

## IV. The War Against Russia in the Summer and Autumn of 1915.

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A. The Front of the Commander-in-Chief East until July 2.

I. The Directive of the Supreme Army Command from April 16.

Map 18 Volume VII.

In the communication that the Supreme Army Command allowed the Commander-in-Chief East on April 16 regarding the intended operation in Galicia, it was stated that his cooperation through the longest possible deception and binding of the enemy north of the Pilica was a prerequisite for the success of the operation.

When this directive was issued, the Commander-in-Chief East had a total of 38 infantry divisions along his approximately 750-kilometer front from the Pilica to the Dvina near Memel, all of which were on Russian soil, most densely on the right wing, while the extreme northern wing was almost unoccupied over a stretch of about 200 kilometers. The battles that followed the conclusion of the winter battle in Masuria and were particularly fierce in the foreland of the East Prussian southern border had subsided since the beginning of the month. Combat strength and fighting power, however, especially among the infantry, were not yet fully restored everywhere, and artillery ammunition was constantly scarce. The formation of three new infantry divisions (101st, 103rd, and 105th) from contributions of existing divisions was underway.

In detail, the situation was as follows:

From the Pilica east of Tomaszow to the Vistula halfway Plock-Nowogeorgiewsk, the 9th Army stood along the Rawka and Bzura. Its front thus advanced 20 to 30 kilometers compared to the neighboring armies. As the successor of General von Mackensen, he led

## The Front of the Commander-in-Chief East until July 2.

Field Marshal Leopold Prince of Bavaria took command. He had a total of 11½ infantry divisions, of which 7½ were active and reserve divisions, and two cavalry divisions. These forces had been in close contact with the enemy (Russian 5th and 2nd Army) on a front width of about 100 kilometers since the December battles, facing an estimated 15 divisions in well-developed contiguous positions.

To the right of the Vistula from Plock to the Szwa north of Ostrolenka, the Gallwitz Army Group covered a front width of about 260 kilometers with 12½ infantry divisions, of which 7½ were active and reserve divisions, and two cavalry divisions. The enemy's deployment was also lighter here, with a greater distance from them than with the 9th Army. It was estimated that there were about 14 divisions of the Russian 1st Army as opponents.

East of the Szwa, the 8th Army under General of Infantry Otto von Below joined in similar conditions, holding a section almost 100 kilometers wide with 6½ infantry divisions, of which only three were active and reserve divisions, up to east of Dipowice. The opposing Russian 12th Army was estimated at 14 divisions; a corps was already missing from the units identified in front of the front in March.

The 10th Army under Colonel General von Eichhorn stood with 7½ infantry divisions, of which six were active and reserve divisions, and two cavalry divisions on a front width of about 120 kilometers forward of the 9th Army.

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1) Volume VII, G. 295.

2) 9th Army from the right: Reinforced XI. A. K. (Corps Plüskow with Div. Menges 22nd and 38th I. G. D., 29th Div. Br.), Corps Frommel (H. R. R. 3 with two brigades of the Corps Posen, 9th and 8th R. R. D.), XXV. R. R. (50th and 49th R. R. D.), XVII. A. K. (35th and 36th R. D.), III. G. R. (Corps Beseler with ½ Corps Posen, 5th and ½ 6th R. G. D., Abt. Westenthagen). — The equipped units mainly consisted of Ldw. and Sht. troop parts.

3) Gallwitz Army Group from the right: Corps Dichhuth (Corps Thorn with 1st G. R. D., 2nd and 6th R. D., 3rd R. D.), Group Albrecht (2nd G. R. D., 1st and 1st G. R. D.), Corps Surén (formerly Jastrzow with Br. Pfeil, Div. Bregel and 10th R. D. Bernik), Corps Watter (Gen. Kdo. XIII. A. K. with 3gl. 3rd and 26th I. G. D.), I. R. K. (1st and 36th R. D.), Corps Kosch (Gen. Kdo. I. A. R. with 2nd G. R. D., 11th R. G. D. Br., 37th and 39th R. D.). Furthermore, the 10th Army section included: 78th G. R. D., 9th R. D.

