltke insisted that the transfer take place. Thus, three corps were withdrawn from the German right wing in France, depriving it of vital combat power at a critical moment. Nor did these three corps participate in the Battle of Tannenberg.

Acting in accordance with his own perception of the situation, François captured Usdau on August 27. This resulted in a penetration of the Russian left and isolated the I Corps from its flank corps, the XXIII, which was positioned west of Niedenburg. François then moved part of his corps south against Samsonov's I Corps and punished its remnants, which were falling back from Soldau. On the left, the Russian VI Corps was fleeing eastward ahead of Mackensen's XVII Corps, which now turned to the southeast. Although victory was still not assured, the net was closing around the Russian center. Only the situation in Scholtz' sector remained in doubt.

Ludendorff ordered François to send a division north to bolster the XX Corps and, for the fourth time in as many weeks, François chose to disregard his superior's instructions. Without an acknowledgment or explanation, François ordered his troops due east toward Niedenburg on the twenty-eighth. Scholtz, left to his own devices, spent the day plugging holes wherever Russian attacks threatened to overrun his positions.

Meanwhile, in Russian Second Army Headquarters, Samsonov was unaware that his army was on the brink of disaster. On August 27, he ordered that an attack to the northwest be launched the next day. The friction of war and poor communications blinded him to the fact that both of his flank corps (I and VI) had been so roughly handled that any attack was doomed from its inception.

August 28 was the day of decision. *(See Atlas Map No. 27.)* Scholtz' XX Corps held its ground in front of the limited Russian advance. In the afternoon, the Germans struck the Russian XXIII Corps flank, which disintegrated; its commander fled in terror. The annihilation of the corps took place just east of the tiny village of Frankenau. François, mesmerized by success, drove stolidly onward toward Niedenburg. Although he did divert one division toward Lahna, his main course of movement showed that he had again disregarded two orders from army headquarters to swing northeastward to assist XX Corps. As the army staff's perception of

Russians Surrender During the Battle of Tannenberg, 1914

the Russian plight became clearer, François' orders were changed, directing him to continue toward Niedenburg exactly as he was doing. To the east, I Reserve and XVII Corps were able to provide little support as, to evade pursuit of the fleeing Russian VI Corps, they were countermarched by Ludendorff back toward Allenstein and Passenheim, respectively. Despite the grumbling in the ranks that resulted from these frequent changes in orders, two German corps were now in the rear of the Russian XIII Corps, which was endeavoring to move southwest to link up with the collapsing XV Corps; steadily, Scholtz and François tightened the noose. As Cyril Falls observed in *The Great War,* "It was like herding stock into a corral, and the head cowboy was François."[18]

The twenty-ninth and thirtieth were almost anticlimactic days. Inept generalship, fatigue, despair, and communications failures combined to preclude vigorous Russian counteraction. The Russian soldiers, in a state of stupor, stood in their hastily prepared positions, awaiting their fate—death or capture. One 15-kilometer-wide escape alley was found along the swift-running Omulev River in the direction of Ostrolenka. However, this corridor could not accommodate all the transports and soldiers endeavoring to make the passage, and many men died along the roadside. From Usdau to Ortelsburg—wherever Russians moved, in seven of the eight principal compass points—they found exultant Germans with rifles poised. Artillery rounds slammed every road intersection with despairing regularity. The three Russian interior corps (XV, XXIII, and XIII) were literally destroyed as the Russian Second Army died in the fastnesses of the trans-border region. General N.N. Martos, Commander of the XV Corps, was taken prisoner, as was the commander of the XIII Corps. Samsonov, retreating with his staff, found the sheer weight of responsibility for the debacle too much to bear. In a nighttime tragedy near

a small rural village, he took unannounced leave of his subordinates and ended his life with a pistol shot. A replay of Hannibal's Cannae had materialized in East Prussia.

By conservative estimates, the Germans captured 500 guns and took between 55,000 and 75,000 prisoners, having left 70,000 Russians dead in the ditches and forests of Tannenberg.* The Germans lost from 10,000 to 15,000 men. There was little time for resting on laurels, however; Rennenkampf's army was still in East Prussia, and could at any moment move on Königsberg or the Passarge crossings.

