

## F. The Operation of the Commander-in-Chief East against Wilna.

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### I. The Battles in Lithuania and Courland until the End of August<sup>1)</sup>.

#### a) The Battles of the Njemen Army.

(Maps 6 and 7, Sketch 26.)

#### The July Campaign against Mitau and Schaulen.

From the month of July, the battles of the Njemen Army are no longer to be regarded as independent actions, but as preparations for a future offensive on Wilna, which the Commander-in-Chief East had proposed as the most effective support for the offensive in Southern Poland on July 2 in Posen, and which had also received the approval of General von Falkenhayn for a later date<sup>2)</sup>. The Commander-in-Chief East kept it constantly in view. If this breakthrough operation was to penetrate so deeply into the enemy's formation that it had full effect, then on the one hand the large fortress of Kowno, which supported the northern flank of the Russian Njemen Front, had to be taken, and on the other hand, a security against the railway lines leading from the interior of the Reich to Dünaburg and Riga was necessary. The latter task had to be solved first, with advancing to the lower Düna and blocking this line being the most effective means and requiring the least forces in the long run. However, since from the beginning of July the entire strength of the Commander-in-Chief East had to be committed to the Narew Operation, only very modest means were available for the time being; intentions and goals had to adapt to this and change several times in detail.

The 10th Army had received the order on July 2 to cease the preparations already begun for the attack on Kowno<sup>3)</sup>, and (in addition to that, the order<sup>4)</sup> to cover the left flank of the Eastern Army in the previously extended position; the Njemen Army, with the 41st Infantry Division ready to intervene as a new force, was to attack the Russian 5th Army, thereby simultaneously relieving the German 10th Army and diverting the enemy's attention from the Narew Operation.

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1) Connection to G. 130 ff. — 2) G. 271 ff. — 3) G. 277. — 4) G. 280.

The N j e m e n A r m y under General of Infantry O t t o v o n B e l o w covered at this time with about seven infantry divisions (and five cavalry divisions<sup>1</sup>) the area north of the Njemen from the lower Dubissa to the area east of Libau in a front width of about 250 kilometers. The opposing enemy seemed numerically somewhat superior<sup>2</sup>). General von Below wanted to lead the attack, similar to the order given by the Commander-in-Chief East in the directive of June 14th<sup>3</sup>), avoiding the strong enemy positions at Schaulen against the predominantly cavalry-based Russian northern flank, to then swing against the flank and rear of the Schaulen position. Accordingly, he organized his troops, weakening the right wing as follows:

S o u t h e r n G r o u p under Lieutenant General Baron von Richthofen (Higher Cavalry Commander 1 with Detachment Eßebd, 36th Reserve Division, Division Beckmann, 3rd and Bavarian Cavalry Division) from the Njemen to Lake Rakisewo south of Schaulen,

C o r p s M o r g e n (General Command of the I Reserve Corps with Brigade Horne<sup>4</sup>) and 1st Reserve Division) in positions before Schaulen,

N o r t h e r n C o r p s under General von Lauenstein (General Command of the XXXIX Reserve Corps with 6th and 78th Reserve and 41st Infantry Division) northward behind the course of the Windau to north of the railway line Libau—Murawjewo,

C a v a l r y C o r p s of Lieutenant General E g o n C o u n t

v o n S c h m e t t o w (6th and 2nd Cavalry Division) northward adjoining,  
G r o u p of Lieutenant General v o n P a p p r i t z (Governor  
of Libau with 8th Cavalry Division and Fortress Troops<sup>5</sup>) at  
Hasenpot and east of it.

The adoption of this organization required considerable marches; the  
attack could therefore only begin around July 15th. The Northern Corps,  
accompanied by cavalry on the left flank, was initially to move in  
the general direction of Mitau, the left wing of the Pappritz Group

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1) I and ½ XXXIX R. C., 41st I. D., 6th R. D., Div. Beckmann, Det. Eßebd  
and troops from Libau; 2nd, 3rd, 6th, 8th and Bavarian R. D.

2) Actually about nine infantry and seven cavalry divisions, essentially  
the same forces as evident from p. 469.

3) p. 127.

4) Gren. Regt. 2 and Ers. Regt. Königsberg along with artillery etc.

5) Including 29th Abw. Br. and two brigades of the 4th R. D.

advance against Windau. As the troops from Libau were to participate, the navy was asked to protect the area against the sea, and also for immediate support by naval forces in the advance against Windau. Due to the expected supply difficulties during the advance, the continuation of the main railway Memel—Bajohren across the border to connect with the Libau—Schallen railway was requested from the Chief of Field Railways, who, however, anticipated six months of construction time; thus, the next operations were little served. They relied on the Libau—Schallen railway, whose eastern half was still in Russian hands, and on a field railway under construction via Tauraggen to Schallen.

The enemy remained calm; it seemed that he weakened his northern flank in favor of the front in Poland. Northwest of Schallen, it was generally expected that there were only about two Russian infantry divisions, against which four German divisions were designated for attack. There had also been signs for some time that the Russians would evacuate western Courland up to the Aa in the event of further German attacks.

As the attack of the Gallwitz Army Group against the Narew was to begin on July 13, the advance in Courland was finally set for July 14 at the request of the Commander-in-Chief East, to ensure the desired diversionary effect. On this day, the Northern Corps, with the left wing (41st Infantry Division) north of the Murawjewo—Mitau railway, launched an attack, with three cavalry divisions to the left. The crossing over the Windau was forced on a front about 30 kilometers wide, with the center and left wing advancing against Russian cavalry and landwehr up to 15 kilometers forward. Aircraft reported continued fires in the north and numerous refugee columns, confirming the impression that the enemy intended to withdraw. On the other hand, on the right wing of the Northern Corps, the 6th Reserve Division made little progress against stronger enemy resistance.

On July 15, the spatial successes on the entire attack front, especially on the northern flank, could be expanded. The attempt to cut off parts of the enemy was as unsuccessful as the day before. On July 16, the Russian resistance intensified. In the 6th Reserve Division, only the left wing advanced. The 78th Reserve-

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1) Notes of General Otto von Below. — Construction began in the second half of July.

2) p. 130. — 3) Ibid.

and the 41st Infantry Division encountered strong enemy forces at Alt Ux, with the decision postponed to the following day. Meanwhile, the Schmettow Cavalry Corps was able to disperse strong Russian cavalry about twelve kilometers northwest of the location in the afternoon and penetrate deep into the northern flank of the enemy; the foremost parts of the 6th Cavalry Division reached Doblen, thus already standing more than 30 kilometers northeast of Alt Ux. Several thousand prisoners and some artillery pieces were the spoils of these first three days of battle. The attempt to annihilate the enemy at Alt Ux on July 17 through a comprehensive attack did not succeed, as he had meanwhile withdrawn strong forces to the north. This led to serious fighting, forcing him to retreat eastward so hastily that he again lost about 4000 prisoners and some artillery pieces. By evening, the Mitau railway was in German hands up to south of Doblen. This brought them within 25 kilometers of Mitau itself, while in the north, the troops of Lieutenant General von Pappritz had come close to Tuckum.

The successes on the northern flank were offset by a setback on the southern flank, where the attack by the Morgen Corps had begun on July 17. Its 1st Reserve Division made little progress, but to its left, the 6th Reserve Division was forced by a counterattack of enemy reinforcements to retreat south of Ofmjany with serious losses back towards the Windau\*).

In this situation, General von Below maintained the intention to first continue the attack against the enemy in the north, to push him away from Mitau if possible; only then did he plan to turn with full force southward against the more stubborn enemy. Thus, the German troops reached Russian positions by July 18, which covered Mitau at a distance of about twelve kilometers to the west. At Tuckum, the western edge of the large swamp area of the Aa estuary was reached. Windau was occupied on the coast, which was blocked by sunken Russian ships. The possession of the western part of Courland was secured, the first phase of the planned attack was completed, and the military spoils increased to more than 6000 prisoners and nine artillery pieces.

For the upcoming operation against the Russian main forces, General von Below issued the first orders at noon. The 6th Reserve Division was to hold its position, the

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\*) The Russians reported 500 prisoners and seven machine guns as spoils.

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Corps to be ready for further attack in the morning, while south of Lake Rakiewo the southern group was to advance on a front of over 40 kilometers with the right wing towards Gudzianka. From the northern corps, the 78th Reserve Division Shagori and the Cavalry Corps Schmettow were to reach Groß Wilzen as the envelopment wing. The 41st Infantry Division and the troops previously under Lieutenant General von Pappritz were to withdraw from Mitau and, if possible, take it by surprise; the command was given to the commander of the 8th Cavalry Division, Major General Eberhard Count von Schmettow.

Meanwhile, the Baltic Sea forces, after the battle at Hesperort on July 2, had been temporarily significantly reinforced by the IV Squadron (seven older battleships) and light forces from the North Sea. The Eastern Commander-in-Chief, at the behest of Grand Admiral Prince Heinrich, sent an officer to Kiel, who was to explain the intentions of the Niemen Army there on July 19 and point out that during the upcoming battles, naval operations in the Gulf of Riga were desirable to bind Russian land forces beyond the Dvina. However, the fairway had to be explored and cleared of mines beforehand, which required some time.

In the Niemen Army, the envelopment troops advancing from the north crossed the Schwed River without a fight on July 19 and reached their set targets Shagori and Groß Wilzen; they were thus deep in the enemy's flank. On the rest of the front, the day passed with preparations for the attack. When this then began on July 20 with the southern group under Lieutenant General Freiherr von Richthofen, the enemy retreated eastward over the Dubissa, but now also began to withdraw north of Schaulen before the 1st and 6th Reserve Divisions. These two divisions were to stay close to him without pressing, while the envelopment troops were driven to the utmost haste by General von Below and reached the main road Schaulen—Mitau behind the enemy. The 78th Reserve Division under Major General von Müller was positioned after a 30-kilometer march in the evening at Mechkuze and thus directly behind the enemy still holding at Schaulen, the Cavalry Corps Schmettow had reached Janischki.

General von Below could hope to capture significant parts of the Russians stationed at Schaulen the following day, July 21, as

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1) p. 131. — 2) For more details see Naval Warfare, Offsee, Volume II, p. 224 ff.

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if these — as was now assumed — retreated in a more southeasterly direction, approximately towards Poniewiez. He wanted to close the ring around them not only from the north but also from the south. He ordered the divisions of the Northern Corps (6th and 78th Reserve Divisions) and the Cavalry Corps Schmettow (Egon) to advance further on Schaulen and Radziwilischki; the enemy was to be attacked everywhere. The southern group was to counter the Cavalry Corps in the direction of Radziwilischki, to prevent the corps from withdrawing at night and to attack again on July 21.

Early that day, however, the Russians turned sharply eastward against the German 78th Reserve Division, while delaying the advance of the 6th Reserve Division, which was set against them from the north, until the afternoon. The Corps Morgen did penetrate the Schaulen evacuated by the enemy at night, but did not get beyond it. Thus, the 78th Reserve Division faced a rather difficult situation and could not prevent strong Russian forces, especially on their southern flank, from escaping eastward. They had to push against the two cavalry divisions of Lieutenant General Count von Schmettow (Egon), blocking from Koltzi on the Muscha to north of Rozalin in a broad front. From the southern group, the 36th Reserve Division under Lieutenant General Krug reached the railway fighting about halfway between Kiejdany and Schadow; further north, the Russian resistance was stronger, causing the Bredemann Division and the Bavarian Cavalry Division to fall significantly behind the 36th Reserve Division on the left.

The ring around the enemy was not yet closed, with a gap of 45 kilometers on both sides of Schadow. The way to Poniewiez was open to the enemy. But even in the north, it was hardly expected that the fighting strength of the Cavalry Corps Schmettow (Egon) would be sufficient to stop a determined Russian breakthrough. Battles and marches with often inadequate supplies and insufficient ammunition, on frequently bottomless roads, in great heat and heavy thunderstorms, had especially taken a toll on the troops of the northern group, who had been continuously on the move for a week. Nevertheless, the last strength had to and should be used to achieve the desired great success.

The army order for July 22 set the I Reserve Corps from Schaulen to the southeast, with the right wing along the railway to Schadow, to attack. Both wing groups were to swing towards the railway and thereby close the ring east of Schadow.

## The Continuation of the Battles and the Capture of Mitau.

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Meanwhile, the bulk of the enemy had already escaped eastward the previous evening and night, and now rushed upon the cavalry corps Schmettow (Egon), which was positioned in a nearly 30-kilometer-wide formation from the north against its rear. In confusing terrain, simultaneously threatened from the rear by Russian cavalry, it was forced to retreat north behind the Muscha after brave resistance in the evening. The majority of the enemy escaped eastward, only smaller parts remained in the area surrounded by the infantry divisions, whose eastern tip lay only about 15 kilometers east of Schadow.

On July 23, the encirclement movement turned into a purely frontal pursuit, which, held up by Russian rearguards, continued eastward that day. Although it was not possible to intercept the Russian troops stationed at Schaulen, the total booty had increased to the considerable number of around 30,000 prisoners and 23 guns in nine days, thanks to quick and purposeful movements.

At the same time, the troops of Major General Eberhard Graf von Schmettow (41st Infantry, 8th Cavalry Division, and Libau Detachment) managed to advance further towards Mitau. About 3½ Russian cavalry divisions along with infantry seemed to be positioned here.



In the battles and marches, the troops have performed excellently." Accordingly, the Commander-in-Chief East reported to the Supreme War Lord on this day). He himself now assessed the situation as follows<sup>2</sup>): "For the further execution of the operation towards Wilna, which is considered decisive from our point of view, the Njemen Army is too weak; a reinforcement of forces is currently not possible). However, this operation can be prepared, as it must, in our opinion, follow the completion of the Narew operation. This includes: the straightening of Mitau, because the Russians can threaten movements on the flank via Riga, and preparations for the capture of Kowno. The possession of this fortress is necessary both for an offensive towards Wilna or southwards to open the main road and ensure supply on the railway, as well as for any other operation elsewhere. Only if we have this fortress and Mitau in possession and the line between both places is secured by a strongly developed line, can stronger forces be withdrawn from here," which meant: from Courland for deployment against Wilna.

In the afternoon, orders were given for the continuation of operations: "The 10th Army is to close off this fortress on the western front as tightly as possible with its left wing on the Njemen below Kowno. — The Njemen Army is to secure the section between Njemen below Njemanza and build a bridge at Wilki<sup>4</sup>). Furthermore, the Njemen Army is preparing with its main forces at Kejdany for the march on Janow and sends the bulk of its cavalry against the Kowno—Wilna railway and towards Wilna." With this order, the Commander-in-Chief East was in full agreement with the Supreme Army Command, which, the next day, while rejecting reinforcements for the 10th Army, announced<sup>5</sup>) that it would be of great importance for the overall operations if the Njemen Army at least advanced with strong cavalry against the Russian connections in the area of Wilna soon. Furthermore, the order of the Commander-in-Chief East was that the left flank of the weakened Njemen Army should be secured by troops at Poniewiez, and Mitau should be evacuated. To this end, it was said, in extension of General von Below's plan, that the temporary dispatch of another infantry division from the main forces of the Njemen Army would not be avoidable.

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1) G. 319. — 2) Entry in the war diary. — 3) G. 316 ff. — 4) 27 kilometers below (northwest of) Kowno. — 5) G. 320.

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These instructions did not allow the intended rest for the troops of the Njemen

Army. They moved the mass sharply south against the northern front of Kowno, other parts sharply north against Mitau, with the cavalry aiming far east, especially towards Wilna. The movements were only feasible if the recently defeated enemy was not allowed to rest. The frontal pursuit had to be continued despite the fatigue of the troops. It led to almost uninterrupted fighting against Russian rearguards and the capture of several thousand men until July 25, reaching the lower Niewiaza on the right flank, about 15 kilometers beyond Poniewiez in the center, which was taken by the now reunited I Reserve Corps, and the left flank up to Poswol on the Muscha. This essentially reached the limit to which supplies for stronger forces could initially be provided. The enemy also seemed so weakened that further pursuit was assigned to smaller units.

General von Below, who moved his headquarters to Schawlen on July 28, had to reorganize his army for the tasks set by the Eastern Commander-in-Chief. While the Esebeck detachment secured against the northwest front of Kowno, the I Reserve Corps with the assigned Hohmeyer Brigade and the Lauenstein Corps (78th Reserve Division and Beckmann Division) were to be positioned at Poniewiez to advance against the northern front of the fortress. The cavalry corps Richthofen and Schmettow (Egon) were to gather south and east of Poniewiez to advance southeast against Wilna and east against Dünaburg. Against Mitau, besides the group Schmettow (Eberhard) already deployed there, the 41st Infantry Division, Libau Detachment, 8th Cavalry Division, and the 6th Reserve Division were designated.

On July 29, the operation against Mitau began with the advance of the 6th Reserve Division against Bausk to gain the right bank of the Aa. However, the Russian resistance was so strong that the division commander, since June Major General Hans von Below, decided not to attempt the crossing below. The army command demanded the reinforcement of the Hohmeyer Brigade. On the night of July 31, the operation succeeded ten kilometers west of Bausk near Mespoten. The newly deployed Russian 53rd Infantry Division retreated north, reaching Kielmy.

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1) 458. The railway from Libau was only usable individually up to east of Prekultn and was very inefficient. The field railway over Tauroggen reached Kielmy on July 19.

back to Riga. For August 1, the 6th Reserve Division and 8th Cavalry Division were deployed on both sides of the Aa towards Mitau. The enemy did not wait for their advance, but had already begun to evacuate the city during the night, into which the 41st Infantry Division entered fighting in the afternoon; the factories were set on fire, the

Aa bridge destroyed. In pursuit, General Count Schmettow had his troops advance halfway to Riga on August 2; the total capture counted about 2000 prisoners. Then the army commander, who personally arrived in Mitau, ordered a transition to defense at the Aa. For this purpose, the 6th Reserve Division, Brigade Homeyer, and Detachment Libau were designated, while the 41st Infantry Division and 8th Cavalry Division were to be prepared for a march south.

With the capture of Mitau, a strong base near the coast was gained for the left wing of the army. Furthermore, the almost pathless

swamp and forest area of the Aa estuary offered secure support. The extensive coast, which had fallen into German hands with the conquest of the western part of Courland,

lay, however, on the side of the Gulf of Riga under the guns of Russian warships. Landings were possible, but could not take on a threatening scale

as long as the Russian land forces were tied down by the Central Powers' attack.

Among the main forces of the Njemen Army, the situation had changed in the meantime, as expected after the conclusion of the battles on July 25. The enemy showed surprising activity and

advanced on July 30 at Kupischki into the gap between the two cavalry corps Richthofen and Schmettow (Egon), which were to begin their movements against Wilna on one side, against Dünaburg on the other, the following day.

The proposal of General von Morgen to support the cavalry by deploying his I. Reserve Corps in the gap initially did not find the approval of General von Below, as the corps was

intended to swing south against Kowno and the enemy in

the east seemed too weak. However, when the enemy pressure in this direction increased on August 1,

the army commander decided to do the whole work to the east first. He deployed not only the

I. Reserve Corps but also the Zastrow Corps, between the two

cavalry corps, for the attack. About 30 kilometers east of Ponie-

wies, fighting occurred on a broad front on August 2. Despite the strong

German deployment of forces, the enemy only gave up their positions in the

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After August 3, resistance was encountered during the pursuit on this day. The Commander-in-Chief East had designated the line Drissch—at the Swienta—Kreivit on the Niemen as the boundary of the pursuit. Moreover, he had already transferred the 4th Cavalry Division from the 10th Army to the army on July 31, which, crossing the Niemen below Kowno, had now turned with the Esebeck detachment against the northern front of Kowno. On the left flank, the 41st Infantry and 8th Cavalry Divisions are now advancing from Mitau; however, the division Bœtmann, composed of troops from the 10th Army, was to soon return to this army.

In battles, it was possible to push the Russians back from position to position on August 4 and 5 and reach the line Drissch—Kreivit. Growing difficulties in supply became apparent; the troops also complained that the success of the attacks was impaired by the inferiority of the transferred ammunition. On the other hand, the enemy seemed to be bringing in new forces along the entire front. Reports on August 5 indicated strong Russian troop transports via Grodno to Vilna and temporarily even gave the impression that the enemy was now preparing an encirclement of both wings of the Niemen Army; new enemy forces were reported advancing in the south from Wilkomierz and in the north from Friedrichstadt via Riga. Numerically, the Russians seemed to be quite superior. Thus, the execution of further operations planned for the two cavalry corps against Vilna and Dünaburg was out of the question for the time being, as was the army's participation in the encirclement of Kowno. The Richthofen Cavalry Corps encountered far superior Russian forces at Wilkomierz and had to be withdrawn north to Kownaß on August 7. General von Below prepared a new counterattack.

It became increasingly clear how much value the enemy placed on holding his position on the left bank of the lower Dvina. The further his front was pushed back in Poland, the more forces he freed up to reinforce the troops north of the Niemen. Airmen reported a large transport movement from the south to Vilna, where extensive fortifications were also being built. At the Commander-in-Chief East, Captain von Waldow wrote down on August 7:

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1) Parts were already previously with the Niemen Army (G. 457).