4) 8th Army from the right: 75th G. R. D., 3rd R. D., 10th R. D., Corps Scholtz (Gen. Kdo. XX. A. K. with 41st G. R. D., 1st Ldw. D., 3rd R. D. with 6th Ldw. Br., 11th Ldw. D.).

5) 10th Army from the right: XXXX. R. (79th and 80th G. R. D.), Corps Lauenstein (Gen. Kdo. XXXIX. R. with 73rd and 92nd I. G. D.), XXI. A. K. (31st and 42nd S. D.), 4th R. D., 16th Ldw. D., Abt. Eidesfeld, 1st Ldw. D., 2nd Ldw. D. Behind the front: H. R. R. 1 with 3rd and 3rd Bavarian R. D., 2nd Lwmt.

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Line Rajgrad—Suwalki—Marjampol. From this place northwest to north of Memel, only Landwehr and Landsturm secured a width of 200 kilometers in the total strength of a weak division as well as a cavalry division. Similarly, as far as was known, the Russian 10th Army south of Marjampol stood with about 15 divisions, while north of it essentially only second-order troops in strength of at most two divisions were assumed.

At Memel, the German eastern front leaned on the sea, which was still dominated by the weak German Baltic Sea forces under Grand Admiral Heinrich Prince of Prussia. The Russian Baltic Fleet was still held in the ports by the ice conditions.

Reliable experiences in trench warfare were still lacking at that time. In view of the overall situation at his front, Field Marshal von Hindenburg had doubts whether the deception or binding of the enemy demanded by the Supreme Army Command would be possible. His Chief of Staff, Lieutenant General Ludendorff, also held "little of such frontal attacks"). Above all, the task of holding the enemy was — as he wrote to General von Gallwitz on April 19 — "contrary to our previous views, difficult to carry out against a strongly entrenched enemy and without sacrificing our own troops; this should not happen according to the opinion of the Field Marshal" (Chief of Staff von Hindenburg had already reported to the Kaiser on April 17\*) that he would deceive and hold the enemy to the best of his ability. However, since this was expressly designated as a prerequisite for the success of the operation in Galicia, he had to dutifully report that he could not guarantee that the enemy, who was currently almost twice as superior in infantry, would not free up forces for other uses.

To solve the assigned task as much as possible, the Commander-in-Chief East wanted to engage the Russians at several points. As a larger enterprise that would bind the enemy for a longer time, he could only envisage a deeper thrust into the sparsely occupied area north of the Njemen, roughly as had been under discussion since the end of March\*). In addition, only smaller local skirmishes were considered, which were intended to temporarily mislead the enemy.

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\*) From a communication by General Ludendorff to the Reich Archives from March 1931.

\*) Volume VII, C. 362.

\*) P. 106 and Volume VII, C. 296.

## 2. The Attack on Lithuania and Courland.

Maps 5 and 6, Sketches 10 and 11, and Map 18 Volume VII.

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The 9th Army was ordered by the Commander-in-Chief East, from April 27 onwards, "through lively fire from groups of heavy artillery concentrated at suitable locations, through increased reconnaissance activity and advancing saps to create the impression that a general German attack is imminent." The execution of this order temporarily increased combat activity, which was then suspended on May 3, the day after the start of the attack in Galicia.

In the Gallwitz Army Group, the diversionary operations were conducted in a similar manner as with the 9th Army. They brought the I Reserve Corps on April 27 at Jednorozec northeast of Przasnysz about 500 prisoners and three machine guns as spoils.

The 8th Army wanted to solve the task by an advance of its right wing. The attack planned for April 29 between Szlawa and Pissa, led by General of Cavalry Burggräf and Count zu Dohna-Schlobitten, however, only led to territorial gains on the extreme right wing at Lipnitz and had to be abandoned elsewhere without having reached the enemy position. The artillery effect was not strong enough. However, it seemed that the enemy, under the impression of this attack decision, had temporarily halted the already initiated transport of his XV Corps.