During the Tannenberg encirclement, Rennenkampf had inched his First Army westward through the Angerburg gap, unaware that he was opposed only by a cavalry screen. Nor was he aware that trains arriving from France and Germany were disgorging fresh German troops eager for a chance to do battle. By the end of the Tannenberg battle, the Eighth Army had been augmented by the XI Corps, the Guard Reserve Corps, and the 8th Cavalry Division. Russian troop strength in the northwest had been reduced by about 50 percent, while German strength had been increased by about the same amount. It was a far more formidable and inspired army that turned on Rennenkampf than had moved on Samsonov two weeks earlier. The Russians still held the numerical edge (24 versus 16 divisions), but this factor had been discounted by events on the battlefield.

The outcome was almost predictable. Jolted by the news of the disaster, Rennenkampf abandoned any previous plan he may have had for a vigorous advance into Prussia and began to dig in. On the German side, morale soared as a consequence of the great victory over Samsonov's army. Lax Russian communications security continued to provide the Germans with all the information that H-L needed to finalize the Eighth Army plan for a repetition of the success in the south. German enthusiasm was moderated, however, by the knowledge that the Austro-Hungarians had suffered alarming reverses in Galicia and Serbia. Conrad pleaded for German assistance in the form of a thrust toward Warsaw to draw off Russian strength south of the Polish Salient, but the Germans demurred for the time being, seeing Rennenkampf as the most immediate threat. Still, Hindenburg was fearful for his own right flank as he moved northwestward against the Russian First Army.

Rennenkampf anchored his army along strong natural obstacles, rivers in the north and the Masurian Lakes in the south. *(See Atlas Map No. 28.)* The German scheme of maneuver called for a wide envelopment of the Russian southern flank, while holding attacks pinned the majority of Rennenkampf's divisions in place. Interestingly, the bulk of the German divisions were committed to the secondary (holding) mission, while H-L assigned two of the most aggressive German commanders (Mackensen and François) the enveloping mission. Their two corps were to sally forth from the southern lakes region south of the fortress of Lötzen. Moving in a wide sweep to the northeast, and then to the north, they would strike behind Rennenkampf's army so as to sever the roads leading to Vilna.

The first action following the German advance occurred on September 7, when one of François' divisions scattered a Russian force at Bialla. By the ninth, the Germans were pressing all along the front. In the center, the Russians battled them to a standstill; but Rennenkampf, noting that his left flank was in danger, elected to initiate a withdrawal. By September 13, he had fallen back to the Russian border, thereby restoring the situation essentially to what it had been at the initiation of the advance into East Prussia a month earlier. The month's campaigning cost the Russian First Army 145,000 men and 200 guns. Estimates of German losses in this First Battle of the Masurian Lakes have ranged from 10,000 to 30,000 men.[19]

Prussia had been cleared of Russian forces, the First Army had experienced very heavy losses, and the Second Army had been destroyed and would not be reconstituted for many months. The Czar could replace the private soldiers, but not the trained officers and non commissioned officers. Two great victories in as many weeks buoyed Germany's confidence in its Eastern Front forces and served to offset the disquieting bulletins of Moltke's failures in the Marne battles. H-L had established a reputation for success that would be used by the German state to mask stalemate elsewhere.

Russian failures at Tannenberg and Masuria were not entirely due to the incompetence of the field commanders. Rennenkampf and Samsonov's tactical mistakes were equaled by the strategic blunders of Marshal Jilinsky, commander of the Northwest Army Group. In response to the urgings of the French for an early offensive, Jilinsky had not counseled his superior, Grand Duke Nicholas, to defer all movements until mobilization was complete and the logistical base established for a large-scale maneuver. Further, he had directed that two large armies approach East Prussia in a poorly coordinated fashion, virtually isolated from each other by restrictive terrain obstacles. He had compounded Samsonov's problems by urging too rapid an approach march over marginally trafficable terrain. His arbitrary orders had worn down Samsonov's troops, who had to undertake sustained combat against fresher German forces.[20] Finally, his intelligence and communications networks had been so poor that he was unaware of the opportunity that arose between August 26 and August 30 to