2) See 121.

3) Communication from Colonel von Waldow from the summer of 1931 to the Reichsarchiv.

"North of the Njemen, the Russians have naturally long recognized the danger, and they are moving as much as they can towards Vilnius, Daugavpils, and Riga. Hopefully, we will soon succeed, if Gallwitz advances well, in drawing forces from there." In view of these circumstances, the Eastern Commander-in-Chief decided on the morning of August 8 to reorganize the tasks of the 10th and Njemen Armies. The encirclement of Kowno was to fall solely to the 10th Army. Instead of Division Beckmann, only the Schede detachment from the Njemen Army joined it, which had to take over the section of the 4th Cavalry Division from Kowno, so that this was now free for other use for the N j e m e n - A r m y. This, as stated in the order, "covers the left flank of the army against any possible enemy advance from the lower Daugava. The holding of Mitau and the captured enemy territory is significant in this."

In accordance with the new task, General von Below withdrew the I Reserve Corps along with the 78th Reserve Division to the area south and north of Kupischki, where a position for sustainable defense was to be established. The extension to the south was then assigned to the Richthofen Cavalry Corps, Division Beckmann, and the 4th Cavalry Division, which joined the left flank of the 10th Army (1st Cavalry Division) north of the Wilia bend from Janow. In the north, the 41st Infantry Division inserted itself between the I Reserve Corps and the Schmettow (Egon) Cavalry Corps, while the 8th Cavalry Division advanced on its left flank. All these movements, which were completed by about August 13, took place in constantly changing conditions and often under fighting against the enemy pressing forward everywhere.

To at least temporarily relieve the Russian pressure, General von Below ordered the right flank of the I Reserve Corps to attack again on August 14. The 78th and 1st Reserve Divisions pushed northward into the enemy formation and were fully successful. On August 15, the pursuit was continued as quickly as possible to the east in accordance with an instruction from the Eastern Commander-in-Chief, without the involvement of the connecting troops to the right of the line, but was unable to significantly advance beyond the Swienta—Njemen line already reached on August 5. Nevertheless, a total of four German divisions had again pushed the enemy back 15 kilometers on a front about 60 kilometers wide, capturing 3000 prisoners in total. The forces were insufficient to continue a new attack. Since reinforcements were still not in sight, the

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The commander-in-chief East further expanded the defensive positions. Thus,

since mid-August, following earlier positions of the I Reserve Corps on both sides of Kupischki, a series of rear installations

were created, extending northwards over Lake Birshi and the lower Niemen to the Aa.

For the protection of the left flank, it would have been desirable to drive away the Russian ships lying in the Gulf of Riga, including the battleship "Slawa" armed with 30.5 cm guns; however, this was not absolutely necessary<sup>1)</sup>. Therefore, and in view of the difficulty of the task, the leadership on land did not make such a demand on the fleet command. Cooperation with their own naval forces was only considered if the attack on Riga-Dünamünde was to be continued. Although this had occasionally been suggested as possible by the Supreme Army Command<sup>2)</sup>, it was still far off. The Commander-in-Chief of the Baltic Sea forces, Grand Admiral Heinrich Prince of Prussia, had known since July 19 that, according to the view of the Commander-in-Chief East, the capture of Riga and Dünamünde was a matter of opportunity; if necessary, flank protection for the troops advancing along the coast was desirable. Since General von Falkenhayn had pointed out at that time that an operation of the fleet in front of or in the Gulf of Riga would also be very welcome<sup>3)</sup>, the Grand Admiral had preventive reinforcements from parts of the High Seas Fleet from the North Sea. When the hope for a quick advance of the army against Riga faded, while about half of the German fleet was in the Baltic Sea, he decided to use this opportunity at least for a foray into the Gulf of Riga. Even if there was no prospect of holding there without a port and without simultaneous advance of the army, he hoped to damage and unsettle the enemy. However, the operation encountered such difficulties on August 8 when crossing the mine barriers in the Irben Strait that the commanding Vice Admiral Schmidt initially gave up. On August 10, it was resumed. After several days of clearing work, the breakthrough was achieved; light forces advanced across the gulf to Pernau on August 20, others against the northern access of the gulf, the Moonsund. Two Russian gunboats fell victim to the German attack. However, laying mines in the Moonsund or inflicting otherwise decisive damage on the Russians did not succeed.

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1) G. 465. — 2) G. 130 and Geertrieg, Baltic Sea, Volume II, p. 199. — 3) Gbenad, p. 236.

Soon after the attacks of General von Below had subsided around mid-June, the Russians began to evacuate the area west of Riga and the important city itself. They removed a large part of the numerous Jewish population and took away everything important for warfare, especially the machines of the Riga factories. At the same time, they were forced by the needs of the main battlefield to weaken their military forces north of the Njemen again. Three infantry divisions alone were relocated by the end of June from there to the Njemen fortresses of Kowno, Olita, and Grodno, with 2½ more transferred to other fronts in the first half of July. Thus, General Plehwe, when the new German attack advanced over the Düna towards Mitau on July 14, still had about 7½ infantry and seven cavalry divisions in total. Of these, about three infantry divisions (XIX. and ½ III. Corps) alone stood in the area of Omjany—Rakienow Lake against the German 6th Reserve Division and the 1½ divisions strong Corps Morgen, about 2½ infantry divisions (½ III. and XXXVII. Corps) further south up to the area of Bethygoła. On the flanks, four cavalry divisions joined in the north, and three in the south. The two divisions of the VII Siberian Corps, which were available as a reserve in Mitau and Riga, had previously suffered so much on the southwestern front that they were temporarily unusable.

General Plehwe initially intended to strike the German advance on Mitau from the south in the flank, but abandoned this plan as it soon proved impossible to gather the necessary forces from the extended front in time. When on July 16 at Alt Auz the resistance of the hastily brought in, numerically small, combat-ready parts of the VII Siberian Corps from Mitau and Riga surprisingly quickly collapsed due to German encirclement, he was able to

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1) Connection to p. 131 ff. — See also p. 441 ff.

2) Romaroff-Kurloff, p. 321 ff.

3) 63rd, 68th, and 7th Siberian Div.

4) 6th and 56th Div. to South Poland, 3rd Turk. Brig. to North Poland.

5) Starting from the right flank: 4th Indep. R. Br., Detachment of General Mamontoff (4th D. and Landwehr), Cav. Corps of General Count Grabbe (15th D., 1st Sifurski - Cav. Br., 4th Don - Coss. D.), XIX Corps (38th and 17th G. D.), ½ III Corps (1st G. S. D., 56th G. Br.), XXXVII Corps (79th G. S. D., 32nd G. S. D.), Cav. Corps of General Raskatoff (2nd Don and 1st O. S. R. D.); already prepared at Mitau—Riga: VII Siberian Corps (13th and 12th Siberian Div. reorganized).



could not decide to further withdraw the right wing of the XIX Corps, which still held northwest of Schaulen; instead, he ordered a counterattack for this wing. The 1st Caucasian Rifle Brigade, the only reserve made available in the meantime, carried it out on July 17 and pushed back the northern wing of the German 6th Reserve Division. After this success, General Plehwe left the Schaulen front, despite the further rapid advances of the Germans towards Mitau, standing for the next two days. When he finally saw himself compelled on July 19 to withdraw the right wing, the XIX Corps, he ordered the execution of this movement only for the night of July 21. But already on July 20, the German 78th Reserve Division was deep in the rear of the Russian XIX Corps at Meschkütze, while the German southern group advanced over the Dubissa. Nevertheless, General Plehwe, who was quite well supplied with information, did not want to believe in the impending danger even on this day. However, he now moved his headquarters from Riga to Poniewiez behind the southern wing. Only on the way there did he decide at noon on July 21 to order the evacuation of Schaulen and the general retreat, to continue to offer resistance in a position west of Poniewiez, while reinforcements rolling towards Mitau were to strike the Germans from there in the flank. But this plan also soon proved impracticable. West of Poniewiez, the left wing was hit so hard by the German attack on July 25 that the XXXVII Corps retreated in great disorder.

All in all, the July operations in Courland and Lithuania were among the most interesting of 1915. In an area that still offered room for operational movements, energetic and aggressive leadership on both the German and Russian sides sought to preempt the enemy. The German general generally had a clear and accurate judgment of the situation and prospects; at the same time, however, as a Russian account occasionally states, "on the German side, the greater maneuverability and the greater amount of ammunition." On the Russian side, they were continuously well informed about the strength and distribution of the German forces, it seems, mainly through agents who had relatively easy work in the wide areas sparsely occupied with troops. This may have contributed to General Plehwe maintaining his confidence even in the most difficult situation.

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1) p. 459.

2) 53rd Infantry Division from the 10th Army and 1st Rifle Division.

did not want to give up on victory yet. It was precisely this superior operational skill and the higher combat power of the Germans in these battles that allowed them to achieve relatively greater successes than everywhere else, where the Russians acted with more caution and avoided threatening danger in time. The German spoils of the ten-day battles up to July 24 amounted to 27,000 prisoners, 40 machine guns, and 25 cannons. This was opposed by about 5,000 of their own losses.

According to Russian judgment, the continuation of the German attack in the days after July 25 would have led to the dissolution of the remaining Russian forces; its cessation allowed the Russians, who had lost at least 35,000 men since July 14 according to their own estimates, to recover quickly through the supply of reinforcements and then to attack again, although by August 20 they again lost more than 6,000 men as prisoners.

Due to the continued failures north of the Njemen, there was "fear" in Petersburg; the Duma "urgently requested" protection; the Russian supreme military command became restless. The commander-in-chief of the Northwestern Front, General Alexeyev, had not previously assessed the danger as high, as the German forces were small in number. However, it seemed to him that a breakthrough between the 5th and 10th Armies had become a possibility. For the dual task of protecting the route to Petersburg on one hand and the right flank of the army on the other, he recommended to the 5th Army — should further retreat be necessary — a position in the foreland of the small fortress of Dvinsk. To replenish the severely weakened units, over 120 individual companies were supplied, and the forces in the area north of the Njemen were increased by shifting parts of the 10th Army by early August to 10½ infantry and 9½ cavalry divisions, so that they more than balanced the 7 infantry and 6½ cavalry divisions of General von Eichhorn. Shortly after mid-month, it was even necessary to order the formation of a new 12th Army at the threatened front section and near Riga. The German naval operation in the Gulf of Riga had the concerns

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1) Krowlown, Schaulen, p. 69 f.

2) p. 449.

3) 5th Army essentially as stated on p. 469 note 6, the 53rd J. D. and 1st R. D. Furthermore, the right wing of the 10th Army extended to the northern Njemen bank: XXXIV Corps (2nd Finnish Rifle Division and 104th Infantry Division), 1st and 2nd Rudan-Rol, D.

4) p. 451.

of the Russians around this army wing further increased<sup>4</sup>). If they considered the retreat of the German ships as their own success and the operation thus had no immediate influence on the situation on land, the concern that it could be repeated led to reinforced defense preparations throughout the threatened coastal area.

b) The attack of the 10th Army on Kowno<sup>2</sup>).

Maps 6 and 7, Sketch 27.

Commander-in-Chief East and the 10th Army had been dealing since June with the question of the attack against the large fortress Kowno, the strong northern cornerstone of the Russian Njemen front, which also blocked the double-track railway Königsberg—Vilna and thus the only efficient route leading into the Russian northern flank<sup>3</sup>). Such an urgent and early attack was the most important preparation for a deep thrust over Vilna into the rear of the Russian army fighting in Poland.

In June, the 10th Army<sup>4</sup>) had already moved its positions closer to the fortress by advancing below and above against the Njemen. On June 20, the Commander-in-Chief East had expected to have the troops and combat resources necessary for the attack ready by early July, when the decision made in Poland on July 2 temporarily led to the suspension of these preparations<sup>5</sup>). At that time, the 10th Army was under Colonel General von Eichhorn, a reformation of the units largely destroyed in the previous battles, with seven infantry and two cavalry divisions<sup>6</sup>) extending 60 kilometers with the right wing southwest of Augustów, with the left on the Njemen below Kowno, where west of the Dubissa estuary the Njemen Army joined.

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1) p. 451.

2) Connection to p. 126 ff.

3) The railway led within the fortress over the more than 100-meter-wide Njemen and through a 1200-meter-long tunnel; destruction by the Russians was therefore to be expected. Besides this railway, there was also the single-track connection Marggrabowa—Suwalki built by the Russians in the winter of 1914/15, which connected to the Russian railways to Grodno and Vilna. For the connection from Vilna via Bajohren—Prekuln and the routes from Libau to Schaulen and Mitau see p. 130, 458, and 464.

4) p. 126 f.

5) p. 277 and 280.

6) The right wing beginning: XXI. A. R. (31st and 42nd I. D.), group of the General Understate von Morgen (77th and 76th R. D.), 9th Ldw. Br., group Litzmann (Gen. Rdr. XXXX. R. R. with 1st R. D., 79th R. D., 16th R. D., 8th Ldw.

D. and 4th R. D.).

An operation by the 76th Reserve Division against Biale Bloto on July 6, which captured 500 prisoners, was of only local significance. On July 7, the Commander-in-Chief East ordered the resumption of offensive operations against Kowno; the next available unit was to be considered for the attack<sup>1</sup>). Meanwhile, to divert attention from the offensive of the Gallwitz Army Group beginning on July 13, a series of smaller operations took place on this and the following two days, during which on July 15, northeast of Gawlik, an attack led by Major General Broßius of the 77th Reserve Division resulted in 300 prisoners. As Generaloberst von Eichhorn now again gained the impression that the enemy was withdrawing forces — the Russian 27th Infantry Division, previously deployed north of Kalvarja, was reported to have appeared before the Mackensen Army Group in southern Poland — he decided, despite an extremely difficult ammunition situation, to attempt a larger strike already. The operation was also intended to prepare for the future attack on Kowno and to be continued south of the fortress over the Jęsia, possibly even to the eastern bank of the Niemen. The Commander-in-Chief East provided 3000 rounds of heavy field howitzer ammunition for this purpose. After thorough preparation led by General Litzmann, the 79th Reserve Division under Major General Boës broke through the Russian positions between the Jęsia and the southern edge of the Kowno forest early on July 21, capturing 1300 prisoners and reaching the Jęsia bank northwest of Preny in a width of about twelve kilometers. However, given the apparently entrenched river course and the Russian positions on the right bank, the continuation of the attack with the now once again limited means promised no success. Meanwhile, the 16th Landwehr Division and cavalry had swung northward against Kowno and had thus reached an encirclement position in the area between the Jęsia and the Niemen below the fortress, which was only about 16 kilometers from the center of the city.

Following the simultaneous major successes of the Niemen Army, the Commander-in-Chief East ordered on July 23 the closest possible closure of the fortress on the western front by the 10th, on the northwestern front by the Niemen Army<sup>2</sup>). As the fall of the Narew positions Pultusk and Rozan also seemed imminent, he considered the time ripe for launching the major offensive over the Niemen towards Wilna.

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<sup>1</sup>) p. 281. — <sup>2</sup>) p. 463.

to prepare thoroughly\*). On July 24, the First General Staff Officer of the 10th Army, Major Keller, was informed by Lieutenant General Ludendorff in Lötzen about the further intentions as follows: As soon as circumstances would allow, the army was to be reinforced by about six infantry divisions to cross at the fortress and south of the Njemen, taking Kowno, and advance southeast. The Njemen Army would accompany and cover this maneuver, echeloned to the left rear. Against Kowno, the infantry was already to advance so far that the heavy field howitzers could take their firing positions; all other preparations for the siege were to be accelerated. Meanwhile, only a single, just transferred brigade\*) was available as reinforcement. The idea of using two divisions arriving from the Western Front in these days, wholly or partially against Kowno, was decisively rejected by the Supreme Army Command; they wanted to deploy strong forces to the Njemen only when "clear signs of the enemy's collapse and retreat between the Vistula and Bug would be recognizable"). Although they had promised a 42 cm battery on July 23, on July 24 they explicitly stated again that reinforcement of the 10th Army was unfortunately not possible at the time, and in the following days also prevented the delivery of Austro-Hungarian heaviest batteries\*). They intended to release German heaviest batteries soon, which had shorter ranges, only small amounts of ammunition, and could not be brought into position by motor transport, but only on rails. Extensive track work was necessary for the artillery deployment.

On July 27, the Eastern Commander-in-Chief had to report that the reinforcements anticipated on the 24th could not be counted on. Although Generaloberst von Eichhorn then raised serious concerns about the too small attacking forces, he had to try to manage with what he had. Meanwhile, five batteries of the heaviest artillery were in prospect.

The fortress of Kowno is located at the confluence of the Njemen and Wilia. It was already protected in peacetime by a city wall and a ring of forts with an average diameter of eight to nine kilometers, whose works — as far as was known — were modern before the war.

had been rebuilt and reinforced. Another four to five kilometers of advanced outer fortifications were then under construction. Based on these extensive permanent works, the fortress had been further expanded over nearly twelve months of war and reinforced with advanced positions, making it appear particularly resistant. The attack plan developed by the Great General Staff in peacetime recommended attacking the southern front, which is divided into two halves by the deeply incised Jesia. For artillery deployment and ammunition supply, only the Königsberg railway was available. Forces alone against the previously narrow perimeter of the place were estimated to require about two corps, around 400 guns, of which about 250 were heavy (including two heaviest batteries). What the 10th Army had to deploy against the significantly expanded fortress was far from meeting these demands. Above all, the attack had to be conducted solely against the western half of the southern front. The forces were insufficient to initially gain a foothold on the eastern Jesia bank, as the numerically superior, combat-ready Russian 10th Army stood opposite on almost 150 kilometers of front width. Hardly any German forces could be freed up there for the attack on the fortress.

When Generaloberst von Eichhorn, on July 31, in view of the progress of the Njemen Army, also had to give up the 4th Cavalry Division<sup>1)</sup>, which was to shield the fortress on the northern Njemen bank in the future, he sent his Chief of Staff, Colonel Hell, to Lößen on August 2 to urgently request reinforcements again. "In view of the inferior garrison of the Kowno fortress," Colonel Hell explained, "and its apparently very inadequate artillery equipment, the High Command 10 is convinced that the goal of quickly capturing the fortress could be achieved with the provision of even just one more infantry division." The Commander-in-Chief East fully shared this view but, "since the Njemen Army is currently engaged in battle and he may not withdraw forces from the Narew front on the explicit order of the Supreme Army Command," could initially only promise to supply the army with at least one more Landwehr Brigade as soon as possible. Colonel Hell wanted to use the 76th Reserve Division, now actually standing in the front from Suwalki, for the attack on the fortress. Consequently, the army received the 6th Landwehr Brigade<sup>2)</sup> from the 8th and a Landsturm Regiment in the following days.

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1) G. 466. — 2) C. 351 f.

## The Operation of the Commander-in-Chief East against Wilna.

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from the 9th Army as well as additional heaviest and heavy artillery; furthermore, the Boedman Division from the Njemen Army was to be returned shortly<sup>1</sup>). The Commander-in-Chief East

planned to provide further reinforcements soon from the 9th Army. He also emphasized to the Supreme

Army Command on August 3 the importance of capturing Kowno; the fortress was under only weak fire, a quick

success was still possible here; however, he would attack Kowno even without further reinforcement. He requested the allocation of the necessary ammunition for the heaviest guns and heavy field howitzers, for which there was a particularly great need<sup>2</sup>).

The order in the attack section between Jesia and the lower course of the Njemen was assigned to the General Command of the XXXX Reserve Corps. The enemy had here, as aerial reconnaissance showed, advanced two new defensive lines in front of the permanent works of the older fort belt (Fort III, II, and I with the batteries 3 and 2 in between), the foremost of which was about twelve kilometers from the city center.

The installations immediately on the heights of Godlewo seemed particularly strong. Lieutenant General

Litzmann wanted to first take possession of these and then proceed against battery 3 and Fort II. Troops available to him included the

Zenter Brigade and the 9th Landwehr Brigade on the right, the 79th Reserve Division on the left of the railway. Reinforcements of heavy artillery began to arrive; their final number was not yet determined. On July 29, it was possible to take advanced positions of the enemy



on both sides of the railway; about 1200 prisoners were

captured. On August 6, the

79th Reserve Division advanced its troops to the line Długa—Sapieżyński

and thus gained the observation posts necessary for artillery fire opening.

On August 7, Colonel General von Sich moved with the operations staff to Kozłowa Ruda, directly behind

the attack section. The following day, the artillery was to open fire.

Meanwhile, the Njemen Army was further tied up to the north<sup>3</sup>),

so that the 10th Army was now also assigned the task of enclosing the fortress north

of the Njemen and securing against the Wilia section up to

Janów. However, from the Njemen Army, it could only receive the approximately one brigade strong detachment Eßbeck, but not the divi-

Command and the newly assigned 4th Cavalry Division were subordinated.

The 10th Army itself had to move the 1st Cavalry Division to northern Insterburg to solve the new task, simultaneously as preparation for further operations, for which a significant cavalry force was to be prepared to advance on Wilna. Also, due to the Supreme Army Command's objection, instead of the intended transfer of troops from the 9th Army by the Commander-in-Chief East, a division from the west had to be awaited, which could only arrive from August 12. Of the requested heavy field railway ammunition, the Supreme Army Command approved only 24,000 instead of 36,000 rounds, that is, only the requirement for about four days of shooting<sup>2</sup>).