In the 10th Army, they sought to deceive the enemy with heavy artillery fire, which suddenly began on the night of April 27. Subsequently, the 76th Reserve Division under Major General Elstermann von Elster pushed back Russian advance troops east of Suwalki over a width of about 20 kilometers. This advance was also intended to divert the enemy from the main operation beginning at the same time north of the Njemen.

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1) Volume VII, pp. 282 f. and 296.

this question was affirmed and an advance north of the Njemen was envisaged. The cavalry units brought in from the west by the Supreme Army Command, the 3rd and Bavarian Cavalry Divisions, were initially stationed at the southern border of East Prussia, as the operation was not yet feasible due to the snowmelt.

Since the insignificant March battles, calm prevailed north of the Njemen. Landwehr and Landsturm under General Lieutenant von Pappritz, with the strength of a weak division, and the 6th Cavalry Division kept watch here. A 12 to 15-kilometer-wide strip was free up to the foremost Russian defenses; they stood east of Jurburg, and their line extended northwards from there over Konstantinowo to the coast north of Polangen; the very extensive deployment had a total extension of 150 kilometers. Behind them, stronger forces were assumed, especially at Stawwile, where half of the 68th Infantry Division was to stand. Everything else seemed to be less combat-effective Landwehr troops, which, according to the view of the Commander-in-Chief East, were not even an equal opponent for the German Landsturm. All in all, they reckoned with a strength of only about 25,000 men with 20 machine guns and 22 guns. This enemy enjoyed the protection of the large Njemen fortress Kowno on its southern flank, while its northern flank, the former war port Libau, was virtually unoccupied.

The Commander-in-Chief East wanted to push the Russians away from the Njemen and Kowno with a surprise attack to intercept their main forces. Given the numerical weakness and low combat strength of the enemy, this seemed to be a particularly rewarding task for cavalry. The infantry was to serve merely as a reserve and only intervene if stronger resistance hindered the expected rapid advance.

The forces designated for the operation were only assembled in the attack area immediately before its commencement. There were a total of about three infantry and three cavalry divisions<sup>1)</sup>, which were directly subordinated to the Commander-in-Chief East under the commanding General of the XXXIX Reserve Corps, General Lieutenant von Lauenstein, as a special "Army Group." Each cavalry division was again assigned an infantry battalion, as in the mobile warfare, and the vehicles were exchanged for lighter ones as necessary. Nevertheless, the extremely unfavorable road conditions required

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<sup>1)</sup> Gen. Rdo. XXXIX. R.K. with  $\frac{3}{4}$  78. R.D. from the 10th Army, 6th R.D. from the 9th Army, Abt. Pappritz (previously Efsched), 5th R.R. 1 with 3 and Bavarian R. K. 2.

## The Front of the Commander-in-Chief East until July 2.

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Supply was difficult; however, it was hoped to find sufficient provisions for the small troop strength in the vast area that had been scarcely touched by the war. The Commander-in-Chief of the Baltic Sea Forces requested the involvement of a cruiser squadron.

On April 22, the Commander-in-Chief East instructed Lieutenant General von Lauenstein in Libau to "destroy as much as possible" the Russian forces north of the lower Njemen; under protection against Kowno and Libau, the railway connecting these places and all telegraph lines were to be thoroughly destroyed. Since the later reuse of the assigned troops south of the Njemen was anticipated, the bulk of the cavalry was not to exceed the mentioned railway, and the mass of the infantry was not to exceed the Kielmy-Telsche line. These objectives meant covering a distance of 90 kilometers in a straight line for the cavalry, while the infantry was assigned about 30 kilometers less.