*The battlefield of Tannenberg was so named by Hindenburg in his dispatches to the Kaiser. Tannenberg was selected as the official name of the campaign to give it historical significance. In 1410, Polish and Ruthenian armies had defeated the German Order of Teutonic Knights in a pitched battle near the same area.

push Rennenkampf's army forward to the southwest. This maneuver would have foreclosed the German action, possibly saving the bulk of Second Army and forcing the Germans to separate their forces.

In September 1914, soldiers in the German Eighth Army could breathe easier. To the southeast, however, other Russian armies were inflicting grievous losses on the armies of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Operations in Galicia, 1914

From the Austro-Hungarian viewpoint, the Eastern Front was of secondary importance. Vienna's first concern was to assault and punish the recalcitrant Serbs. After that, the bulk of the Empire's combat power could be employed against adversaries who ranked lower on Austria's scale of priorities: Italy, Rumania, and Russia. Despite Vienna's immediate concern, however, Conrad appreciated the ominous threat to the Empire presented by Russian armies surging across the Vistula. For this reason, he had hoped that the German effort in the East would be greater and more closely coordinated with that of Austria. When these supportive efforts failed to materialize, Conrad had to deal with Russia largely alone, never quite being able to concentrate his force on either front (Serbia or Galicia).

The Austrian Situation

Initially, Conrad activated the Dual Monarchy's Plan B, which called for the launching of three armies across the Danube and Save Rivers against Serbia. *(See Atlas Map No. 24b.)* Under this plan, three additional armies in Galicia were to face eastward in position to defend against a Russian offensive against Austria. However, the abysmal failure of the first Austrian invasion of Serbia, the surprise early Russian advance into East Prussia, the decision of Italy and Rumania not to enter the war on the side of the Central Powers, and the assembly of large Russian forces between Lublin and the Dniester, all convinced Conrad that Plan B had to be abandoned in favor of Plan R. This plan required the transfer of one army from the Serbian front to Galicia. There were additional factors bearing on this critical decision to go on the offensive in Galicia. First, the depth of defensible terrain north of the Carpathian Mountains was shallow, and it would be practical to increase maneuver room for future operations. Second, the Austrians wanted to regain prestige following the Empire's humiliating defeat by the Serbs. Finally, Conrad was probably a victim of the same weakness that affected the Czar and his Commander-in-Chief, the Grand Duke Nicholas

Field Marshal Conrad von Hötzendorf

of Russia—he wanted to be a good ally. By undertaking an offensive against the Russians, he hoped to draw a considerable amount of Russian attention and strength to the southeast, thus relieving pressure on East Prussia. If the Austrians were successful, Germany could hold that region with the modest Eighth Army, thereby enhancing German chances of success on the Western Front.

By contemporary European military standards, the Austrian Army should have given a better account of itself than it did. Modeled along German lines, it had a nice balance among the combat arms of infantry, cavalry, and artillery. The Austrian Skoda armament plants in Pilsen were as efficient as the German Krupp works. In fact, the Austrians provided a substantial number of the heavy howitzers and mortars to the Germans on the Western Front. Austrian railway construction units, hospitals, and signal and pioneer companies were organized, trained, and mobilized. There was also a rudimentary air force, and the Austrian Navy was capable of providing considerable gunfire and limited amphibious support.

While not immediately obvious, it became evident during the first Austrian clashes with the Serbians that national diversity was the fundamental weakness of the Austrian Army. There was a plethora of ethnic groupings—over a dozen were incorporated in the armed forces.[21] The pluralism of the Austro-Hungarian state was a decisive factor in both political and social areas, and seriously affected the Army's operational planning. While German units from Prussia and Bavaria were different in some ways, they were literate and had ethnically similar backgrounds. The linguistic and cultural diversities of Austria, however, rendered command and control ex-