On August 8, the difficult deployment of the heaviest and heavy artillery in the pathless terrain was mostly completed. After an hour and a half of calibration, the effective firing began around noon from about 120 barrels. The Russians responded more strongly than expected. Under the cover of the destruction fire directed against the enemy

artillery positions and works, the 79th Reserve Division of Major General Boësz gradually advanced between the railway and Niemen, stormed the positions of Godlewo and the northern adjacent strongpoints on the evening of the 9th and in the night to August 10,

and held them against soon commencing heavy Russian counterattacks. South of the railway, the 9th Landwehr Brigade covered against the Jesia section. The battles of the three days brought in over 2000 prisoners, 16 machine guns, and four guns in total.

Colonel General von Eichhorn had already anticipated that the opening of fire against Kowno would also move the enemy south of the fortress<sup>3</sup>).

This then broke out on August 11, about 40 kilometers southwest of the attack front,

after thorough artillery preparation east of Marjampol over the Dawina, and repeated his attack, apparently conducted to relieve Kowno, in the following two nights. Each time he was repelled with heavy losses by the now extended northern wing of the XXI Army Corps, 31st Infantry Division under Lieutenant General von Berxer. At the same time, however, Russian reinforcements seemed to be rolling towards Kowno, whose garrison consisted of Landwehr replacement and border guard troops, a total of 15 to 20 battalions; four new infantry regiments

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1) G. 346 f. — 2) G. 347. — 3) Notes of Colonel General von Eichhorn from August 7, 1915.

should have arrived by now. The enemy also seemed to have very ample ammunition, while the attacker had to be quite frugal with his.

Colonel General von Eichhorn urged haste on August 12:

"Any delay seems undesirable because the enemy can continuously bring in personnel and material for reinforcement." The fire of the entire artillery, which was constantly receiving new reinforcements, had to be opened as quickly as possible. The 76th Reserve Division, meanwhile relieved in the south, was deployed to the left of the 79th; coming from France, the 115th Infantry Division began to arrive behind the assault troops.

General Litzmann, who had meanwhile also taken command of the Esebeck detachment standing north of the Njemen, considered it important to flank the Russian lines from there. However, the deployment of the flat-fire batteries intended for this purpose depended on the relocation of the bridge previously built at the Dubissa estuary, which could only be used again on August 13 at Altoniki between the Niewiaza and Dubissa estuaries.

Meanwhile, a total of 162 guns (more than a third of which were heaviest and heavy indirect fire) were available against the front to be attacked.

The enemy had 27 batteries, including some of 30.5 cm caliber. According to aerial reports, Forts III and II seemed to be ready for assault due to the German artillery fire; some of the batteries in the intermediate terrain were defeated, others, however, were still fully active. On August 14, the

troops themselves were convinced they could take Forts III and II with reinforcement from two fresh infantry regiments; they were provided from the 115th Infantry Division.

On August 15, progress was good on the border between the 79th and 76th Reserve Divisions; about 1800 prisoners were taken.

However, new difficulties arose on the right wing of the attack front due to the unexpected stubbornness of the Russian resistance.

Similarly, the advance on the left wing stalled because the Eisebeck detachment was too weak in artillery to suppress the now flanked Russian defensive line from the Njemen. Colonel General von Eichhorn deployed the newly supplied 3rd Reserve Division by the Commander-in-Chief East over the Njemen at Altoniki against the Wilia north of Kowno.

On August 16, in a telephone conversation between the army

The High Command and General Command Litzmann decided that a two-hour bombardment should be conducted against Forts III and II, under the direction of the newly appointed General of Foot Artillery, Major General Schabel. General Litzmann intended to order the assault between 11:00 and 12:00 noon, unless the divisions had already begun on their own. Overwhelming fire in the first quarter-hour from 208 guns, including about 80 heavy and 10 heaviest artillery, well-directed by aircraft and balloon observation, completely shook the Russian works and positions. General Litzmann ordered the assault. At 2:00 in the afternoon, troops of the 79th Reserve and 115th Infantry Divisions broke through the Russian positions between Fort III and II and subsequently captured both forts, while the infantry of the 76th Reserve Division stormed Fort I at 6:45 in the evening. By the evening of August 16, the entire line of permanent works between Jefja and Njemen was in German hands; more than 4,000 prisoners and 52 guns, 30 of which were captured in action, were reported as spoils.

The attack was to be continued on August 17 against the city fortifications and across the Njemen, with the heaviest and heavy artillery also directed against the rear and flanks of the works on the right bank of the Jefja and Njemen, Forts IV to IX; the railway station was kept under disruptive fire. For several days, bridge trains had been brought close. Above all, the 3rd Reserve Division, along with the subordinate Siebecke detachment, was advancing against the Wilia in the north of the fortress. On the other hand, signs of Russian attack intentions on the Jefja front prompted the mass of the 115th Infantry Division to be regrouped as a reserve behind the right wing of the attack.

At 10:20 in the evening, a radio message from the commander of Kowno, General Grigoriew, indicated the extent of the success so far; it read: "We have retreated behind the Njemen. Losses enormous. Telegraphic connection to Wilna lost. Front is open. Awaiting directives." General Litzmann now only gave the brief order: "Advance to the Njemen!"

On the night of August 17, numerous explosions indicated that the Russians were destroying ammunition, supplies, and transport structures. Despite the strain of the last few days, the German infantry advanced at dawn towards the Njemen, reaching its banks by 10:30 in the morning. The enemy had destroyed the bridges but offered no

## The Operation of the Commander-in-Chief East against Vilna.

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There was no serious resistance anymore. Under the protection of the artillery, which was soon moved forward, the infantry of the 79th and 76th Reserve Divisions managed to gain the right bank of the Njemen and advance through the city itself. By evening, the Petersburg and Fort VII of the northeastern front were reached. South of the Njemen, parts of the 115th Infantry Division had crossed the Jefza and occupied Fort IV.

On the night of August 18 and on that day, the conquest of the line of forts was completed; the last to fall was the southernmost Fort V, adjacent to the Njemen, in the evening, while the enemy still held the Jefza section near Godlewo. General Litzmann's troops were positioned in the Fort V—Smierza section, while from the northwest, the foremost parts of the 3rd Reserve Division had crossed the Wilia and reached Normialow. The 1st Cavalry Division was positioned in front of Janow. The enemy had retreated to the east.

With Kowno, the strongest stronghold of the Russian Northwestern Front had fallen. The German heavy artillery had fired 53,000 shots against it, 1,000 of which were from the heaviest steep-angle guns. More than 20,000 prisoners and over 1,300 guns, including about 350 heavy ones, were counted as spoils, along with 100 machine guns, 20,000 rifles, 810,000 rounds of artillery ammunition, large quantities of military equipment, and supplies. The restoration of bridges and railways was immediately begun.

The Russians had attached special importance to the large and heavily fortified fortress of Kowno. While the 5th Army, positioned further north, had the independent task of covering the routes to Riga and Petersburg, the fortress formed the northern cornerstone of the Russian army. Therefore, after initially being under the 10th Army, it was directly subordinated to the Commander-in-Chief of the Northwestern Front as an independent part on June 5. In a directive from August 17, which could no longer influence the events, the Supreme Army Command explicitly stated again that everything must be done to hold Kowno; under no circumstances should it come to the fortress being encircled; in the extreme case, the garrison should be withdrawn in time. Its strength had changed several times; in the last days of the capture, it was at its greatest with about 6 divisions, mainly consisting of Landwehr. The

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1) Rjesanow, p. 100; Danilow, p. 542.

2) 104th and 124th J. D. (Pnd.), "Border Guard" Division and some other parts.

The mass of these troops, along with their artillery, managed to retreat in time while fighting. Due to the significant delays the German attack suffered from the gradual arrival of necessary forces, the Russians did not ultimately expect such a swift end. When the German attack began with full force on August 16, it was already too late to save the unlimbered guns. The advancing German troops had the impression of a completely surprised retreat. The railway tunnel was only slightly damaged, and the particularly tall radio tower was intact.

For the Russian High Command, the rapid fall of the fortress came as a complete surprise. According to the Chief of Staff of the Russian Field Army, General Januschkewitsch, Kowno should have been held since it was not actually besieged; the early surrender was solely blamed on the cowardice of the commander, General Grigoriew. He had already left the fortress on August 17 and was sentenced to severe punishment by a military court for his abandonment. Moreover, according to General Danilow, the fall of the fortress was "one of the most severe blows of the last war period, both in moral terms and regarding its influence on the overall situation of our armies."

General Ludendorff judged the great success: "No fortress has been attacked with fewer means. But the troops that were supposed to do it were inspired by the fresh spirit of their leaders." — They brilliantly solved the difficult task assigned to them.

c) The Advance of the 10th Army until August 31.

Maps 6 and 7, Sketch 28.

With the Commander-in-Chief East, the idea of continuing operations in the Njemen area took on a more definite shape around mid-August. The goal was to break through the northern wing of the Russian front to strike the flank of the masses retreating from Poland in the direction of Wilna and Minsk. To this end, as General Ludendorff later wrote,

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1) Kudajew letter from August 26, 1915.

2) Danilow, p. 554 f. and Knor, p. 325 ff.

3) Danilow, p. 554.

4) Ludendorff, *Memories*, p. 124.

5) *Memories*, p. 129, and communication from December 23, 1931, to the Reichsarchiv, in accordance with a communication from the current Chief of Staff von Bockelberg from the summer of 1931 to the Reichsarchiv. — The files contain nothing about these intentions and thoughts.





## The Operation of the Eastern Commander-in-Chief against Vilna.

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The enemy, who stood before the 10th and Njemen Army in a continuous but northeast of Kowno only thinly occupied front, was broken through, that is, on the one hand over Vilna to the southwest and south, on the other hand against the Dvina to the northwest and north, to clear the way for the cavalry divisions to Minsk—Polotsk. "But the question remained," wrote General Ludendorff further, "whether the operation could still be profitable given the very far eastward retreat of the Russians. There was no doubt that every day it was postponed made it less promising. I considered not to be content with a thrust over Olita—Orany to Lida. I rejected this because all similar attempts to achieve a flanking maneuver in the past summer campaign had led to no success. Thus, I remained true to my idea of the great operation, because it could still have a greater success. We were also forced here to act in uncertainty." The breakthrough itself had to fall to the 10th Army. For this, it was necessary that its right flank be secured by further advances of the 8th and 12th Army against the enemy north of the Rokitno Swamps, the left against the Russians on the Dvina by additional forces, for whose transport the railway conditions there were quite favorable. This securing had to be the task of the Njemen Army, which had to be advanced against the lower Dvina, while the far-reaching cavalry masses had to paralyze the use of the railways as early as possible. They had already been concentrated on the southern flank of the Njemen Army since the beginning of August<sup>1</sup>). Troops were to be primarily supplied to the 10th Army. The

Eastern Commander-in-Chief thought of withdrawing parts from the pursuit front in Poland. In view of the differing opinion of the Supreme Army Command, he could not, however, make any great hopes in this regard for the time being.

To successfully carry out the operation, the expected additional demands of the supply had to be taken into account, as the Narew campaign had just clearly shown.

These preparations had to go hand in hand with a considerable reinforcement of troops, because the more the forces to be deployed swelled and the deeper and faster the thrust was to be carried out, the more effective and, if possible, the more the need for railway lines and transport means for the supply had to increase. However, the rear connections did not yet meet this need in any way<sup>2</sup>).

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1) p. 463 and 477. — 2) p. 472.

When Kowno was taken on August 18 and Nowogeorgiewsk was on the verge of falling, the question of the further attack by the 10th Army became pressing. The Commander-in-Chief East reported to the Supreme Army Command on that day, intending, with their consent, to assign the encirclement troops from Nowogeorgiewsk to the 10th Army, "to enable it to launch the offensive over the Njemen downstream from Grodno." Half of the 85th Landwehr Division would be assigned to the 12th Army. Should the Supreme Army Command be able to allocate additional forces for an offensive from Kowno towards Vilna, he expected "a far-reaching success from it." The response from General von Falkenhayn, received the same day, stated: "There are no objections to bringing the encirclement troops from Nowogeorgiewsk to the 10th Army after the fortress falls. The planned offensive over the Njemen below Grodno and from Kowno to Vilna fully aligns with the intentions of the Supreme Army Command. Whether a reinforcement of the Kowno group from my resources is possible can only be decided in the coming days. Moreover, it must be noted that continuing the Eastern campaign into the winter and into the interior of Russia is unfortunately not an option for us. The operations of the strike groups in Poland cannot be carried out significantly beyond the general line Brest Litowsk—Grodno. These groups will likely soon have to allocate considerable forces to other theaters of war." Although the reinforcement promised by the Supreme Army Command was minimal, and it was questionable whether larger reinforcements could be expected later, it was a late satisfaction for the Commander-in-Chief East after the previous dispute that the Chief of the General Staff of the Field Army had finally agreed to carry out the long-planned and, in the meantime, as well-prepared as possible attack operation of the left army wing. On August 19, the Commander-in-Chief East issued the following attack order: "12th and 8th Armies continue the attack; 10th Army attacks comprehensively with its left wing towards Vilna and pushes the Russians back over the Njemen downstream from Druskeniki. The right wing temporarily holds Augustowo and later presses along the highway

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1) G. 378 f. and 480.

2) The other half of the division was already there.

3) Follow advance directions (p. 363).

## The Operation of the Commander-in-Chief East against Vilna.

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Augustów—Grodno north of the Bobr before. 4th Cavalry Division<sup>1)</sup> is subordinated to the 10th Army, likewise after the fall of Nowogeorgiewsk, which is expected today or tomorrow, three Landwehr Divisions<sup>2)</sup> ... Niemen Army generally has to cover the flank of the army against the line Swenziany—Riga. It is initially to carry out the intended attack while holding Kowno<sup>3)</sup><sup>4)</sup>. Depending on its outcome, its task will be further defined."

The 10th Army under Colonel General von Eichhorn previously had ten infantry divisions and one cavalry division<sup>4)</sup>, of which almost half were on the northern wing near Kowno, while the rest were distributed in a wide stretch from Rajgrad through Augustów and Kalvarja to south of Kowno. Here the enemy stood on more than 120 kilometers of fortified front still in their old positions, expanded for months, west of the Niemen. They lay in the south in the direction of Grodno about 55, in the north, where they relied on the Jeśia section, only about 15 kilometers from the river, which here at the Strawa confluence bends sharply from north to west. After Kowno, the firm wing support of the entire position, had fallen, there was justified hope to quickly gain ground from here on the right, in this part of the river's northern bank, to the east and thereby at least force the enemy to evacuate his positions on the Jeśia, and in the further course probably also to abandon the entire Niemen section running from south to north between the river bend at the Strawa mouth and the Grodno fortress.

Colonel General von Eichhorn had therefore, in accordance with the intentions laid down in the orders of the Commander-in-Chief East the following day, already immediately after the capture of Kowno, on the evening of August 18, ordered his assault wing advancing on both sides of the Niemen through the fortress to continue the attack in order to bring down the Russian front still holding further south. Meanwhile, however, the enemy began on the night of August 19 to

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1) Right wing of the Niemen Army.

2) 87th, previously Corps Litzhuth, and 89th I.D., previously Abt. Westernhagen (both mainly consisting of Landwehr and replacement troops) and 14th Ldw.D. were transferred on August 20.

3) This is an operation of the left wing (p. 533 ff.).

4) Right boundary: 16th Ldw. D.; 77th R.D. with 6th Ldw. B.; XXI. C.R. (General Command of Hutier); Group Rieß (Gen. of Inf. v. R.); 1st R.D. (previously Crt. Br. Sander), 2nd Ldw. Br. and 115th I.D.); Group Littmann (Gen. R. v. XXXX. R.R. with 79th R.D., 76th R.D. Abt. Siebeld, 3rd R.D. and 1st R.D.).

retreat. Only in front of the southern flank at Rajgrad—Augustow and in the north at the Jesia section did it still stand. Where it had retreated, the German troops followed; here and there they were temporarily held up by rearguards. But already on the evening of August 19, the XXI Army Corps found itself west and north of Sejny facing new enemy positions. As the pressure from the north was to bring the decision, Generaloberst von Eichhorn ordered to avoid costly attacks here as well as on the rest of the front.

On August 20, the parts of the Litzmann group advancing north of the Njemen from Kowno encountered more serious resistance; the enemy tried to hold a line running north to the Wilia in the extension of his Jesia front. But the advancing German left wing, the 76th and 3rd Reserve Division, forced him to give way; the 1st Cavalry Division reached Janow on the Wilia, where the 4th Cavalry Division, rejoining the army, joined. On the night of August 21, the enemy also gave up resistance at the Jesia section, and it soon became apparent that he was in further retreat on the entire front from north of Augustow to Janow.

While the assault group Litzmann (79th, 76th Reserve, 115th Infantry, 3rd Reserve Division) formed on the right, eastern, Njemen bank now received the direction from Janow along the Wilia to the southeast and thus towards Wilna, the XXI Army Corps on the left of the Njemen gradually moved more northward in its advance against the river section Olita—Preny. Its 31st Infantry Division under Lieutenant General von Berner reached the eastern bank of the river in the Preny bend as early as August 22; the right wing of the Litzmann group reached the Strawa and eastward on this day. Here, however, the enemy offered stubborn resistance and, with reinforcements brought in, the 56th and 65th Divisions from southern Hungary and Galicia, even launched strong counterattacks. In the next two days, the left wing of the Litzmann group continued with constant pressure; the 115th Infantry Division captured more than 1200 prisoners. Thus, the enemy was forced to evacuate the Strawa section on August 24 and then, in view of the pursuing German pressure, which was now also sharply directed south from east of Kowno, to abandon the river defense position north of the Preny bend. The 31st Infantry Division, advancing from this river position, faced Russian positions blocking their opening. To better

To bring about an effect, Generaloberst von Eichhorn now marched north on the western Njemen bank, so that it would gain the Stuffer north of Preny.

Meanwhile, the enemy continued to retreat on this bank before the Litzmann group.

On the extreme northern flank, the 4th and

1st Cavalry Division, along with the Eisebeck detachment, now under the unified command of the newly established Higher Cavalry Commander 6,

Lieutenant General von Garnier, crossed the Wilia on August 24 and connected northwards to the southern flank of the Njemen Army standing west of Wilkomierz.

On August 25, the Garnier Cavalry Corps was set to advance on

the right Wilia bank against Vilna, where the Russian resistance

seemed to be weak. General Litzmann therefore considered it promising

to also lead his three northern divisions across the Wilia, to advance

comprehensively from the north against Vilna with them. Generaloberst von Eichhorn, whose headquarters had been moved forward to Kowno since August 23, rejected

this plan, as it would have "resulted in a fragmentation of the army with too

much weakening of the forces fighting south of the Wilia," without guaranteeing

rapid progress north of the Wilia. "Advancing south past Vilna with concentrated force

under cover of the northern flank north of the Wilia" by the cavalry

corps was expected by the army high command to lead to faster and

secured progress. "It was not overlooked that with

the availability of additional forces, an advance north of Vilna would have given increased hope

of timely positioning before the retreating main enemy forces." It was ordered: "The encircling wing remains

south of the Wilia."

On August 26, the Litzmann group, in pursuit,

was already approaching the marshland of Troki-Nowe, where it encountered strong resistance

about 30 kilometers west of Vilna. To the left, north of

the Wilia, the Garnier Cavalry Corps had advanced to the same level,

but had to hold back its 4th Cavalry Division significantly,

to secure the open flank extended far to the north, where the

already 3rd Cavalry Division of the Njemen Army took Wilkomierz on this day.

To the right of the Litzmann group, the

XXI Army Corps under Lieutenant General von Hutier, with the main forces

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1) p. 535.

2) Entry in the war diary of the High Command 10 from August 25, 1915.



now already on the eastern bank of the Njemen, reaching the area north of D i t a, whose works located west of the river, four older forts, had been abandoned by the Russians and were already in German hands. Separated from these main forces of the army by a 25-kilometer gap, the southern wing, reinforced by three divisions, was able to gain further ground in the direction of the river bend of Merecz and in the Augustów Forest. Overall, this advance took place along the entire army front amid continuous fighting, with the enemy showing a relatively large amount of artillery, including heavy artillery.

The Commander-in-Chief East had already<sup>1)</sup> anticipated that the Russians would continue to slowly retreat behind the Njemen and shift as many forces as possible to the north. All the more he needed to be stronger against Vilna; the forces freed at Nowo-georgiewsk were only to be expected in these days.

Meanwhile, on August 26, he was able to order further reinforcement of the 10th Army by three divisions of the 12th and 8th Armies, "to increase the pressure of the left wing of the 10th Army," after the prospect of achieving anything greater with these armies had diminished to the extent that even the Supreme Army Command raised no objection to the transfer. He redefined the further tasks of the left army wing in an army group order<sup>2)</sup>: "10th Army advances with its security forces against Grodno towards the railway line Bialystok Druskieniki Vilna. The Njemen Army continues to cover the flank of the army. It pushes

its outermost right wing over the Swjenta and its left as far as possible to the Dvina<sup>3</sup>)."