Lieutenant General von Lauenstein wanted to envelop the enemy primarily through sharp pressure from the south. The right wing group was therefore made the strongest; it consisted of the cavalry corps of Lieutenant General Freiherr von Richthofen (3rd and Bavarian Cavalry Division) and  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the 78th Reserve Division, which were to assemble at Jurborg. Furthermore, the following were prepared: at Tauroggen the Pappritz detachment, at Tenenie the 45th Brigade of the 6th Cavalry Division, at Wenzingany the 12th Reserve Infantry Brigade of the 6th Reserve Division, and at Russian-Rottingen as the left wing again a stronger group:  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the 6th Reserve Division and  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the 6th Cavalry Division. To protect the right flank of the attack, the 10th Army was to occupy Schaft. In front of the left flank, the fleet was to drive away the reported Russian forces near the coast at Budwendingshof with fire. Additionally, the commanders on land desired to distract the enemy by feigning a landing at Libau and other feigned operations before Windau and Riga. However, the available naval forces were insufficient for such extensive operations. The navy had to limit its commitment to shelling Budwendingshof and a demonstration before Libau.

On the evening of April 26, all parts of the Lauenstein army group were ready. The situation with the enemy seemed unchanged. Lieutenant General

## The Attempt to Intercept the Enemy.

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von Lauenstein demanded "strong marches" from the flank groups so that the enemy would not escape. This mainly concerned the Russian 1/268 Infantry Division reported at Stawdwile. It was positioned on the main road leading from Tilsit via Tauroggen to Schaulen, which, alongside the coastal road Memel—Libau, was the only solid road in the entire operational area at that time. Against this most combat-effective part of the enemy's formation were deployed: the cavalry corps to advance into its rear, 2/78 Reserve Division to attack from the south, the 25th Cavalry Brigade, starting later, from Tauroggen towards Stawdwile. The cavalry units were to advance independently of the infantry so that their greater marching speed could be fully effective.

On the night of April 27, movements began.

The Richthofen Cavalry Corps, which was to "in a wide encirclement... particularly disrupt the retreat on the only major road Tilsit—Schaulen," had already covered an approach of about 20 kilometers when it set out from Jurburg. During the day, the Bavarian Cavalry Division under Lieutenant General von Hellmuth reached Rossienie after another march of 50 kilometers without combat. The 3rd Cavalry Division under Lieutenant General Kurt von Unger was delayed by congestion at the Niemen crossing. Lieutenant General von Richthofen himself rode with them. After an advance of about 40 kilometers, the division encountered the enemy east of Stawdwile in the afternoon, which they identified as a flank cover, while other Russian forces were supposed to be retreating northwards on the main road towards Kielmy. General von Unger attacked the Russian flank cover and pushed it back. Only at night around 11 o'clock, when the foremost parts of the 78th Reserve Division were already approaching, did the 25th Cavalry Brigade, deployed against the main road itself, continue. In the middle of the advance, the weak enemy had everywhere vacated the field in time before the advancing German units.

On the extreme left flank, the 6th Cavalry Division under Lieutenant General von Graf von Schmettow had already encountered resistance at the Mingé section near Korciany, which they could not break. In view of the difficult conditions off the main road, they awaited the intervention of half of the 6th Reserve Division, which, under Lieutenant General von Schichtus, launched an attack around noon at Neudorff, while the bulk of the Cavalry Division raced behind their front. Only in the evening could the infantry cross the Mingé; the cavalry remained behind. Two Russian Landwehr battalions had fortified

Advance halted 15 kilometers from its starting point for a full day.

At dawn, two small cruisers of the Baltic Sea forces briefly shelled Budwendingshof and then advanced towards Libau.

General von Lauenstein in Tilsit, based on the reports received on the evening of April 27, believed that the enemy was still standing at and east of Staudwile and that the road from there to Schaulen had already been blocked. The detachment Pappritz, positioned from the southwest on the main road against Staudwile, reported after dark that they had encountered a "strong enemy" before Staudwile. Thus, General von Lauenstein set the 3rd Cavalry Division, the 78th Reserve Division, and the Pappritz detachment for an all-encompassing attack on Staudwile on April 28, with the Bavarian Cavalry Division moving from Rossiliene north towards Kielmy.