Meanwhile, the 10th Army was to be reinforced from Nowogeorgiewsk by the General Command of the III Reserve Corps, the 87th and 89th Infantry and 14th Landwehr Division, as well as some smaller reinforcements.

Colonel General von Eichhorn transferred to the General Command of the III Reserve Corps<sup>4</sup>)

with 2½ divisions of the southern wing (16th Landwehr, 89th Infantry Division, 6th Landwehr Brigade) the encirclement of the enemy in

G r o d n o (against which the left wing of the 8th Army was also advancing

south of the Bobr towards Dombrowo). The 77th Reserve Division previously assigned to Merecz

and the newly arrived 87th Infantry-

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<sup>1</sup>) According to the records of Captain von Waldow from August 22, 1915.

<sup>2</sup>) P. 367... P. 534.

<sup>3</sup>) P. 364 ff. and 495.

<sup>4</sup>) For General von Beseler, who had meanwhile become Governor-General of the General Government of Warsaw (P. 351), General von Carlowitz was appointed as the commanding general of the III Reserve Corps on this day.

<sup>5</sup>) Until then, he had been the Chief of Staff, Major General von Sauberzweig.

## The Operation of the Eastern Commander-in-Chief against Vilna.

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Divisions were to be moved north over Premy to the attack troops east of the Njemen. Here, the reinforced XXI Army Corps (31st, 42nd Infantry Division under Division Zenker<sup>1)</sup>) and the Linsmann Group (79th, 76th Reserve, 115th Infantry, 3rd Reserve Division) were given the line Drany-Vilna as their target. On the left army wing, the 14th Landwehr Division was moved to follow the Cavalry Corps Garnier (1st and 4th Cavalry Division and Esebeck Detachment).

Due to the northward march of the 77th Reserve Division, the group of the III Reserve Corps assigned against Grodno found itself completely separated from the rest of the army and primarily dependent on cooperation with the 8th Army, whose 11th Landwehr Division was to advance from Dombrowo over the Bobr to Lipsk on August 28. An attack by the 16th Landwehr Division against the Wolkulsze section west of Sopockinie, which was supposed to support this advance and on which the General Command of the III Reserve Corps insisted despite the counter-offensives of the division, failed with a loss of 500 men. Similarly, the 89th Infantry Division failed to carry out the Njemen crossings assigned to it northeast of Sopockinie. The advance of these two divisions remained stuck at the Wolkulsze section, at the Augustower Canal, and at the Njemen above Druskeniki in the face of superior Russian defenses.

Meanwhile, the XXI Army Corps under Lieutenant General von Hütten had continued its advance south on the eastern Njemen bank; its 42nd Infantry Division under Lieutenant General von Bredow broke stubborn Russian resistance east of Olita on August 28 and thereby also opened the river crossing for the 6th Landwehr Brigade and 77th Reserve Division advancing from the west towards the location. The 31st Infantry Division was already approaching the Grodno-Vilna railway. Significantly harder battles were faced by the divisions of the Linsmann Group in these days in the lake and hill-rich terrain that stretches from south of Troki Nowe to the Wilia. Here, the Russians covered the access to Vilna in deep and well-developed positions, where they, although particularly stubborn here, were always forming new units in this area and now also north of the Wilia<sup>2)</sup>, which

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1) Formed from 177th J. Br. and 9th Ldn. Br.

2) In fact, the two front sections faced a total of nine divisions. Starting from the south: 1st and 2nd Russian Gr. D., 4th Finnish Sch. G., H. Lauf. Corps (tau. Gren. D. and 51st S. G.); XXXIV Corps (104th, 53rd S. G.), V Corps (10th and 7th S. G.); 65th J. D. – Of these, the units marked with \* were, insge

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apparently had been brought in as reinforcements from other fronts. Thus, the German assault wing made no decisive progress. When on August 30, the Supreme Commander I. again promised reinforcements, Generaloberst von Eichhorn decided to redirect the operation. This required major shifts. However, by the evening of August 31, significant ground had been gained southward east of the Njemen, reducing the gap to the forces positioned west of the river against Grodno to about 20 kilometers on both sides of Druskieniki. At the same time, the 31st Infantry Division near Lejpuny had approached the operational railway Grodno—Wilna so closely that train traffic was disrupted. Otherwise, movements and battles gradually came to a standstill over the course of the day.

d) Disputes with the Supreme Army Command<sup>1)</sup>

Maps 6 and 7.

On August 27, the Supreme Army Command issued the following fundamental order:

"His Majesty has ordered: The army groups Prince Leopold and Mackensen will halt their main advance eastward at the swampy terrain east of the line Ratno (50 kilometers north of Kowel)—Robryn—Szereszowp, but will remain with smaller mixed units on all roads at the enemy. Whether parts of the left wing of the Mackensen group and the right wing of the Prince Leopold group should make an advance against the enemy's rear connections north of Fort Bialowiec over Pruzana—Szereszowp in a northerly direction will be ordered. Early grouping for this purpose is to be sought in all cases. The Mackensen army group will immediately begin establishing a field position suitable for permanent holding with the least possible forces... The Prince Leopold army group will establish a similar position... around the western shore of Fort Bialowiec or more the fort, if conditions are more favorable there, up to the Narew estuary into the Narew... Generaloberst Hindenburg<sup>2)</sup> conducts the operations initiated by her north of the upper Narew and east of the middle Njemen to inflict the greatest possible damage on the enemy. It should be noted that as soon as the general situation requires, the permanent

six divisions, only arrived after the fall of Kowno, three from West Prussia, two from South Poland, one from Riga, and a little earlier from Galicia the 65th I.D. <sup>1)</sup> Connection to G. 351. — <sup>2)</sup> S. 363.

## The Operation of the Commander-in-Chief East against Vilna.

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The responsibility for the line from the Narew at the Narewka estuary to the sea will be assumed. Whether the connection to the sea occurs in the Gulf of Riga or at Libau is left open. The construction of an appropriate field position is to be initiated, with the expansion of the Njemen fortifications to begin promptly... All army groups will receive specific instructions regarding which army units they will soon have to release for other uses."

This order, which reached the Commander-in-Chief East on August 28, gave him the long-awaited opportunity to continue the operation against the Russian northern flank with increased forces and utmost emphasis. He was immediately determined to do so. In view of the prospects that still seemed to present themselves, he believed that consideration for a position that might later need to be permanently held, "as soon as the general situation required," had to be set aside. Since the army group Prince Leopold Borken also deemed it necessary to advance to the eastern edge of the fortress of Bialowiec and therefore wanted to continue the pursuit to Pruzana—Wolkowysk, a discussion took place between the two command authorities via telephone. "There is uncertainty," it says in the war diary of the Commander-in-Chief East, "whether the ordered defensive line is to be a rear position or whether it should later be returned to this line. For now, the groups Leopold and Hindenburg remain in advance. Perhaps the success of the Hindenburg army group will provide new perspectives. Since the right wing of the 12th Army was directed by the Supreme Army Command towards Siemienowka, thus to the northeast," the Commander-in-Chief East now considered further reinforcement of the 10th Army possible, and it seemed unobjectionable to him to take it from the 12th Army, as the latter reported that its advance was "merely held up by supply difficulties; it was, however, impossible to advance further for the time being."

On August 29, the following army group order was issued: "An advance of German forces east of the fortress Bialowiec from Pruzana towards Slonim is being considered by the Supreme Army Command; the 9th Army advances through the named forest. The 12th and 8th Armies follow the enemy as closely as possible; the 12th Army in the Bormarsch strip Swislocz—Indura, until overcoming their supply difficulties, in any case with Borhuten. Preparations are to be made so that the main forces can soon follow in large marches. The 8th Army attacks Grodno."

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1) Order from August 25 (p. 367).



Heavy artillery arriving in Augustow is subordinated to it. Connection to the right to the 12th Army; to the left, it extends to the Augustow Canal north of Sopockinie. The 10th Army continues to advance towards Drany—Wilna, focusing as much as possible on and north of Wilna.

The Njemen Army advances in front of Friedrichstadt and continues to cover against the upper Düna." Thus, the 10th Army was relieved of the attack on Grodno, allowing it to concentrate all its strength against Wilna. The order was supplemented on August 30, stating that the 12th and 8th Armies were to transfer the command of the I Army Corps along with the 2nd, 58th, 88th Infantry, 10th Landwehr, and 9th Cavalry Divisions to the 10th Army, thus slightly more than intended on August 26), "to achieve a more unified approach south of the Sejntara (near Wilkomierz). Enveloping the enemy's flank north of Wilna is of utmost importance. Otherwise, the 10th Army remains on the offensive, as ordered on August 29, securing upwards along the Njemen to Druskieniki inclusive." The 16th Landwehr Division, previously the right flank of the 10th Army, was temporarily subordinated to the 8th Army, which was to prepare to soon build bridges over the Njemen on both sides of Grodno.

Meanwhile, the Supreme Army Command became aware of the intentions of Prince Leopold's army group regarding the different views on the permanent position and inquired with the Commander-in-Chief East about the general course of the permanent position. He replied: "If the Supreme Army Command orders holding at the Narewta estuary, I have no choice. As a position,

only the line Narewta estuary—Wilna—Niemen—Mitau comes into consideration after the fall of Grodno and Wilna.

However, I cannot recommend this position, as it would involve a permanent withdrawal of the army at certain points if the operation, as envisaged by the Supreme Army Command and as urgently necessary, is continued to finally defeat the Russians."

Which line would then be considered cannot yet be foreseen. For the right flank, however, the Narewta—Szczara section will not require more troops than the previously planned position.

"To finally defeat the Russians" was not envisaged by General von Falkenhayn. Otherwise, he adhered to the decision once made, but also wanted the Commander-in-Chief



Often not hindered in the execution of his intentions. He replied to Field Marshal von Hindenburg on August 31: "Although it is not to be assumed that it could succeed in any way possible for us to truly defeat an enemy who is determined to retreat without regard to sacrifices of land and people as soon as he is engaged, and who has vast Russia at his disposal, Your Excellency's intention to strike as decisively as possible the part of the Russians in front of the army group fully corresponds to the wishes of the Supreme Army Command. However, as stated in the directive of August 27, even with the most favorable course of operations, the absolute necessity will unfortunately arise in the not too distant future to leave only a few troops and ammunition in your current command area, as is already the case with the other army groups on the eastern theater of war, as are indispensable for holding the shortest line in enemy territory... With the shortest line, of course, is meant the one that can be held with the minimum expenditure of forces. After the decision on where the main operations should be continued has been made against the east, there is no choice. Even the abandonment of occupied land must, if necessary, be accepted." Whether the Eastern Commander-in-Chief actually uses the forces in troops and ammunition to be measured later in the ordered line, which is to be expanded in any case, or chooses a position further forward outside it or allows the troops to conduct a mobile defense forward of the expanded shortest line, is entirely left open. However, the condition is that under no circumstances should the shortest line be lost and any request for troops and ammunition be avoided within the limits of possibility. According to preliminary estimates, it is to be assumed that later about ten to twelve divisions would have to be given up. With the other two army groups, the terrain and their imminent weakening due to transport from the outset force a restriction. "At the Narewta estuary as a junction point of the permanent positions of the Hindenburg and Prince Leopold army groups must therefore be held."

Already the next day, on September 1, the Eastern Commander-in-Chief was informed of an instruction given to the Prince Leopold army group, according to which it should also continue the offensive, namely against the road section Slonim—Zelwa, i.e., against the Zelwianka section. Immediate agreement on the demarcation and mutual support is required.

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1) p. 489.

to make a decision. On September 2, a communication followed from General von Falkenhayn to Colonel General von Conrad, in which it was stated at the end: "Only if it should succeed in pushing the enemy back behind the line Pinsk—Baranowicze—Friedrichstadt—Riga Bay, would a forward positioning of the permanent position there be considered, because holding it will presumably not require more forces than the rear line." The Supreme Army Command thus felt inclined to approach the view of the Commander East. The question of the permanent position remained dependent on the results of further actions.

The Commander East now turned to the Mackensen Army Group: Since the Supreme Army Command had approved the continuation of the offensive of the Prince Leopold Army Group on Slonim—Zelwa, he would "promise great success from the most energetic advance of the left wing of the 11th Army towards Slonim." He received the response that this advance would take place on September 3. Regarding his own intentions, he reported on September 4 in response to an inquiry to the Supreme Army Command: "I intend around September 8 or 9, depending on the progress of the railway transport movement, to attack with the reinforced left wing of the 10th Army on and over Wilna—Wilkomierz, to encircle east of Wilna. The Niemen Army will join the attack, while the 8th and 12th Armies will continue the attack with a focus north of the Niemen, otherwise against the Szczara section, where cooperation of the 9th and 11th Armies can still achieve significant successes. The resistance of the Russians in front of my front is not yet broken; it must still be pressed."

On the night of September 5, the Supreme Army Command replied: "The Prince Leopold Army Group and parts of the Mackensen Army Group will attempt to influence the enemy north of the swampy terrain by advancing in the general direction over Slonim. Whether they succeed is doubtful given the current state of the connections. If the situation in the West does not require it earlier, two reserve divisions will initially be withdrawn from that area on September 15. (It is likely that the withdrawal of the remaining forces intended for other theaters of war) will then have to occur in approximately three-day intervals."

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1) The army groups meant were Prince Leopold and Mackensen.

2) Decision from August 31 (p. 492).

This seemed to bring clarity and, as the Eastern Commander-in-Chief had to assume, also alignment with the supreme army command for the next objectives. In reality, however, this was not the case. General von Falkenhayn thought differently, as he indicated to the Eastern Commander-in-Chief only after the conclusion of the operations in a letter dated October 8, and later explained in his works, not of an encirclement worthy around Vilna, but of a breakthrough attack, perhaps through a push towards Lida, against the seemingly weak Russian center. He had promised, in cooperation with the army group Prince Leopold, "the consolidation of the entire left enemy wing on the marshes of Slonim." However, he did not intervene, he wrote to the Eastern Commander-in-Chief, because he "respected the conviction of everyone else, as long as it remains within the given framework, thus not threatening the whole, and because the outcome of no operation, which is conducted as energetically as it always is there, can be foreseen with mathematical certainty beforehand."

## 2. The Battle of Vilna.

### a) Reorganization and battles up to September 8.

Maps 6 and 7, Sketch 28.

The strength of the Russian resistance in the area of Troki Nowe and the prospect of significant reinforcements, a total of a general command, four infantry divisions, and a cavalry division, had prompted the command of the 10th Army to revert to the plan of General Litzmann, which had been rejected under other circumstances, who had advocated the attack north of the Wilia. On August 30, Generaloberst von Eichhorn ordered the formation of a strong and powerful encirclement group to "absolutely outpace the enemy forces retreating over the Grodno—Wolkowysk line to the northeast." While the rest of the army tied down the enemy south of the Wilia, the encirclement group was to advance north past Vilna over the Vilna—Dünaburg railway. In addition to other deployments, the XXI Army Corps was to move as an active troop unit from the area east of Dran to the southern flank north of the Wilia, as its commanding general had himself proposed. Until these movements

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1) von Falkenhayn, p. 115.

2) The simultaneous battles of the Njemen Army are described on p. 533 ff. in context.

3) p. 491. — 4) p. 486.



Once the operations were carried out and reinforcements had arrived, about a week had to pass.

Meanwhile, the enemy, who had to increasingly recognize the looming danger and had freed up forces by retreating from Poland, launched heavy but for him extremely costly counterattacks on September 1st and 2nd in the area of Troki Nowe and north of the Wilia. All these attempts failed against the defense of the Litzmann and Garnier groups. On September 3rd, the Russian attacks subsided.

In the north, the Njemen Army wanted to gradually extend its pressure, which had previously been successfully directed against the lower Dvina towards Friedrichstadt, further southwards. As the outermost right wing of this army, the 3rd Cavalry Division maintained contact with the northern wing of the 10th Army northwest of Schirwinth since September 3rd.

In front of the right wing of the 10th Army and further south, the Russian counteraction had subsided in the last days of August. For the pursuit movements of the 12th and 8th Army, the order of the Supreme Commander East from August 29th<sup>1)</sup> formed the basis. While the Chief of Staff of the 12th Army, Colonel Marquard, initially considered a multi-day halt necessary due to supply difficulties for this army, Lieutenant General Ludendorff insisted on the immediate continuation of the advance, at least with parts. The pressure was to be on the right wing, the next target was the Swislocz section between the place of the same name and Indura, while the 8th Army was directed towards the Njemen fortress Grodno, which it was to attack. Overall, on August 30th, the 12th Army had 10½ divisions, of which only four were in the front line<sup>3)</sup>, the 8th Army had 5½ divisions, of which 4½ were in the front line<sup>4)</sup>; for the attack on Grodno, 21 heavy and siege batteries were brought up. Without encountering much resistance, the pursuit continued for both armies.

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1) G. 535. — 2) G. 367 and 490.

3) Formation starting from the right: deployed XVII. A. K. (3rd, followed by 35th and 36th I. D.), Corps Battery (Gen. Kdo. XIII. A. K. with 26th I. D., followed by 1st G. R. and 4th G. S. D.), XVII. R. R. (½ 85th Rnd. D., followed by 86th I. D.), Corps Pfülfow (Gen. Kdo. XI. R. R. with 54th and 38th S. D., followed by 50th R. D.).

4) Formation starting from the right: Sow. Sollon (37th, followed by 83rd G. S. D., 75th R. D., 1st L. Pnd. D.), 169th Rnd. D., 11th Pnd. D.



## The Operation of the Supreme Commander East against Vilna.

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By September 1, the foremost troops of the 12th Army arrived and crossed the naturally strong Swislocz section; the expected enemy resistance did not materialize even here. The 8th Army, thanks to the excellent performance of its pioneers, was able to overcome the Bobr swamps relatively quickly and stood before Grodno on this day.

Since 1913, the fortress of Grodno had been expanding into a strong, modern military site by advancing a new line of forts, which lay twelve kilometers west of the city; during the war, reinforcement work had continued. To keep the pursuit going, the fortress had to be dealt with quickly. The attack was to be directed against the northwest front. Of the siege artillery provided, which was weak in number anyway, the heaviest batteries had not yet arrived; the bulk of the heavy batteries opened fire on September 1 against Forts III and II. Meanwhile, the 1st Landwehr Division, intended for the southwest side of the fortress under General of Infantry von Jacobi, had already come close to Fort IV and, after their mortars and heavy field batteries had fired, was to storm at noon, but did not reach the target. However, in the afternoon, a first attempt succeeded with only slight enemy counteraction. The Russians had retreated to an intermediate position; the unexpectedly easily achieved success and intercepted telephone messages indicated that they no longer considered a serious defense of the place. The next day confirmed this perception. With light fighting against Russian rearguards, the works abandoned by the enemy could be occupied; the crossing over the Njemen began. Although September 3 brought fierce enemy counterattacks against the parts of the 8th Army advanced to the right bank of the river, the enemy then retreated to Stidel and Jeziory. The spoils were limited to 3600 prisoners; six heavy guns, including two Japanese ones, were found buried. The Russians had presumably initiated the evacuation of the inherently strong fortress early on, unable to hold out completely, since the traffic on the railway to Vilna was blocked by the advance of the German 10th Army<sup>2)</sup>. After the Russian front in the south as well as in the north had already moved east of Grodno, the garrison was also withdrawn in view of the German artillery deployment; the experiences from Nowogeorgiewsk and Kowno may have contributed.

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1) p. 452. — 2) p. 489.

The southernly adjacent German 12th Army had gained further ground, accompanied on the right by the army group Prince Leopold. On September 3rd and 4th, it advanced ten kilometers west of Wolkowysk without encountering new resistance east of Indura, against which it gained ground only very slowly in a frontal attack in often difficult terrain, while the 8th Army was still held up by the Njemen crossing. However, intercepted Russian radio messages on the afternoon of September 4th indicated that the enemy would continue the retreat along the entire front between the Rokitno Swamps and Grodno, starting from the southern flank, the following night. Accordingly, on September 5th, the right wing of the 12th Army advanced, and on the 6th, its left wing also moved forward again. However, in front of the 8th Army, the enemy had repositioned itself 20 kilometers east of Grodno in the Njemen bend from south of Stibiel over the lakes of Jezioro to Druskieniki in a strong position. Meanwhile, the overall plan for the continuation of the offensive against the northern flank of the Russian army front had been further developed by the Commander-in-Chief East. In view of the impending deployments of ten to twelve divisions, which were to begin with two divisions as early as September 15th, if not even earlier, and also due to the approaching unfavorable season, haste was increasingly necessary if decisive results were still to be achieved. The agreement of the Supreme Army Command for the cooperation of the army groups Mackensen and Prince Leopold made it possible for the 12th and



8th Armies to continue in the general direction towards Lida and northwards, thus to the northeast, to be deployed for the attack and, if possible, to break through in this direction,

to capture Wilna also from the south. The Njemen, flowing from the northeast about 120 kilometers south of Wilna over a longer stretch, offered a suitable boundary for the attack objective to the right. The 12th Army was to soon lead its main forces to the northwestern, right bank of the river, while on the southeastern bank, weaker parts were to cover the flank in connection with the army group Prince Leopold. In the north, the security against the Russian 5th Army and against the railways leading from Smolensk, Petersburg, and Riga to Düna burg could be most effectively organized by the attack of the Njemen Army in this direction. How far the 10th Army then

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1) G. 555. — 2) C. 492 f. — 3) C. Ibid.  
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wanted to strike out to the north and east, could be left to her<sup>1</sup>).