At 2 a.m. on the night of April 28, the 25th Brigade, dispatched by the 3rd Cavalry Division, reached the enemy's retreat road at the Kryszborg crossroads, nine kilometers northeast of Staudwile, and learned that a strong enemy had already marched through in the direction of Schaulen. By 5 a.m., the 3rd Cavalry Division had reports indicating that the enemy had marched northeast from their front at Staudwile. A delayed radio message from General von Lauenstein also arrived, ordering the blocking of the main road to Schaulen "with strong forces still on the 27th."

At the General Command in Tilsit, the completely changed situation was learned too late. But even the leader of the Cavalry Corps with the 3rd Cavalry Division did not see it so clearly that he would have been prompted to now set both divisions past Kielmy for a far-reaching pursuit. Thus, the Bavarian Cavalry Division rode on April 28, according to the General Command's orders, towards Kielmy, with the 3rd Cavalry Division and 78th Reserve Division following the enemy along and on the main road. At Kielmy, the enemy offered resistance. The Bavarians under Lieutenant General von Hellmuth attacked him from the flank around noon. An attempt to overtake him was not made. Also, an eastern reconnaissance detachment of the Dubissa (two squadrons and a gun), which had already reported at 10 a.m. on the enemy's continued march from Kielmy to Bubje, did not attempt to reach the Dubissa bridge there before him.



## The Attempt to Intercept the Enemy.

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rather, it moved against his flank. When the Russian resistance ceased in the evening, the 3rd Cavalry and 78th Reserve Division had also arrived to the left of the Bavarian cavalry.

On the rest of the front of the army group, the enterprise, which had begun with great hopes, also turned into a purely frontal pursuit. The 6th Cavalry Division was positioned on the evening of April 28, with its foremost parts ten kilometers west of Telsche, only about ten kilometers from the foremost infantry. The enemy was in full retreat everywhere and had also lost several hundred prisoners. However, the goal of the operation, to decisively strike him, was not achieved. Parts of the Baltic Sea fleet had cruised off Libau at noon, as long as the weather made a landing attempt seem plausible.

The Commander-in-Chief East expressed his dissatisfaction with the previous results of the operation. He expected, as General von Richthofen conveyed to his divisions on the evening of April 28, "more tomorrow" as well as a report on why the main road Staudwile—Schaulen had not been blocked as ordered on the evening of April 27. As a new pursuit target, also for the infantry, he now set the line Radziwiliski—Schaulen—Popeljany, thus the course of the railway Wilna—Libau.

General von Lauenstein positioned the 78th Reserve Division and behind it the Pappritz detachment on the main road against Schaulen; the cavalry corps was to extend to the right and left of the road to get behind the enemy. The 78th Reserve Division found the bridge of Bubje destroyed at noon and the east bank of the Dubissa occupied; Major General von Müller immediately turned north over the Windau Canal to gain the enemy's flank and the way to Schaulen. The Bavarian Cavalry Division was also held up by destroyed bridges. Thus, by the evening of April 29, only the line Szawlany (Bavarian Cavalry Division)—area six kilometers west of Bubje (78th Reserve Division, behind it Pappritz detachment)—Kurschany (3rd Cavalry Division)—Strick (6th Cavalry Division, behind it 6th Reserve Division) was reached. Cavalry patrols succeeded in interrupting the railway Wilna—Libau on both sides of Schaulen by blasting. Reports from residents and agents about Russian reinforcements, which were supposed to be advancing on foot and by rail from Kowno, were not confirmed by air and cavalry patrols. The 78th Reserve Division resumed its advance after a short rest in the middle of the night to April 30, but was met with Russian resistance

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held up and only reached Schaulen at noon; the enemy had already withdrawn. The Bavarian cavalry division, which was deployed over Radziwiliski against its southern flank and rear, only managed to damage the troops marching north on the main road with artillery fire, and then withdrew just east of Schaulen. The 3rd Cavalry Division, deployed from the west against the Russian retreat road, had already exhausted part of its forces in the area of Kurschany in skirmishes against smaller Russian units. With 13 squadrons and 2½ batteries, the division commander managed to reach the main road north of the wide and often swampy Muscha section before the enemy; by sending the 25th Cavalry Brigade to Janischki, where it was to block with its front facing southwest, the combat strength of the division was further weakened. The parts left behind at the Muscha were surprised by Russian artillery fire; the enemy seemed to be unfolding in the forest southeast of the section, beginning to encircle. Without knowledge of the situation and the whereabouts of the other units, the division commander now considered his forces too weak to hold off the enemy. Losing three guns, he retreated to the northwest. The crossing over the Muscha section was free for the enemy, who now drove out the 25th Cavalry Brigade at Janischki during the night and thus finally escaped.