The Eastern Commander-in-Chief summarized his intentions on September 6 in the following army group order<sup>2</sup>: "I aim to strike the Russians again, and decisively, before they retreat over the western Berezina and the Wilia." The 12th Army was to push its opponent with a weaker right wing into the swamp area of the Zelwianka and Szczara, but with the main forces to cross to the northern Niemen bank to join the 8th Army. This army was initially to break the Russian resistance at Stödel. Furthermore, the attack direction of the 12th and 8th Armies was on both sides of the Siedlce-Lida railway to the northeast. The 8th Army had the 75th Reserve Division, the 12th Army was soon to hand over the 4th Guards and the 37th Infantry Division for use by the 10th Army. The order continued: "10th Army attacks on September 9 with the left wing. Here, Higher Cavalry Commander 6 with the 1st and 9th Cavalry Divisions is to be deployed north of Wilkomir up to Aufschluß-Uszjany, with the main focus on Uszjany. The 10th Army is to take care to deploy further forces already under its command on its left wing." The Niemen Army, to which the 88th Infantry Division and two mortar batteries intended for the 10th Army were now assigned, was to continue the attack southeast of Friedrichstadt with its southern wing, the Beckmann Division, also attacking in the direction of Uszjany.

By September 8, the 12th Army, which continued to be hindered by initial supply difficulties, had reached the Zelwianka section near Zelwa and northward in connection with the Prince Leopold army group. On its left wing, the Plüskow Corps was crossing the Niemen southwest of Stödel. It joined the 8th Army, which had not yet been able to take this place due to strong Russian counteraction and was still stuck in front of Jeziory and Druskeniki.

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<sup>1</sup>) The basic ideas of the attack plan are derived from various designations in other records as well as from the terrain and the situation. They have been confirmed by communications from General Ludendorff, Lieutenant General von Böckendorff, and Colonel a. D. Keller from the summer and autumn of 1931 to the Reichsarchiv. In particular, General Ludendorff expressed that he wanted to "break through" with the 8th Army.

<sup>2</sup>) See the orders of August 29 and 30 (p. 490 f.) and the report to the Supreme Army Command of September 4 (p. 493).

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In the 10th Army, the preparation for the envelopment attack was essentially completed. Behind the front of the Litzmann and Garnier groups, eight infantry divisions were ready, with two cavalry divisions forming the outermost left wing, extending north of Wilkomierz. For September 9, Generaloberst von Eichhorn ordered the start of the comprehensive attack on Wilna, with a reorganization of the army. He assumed that the enemy was now positioned in front of his line with about eleven divisions to the south and nine divisions north of the Wilia for defense. He estimated that the northern flank of these approximately 20 enemy divisions, from Schirwintn on the Schirwinta further north to the Wilkomierz—Dünaburg road, was currently only occupied by cavalry. Generaloberst von Eichhorn himself had a total of 17½ infantry and four cavalry divisions for the attack, which was significantly weaker in number than the enemy to be attacked. He expected the 8th Army to advance northeast along the Mereczanka with its left wing. From the 10th Army<sup>2)</sup>, the Carlowitz group with four divisions and Litzmann with 5½ divisions, including 1½ north of the Wilia, were to tie down the enemy, while further north the Hutier group with five infantry divisions and the Eben group with three infantry divisions and one cavalry division were designated for the thrust. This was to begin with a rightward swing around the furthest forward position of the 115th Infantry Division as a pivot, so that only the four infantry divisions of the outermost left wing would advance early on September 9, with the others joining gradually. The cavalry corps Garnier, as strong as a division, was to advance on Lzjany in conjunction with the Bedmann division of the Niemen Army<sup>3)</sup>, and then cover the left flank north of the lake area of Malaty, ready to facilitate the advance of the left wing of the Eben group through flanking action.

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1) p. 488.

2) Organization from the right wing: Carlowitz Group (Gen. Kdo. III. A. K. with reinforced 6th Ldw. Br., 87th and 89th S. D., and 16th Ldw. M. D.), Litzmann Group (Gen. Kdo. XXXX. R. D. with 79th, 76th, 3rd R. D., reinforced Brig. Monteston [of the 80th R. D.], 4th Ldw. D. and Abt. Siebeck), Hutier Group (XXI. A. K. [31st and 42nd D., 115th S. D., 77th R. D. and Div. Jenter), Eben Group (Gen. Kdo. I. A. K. with 10th Ldw. D., 58th and 2nd J. D. and 4th R. D.), Cavalry Corps Garnier (1st and 9th R. D., assigned 3rd R. D. of the Niemen Army). — 6th Ldw. Br. and Br. Monteston had the battles of one division each.

3) p. 535.

b) The Attack until September 14.

Map 6, Sketches 28 and 29

On September 9, the attack movements began on the northern wing of the 10th Army. They led to battles in terrain that, in a wide area around Wilna, especially near the often winding Wilia course, features heights and valleys in rich variety, often forested and therefore very confusing.

The assault divisions of the extreme left army wing and the cavalry corps launched an attack, pushing back Russian cavalry north of Schirwinta and gaining up to 20 kilometers of ground forward. The northern wing of the German cavalry could approach Užjany within 15 kilometers, while the Huiter group was still held back for the time being. On September 10, the forward movement of the encircling wing continued systematically without major battles. The Eben group reached the area between the lake of Malaty in the north and the swamp area of the Schirwinta lake in the south. It had thus maintained its essentially eastern advance direction and was to continue to proceed directly on the railway crossing Lidujna west of Swenziany. South of it, however, the left wing of the Huiter group (77th Reserve and 42nd Infantry Division) had already turned southeast against the Russian Guard Corps, whose southern wing was thrown out of its position in the evening by the 115th Infantry Division under Major General von Kleist, then followed up to the Wilia, still in the old line, 1½ divisions (Esebeck detachment and 14th Landwehr Division) of the Kitzmann group, so that between Schirwinta lake and Wilia, on a front about 25 kilometers wide, 4½ divisions were in battle. South of the Wilia, three divisions (Zenter Division and 31st Infantry Division of the Huiter group and 76th Reserve Division of the Kitzmann group) were still available for deployment, with the 75th Reserve Division on the march to Wilkomierz.

On September 11, two more divisions were deployed for the attack between Wilia and Schirwinta lake, but no major progress was made in difficult terrain. Here, 6½ German divisions were now fighting over a width of 27 kilometers, as was assumed, against at least as many Russian divisions.

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1) In fact, only three Russian divisions were in the front line (starting from the Wilia: ½ Border Guard Div., 6th Rifle Brigade, 1st, 1st and 2nd G.S.D.) with one division in reserve.



The emerging gap allowed Group Eben to seize the Russian position from the north and thereby assist the frontal attack. Meanwhile, General von Eben reached the lakes east of Dubniki almost without resistance. He thus approached the Scheimjany section and the accompanying major railway line Wilna-Swezhany-Dünaburg and was forced to take an increasingly wider front with his three infantry divisions. To the left, the cavalry divisions (4th Division and Cavalry Corps Garnier with 1st, 3rd, and 9th Divisions) extended the flank from the Malaty Lakes to the Dünaburg road northeast of Lidsyn over about 45 kilometers, while the Njemen Army itself had taken up the Bornarchs against Dünaburg.

Meanwhile, the Eichhorn High Command had gained the impression that the enemy was withdrawing troops from the front south of Wilna, apparently two corps (III Siberian and XXVI?), and shifting them to the northern wing of his Wilna group, approximately to the area west of Swezhany. The army thus likely still faced its most difficult task. However, it became increasingly clear that the main concentration was no longer between Wilia and Schwininta Lake, where the German troops were densest, but in the area northeast, perhaps even east of Wilna, where only relatively weak German forces had been in the Bornrücken. General von Eben was justifiably concerned about losing contact with the rest of the army during the advance. The army's chief of staff, Colonel Hell, nevertheless insisted during a telephone conversation on continuing the Bornarchs to "extensive envelopment over Lidujna and then only turning over Griby to Lowki," which is about seven kilometers southwest of Lidujna.

These issues also occupied the Eastern Commander-in-Chief. In his war diary on September 11, it states: "The northern wing of the 10th Army is making good progress; its envelopment promises full success. It is important that it is impossible to bring up strong reserves behind this wing. The only danger for it would be if the Njemen Army, as at the Bornrücken, moved against Dünaburg and thus effectively covered the rear. However, on the southern wing of the overall attack, the 12th Army was north of the Szelwianka, and above all, the 8th Army northeast of Grodno, firmly facing new enemy resistance for days. However, since September 9, the Plüskow Corps (Frommel?) of the 8th Army has been struggling with varying success, where

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1) G. 535. — 2) Actually only the III Siberian Corps.

3) H.R.R. 3 with the troops of the former Hollen Corps (p. 495).

## The Operation of the Eastern Commander-in-Chief against Vilna.

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The 37th Infantry Division under Lieutenant General Freiherr von Hollen had to bear the brunt of the battle. Since there was no sign of the Russian resistance weakening in front of the right wing of the 10th Army, the Eastern Commander-in-Chief expected great success from a relentless breakthrough of the left wing of this army in a southeasterly direction. In an effort to make the ongoing operation truly decisive, he turned to the Supreme Army Command and requested the X Army Corps for ten to fourteen days, which, coming from southern Poland, was ready for transport to the west at Białystok. As a replacement, he offered one to two divisions of the 12th Army, which could arrive at Białystok in four days. When the 12th Army reported in the evening that it had succeeded in gaining a foothold on the eastern bank of the Szelwianka, and aerial reports indicated that a Russian retreat was now likely to continue, the Eastern Commander-in-Chief saw this as the effect of the encirclement movement of the 10th Army and urgently repeated his request to the Supreme Army Command with the reasoning: "I expect great success from throwing the enemy into the swamp and lake areas east of Vilna. If the Russian wants to save his army, he must try to strike the left wing of the 10th Army from Dünaburg in the flank and rear. Against this danger, I need a deep echelon of this wing, which would be naturally achieved by the timely arrival of the X Army Corps at Kowno."

The Chief of the General Staff of the Field Army, however, was not in a position to comply with this request, as the danger of a new major breakthrough attempt by the enemy on the western front had grown considerably. He emphasized that the Supreme Army Command did not ignore the reasons given. However, the general situation would be so adversely affected by the requested measure that His Majesty could not decide on it. Also, the corps, as it could only be transported from Białystok with 12 to 14 trains daily, would not be ready in the area southwest of Dünaburg before the end of the month and would not be offensive again before mid-October. Meanwhile, "the operations here in the east with the forces previously used for this purpose" would unfortunately not be allowed to continue at all. Independent of this telegram exchange, the visit of the Supreme War Lady to the 10th Army in Kowno was announced for September 16.

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1) For more details, see Volume IX. — 2) p. 492.

The Commander-in-Chief East had to rely on his own forces; however, the enemy seemed to have strengthened in front of the extremely weak northern flank of the Njemen Army; a new army command was reportedly established north of Riga). This should not disrupt the initiated major operation. Even if the Njemen Army wanted to remain on the offensive with its right wing as before, the Commander-in-Chief East now considered deploying the 3rd Infantry Division, withdrawn from the 12th Army, with the Njemen Army instead of the 10th Army. This division was instructed, under the strong Hutier Group, to "attack sharply to hold the enemy and prevent them from countering the envelopment forces, or to shift forces to the left to make the pressure of the envelopment more sustainable." The enemy had begun the expected retreat before the 8th Army during the night, which became noticeable on the extreme southern flank of the 10th Army by September 12. However, the enemy still held firm. Between Wilia and Schirwinta Lake, the continuation of the costly efforts of the Litzmann and Hutier groups resulted only in a gradual pushing back of the Russians on this day as well. Although it was possible to advance on both sides around the marshy area of Schirwinta Lake, shortening the front accordingly, the attack of the Hutier Group repeatedly encountered new enemy positions frontally, while the envelopment group Eben continued to advance eastward unhindered. On a 36-kilometer-wide front, three infantry divisions had crossed the Dünaburg railway and stood in the evening with the left wing at Swenziany, 65 kilometers south of Schirwinta Lake. North of Swenziany, four cavalry divisions covered the open flank in an increasingly widening area. The enemy seemed to be completely surprised by the appearance of German troops so deep in their rear; nothing here indicated preparation for defense. Airmen reported that troops were unloaded in Besdamy, 18 kilometers north of Wilna; it was suspected that they were originally intended for Swenziany but had already found the way blocked. Several Russian cavalry divisions were also expected to gather northeast of Swenziany, near Widzy. To fully exploit the current favorable situation, the envelopment wing was on Jschody. However, the bulk of the army was stuck in a stubborn frontal battle, the end of which was not yet foreseeable. Under such circumstances, the now 25-kilometer-wide area, only held by the Kenter Division

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1) See p. 451.



The occupied gap between the Hutier and Eben groups could even give cause for concern for the duration. Already, General von Eben had left parts of his 10th Landwehr Division there; the 75th Reserve Division, which had meanwhile arrived at Wilkomierz, was expected in two days at the earliest.

On September 13, the two right-wing divisions of the Eben Corps turned south against the Wilia east of Vilna, and the frontal attacks of the Hutier and Litzmann groups continued; at the same time, forces were withdrawn from these to follow the Eben group. The cavalry corps, with three divisions, took the direction towards Ostrowje against the Smir and Narocz lakes, advanced 15 kilometers south of Swenziany, and sent demolition units to disrupt the railway leading from Smolensk via Polozk to Molodeczno. Meanwhile, the Beckmann Division of the Njemen Army had been withdrawn northwards to advance on Dünaburg, so the 9th Cavalry Division now had to secure the open northern flank of the 10th Army's encircling wing alone at the Polusche lakes.

The continuation of the frontal attacks did not bring any decisive result against the tenacious enemy on this day either. In the south, however, the Russian retreat in front of the 8th Army had meanwhile extended to the right to the front of the 12th Army and to the left almost to the entire front of the Carlowitz group. This had been a leftward swing from the southeast-facing front around Leipuny as a pivot, which, in cooperation with the Eben group, could lead to a double-sided encirclement of the Russians holding northwest of Vilna in the further course.

On September 14, the right wing of the army, fighting against Russian rearguards, continued its leftward swing in connection with the movements of the 8th Army to such an extent that by evening it approached the Wersoka section with its front facing northwest. From Leipuny via Troki Nowe to northwest and north of Vilna, the enemy still stood. Northwest of Vilna, the German attack was now continued by small forces, while further parts moved east to strengthen the encircling wing for the decisive battles expected there. The first withdrawn 42nd Infantry Division was already redeployed on this day between the Zenter Division and the 10th Landwehr Division of the Eben group, thus in the middle of the northern front, and made progress here in the direction

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1) p. 535f.

on the Wilna arc from Niemenczyn. On the outer wing of the envelopment, the last infantry division of Group Eben, the 2nd Infantry Division, whose commander, Lieutenant General von Falk, had wanted to continue the march on the right bank of the Wilia towards Smorgon, had already turned towards the river, which it reached at Michaliszki. From here to the area south of Lake Schirwinta, almost 70 kilometers of front including the advancing 75th Reserve Division, but only six German infantry divisions were in the enemy's flank and rear, from there northwest of Wilna only 30 kilometers wide still as many divisions, one of which had already been withdrawn to the east for reinforcement. The three cavalry divisions of General von Garnier were able to approach the city of Smorgon to within 15 kilometers without encountering resistance, parts of them were already southeast of Lake Narocz. 60 kilometers from their position, the 9th Cavalry Division was now at Swenziany, while 90 kilometers further north the Niemen Army had reached the positions near Dünaburg.

Pilots reported larger bivouacs near Smorgon and west as well as troop transports from Wilna to Molodeczno. Generaloberst von Eichhorn "had to, that in the Wilna sector four Russian general commands were present, including their corps. The headquarters of the corps were moving closer together in the smallest space according to

intercepted radio messages. The entire 10th Army hoped for full success." They wanted to continue to block the Russian masses, probably about 15 divisions, by constant holding and shifting to the left to delay the retreat, while the cavalry was to go around them. At 4:15 in the afternoon, Generaloberst von Eichhorn gave the cavalry corps Garnier the order by radio: "Enemy, in, north and south of Wilna, is encircled. Blocking the escape route between Lake Swir and Berezyna swamps south of Wiszniew is crucial. Destruction of the Wilna-Molodeczno-Polock and Wilna-Molodeczno railway is important. Army closes across to the left. 2nd Infantry Division tomorrow from Michaliszki to Soly." Corresponding instructions were sent to the other parts of the army.

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In this situation, the Commander-in-Chief East intervened. He was not at all satisfied with the progress of the attack so far.

- 1) Communication from Colonel a. D. Keller from summer 1931 to the Reichsarchiv.
- 2) Hoffmann I, p. 87. — Letter from September 13.

## The Operation of the Eastern Commander-in-Chief against Vilna.

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The exposure of the area between the 10th and Njemen Army had already prompted him in the morning to order the latter to send the Bavarian Cavalry Division to Duschki, where the 9th Cavalry Division had moved south; in the afternoon, he further demanded the securing of the 10th Army against Russian forces that might advance over Vilna. Regarding the situation with this army, it is stated in his war diary on September 14: "The Eastern Commander-in-Chief is also intervening with the 10th Army. The right wing has encountered a strongly fortified enemy position, further north unchanged. West and north front are under enemy attack." The enemy had free rein to move his strong forces stationed at Vilna northeast against the impending encirclement; "he has the shorter route." Moreover, intercepted radio messages indicated that a newly assembled Russian 2nd Army (XXVII, IV Siberian, XIV, XXVI Corps, and 3rd Cavalry Division) was to be transferred from the center of the enemy's overall front to Molodeczno—Smorgon, and therefore wanted to bring their own operation, as Lieutenant General Ludendorff explained to the Chief of General Staff, Colonel Hell, on the telephone, to a favorable conclusion before the new Russian army could make itself felt. Further shifting of the 10th Army to the left was therefore inadvisable. "Utmost urgency" — as the telephone conversation is further recorded in the 10th Army's war diary — "was required to prevent the danger of enemy forces impacting the eastern flank and rear of the 10th Army. Immediate withdrawal of all forces of the army from the currently gained open semicircle to a concentric attack on Vilna was absolutely necessary. The advance of the 2nd Infantry Division from the reached area in a directly western direction was to provide the utmost limitation of the attack." In contrast, Colonel Hell held the view that a decisive success could only be achieved if the enemy was deprived of any possibility of escape by closing the ring as much as possible, and that further shifting of forces to the left also seemed advisable, as an immediate ...

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1) The assumptions were correct.

2) Other records on this are missing in the files. However, Lieutenant Colonel Hofmann made the following remark on September 13, 14, and 15, 1915, regarding the differences of opinion discussed here (Hofmann, p. 67 f.). They culminate in the view of the Eastern Commander-in-Chief, also confirmed by contemporary records of Captain von Waldow and communications from Colonel a. D. Keller (these from the summer of 1931 to the Reichsarchiv): "There will not be a second Brzeziny, we must aim for a smaller success for ourselves tomorrow, a great risk is no longer taken ..."

There is currently no threat from the east. Furthermore, it is highly likely that the railway lines Molodeczno—Polozk and Molodeczno—Vilna will be sustainably destroyed by the cavalry dispatched for this purpose on September 15. Moreover, the strong army cavalry provides extensive security for the army flank in the terrain favorable for the sectional holding of advancing forces. "These counterarguments," it says further in the notebook, "were not recognized. Colonel Hell was informed that the Commander-in-Chief East demanded the withdrawal of divisions for concentric attacks by September 16 at the latest, and added that the telephone order for this would be issued immediately."

This decisive order from the Commander-in-Chief East stated:

"I expect the army to attack on its entire front by September 16 at the latest, as any later time can only change the situation to our disadvantage."

The 12th and 8th Armies were to participate. They had, in connection with the army group Prince Leopold on September 14, reached the west bank of the Njemen, particularly in its southern part, a broad and marshy Szara section, as well as north of the Njemen a line running generally north-northeast from the Szara mouth, which connected west of Radun to the southern flank of the 10th Army. The Russians seemed to have set themselves for new resistance. Behind their front, troop movements were observed on the railways to Minsk and Molodeczno; it was suspected that they would be disturbed by bombing attacks from aircraft. The Commander-in-Chief East pointed out to the 12th Army to exert strong

pressure on the northern Njemen bank in a northeasterly direction to also "influence the encirclement of the 10th Army." The 8th Army was reminded: "I expect that tomorrow, September 15, Group Plüskow will energetically gain ground towards Lida." This should also encircle the enemy at Vilna from the southwest.

c) The concentric attack and the pursuit

from September 15 to 19.