The line given as the advance target by the Commander-in-Chief East was reached. Due to the threat from Kowno, the right wing had to be halted. On the left flank, Libau posed a certain danger. With the cooperation of the fleet, it could probably be taken easily and thus perhaps gain an important port for later operations. Thus, General von Lauenstein received the order on the evening of April 30 to hold the land west of the Dubissa; only the 6th Cavalry Division and smaller infantry units were to remain advancing on Mitau. The operation against Libau was to be prepared so that it could begin by May 5 at the latest.

These instructions had no influence on the events of May 1. The day passed with pursuit operations by the entire cavalry. However, from Kowno, a new enemy seemed to be advancing. On May 2, parts of the 3rd and 6th Cavalry Divisions managed to intercept a scattered Russian battalion with four guns north of Schaulen. In the evening, the cavalry corps stood east of the Schaulen road

## Conclusion of the Operation against Schaulen.

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— Mitau on both sides of the Muscha, the 6th Cavalry Division was located 20 kilometers southwest of Mitau at Grünhof and advanced to within two kilometers of the city the following day. Thus, the pursuit concluded on the evening of May 3.

In total, about 20 Russian battalions, 20 squadrons, and 30 guns, mostly militia, were stationed north of the Njemen. The preparations for the German operation had not gone unnoticed by them, as reliable cordoning was not possible due to the vastness of the area. The main Russian forces, ½ 68th Infantry Division, had left Stawdwile on the afternoon of April 27 and diverted the German 3rd Cavalry Division from continuing southward by a lateral movement. They could only have been shaken off if the entire cavalry corps had immediately taken up the overtaking pursuit east of the Dubissa on the morning of April 28, to advance near Buhje. Whether this would have succeeded given the partially pathless roads remains uncertain, raising the question of whether it might have been more expedient to direct the cavalry corps more eastward from the outset, towards Schaulen and Buhje instead of Rossienie and Stawdwile.

The enemy was able to march unimpeded on the main road from Kielmy to Buhje on April 28 and hold here and later at Schaulen for a full day. It was only towards the evening of April 30 that they reached the Muscha section, which they also crossed unimpeded during the night of May 1 after evading the German cavalry stationed there. Thus, despite the not at all hasty withdrawal of the Russians, the numerically and combat-power superior German forces, positioned from a favorable direction, including more than 40 heavy and as many mounted batteries, despite the utmost efforts of rider and horse, failed to capture the enemy. Across the entire front of the army group, the spoils by May 3 amounted to about 2000 prisoners and four guns. The tactical goal of the operation, intercepting and destroying the Russian forces north of the Njemen, was not achieved.

attempt. The Dubissa line is soon to form the basis for the raid of the cavalry divisions towards Vilnius. After the implementation of the new divisions planned by the Supreme Army Command<sup>1</sup>), it is intended to strengthen Group Lauenstein as much as possible to launch a new offensive."

General von Falkenhayn replied the next day: "His Majesty has ordered: According to the considerations under which the transfer of the 3rd and Bavarian Cavalry Division was carried out<sup>2</sup>), the most important goal of Army Group Lauenstein is to maintain the impact against the enemy's rear connections on the right bank of the Niemen. Whether a coup against the difficult-to-access Libau from the land side is advisable must be left exclusively to Your Excellency's consideration."