Maps 6 and 7, sketches 28 and 29.

For the 10th Army, September 15 served as preparation for the general attack now set for the 16th. According to the specific instructions of the Commander-in-Chief East, Colonel General von Eichhorn was forced to rescind the previously issued orders and redirect his troops sharply towards Vilna.

## The Operation of the Eastern Commander-in-Chief against Vilna.

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For the Garnier Cavalry Corps, the order given by radio before the intervention of the Eastern Commander-in-Chief was not changed. However, during the night, the Eastern Commander-in-Chief ordered that the 9th Cavalry Division, intended by General von Garnier to unite with the 1st and 4th Cavalry Divisions, should instead ride north to join the Bavarian Cavalry Division of the Njemen Army in attacking two Russian cavalry divisions that seemed to be gathering at Poluske. Of the remaining three divisions of the cavalry corps, the 3rd Cavalry Division reached the area of Krzywice on September 15 and then blocked the Polozk—Molodeczno railway. Only the 1st and 4th Cavalry Divisions remained to advance against the rear of the Russian Vilna Group. They crossed and interrupted the Molodeczno—Vilna railway near and northwest of Smorgon. The 1st Cavalry Division reached the area south of Zuprany without serious combat, while the 4th Cavalry Division under Major General von Hofmann was forced to turn northwest against the enemy holding the Disnjamjanta section Zuprany—Solly.

In the Eben Group, the left wing, following the instructions of the Eastern Commander-in-Chief, was initially directed from Michaliszki over the Wilia southwest towards Worjanaj. The 2nd Infantry Division under Lieutenant General von Falk was able to approach this location within about three kilometers by evening, despite some fierce fighting. Subsequently, the left wing of the 58th Infantry Division also crossed the Wilia, and the 10th Landwehr Division, followed by the 42nd Infantry Division transferred from the Hutier Group, moved across the Scheinjana to the southeast.

Meanwhile, the enemy had retreated southward on a broad front west of the Scheinjana estuary during the night. The troops of Major General von Hutier were able to advance up to twelve kilometers without combat and stood in the evening from the Scheinjana estuary to west of Niemenczyn on the Wilia, then the front continued westward. The enemy seemed to have regained a strong position. In the Litzmann Group, the 14th Landwehr Division had gained some ground immediately east of the Wilia below Vilna, but otherwise, the front remained here; the Carlowitz Group had advanced a few kilometers further to the section held by the enemy. In the 8th and 12th Armies, the offensive power was no longer sufficient due to extremely tight supplies to achieve the set objectives.

to resolve. They were stuck before Russian resistance. To what extent, apart from the troop contributions made, the strength had declined in two months of attack is shown by the following information about the conditions of the 12th Army<sup>1</sup>): Since July 13, it had lost around 1800 officers and 80,000 men. 47,000 men of replacement already set and another 13,000 who were on the march had numerically covered such a loss by three-quarters, so that the battalions were nowhere below 600 men, but could by no means replace to the same extent what had been taken from the troops, especially the best battle-tested leaders and soldiers.

For the 10th Army, the order for the general attack on September 16 initially stated that the right-adjointing 8th Army would advance with the left wing from Radum to the east, the Njemen Army would cover the rear of the attack north of the road leading from Smolenzin via Postawy to the east. The attack of the 10th Army was set with ten divisions of the army center, seven of them from the northern Wilia bank, concentrically against an area that finally narrowed on both sides of Wilna to a total of 20 kilometers, with wing groups of four divisions each accordingly. Specifically, the following were to attack: Group Carlowitz with four divisions (reinforced 6th Landwehr Brigade, 87th and 89th Infantry and 16th Landwehr Division) from the west, Group Litzmann with five divisions (79th Reserve Division, reinforced Brigade Monteton, 3rd Reserve, 14th Landwehr and 76th Reserve



Division) from the northwest, Group Hutier with 5½ divisions (115th Infantry Division, Section Schede, 77th Reserve Division, Division Lenter, 31st Infantry, 75th Reserve Division) from the north, Group Eben with four divisions (10th Landwehr, 42nd, 58th and 2nd Infantry Division) from the northeast. From the cavalry corps Garnier, which had to cover the southern flank of the army, two divisions were to block the Diznańta crossings at and south of Diznańty and interrupt the Molodeczno-Lida railway; the 3rd Cavalry Division was to turn to Molodeczno itself, where a Russian army headquarters was assumed, to interrupt the Molodeczno-Lida railway and to advance a communication section against the Minsk-Smolensk railway. The 9th Cavalry Division, which, without encountering any significant enemy<sup>2)</sup>, had reached the area east of Polusche and had made contact with the Russian cavalry division, could now indeed

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1) von Gallwitz, G. 364.

2) p. 508. — In fact, between Lake Narocz and Dünaburg, although very widely dispersed, the Russian cavalry corps Kasnakow stood with 2½ divisions.

was to be brought closer again and was to take over the cover against the east between the Molodeczno–Polozk railway and the Smolenzjan–Postawy road.

The attack movements began according to the army order, but did not lead to the desired result. In the Carlowitz group, all attempts to cross the Wersoka failed. South of the lower Wilia, the right wing of the Litzmann group had to repel Russian counterattacks; north of the river, its left wing and the right of the Hutier group gained little ground. The enemy seemed to be stronger in artillery than on previous days<sup>1</sup>). The left wing of the Hutier group was stuck at the Wilia section Niemenczyn–Schemjana estuary. East of the Schemjana, the 10th Landwehr and 42nd Infantry Division of the Eben group fought for the river crossing, but then, like the 58th Infantry Division, did not get much further. Only at the extreme left end was the 2nd Infantry Division able to push the enemy back a larger piece; it reached its eastern wing Gernyaty, reducing the gap to the Garnier cavalry corps to 15 kilometers. The 4th Cavalry Division took Soly and Zuprany, but did not get beyond that. Subsequently, the 1st Cavalry Division, whose reconnaissance from Disznyany to the south to Dziamy had identified Russian positions, remained in the line Zuprany–Bornuny, thus facing west. The goal set in the army order was not achieved here. The 3rd Cavalry Division advanced on Molodeczno in small skirmishes in the evening to Wiliejska, the 9th withdrew as ordered more to the south.

In the afternoon, the Kaiser arrived with General von Falkenhayn at the high command in Kowno. General Ludendorff reports on this<sup>2</sup>): "After his arrival, General von Falkenhayn asked me if a major blow was still to be expected. I denied it. The right time for a major blow had definitely been missed; naturally, one should strive for one's own success as long as possible. Everything depended on whether the Russians could send reinforcements from the front to the area north of Wilna"<sup>3</sup>). While General von Falkenhayn soon after

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<sup>1</sup>) As can be seen from Russian sources, it was only about increased ammunition consumption.

<sup>2</sup>) Communication from December 23, 1931, to the Reichsarchiv.

<sup>3</sup>) In a similar sense, Major von Fleischner reported on the evening of September 16 to Schemjana: "The success will be absent due to the encircling wings, as it is questionable whether it is possible to withdraw the right or left wing from the Molodeczno–Wilna railway again when the front

Continuing in Berlin, Field Marshal von Hindenburg reported the situation to the Kaiser<sup>[1]</sup> and subsequently informed his armies that he had assured the Supreme War Lord that they would "give their all to defeat the Russians. I know I can rely on my armies."

On September 17, the attack was to continue, but it was already recognized that the enemy had begun to retreat in front of the entire front of Group Litzmann and the right wing of Group Hutier, eventually extending southward to the left wing of Group Carlowitz. This rightly reflects the impact of the German attack, which had been ongoing for a week. The prospect of decisively defeating the enemy had thus diminished, especially as they still held further south. Here, the reinforced 6th Landwehr Brigade under Major General Simon achieved a local success by capturing 1,000 prisoners and five machine guns north of Radun. The 8th and 12th Armies had barely advanced since September 14, despite some successes. In the 10th Army, Groups Litzmann and Hutier reached the general line Lejpuny-Landwarowo-Wilia north of Wilna in pursuit. They were thus about five kilometers from the city. Above Wilna, the enemy held the southern bank of the Wilia. Only in the area of the Schemjanka estuary and upstream to Bystritza did the sharply engaging 75th Reserve Division under Lieutenant General von Seydewitz, as well as the 10th Landwehr and 42nd Infantry Divisions, manage to gain more ground in the attack across the river. On the far left wing, the 2nd Infantry Division could only slightly improve its position.

Thus, there was still a wide gap to the Cavalry Corps Garnier, whose situation became quite difficult as a result. The 4th and 1st Cavalry Divisions were attacked by a far superior enemy, who broke through their front at Zuprany, swung with strong forces against the northern wing of the 1st Cavalry Division, and forced them to retreat eastward. Finally, General von Garnier found himself compelled, in view of the simultaneous Russian pressure on the right flank and the

attack on Wilna at the time of the activation of the enemy flank from Molodetschno, which had not yet been broken through, is of course not yet foreseeable. (Records of the Vienna War Archives.)

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1) Records on this are missing.

## The Operation of the Commander-in-Chief East against Vilna.

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now also in the rear at Molodeczno with newly appearing enemy forces, to withdraw both divisions to the area of Smorgon.

The fact that the expected Russian troop transports from

Minsk to and over Molodeczno had actually begun around September 13th,

had already been learned by the High Command Eichhorn during the night of September 16th to 17th through an agent message communicated from Pleß, and the cavalry corps was immediately informed by radio. During the night, the 3rd Cavalry Division under Major General von Brumb had set out again from Wilejka and arrived north of Molodeczno by morning. By evening, they managed to push back Russian security over the Usza section and disrupt rail traffic with artillery fire. Enemy and radio connections, however, prevented further advance against the extensive railway facilities themselves, from which they were still about three kilometers away. In the evening, the division from Jasiewicz secured the flank of the cavalry corps just north of Molodeczno, while the 9th Cavalry Division, meanwhile, without encountering the enemy, had ridden 20 kilometers east beyond Postawy.

To strengthen the left wing of the army, Lieutenant General von Hutier had already proposed in the morning, as the army center's formations increasingly converged in pursuit of Vilna, to withdraw surplus parts in line with the intentions of the army high command. Thus, the 31st Infantry Division and the Zenter Division had already been set in motion eastward during the day; the 115th Infantry Division, which had already advanced very far south in pursuit, was to follow.

In the army order of the afternoon of September 17th, it was stated: "The enemy apparently wants to escape encirclement by rapid retreat. Ruthless action of the entire army front with wide outflanking of the eastern wing is required." The command boundaries of the encirclement line (Group Hutier), that under leftward shifting of Group Hutier, it is, "constantly seeking, sharply turning east, to consider the retreat routes of the enemy in the narrowness north of the Berezyna swamps more and more. It is to be aimed to maintain connection to the left continuously." The cavalry corps was to remain on the left flank.

The Commander-in-Chief East in Lötzen only learned of the enemy's retreat to Vilna in the afternoon. He ordered

thereupon: "Decisive successes in the campaign can be achieved. I expect the highest exertion of strength. The armies continue to attack: 12th Army in their current combat zone, 8th Army with a strong left wing Woronow, 10th Army with a strong and far forward deployed left wing towards north of Smorgon. 10th Army places its cavalry divisions ahead of the enemy retreat, possibly in line Wilna—Minsk and later on the eastern Beresina<sup>1</sup>). The railways leading away from Minsk are to be destroyed. — Niemen Army pushes the entire Bavarian cavalry division as soon as possible towards Krzywiczce northeast of Wilejka and lets its infantry follow."

When it became clear on the morning of September 18 that the enemy was now also retreating before the 8th and 12th Army, the Supreme Army Command urged "vigorous" pursuit by the army groups Mackensen and Prince Leopold and also requested it directly from both army groups and from Generaloberst von Conrad. The response from the Supreme Army Command stated that instructions for "utmost pursuit" had already been given.

The right wing and the center of the 10th and 12th Army advanced well on September 18, following the enemy; the heavily surrounded but no longer defended city of Wilna was occupied. In the evening, the German troops were about ten kilometers west of the Lida—Wilna railway, within a radius of ten kilometers south and southeast of Wilna and further east to Bystritza on the Wilia, where the group Eben joined the left wing of the group Suttier. They and the cavalry corps had fought hard. As the right wing of the group Eben, the 58th and next to it the 2nd Infantry Division had been set to attack southwards to cut off the enemy's retreat. However, this did not happen; rather, the 58th Infantry Division under Lieutenant General von Gersdorff had only with difficulty repelled fierce enemy attacks, and also with the 2nd Infantry Division only the extreme left wing gained some ground to the south. Behind this wing, the 31st Infantry Division was deployed as the foremost of the reinforcements, having initially reached the eastern Dsjamaika-Herzen up to the level of Bernjaty. The division was still 20 kilometers further back north of Michaliszki, the 77th Reserve and 115th Infantry Division in the area north of Bystritza another 12 kilometers further from the wing.

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1) 100 kilometers east of Molodeczno flowing from north to south.

2) C. 556.

## The Operation of the Supreme Commander East against Vilna.

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The cavalry corps had been instructed by Generaloberst von Eichhorn, in accordance with the directive of the Supreme Commander East, although not quite as far-reaching as the latter, to block the exit between Wilia and Beresyna for the enemy during the night. However, General von Garnier soon found himself heavily attacked by a superior enemy at Smorgon. The 4th Cavalry Division had to retreat behind the Wilia, as the eagerly awaited infantry did not arrive in time, and extend its right flank north to Zodziski; to its left, the 1st Cavalry Division held Smorgon as a bridgehead east of the river. The 3rd Cavalry Division, facing growing enemy resistance, unsuccessfully attempted to capture Molodeczno, against which the enemy was bringing additional troops from Minsk and apparently also from Lida. Although it had only 50 to 100 carbine shooters per brigade besides its infantry battalion, it attempted to block the front to the south in a width of almost 25 kilometers on both sides of Molodeczno. The 9th Cavalry Division under Major General von Heydebreck was directly tasked by the army command to destroy the Molodeczno-Polozk railway and advance further towards Minsk against the Russian retreat lines. Swinging sharply east, it reached as far as Glubokoje, where a Russian Cossack division was supposed to be; it was about 100 kilometers away from the battlefield at Molodeczno. The Bavarian 1st Cavalry Division of the Njemen Army, ordered by the Supreme Commander East, was not yet to be expected; it had enemy forces in front of it at Widzy, about 120 kilometers north of Molodeczno, but reported the intention to continue riding south the next day.

According to the reports available at the Eichhorn High Command in Kowno, which were mainly obtained from Russian radio messages, the enemy seemed to be in full retreat to the southeast with four corps. An eastern group of three additional corps sought to cover the northeastern flank of this movement against Wistritz-Smorgon, partly in defense, partly in attack against the German encirclement, while two newly introduced from the direction of Lida

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1) Actually more than five corps; starting from the Russian left wing: XXVI., XXXIV., II Caucasian Corps, 65th and 104th Infantry Divisions, V Caucasian and Guard Corps with a total of 13 to 14 divisions.

2) Actually only three corps: III Siberian, II, and V Corps with a total of 6½ divisions, the fourth assumed by the Germans (XX.) Corps had not yet appeared

Corps<sup>1)</sup> to attack Smorgon and others to roll from Minsk to Molodeczno. Accordingly, about eight Russian corps were still positioned west of Smorgon; their retreat had to be stalled in the area west of Molodeczno, as the overall retreat direction of the Russian army pointed north of the Rokitno swamps towards the northeast. From these circumstances, the German leadership hoped that such difficulties would arise for the enemy's movement that there was a prospect of cutting off significant parts, provided it was possible to strengthen their own left wing in time so that it made decisive progress southward.

The Commander-in-Chief East as well as the High Command 10, which was almost constantly in telephone communication with its corps, therefore repeatedly urged with all means to "shift to the left" to extend and strengthen the encircling wing. On September 18 at 7 p.m., General von Eben received the directive: The enemy in front of the Litzmann and Hutier groups, which was increasing today at Miedniki, would "according to reliable reports"<sup>2)</sup> break out tomorrow at 5 a.m. The Litzmann and Hutier groups would continue the pursuit on September 19 at 4 a.m. on both sides of the Wilna—Molodeczno railway. This would likely cause a congestion of the attacking troops unless it was possible to detach forces from the Eben group and "bring them through a subsequent march to the outer decisive wing; keep shifting everything to the left." The 115th Infantry Division was subordinated to the Eben group with the determination to advance it quickly between the Wilia and the Swir Lake. The cavalry corps retained its blocking task until infantry arrived; the Bavarian cavalry division was instructed again to advance on Krzywicz.

On September 19, the Carlowitz, Litzmann, and Hutier groups followed the retreating enemy frontally and were only held up here and there by rear guards, bridge demolitions, and terrain difficulties. In the evening, however, they faced new enemy resistance in a line running from south to Miedniki and then northeastwards. Also, in front of the right wing of the Eben group, where the 95th Infantry Division was given the attack direction southwest towards Globokko, on the railway west of Solo, the enemy had vacated its position during the night. The 31st Infantry Division was set as the new left wing of the group on Smorgon. Overall, it succeeded, despite

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<sup>1)</sup> IV. fib. and XXXVI. Corps.

<sup>2)</sup> Deciphering for intercepted Russian radio messages.

d) The Defense Against the Russian Counterattack and the End of the Battle.

Maps 6 and 7, Sketches 28 and 30.

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partly due to heavy enemy counteraction, west of the Disnjanka, to advance about eight kilometers southward, while east of the river

the 31st Infantry Division under Lieutenant General von Berner, after great marching efforts, gained connection in the evening ten kilometers north of Smorgon to the extreme northern wing of the cavalry corps.

The day was difficult for the three cavalry divisions that General

von Garnier had at hand. Before the gap between the 4th and

1st Division at Smorgon on one side, and the 3rd at Molodezno on the other

could be closed by right-turning this division, the

enemy had broken through the Wilia at Jatfienzize and thus reached the

flank of the bridgehead position held by the 1st Cavalry

Division at Smorgon south of the river. Countermeasures

were taken, the bridgehead had to be held. The division

commander, Colonel von Lenthe, himself reported that he would hold out during the day;

but if the 31st Infantry Division did not arrive by night, he could

no longer vouch for the outcome due to the exhaustion of his troops

and would have to retreat. The infantry division did not come. The enemy

engaged at the front was repelled, but remained so close that

retreating over the Wilia seemed only feasible with losses.

Colonel von Lenthe, who had three infantry battalions



and about double the equipment of machine guns and artillery at his disposal, decided to hold out further. Meanwhile, further east, the 3rd Cavalry Division had already had to give up its position in front of Molodezno due to the constantly strengthening enemy pressure and had retreated up to twelve kilometers north behind the Wilia; its eastern wing held Wilejka.

The advancing Russian 2nd Army now had to be assumed to be moving against the eastern flank of the German 10th Army. Consequently, a rapid continuation of the pursuit pressure was deemed necessary, with constant use of the eastern flank. To reinforce this, additional forces were to be withdrawn from the front. Furthermore, to defend against the new enemy, apart from the 9th Cavalry Division, which on this day, without encountering the enemy, rode via Glubokoje and reached the Polotsk railway at Poprize, 70 kilometers northeast of Molodeczno, infantry forces advancing behind the encircling wing were also considered.

Accordingly, Generaloberst von Eichhorn ordered the continuation of the attack for September 20. The 115th Infantry and 77th Reserve Divisions, which had reached the area west of Lake Swir, were to continue marching southeast towards Iza, with the command of the Hutier group and two additional divisions of the pursuit front to be held ready at Gernjatyn and westward.

The attack advanced the Carlowitz group by only about five kilometers, and the Litzmann group even less. The Eben group, despite successful and partly heavy fighting, was unable to achieve any significant change in the situation. The cavalry corps again faced the toughest situation, which, although relieved by the intervention of the 31st Infantry Division, was too late to assist the 1st Cavalry Division, which still held Smorgon on the morning of September 20. By noon, after three days of heroic resistance, it had to abandon the posts projecting about three kilometers over the Wilia from the rest of the front under heavy losses. Since then, the front of the Garnier cavalry corps left this area about eight kilometers northeast of the Wilia, only reaching it again at the river bend northeast of Jasiewiczze. From there to Wiliejka, the 3rd Cavalry Division had been able to hold on the Wilia. Further east, the Bavarian Cavalry Division arrived at Krzywiczze in the evening after a ride of over 60 kilometers; the 9th had advanced to Dolhinow, 15 kilometers southeast of it, so that now a stronger cavalry group was available on the extreme left flank.

Given the overall course of the last few days, in which the loss of Smorgon and the retreat at Molodeczno represented only a partial setback, the Eichhorn High Command was now of the opinion that the

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1) The Russians reported 350 prisoners and nine machine guns as spoils.