Since this involves the participation of a large part of the fleet, early notification of the intended action is required. Regarding a later new offensive by the group to be strengthened, it was pointed out that given the difficult overall situation<sup>3</sup>), it is not necessarily certain whether the new divisions to be set up by the Commander-in-Chief East could remain with him. It is rather assumed that he will also draw reserves for his own use from the front in addition to the new formations.

The former Russian naval port of Libau had been removed from the list of fortresses since 1910, but still held significance due to its location on railway and road, its port facilities, and, though outdated, works. These were supported by the natural strength of the place; between sea and lakes, three narrow straits formed the only accesses to the city. The attack had

to be conducted over partially swampy terrain crisscrossed by watercourses, so that a tenacious defender could hold off even a strong superior force. The garrison was expected to be very small at the time. Since the capture of Schwalen, an important land connection of Libau was in German hands, German warships controlled the sea. Thus, the Commander-in-Chief East considered the moment particularly favorable for the capture of the place; he believed he could achieve this with small forces and thereby improve the rather unfavorable rear connections of Group Lauenstein by capturing a Russian railway junction. Upon inquiry with the Commander-in-Chief of the Baltic Sea Forces, he received his cooperation most willingly assured. He reported to the Supreme Army Command,

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that the desired cavalry operation would not be hindered in any way by the attack on Libau.

In total, only five battalions, nine squadrons, eight batteries<sup>1)</sup> were to be deployed, which had been gathering since May 1 in the Salanty—Budeningkshof line. General von Lauenstein entrusted the command to the commander of the 3rd Cavalry Brigade, Colonel von der Schulenburg, who was ordered to begin the advance on May 5 and to quickly conclude the capture of Libau; the attack itself was to be directed best against the eastern front, where the heavy artillery could be most effective. He was to be supported by Rear Admiral Hopman, who had seven cruisers at his disposal after reinforcement by the IV Reconnaissance Group from the North Sea<sup>2)</sup>. The 6th Cavalry Division was to secure against Mitau.

Without combat, the main forces of the Schulenburg division approached from the south. On May 6, they reached the Bartau section east of Libau, which was unoccupied; a side detachment advanced along the coast. Reconnaissance submarines and naval aircraft received weak fire from light and medium artillery at Libau itself. The fortifications of the land front appeared to be blown up. On May 7, the advance met no resistance but was delayed by bridge destructions. In the afternoon, German artillery opened fire from land and sea; it was not returned. After completing all preparations, the assault was to take place the next morning. Meanwhile, the small side detachment, consisting of Landtrum and supported by ship fire, had already occupied the southern fort and the southern part of the city. On the morning of May 8, the main division also entered the place. 1600 prisoners, 12 mostly older guns, 4 machine guns were the spoils of the operation; valuable raw material stocks were found. A weak enemy had retreated north.

Libau had been under the command of the Russian Baltic Fleet commander, Admiral von Essen, who, on April 30, in view of the German advance on Schaulen and the appearance of German fleet units before the city, ordered the withdrawal of the garrison (3½ battalions and auxiliary weapons) and the destruction of the fixed guns and defenses-

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<sup>1)</sup> Including I.R. of the 6th R.D., two Ost. Btle., 3rd K. Br. (from the 8th Army), five light, three heavy (including one Mtz.) batteries, one Pi. Btl. with siege train.

<sup>2)</sup> For more details on the fleet's involvement, see Seefrieg, Baltic Sea, Volume II, p. 57 ff.

## The Front of the Commander-in-Chief East until July 2.

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had ordered facilities. Upon the objection of the Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Northwestern Front, he then received orders from the Supreme Army Command to reoccupy Libau and, if necessary, support land operations from the sea. To what extent attempts were made to carry out these orders is not known.

### c) Defense against Russian Counterattacks, May 3 to 14.

The Lauenstein Army Group continued to hold the area west of the Dubissa\*). As the advance against Libau was imminent on May 3, its troops were organized as follows: 70th Reserve Infantry Brigade of the 36th Reserve Division (I Reserve Corps), previously army reserve, arrived at Jurburg; main part of the former Pappritz detachment, about one brigade, under Major General Baron von Esebeck at Rossienie; 6th Reserve Division at Kielmy; 78th Reserve Division at Schaulen; Richthofen Cavalry Corps northeast of Schaulen on both sides of the Musa, including the 1st Bavarian Cavalry Brigade at Schadow and Stednik; 6th Cavalry Division in front of Mitau; Schulenburg detachment at Salanty, ready to advance against Libau.