The enemy, "trusting in the relief that the reinforcements brought against the eastern flank

of the German 10th Army must bring, was determined to continue the resistance in the area southwest of Wilna"<sup>1)</sup>. All the more, it remained the case to continue the attack on the entire front with emphasis. Influence on the Russian retreat routes continued to be the guiding point. In addition, the defense against the new enemy had to be taken into account. In total, about four Russian corps<sup>2)</sup> seemed to be advancing against the line Smorgon—Wilejka and eastwards. On this more than 30-kilometer-wide front, there were previously only three German cavalry divisions, which were exhausted and severely depleted by the battles of the last few days. To replace them, a new group Huiter (42nd Infantry, 77th Reserve, 115th Infantry Division, behind it 75th Reserve Division) was formed from the advancing infantry divisions, freeing the cavalry for other tasks. When the Supreme Army Command inquired with the Commander-in-Chief East in the evening whether "a greater external success in the area south of Wilna was expected" in the near future, the answer was: "Hoping for a favorable outcome of the battle; no time can be foreseen; the battle will certainly last several more days."

On September 21, the 12th and 8th Armies were in pursuit up to just before Nowogrodek and, 20 kilometers beyond Lida, up to the lower Gawia. The command over the 12th Army, which had been reduced to only four divisions due to detachments, was taken over on that day by the previous High Command 1 from the west, General of Infantry von Fabeck with Lieutenant General von Kuhl as Chief of Staff, after General von Gallwitz had been tasked with leading a new army formed against Serbia.

With the 10th Army, the enemy vacated their positions in front of the groups Carlowitz and Litzmann. The pursuit was maintained but soon came to a halt again in front of a new cohesive Russian defense front. Against the Eben group, fierce attacks were repeated, which were conducted in large masses in places and repelled with heavy losses for the enemy. North of Smorgon and from there east to Wilejka, troops of General von Huiter could enter the front of the cavalry corps without a fight.

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1) War Diary of the Army High Command 10.

2) p. 506. In fact, from the Russian 2nd Army on September 20: at Smorgon XXXVI Corps, then southeast following IV Siberian Corps, Molodeczno XXVII Corps, behind it 1st Cavalry Corps, XIV Corps, and 45th S. G.

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(1st, 4th, and 3rd Division) to move in, from which large parts had been withdrawn. Extraordinary marching performances of the advancing divisions had been necessary for this. The 115th Infantry Division, forming the left wing in Wilenska, had covered 180 kilometers in the last five days; due to the exertion and the preceding battles, the combat strength of the battalions had dropped to about 300 rifles. Further east, the Bavarian and 9th Cavalry Division had been deployed from Krzywice and Dolhinow to the south and southwest to hit the flank and rear of the advancing enemy. Instead, they had to find that the Russian wing extended with infantry to Ilia, with cavalry even further east, thus still significantly surpassing the front of the 10th Army.

Meanwhile, the particularly difficult deciphering of a Russian radio message intercepted the day before had succeeded, which contained an order from the Russian Western Front. It read in its decisive parts: "The Russian 10th Army strengthens the reserves behind its extreme right wing, attacks vigorously, and seizes the line Sawelzy—Globodka, where it has to entrench itself as well as on the entire remaining front ... over Dsjmiany to the Gawia River. The 2nd Army accelerates its attack on the line Sawelzy—Narocz Lake." It was thus clear that the enemy wanted to hold between the Niemen east of Lida and the Wilna—Molodeczno railway with the front facing west, but attack north and east of the railway against the eastern wing of the German 10th Army. In view of this situation, the encirclement attack could not be continued. Generaloberst von Eichhorn had to decide to remain initially in defense against the expected further Russian attacks; he hoped to be able to extend his own eastern wing so far that he could still encompass it at the appropriate time. To relieve the rest of the front, the Carlowitz group was to attack sharply to the northeast on September 22. To give this frontal attack greater impact, the Commander-in-Chief East had already brought two divisions, the 4th Guard and 37th Infantry Division, from the 12th Army north behind the southern wing of the 10th Army. On the other hand, he had arranged for the Njemen Army to push forces south and for the 3rd Infantry Division to be assigned to it, as he still fully expected the possibility that Russian forces freed at this point could also be deployed in an eastern direction, over Polozk, against the German 10th Army. Above all, for this reason, he had

## The Operation of the Commander-in-Chief East against Vilna.

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"Significant damage"<sup>1)</sup> to his operations was felt, as the

Supreme Army Command had already withdrawn the 26th Infantry Division, which was ready to follow behind the 3rd Infantry Division, on September 19 and then held it despite all objections. How

urgent the situation on other theaters of war demanded this measure,

the Commander-in-Chief East could not overlook.

On September 22, General von Hutier wanted to leave the strongest part of the defensive front, the Wilia section from north of Smorgon to Wilia, on the eastern flank of the 10th Army, with one infantry division and two cavalry divisions,

while three infantry divisions, deployed for a comprehensive attack,

moved to the Wilia—Wiazyn line. The cavalry corps

Garnier, newly formed with the 4th, 9th, and Bavarian Cavalry Divisions,

was to act further east against the enemy's flank according to the orders of the High Command. These intentions were disrupted by Russian

attacks, which began early in the morning. The German front, previously advanced to the river in the Wilia bend Smorgon—Wilia, was pushed back to the straight line;

instead, General von Hutier had to deploy 1½ infantry divisions

alongside the cavalry here. Furthermore, as the 115th Infantry Division was already tied down by Russian attacks at Wilia and east of it, there were hardly 1½ divisions left for a thrust of the

left wing, which, however, were ready about twelve kilometers north of Wilia by rail.

Meanwhile, the Russian attack had extended so far east

that encirclement was no longer possible for these forces.

East of the 115th Infantry Division, the enemy had already crossed the Wilia; the three cavalry divisions of General

von Garnier could only intercept his advance in a 20-kilometer-wide

line, which was already four kilometers north of the river north of Rabun and only rejoined him at the Serwecz mouth<sup>2</sup>). However, the enemy now seemed to extend even further east.

The German attacks launched by the Carlowitz group and the 8th Army

achieved only purely local successes. The groups

Litzmann and Eben held their positions and were able to easily repel individual

Russian attacks.

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<sup>1</sup>) Telegram to the Supreme Army Command from September 19.

<sup>2</sup>) Northern tributary of the Wilia, not to be confused with the later mentioned Serwecz, left tributary of the upper Niemen.

It became increasingly apparent that the forces of the 10th Army were insufficient for an effective strike on the decisive eastern wing. The distance from the railway points precluded rapid reinforcement of this wing. However, the Commander-in-Chief East believed that the offensive could still be set in motion again through the frontal attack from the west after the arrival of the two reinforcement divisions, and he had not entirely given up hope of advancing to Minsk. He had already ordered the 8th Army, which was already beyond Lida, to push through to the northeast with all its might to Bogdanow, while the 10th Army was to "continue the attack" and the "Njemen Army," positioned with the main forces in front of Dünaburg, was to "as soon as possible provide a marching division" behind its right wing. When the attack made little progress during the day, he again pointed out to the 8th Army that now, after the Russians had thrown their entire 2nd Army against the encirclement of the left wing of the German 10th Army and were attacking very sharply, the pressure by the 8th Army towards Bogdanowo must lead to success.

For the continuation of the attack on September 23, only the right wing of the 10th Army was considered, where the Carlowitz group could be reinforced by the 4th Guards and the 37th Infantry Division, while General Litzmann also assembled a shock group of more than two divisions on his right wing. On the eastern wing of the army, General von Hutier no longer felt strong enough for his own attack; he wanted to wait for the Russian attack behind the Wilia and then counterattack; Generaloberst von Eichhorn agreed with this.

On the morning of September 23, the enemy was again retreating in front of the 12th and 8th Armies. But also with the 10th Army, he had cleared his entire front west of the Szymiana; the pursuit reached the line Olzany-Augustow area west of Soly. The enemy attacked the Wilia front all the more fiercely. Caught in the flank from the east, the 115th Infantry Division was forced to give up Wilieska in the afternoon, losing eleven guns; the 75th Reserve Division, expected east of the place since the morning, arrived too late to prevent complicity. The cavalry corps had to withdraw parts from the front to secure against the expected attack from the east.

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1) See p. 530. — 2) p. 536 f.

## The Operation of the Commander-in-Chief East against Wilna.

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and extend his position behind the Wilia over a width of 40 kilometers, to Milcza, towards the east. However, there was also a report that a demolition unit of the 3rd Cavalry Division had succeeded in destroying the Smolensk—Minsk railway southwest of Borissov.

For September 24, the Commander-in-Chief East had ordered the continuation of the attack, with the 8th Army receiving the thrust direction south of the Berezina crossing, ready to turn north. The 10th Army was to shift additional forces to its left flank and keep the bulk of the cavalry in the Dolhinow area ready to advance in a southeasterly direction. The 1st Cavalry Division was to be sent to the northern end of Lake Narocz for the disposal of the Njemen Army, so that together with the 3rd Infantry Division advancing from Kowno and a cavalry division of this army, it would block the area between Lake Narocz and Lake Dryswjaty. In execution of these orders, the 8th Army and the western flank of the 10th Army came behind the retreating enemy to Krewo and up to Smorgon. However, the entire eastern flank of the 10th Army was so tied down by Russian attacks that shifts to the left were out of the question.

On this day, the Commander-in-Chief East learned from the army group Prince Leopold that their corps, by order of the Supreme Army Command, should not initially advance beyond the Sczara east of Baranowicze and the Serwetsch. He himself had not received a corresponding order, wanted to try to advance towards Minsk, and requested the cooperation of the neighboring army group.

The next day, September 25, when the French attack broke out in the west, the following fundamental order of the Supreme Army Command was received: "His Majesty has ordered, in extension of the supplement to the directive of August 27, that Army Group Mackensen establish the position already taken by its left flank north of the Pripjet up to and including the Telechan Ognitski Canal for permanent holding. — Army Group Prince Leopold continues the pursuit only up to the approximate line Ognitski-

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1) The damage was (according to Knorr, p. 339) "repaired in a few hours." The decisive point, the Berezina Bridge near Borissov, could not be reached by the cavalry, as it was protected by a Russian battalion with artillery.

2) p. 489.



The canal from Telechany—Upper course of the Szczara—Serwetsch)—Mouth of the Beresyna into the Niemen continues, where it also immediately begins with the arrangement for the duration. — Army Group Hindenburg continuously secures the area between the mouth of the Beresyna into the Niemen and the coast.” Besides the already requested units, two general commands and six divisions, this army group will probably have to give up another general command and five divisions later. Two divisions are now to be moved to the railway as soon as possible, acceleration is very urgent due to the situation in the west.

On this day, the war diary of the Supreme Commander East states: “This is the first impetus to stop the operation. Only the meeting of the two moments: the order of the supreme army command and its halting of Army Group Leopold and the appearance of strong enemy forces from the northeast (near Dünaburg?) cause the Chief of the General Staff to advocate this. He is strongly supported in this view by the First General Staff Officer (Lieutenant Colonel Hoffmann).”

“12th Army and 1st Landwehr Division repel the enemy back over the Beresyna and then only follow with advance troops. 12th Army goes on the defensive in connection with the 9th Army at the mouth of the Beresyna. — 8th Army remains in attack against the line Wlozyn—Dubina. — 10th Army continues the attack.” It should generally not go beyond the Serwetz, the right tributary of the Wilia, with the Hutier group.

Meanwhile, the battle with the 12th, 8th, and 10th Armies had continued, but had not made any significant progress, although it was firmly engaged in some places. Thus, the 16th Landwehr Division of Lieutenant General Sommer, when it took Krewo on the night of September 24th to 25th, lost 17 officers and 800 men. The eastern flank successfully defended itself against fierce Russian attacks. The cavalry corps Garnier had to bend its left flank back from the Wilia to Dolhinowo in the face of increasingly encroaching Russian cavalry.

Also on September 26th, only local successes were achieved. Overall, the 12th and 8th Armies were positioned at the swamp section of the lower Beresyna from the mouth to east of Bogdanow, the right flank of the 10th Army from there to Smorgon, facing strong Russian positions. As all armies of the Supreme Commander East already had numerous forces fixed.

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1) Left tributary of the upper Niemen.

2) Probably meant Mitau (p. 537).

had been given and more were to be given<sup>1)</sup>), there was hardly any prospect of getting the movement in this eastward-directed section of the front going again. On the other hand, the left wing of the 10th Army, facing south with the front, was constantly threatened by superior Russian encirclement and by the uncertainty in the direction of Polotsk, so that without reinforcements, holding its current line for a longer period was out of the question. Therefore, Generaloberst von Eichhorn decided, with the consent of the Commander-in-Chief East, to bend this wing back from the Wilia behind the Serwecz to the north.

<sup>1)</sup> Deliveries from 1st to 26th September.

Status at the beginning of September

Given or still to be given \* to:

10th A. | N. A. | D. H. L.

(The underlined divisions should remain with the C. C. East)

12th Army (10½ Div.)

4th G. D., 1st G. R. D.

3rd, 26th, 35th, 36th, 38th, 54th, 86th I. G. D.

50th R. D.

1st/85th Ldw. D.

8th Army (5½ Div.)

37th, 83rd I. G. D.

75th R. D.

11th Ldw. D.

169th Ldw. Br.

10th Army (17½ Div.)

2nd, 31st, 42nd, 58th, 87th, 89th, 115th I. G. D.

3rd, 76th, 77th, 79th R. D.

10th, 14th, 16th Ldw. D., reinforced 6th Ldw. Br.

Div. Zenter, reinforced Br. Monteon,

Det. Eisbeck

N. Army (8 Div.)

41st, 88th I. G. D.

1st, 6th, 36th, 78th R. D.

Div. Bedtmann, Br. Homeyer,

Det. Libau

total: 41½ Div. 13 Div.

(The "Infantry Divisions" listed here with numbers from 83 to 89

were not composed of active troops.)

Thus, on September 26, with the cessation of the right wing of the army and the simultaneous retreat of the left, the idea of a comprehensive offensive battle was finally abandoned. When the army received the order from the commander-in-chief Ost the following day to take up a permanent position, it was a measure fully justified by the combat situation.

e) Operations of the Russians<sup>1)</sup> and Considerations.

Maps 6 and 7, Sketches 28, 29, and 30.

When Kowno, the northern pillar of the Russian Northwest Front, unexpectedly fell quickly on August 18, a breach had already been made in the overall Russian front, as the 5th Army operating further north in Courland had to cover the routes to Petersburg and its retreat direction was northeast. Thus, the right wing of the main Russian front, the 10th Army, was now threatened with encirclement from the north; its leader, General Radkewitsch, independently ordered a gradual retreat eastward to the right bank of the Njemen, while the 5th Army had already retreated northeastward against the lower Dvina under German pressure. This opened a gap about 100 kilometers wide between the two Russian armies in the direction of Wilkomierz-Swenzjany, creating the preconditions for a large encirclement operation against the Russians still holding at Wilna and south. However, a strong assault group to exploit the favorable opportunity was lacking.

When the German 10th Army advanced from the west against Wilna, General Alerjeew, the commander-in-chief of the Northwest Front, instructed his 10th Army on the 20th and again on August 26 to cover Wilna and the route to Minsk, thus protecting the flank and rear of the four armies (1st, 2nd, 4th, and 3rd) adjoining to the south. General Radkewitsch extended his right wing against the threatening encirclement over the Wilia to the north and was able to gather strong and mobile reserves from the retreating front in Poland. However, the forces intended to close the gap at Swenzjany were exhausted due to simultaneous demands from the front in Courland. The Russian 2nd and 1st Armies, with a total of 32 divisions, now faced the German 12th and 8th Armies, while the Russian 10th Army, with about 18½ divisions, faced the German 10th. Of these, on August 25, when General

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<sup>1)</sup> For overall operations see C. 451 ff.

<sup>2)</sup> See p. 481.



## The Operation of the Commander-in-Chief East against Wilna.

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Litzmann proposed to lead his three northern divisions to the right of the Williser and, encompassing from the north, to advance on Wilna, engaging eleven divisions from Druskeniki to the Wilia in the front line, but besides cavalry, which formed the outermost northern flank, also already three infantry divisions north of the Wilia. Furthermore, 4½ divisions were positioned closely south of the river near Wilna as a reserve, so it should not have been difficult for the Russians at that time to halt the German thrust north of the Wilia.

The following days brought the division of the Russian Northwest Front into North Front and West Front, with the gap from Svensziany falling to the North Front. Its left wing, the 5th Army, was to support the right of the West Front, the 10th Army, near Wilna as much as possible. Forces becoming available in Poland were to be directed to the North Front as a new 2nd Army in the Svensziany area. Meanwhile, however, this measure had not yet been implemented, with only a single division reaching the 10th Army. On the other hand, the German attacks conducted south of the Wilia in the last days of August had prompted the Russians to shift their focus in retreat approximately to the same extent northward as the German 10th Army had done through its regrouping. Thus, on September 8, the eve of their new attack, this army faced 15 Russian divisions south of the Wilia on an almost 100-kilometer-wide front, opposite the 1st and 10th Armies, while it itself had only seven divisions in this section (excluding the 76th Reserve Division pushed to the northern Wilia bank), four of which were not very combat-effective. North of the Wilia, 4½, including reserves staggered to the east of Wilna, 8½ Russian divisions were now ready to repel the attack, for which 10½ German divisions were designated. That was not a large surplus of forces. The German leadership also had to anticipate that the enemy would bring in further reinforcements, while they themselves, according to the decision considered by the Supreme Army Command, could hardly expect such reinforcements in any significant extent, rather had to be prepared for the withdrawal of forces. Reinforcements of the 10th Army at the expense of the 9th Army, which faced two Russian armies, were not considered feasible by the Commander-in-Chief East. It was all the more urgent to become completely clear about the goal and nature of the attack. Here, the idea of an immediate tactical victory over the enemy north of Wilna on the one hand, and the desire for deeper operational cuts on the other, were in conflict. To achieve both, it would be

Another army would have been necessary, initially positioned behind the encircling wing, to begin the attack northwest of Wilna and advance over Smenjany to Wiliejka. Since it was missing, there were concerns

about pursuing both objectives simultaneously. If one wanted to advance operationally into the depth of the Russian flank

with the limited forces available, encircle the enemy with a wide sweep and then crush them, one had to also take the risk of

further weakening the encircling front west and northwest of Wilna early on and carrying out the thrust into the depth with a group of at least

six, but preferably more infantry divisions. However, whether the enemy, who had shorter routes and good rail connections,

would not then return with troops from the front west of Wilna to defend against the encircling wing, depended primarily on the degree of surprise achieved.

It was also questionable to what extent a powerful, numerically strong encircling wing could be sufficiently supplied for a prolonged battle as it moved further from the railway. Thus, it seemed advisable to initially limit oneself to the tactical victory north of Wilna.

It was also considered to turn the encircling forces, which would be heavily used in this case as well, against the enemy's flank and rear as soon as possible. How far such a victory could then be exploited operationally had to be seen.

In fact, the attack begun on September 9 fixed 6½ German divisions against 4½ Russian divisions on the front measuring over 25 kilometers between Wilia and Schirwinta Lake, while three German divisions undertook a wide flanking march. Gradually, other forces followed them. By September 14, on the front now extending far eastward south of Schirwinta Lake, from Wilia to the lake, 5½ German divisions faced five Russian ones, from the lake to Schemjana three German against 2½ Russian divisions, and similarly east of Schemjana two against two divisions. Nowhere was there a German superiority that could bring about a decision; numerous enemy forces were still located between Wilia and Schirwinta Lake, where it was least expected, on the more than twice as long front east of the lake. Regarding the question of why more than half of the seven divisions originally assembled on the German northern wing for encirclement were used for the frontal attack and why, after that had happened, the group was not immediately moved southwest, the then first General Staff officer involved in the battle wrote,





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Officer of the 10th Army, Major Keller<sup>1</sup>): "The deployment became necessary to relieve the army units engaged in heavy frontal battles. The idea of encirclement was constantly kept in mind and accounted for by withdrawing the available parts from the front and shifting them eastward to maintain the connection and strengthen the encirclement wing. Sharp penetration by Group Eben was not yet ordered, as the combat situation at the front did not require it and only a wide encirclement could decisively disrupt the enemy's flank and rear."

How unfavorable the conditions developed was recognized by the Eichhorn High Command after the first days of attack, and since then, all efforts were made to strengthen and extend the encirclement wing by bringing up units withdrawn from the front. Whether such a procedure would have ultimately led to a significant result cannot be proven, as the Commander-in-Chief East prevented the attempt. In any case, the task had become much more difficult than it would have been with the immediate deployment of a strong flanking wing.

On the Russian side, the advance of the Germans over Swenzjany prompted them to instruct the 5th Army on September 12 to support the 10th again, to unload the first parts of the 2nd Army intended for the gap of Swenzjany directly behind the right wing of the 10th Army around Molodeczno, and finally to deploy the entire army there under assignment to the Western Front. The news of the imminent appearance of these new Russian forces prompted the intervention of the Commander-in-Chief East on the German side on September 14. Whether the actual danger was overestimated remains uncertain; the memory of the first days of Brzeziny played a part here. However, the tactical victory now sought at Vilna was not achieved to the extent hoped for, and the direction of the thrust was also not as successful as expected. The main reason is that the offensive power of the German troops was no longer sufficiently superior to the enemy's defensive effect. Above all, the forces of the southern wing of the 10th Army, as well as those of the 12th and 8th Armies, were so weakened by previous battles, losses, supply difficulties, and the gradual withdrawal of entire units that these parts of the German front were no longer able to break the enemy's more serious resistance. The Russians had to gradually withdraw from Stei-

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1) Communication from summer 1931 to the Reich Archive.

to retreat to position, but it is quite doubtful whether this was more due to the overall situation than to the local frontal pressure.

In any case, they were able to withdraw entire units from the front and move them by rail and foot march to the threatened flank. Thus, everything still depended on the rapid success and decisive outcome of the attack north of Wilna.

When the Russians then, instead of being encircled, also withdrew at Wilna, the German leadership's idea of the flanking envelopment movement came back into play. However, the prospects had again diminished after further loss of combat strength and time.

Already on September 16, the Russian Supreme Command intervened with the directive to further shorten the front of the 10th Army and to strengthen its right flank; by the 17th, they were reassured that in the German "Angebangsgruppe" east of Swenzjany, only cavalry, but no infantry, had been detected. General Ewert, Commander-in-Chief of the Western Front, now considered further withdrawal of his army to the line Michaliszki—Rasnjany—Nowo-sodew—Baranowicze necessary, so the Supreme Command ordered the execution. When further parts of the 2nd Army arrived in the Molodeczno area, General Ewert issued the already mentioned attack order for the 20th of September for these and the 10th Army, which became known to the German leadership through a radio message. The goal, the line Narocz-

Lake—Glubokaja—Gawja River, was not achieved in any way. The Russian Supreme Command, however, ordered on September 22 to withdraw the right flank of the 10th Army to Smorgon. The mission of the newly deployed 2nd Army remained to close the gap from Swenzjany and to attack.

In view of this development, the German leadership and their troops tried to salvage as much as possible from the situation.

In the effort to intercept parts of the enemy, the utmost was achieved under the strain of all forces. Meanwhile, so much time had passed that the pressure of the Russian 2nd Army forced the left flank of the German 10th Army into defense. When Colonel General von Eichhorn ordered the cessation of the envelopment maneuver on September 26, his 18½ infantry and five cavalry divisions from the Beresyna bend east of Bogdanow to Dolhinow on a 120-kilometer wide front faced 34 Russian infantry and six cavalry divisions,

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1) p. 519.

2) World War. Vol. VIII. 34

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thus facing almost double superiority. The major attack of the 10th Army did not have a fully satisfactory result, bringing in 16 days of fighting and marches only about 25,000 prisoners, with more than double the total own losses.

At the same time, the 8th and 12th Armies, through the successes of the 10th Army, again gained about 150 kilometers of space forward. The fact that the opponent, from the 32 divisions that had stood opposite at the end of August, gradually withdrew 15½ and was mostly back in battle at Vilna and to the north, was not to be overlooked, especially since at the same time the number of divisions of the two German armies had been reduced from 16 to only more.

The left wing of the German 10th Army had been extended far beyond Wilejka to the east. Although the tireless work of the railway troops had succeeded in restoring continuous rail operations after the restoration of the bridge and tunnel in Kowno as early as September 22 to the thoroughly destroyed tunnel of Landwarowo, 15 kilometers west of Vilna, the distances to Wilejka alone were already 120, to Dolhinow more than 150 kilometers, which had to be covered on poor country roads. Movements around battles took place here in an area that, completely untouched by the war, held abundant supplies immediately after the harvest. The rapid incursion over Swenzjany had come so unexpectedly to the Russians that they had no time to remove supplies or burn down villages as they had on previous battlefronts. It was added that on this left wing of the German attack over a wide area, only relatively weak forces were deployed, which were able to solve their task more through marching performances than through prolonged battles, so that the ammunition requirement was temporarily kept within tolerable limits. From these circumstances, it is explained that the troops here "never suffered from a lack of supplies. The enormous marching performances could also only be achieved by providing the troops with ample supplies. The companies, 50 to 70 men strong, ate their field kitchen empty once at noon and once in the evening"2). Part of the vehicle columns, which would otherwise have been required for supply replenishment, could be used for ammunition transport. Thus, complaints about supply difficulties in the 10th Army were only heard late and first from the army center and the right wing, where they soon

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1) G. 548.

2) Notes of Lieutenant General a. D. von Cochenhausen, then General Staff Officer of the 115th I. D.

assumed a similar extent as with the 8th and 12th Army. The railways ended temporarily about 150 kilometers behind the front at the destroyed Njemen bridges of Olita and Grodno). In addition, the constant leftward shifting necessitated assigning filled columns of the original flank divisions further extended, so that in addition to the distance of the route, other frictions arose, which became greater the more divisions had to follow along the entire front on the same approach route. Thus, it could eventually happen that, for example, a regiment of the army center reported it was combat ineffective due to a complete lack of supplies. An additional circumstance exacerbated the difficulties by interrupting traffic to Wilna for a day.

As the battles continued in the same area, the conditions had to become increasingly difficult. On the right flank of the 10th as well as the 8th and 12th Army, where the enemy had systematically destroyed numerous bridges during the retreat, the difficulties of warfare far from the railways became all too evident despite the still small number of divisions deployed. Similar complaints were repeated as with the Gallwitz Army already in August. A picture of the conditions is given by an entry in the war diary of the Plüskow Corps (General Command of the XI Army Corps), in which it is stated on September 5: "The 54th Infantry Division submitted a report on the worst condition of the troops due to excessive exertions and the completely inadequate supply. The mail, replacement of clothing items are missing. The wet weather is particularly noticeable due to the lack of any accommodation, as all localities are burned. The General Command is well aware of these entirely justified representations, and the General Command has repeatedly pointed out to the army that the troops suffer greatly in combat effectiveness due to the failure of supplies; the undernourishment of the horses appears quite worrying. In addition, apart from beets and potatoes from the land, which is systematically devastated, nothing can be taken. The demands on the corps columns are hardly manageable, and yet do not fully meet the urgent needs of the troops. The army was once again emphatically pointed out these difficulties and the disastrous influence they exert on the combat effectiveness of the troops." The justification of such complaints was acknowledged by the army command-

The command was also fully recognized. However, effective assistance was only possible if the forward movement was halted. But that could not be considered as long as there was still hope for success with the 10th Army.

When the Vilna operation was abandoned, the limits of what was possible in terms of supply were reached, as well as the strength of the troops: "They must first come to rest," wrote

a General Staff officer of the Commander-in-Chief East at the time<sup>1</sup>),

"Receive shirts and boots; everything is torn. Then the railways must follow the troops..."

The German troops and their leadership had, according to the unanimous judgment of all involved, including authoritative sources, once again achieved "superhuman" feats. "The advance and combat terrain

constantly placed the highest demands on man and horse due to its partly swampy, partly deep sandy and densely wooded ground conditions, which made oversight and the cooperation of the weapons extraordinarily difficult.

In doing so, the divisions had to fight in widths that exceeded the normal of an army corps — against an enemy who stubbornly defended himself in prepared positions<sup>2</sup>). A special task corresponding to its nature was assigned to the cavalry, which in wide-ranging

movements and multiple advances and retreats ahead of the infantry covered hundreds of kilometers and easily pushed back the numerically hardly inferior Russian cavalry everywhere. To break stronger resistance or to prevent the advance of Russian infantry divisions for a longer time had to exceed their strength. However, they

also achieved what was possible with the armament and equipment of the time.

"Our cavalry must take the tactical skill, courage,

and the unlimited drive of the German cavalry as a model," it was said in an instruction from the Russian Northwest Front

of that time<sup>3</sup>).

All in all, the last major offensive of the Commander-in-Chief East,

besides the possession of the large city of Vilna, resulted in

the enemy's entire front north of the Rokitno

swamps being pushed back another 80 kilometers and thus behind the important railway

cross-connection Lida—Dünaburg. The combat

strength of the Russian troops was, although they had suffered no losses in artillery,

once again decisively weakened. Especially

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1) Record of Colonel von Waldow.

2) From a communication by General von Hutier to the Reich Archive from summer 1931.

3) Knor, p. 340.



Despite all the skill the Russian leadership had shown in executing the operations in detail, their reputation suffered a new blow due to the retreat, which was all the more sensitive as it coincided with the time when the Tsar himself had taken command of the operations, with the decision to put an end to the previous retreat.

3. The Battles of the Njemen Army<sup>1)</sup> from mid-August to the end of September.

Maps 6 and 7, Sketches 26 and 28.

The N j e m e n A r m y under General O t t o v o n B e l o w had around mid-August a strength of about seven infantry and six cavalry divisions<sup>2)</sup>. It was positioned in a line that, starting north of Janow, ran to Szjenta, over the Birshi Lake to the Niemen River, then following its course, over Mitau to the Gulf of Riga. On this approximately 300-kilometer-long front, about nine Russian infantry and eight cavalry divisions<sup>3)</sup> seemed to be facing them. General von Below had, as before, to cover the northern flank of the Eastern Army and sought to solve this task as offensively as possible. His inquiry as to whether the army was later intended to advance on Wilna or Riga was answered by the Commander-in-Chief O s t on August 15, stating that the army should be prepared to advance "on Wilkomierz," thus against Wilna. When General von Below then gained the impression that the enemy, who had just harassed his left flank south of the Friedrichstadt-Mitau section, consisted there of weak and only few combat-effective troops, parts of the XXXVII Corps and cavalry, he believed he had the opportunity for tactical success by quickly seizing this position, and decided to advance from the area of Bausk and eastward to the north. The Commander-in-Chief O s t gave his consent in the order of August 19<sup>4)</sup>.

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<sup>1)</sup> Connection to p. 468 ff.

<sup>2)</sup> From the right flank: Cav. Corps Richthofen (5. R. R. 1 with 4., 3. and Bavarian R. D.) and Group Lauenstein (Gen. Kdo. XXXIX. R. K. with Div. Bredtmann 78. R. D.), I. R. R. (1. and 36. R. D.), Group Schmettow (5. R. R. 5 [newly formed] with 41. G. D., 2. and 8. R. D.), Brig. Homeyer, 6. R. D. with Det. Ribau and 3. Cav. <sup>3)</sup> p. 483.

<sup>4)</sup> Actually more than ten infantry and 9½ cavalry divisions.

On August 23, the operation led by the Higher Cavalry Command 5, Lieutenant General Count Schmettow (Egon), began, involving the 41st Infantry as well as the 2nd, 6th, and 8th Cavalry Divisions and the Horneyer Brigade. However, the main thrust expected from the first day's attack did not materialize. The intended surprise was not successful; the enemy had found time to evade the decisive blow of the 41st Infantry Division by initially retreating to a rearward position, thus escaping the encirclement intended for him. During battles, where the extensive and uncovered right flank occasionally caused concern, the advance approached the Dvina west of Friedrichstadt in the following days. When the Eastern Commander-in-Chief then ordered on August 26 to "continue to cover the enemy's flank," and to push the left wing of the army as far as possible to the Dvina, and the right in view of the advances of the 10th Army over Swienta, Friedrichstadt became the target of the Schmettow Group. In response to the repeated inquiry from General von Below, whether after the capture of this city the operation against Riga should continue or a strike against the enemy in front of the southern wing of the army should be carried out, the Eastern Commander-in-Chief decided on August 28, considering the operations of the 10th Army, for the latter direction.

Meanwhile, after the enemy had also been driven out of the Niemen bend southwest of Friedrichstadt, the assault on Friedrichstadt was to begin on August 29 after four hours of artillery preparation; it had to be aborted because the effect against the heavily fortified positions was insufficient. They wanted to wait for the return of the mortars temporarily assigned to the attack on Kowno. The command in this part of the front was transferred on August 31 to the Higher Cavalry Command 1, Lieutenant General Baron von Richthofen, with the task of pushing the Russians back over the Dvina section Friedrichstadt—Lennewaden and thoroughly destroying the railway running beyond the river Düna—Riga. After preparations and battles, the 8th Cavalry Division under Major General Count Schmettow (Eberhard) captured the Russian bridgehead at Lennewaden on September 2, and the 41st Infantry Division under Major General Schmidt von Knobelsdorf captured Friedrichstadt on September 3. Thus, the Dvina was reached. However, the destruction of the railway beyond the river could not be assigned to the artillery, which was primarily focused on the section at Lennewaden.

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1) p. 487.

held so effectively under fire that the Russians had to reroute traffic over Pleskau. In addition, the eleven-day operation captured around 5000 prisoners, almost half of them on September 2 and 3, and brought two guns as spoils.

Meanwhile, on the right wing of the army, the Lauenstein group had already been able to advance their lines at various points over the Swjenta by the end of August. Here, the 3rd Cavalry Division, after the 4th had withdrawn to the 10th Army, formed the right wing and advanced until September 3, following the advance of the cavalry corps Garnier of this army, into the area south of Wilkomierz.

The army group order of August 29 had not changed the task. General von Below wanted to attack the enemy, who was positioned in front of the center of his army, the I Reserve Corps, on both sides of the railway to Dünaburg. He intended to force them to retreat to Dünaburg by advancing the Lauenstein group on Uxkull in the south and encircling them with the Richthofen group from the north. The commander-in-chief East assigned the 88th Infantry Division, initially intended for the 10th Army, to the right wing of the Njemen Army.

The execution of the operation was delayed. The Richthofen group, in attempting to gain space for the later encirclement initially along the Düna to the east, towards Jakobstadt, encountered a strong enemy counterattack and therefore advanced only slowly. The high command had reports by September 9 that a new Russian 12th Army was forming north of the previously opposing Russian 5th Army, from parts of the 5th and newly brought-in troops. The Richthofen group, meanwhile reinforced by the 78th Reserve Division, was initially fixed opposite them at the Piktfer section. Furthermore, the army's other operations were under the guiding principle of covering the left flank of the German attack advancing on Wilna that day. To this end, on September 9, the Lauenstein group (now the 3rd Cavalry Division, Division Bredtmann, and following behind the 88th Infantry Division) on the southern flank, in direct connection with the cavalry's advance, launched an attack on Uxkull. However, it seemed urgent to push the Russians back across the entire front and also to break the resistance in the north. General von Below sought success in this.

also continued on the flanks, especially since Lieutenant General von Morgen was of the opinion that the forces of his I Reserve Corps, after multiple detachments, were no longer sufficient for an attack on the strong enemy front.

While on the right, the Lauenstein Group, under daily battles, especially the Beckmann Division, advanced further against Dünaburg and reached the height of Lake Alowitscha on September 11, the right wing of the Schmettow Group was to break through the Niemen into the northern flank of the enemy held by the I Reserve Corps on that day. Both decisions remained, even when a strong Russian attack from Jakobstadt hit the northern flank of the encirclement on the same day. "The continuation of the offensive of the right wing on Dünaburg was daring under these circumstances," it says in the war diary of the Eastern Commander-in-Chief. However, the success was not absent; on the night of September 12, the enemy retreated.

The pursuit, taken up with emphasis on the entire army front on September 13, led the right wing of the Niemen Army against the position in front of the small fortress Dünaburg, which had already been thoroughly explored in the extended bridgehead by aviators — stretching from Nowo Alexandrowo to Illuxt, about 15 kilometers in front of the Düna. The idea of penetrating them simultaneously with the retreating enemy proved unfeasible; the Russians halted the German advance at the fortified lake narrows west of Nowo Alexandrowo. Further north, German cavalry reached the extent of the Düna lowlands. Here too, the enemy held a larger bridgehead in front of Jakobstadt, which had a depth of about seven kilometers in difficult-to-access lowland terrain.

The main efforts continued to focus primarily on the capture of Dünaburg. The Eastern Commander-in-Chief also placed decisive importance on expelling the Russians from this bridgehead, which posed a constant threat to the German northern wing due to its railway connections. Furthermore, he was occupied with the idea of gradually gaining control of the entire left bank of the Düna, initially the bridgehead of Jakobstadt, but above all the extremely important large commercial and industrial city of Riga for Russian army supply. However, a lack of forces eventually forced him to abandon the latter goal.

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1) p. 519 f.

Near Dünaburg, the Russian position, interrupted over long stretches by lakes, extended from the Wilna railway in the south to the connection with the river in the north, covering a distance of over 60 kilometers. Five German infantry divisions<sup>1)</sup> were deployed against this; approximately equal forces were assumed to be opposite. After the arrival of heavy batteries, the northwestern section of the enemy lines was subjected to two days of effective fire on September 17. However, the subsequent assault only allowed the Bockmann Division to advance a larger section, where a particularly effective artillery flanking was possible across the lakes; the division captured 11,000 prisoners. The enemy then completely abandoned the lake positions on the night of September 20 in the face of a threatening new attack. The German encirclement line could be pushed forward beyond Nowo Alexandrowo to the east and thus significantly shortened. The attack undertaken on September 21 against the northwest section brought only local successes, while losses increased. In the 88th Infantry Division, composed of older age groups, more than half of the infantry regiment and battalion commanders were killed or wounded since the beginning of the attack. The striking power of the troops eventually diminished.

Meanwhile, since September 14, the Bavarian cavalry division had been sent south to take over the immediate rear protection for the 10th Army<sup>2)</sup> and then join it. On September 22, the 2nd Cavalry Division, which had been used north of Dünaburg, followed, and the next day, under the command of General von Richthofen, along with the newly arrived 3rd Infantry Division<sup>3)</sup> and the 1st Cavalry Division sent by the 10th Army, was to take over the security between the Narocz and Driswiaty lakes. Near Dünaburg, the Russians were gradually pushed back by the I Reserve Corps in tough fighting. On the other hand, an attack against the German positions near Mitau seemed to be preparing, where under General von Pappritz only troops with the strength of 1½ infantry divisions and ½ cavalry division<sup>4)</sup> were stationed.

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1) From the right: Group Lauenstein (Gen. Kdo. XXXIX. R. R. with 88. I. D. and Div. Bockmann), reinforced I. R. R. (36., 1. and 78 R. R. D.).

2) G. 508.

3) G. 519.

4) R. D., Abtlg. Libau, 18 R. Br.

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In this situation, on September 27, the army received the order from the Eastern Commander-in-Chief to take up a permanent position.

The Njemen Army had initially faced the Russian 5th Army<sup>1)</sup> under General Plehwe in the summer, with a strength of more than ten infantry and 9½ cavalry divisions<sup>2)</sup>, tasked with holding the Dvina line, especially Riga with the naval fortification of Dünamünde, and the fortress of Dünaburg. At the end of August, the right wing of the army below Jakobstadt was detached from the 12th Army under General Gorbatowski, but the number of troops deployed was only increased by three divisions (II Siberian Corps) and was not further increased with the immediate formation of the "Northern Front" under General Russki<sup>3)</sup>. Rather, the new Northern Front soon had to give up two divisions for the battle at Vilna<sup>4)</sup>. Even the reinforcements intended for it (several corps and the newly formed 2nd Army) were not provided, except for four infantry<sup>5)</sup> and some cavalry divisions. But even these reinforcements arrived at the Dvina only gradually and with great delays, the last only towards the end of September. As an emergency measure, a number of individual replacement battalions were transferred from the interior of the Reich.

Thus, the Russian Northern Front was able to hold its ground on the Dvina and in the bridgeheads of Riga, Jakobstadt, and Dünaburg against the repeatedly and skillfully conducted attacks of the numerically inferior German army, but was in no way able to carry out the offensive repeatedly ordered since September 12 to relieve the neighboring armies struggling hard northeast of Vilna<sup>6)</sup>. The fact that the railway along the Dvina was under German fire made the rapid shift of forces from the right to the left wing of the army group necessary. General Russki complained that his troops were insufficient to solve the tasks assigned to him; the reinforcements were delayed

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1) P. 448 ff. and 469 ff.

2) Starting from the Russian left wing: 2nd Finnish Div.; 3½ Cav. Div.; III Corps with 1½ Inf. Div.; XIX Corps with 2½ Inf. Div., 4½ Cav. Div.; XXXVII Corps with 1½ Inf. and 1 Cav. Div.; VII Siberian Corps with 3 Inf. Div., ½ Cav. Div. and some Abw. Brig.

3) P. 451.

4) P. 453.

5) 3 and ½ 2nd Finnish Div.

6) ½ XXIII, XXVIII, and ½ XXIX Corps.

## The Battles of the Njemen Army.

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The number and quality leave much to be desired; it seems that their front section is considered to have "only a third-class significance." The official Russian account considers these complaints of the Northern Front's commander to be exaggerated and points out that his Chief of Staff, Major General Bonč-Brujevič, reported on September 27 that the opposing German troops received mostly untrained 45-year-old militiamen and only a few young soldiers as replacements; their total strength had not changed. The account thus concludes that the Russian troops on this front showed insufficient resistance, as the Germans were weak in number, and their artillery played no decisive role, as they lacked large calibers. Over a wide area and with limited forces, on a 250-kilometer front with only eight divisions of infantry, German leadership and German troops also gave their best here, thereby covering the rear of the 10th Army's encirclement operation in an exemplary manner. This also raises the question of whether it might have been possible, instead, to deploy parts of the Njemen Army for an encirclement attack, which would have taken forces from an already extremely weak front against the Dvina. Given the two Russian armies facing each other on the Dvina and the possibility of their rapid significant reinforcement offered by favorable rail connections, such an attempt would have been a risk that was hardly justified by the overall situation.

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1) Njesnamow, p. 114 and 123 f.

2) p. 506, 510 note 3, and 543 note 1.