The attempt to intercept a Russian infantry and a cavalry division advancing from the east against Rossienie on the morning of May 4 by encircling them from all sides failed. The Russians withdrew in time but remained on the western bank of the Dubissa. A new enemy appeared at Schadow and engaged the cavalry corps in various battles. The 6th Cavalry Division had to retreat before Mitau; since then, it covered the operation aimed at Libau. On May 6, it succeeded in pushing the enemy east of Rossienie over the Dubissa and gaining the eastern bank; however, blocking the Russians' retreat did not succeed this time either. The cavalry corps assigned for this purpose had suffered significantly from previous marches and battles with limited supplies, and its already low combat strength was severely reduced by frequently changing reconnaissance tasks. Now it was fully engaged by a new enemy appearing at Rejdamy.

The Commander-in-Chief East prepared the rest of the I Reserve Corps under Lieutenant General von Morgen to reinforce the army group. He was soon to take over the defense against Mitau. On the southern flank, the eastern bank of the Dubissa was to be temporarily

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be maintained to preserve the impression of German superiority for as long as possible.

On May 7, the Bavarian Cavalry Division of the Richthofen Cavalry Corps advanced deeply east of Kiejdany into the rear of the local enemy and interrupted the railway to Vilna near the Wilia. However, breaking the Russian resistance in the area of Kiejdany itself was not successful. Three Russian cavalry divisions were supposed to face them, and according to prisoner statements, a Russian corps was also to be unloaded. From Mitau, where the unloading of a corps was also reported, the enemy, advancing on the main road, reached Janischki and also moved with at least seven battalions north of the Mitau—Murawjewo railway in the direction of Libau, which was already on the verge of falling by the evening of the day. It became apparent that the enemy could bring reinforcements on four main railways, each from Vilna, Dünaburg, Jakobstadt, and Riga, while on the German side, they were dependent on marching on foot from the border. The Russians apparently assembled 2½ corps and three to four cavalry divisions in the Rowno—Poniewiez—Mitau area. Thus, the operational goal of the German enterprise against Russia, diversion of the enemy and withdrawal of his reserves, was achieved. Already, apart from the forces previously stationed in the section, a total of four infantry divisions and two cavalry divisions were deployed, which were absent elsewhere.

The Commander-in-Chief East wished to hold on to the successes achieved. This was all the more difficult as the front had experienced a significant bulge and was now about 100 kilometers longer than the starting line Jurburg—Tauroggen—Polangen. However, on May 7, the Supreme Army Command<sup>1)</sup> demanded "in case Italy should intervene in the war on the side of our opponents," significant forces from the Commander-in-Chief East. The three newly to be established infantry divisions<sup>2)</sup> would then in no way suffice. Given the seriousness of the situation, in such a case, all considerations of secondary importance would naturally have no significance; the Commander-in-Chief East would then have to be assigned a purely defensive task. Should this change as a result of the victory in Galicia, the withdrawal of forces would be unnecessary. Field Marshal von Hindenburg replied that, in addition to the new divisions, he would also...

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<sup>1)</sup> Volume VII, p. 420. — <sup>2)</sup> p. 103 and 114.



could free up troops, including the 1st Reserve Division of the I Reserve Corps; parts could now already be dispatched.

If these tasks had to be carried out, there was hardly any prospect of holding the conquered territory north of the Njemen; at times, however, it was thought to hold it. General von Lauenstein wanted to lead the defense at the Dubissa and take connection to Libau to the northwest, utilizing the Windau course, which offered secure support by the sea. Whether Schaulen, which was important as a large place and held rich supplies, but lay forward of the Dubissa-Windau line, could be held was questionable.

When Libau was taken on May 8, the Supreme Army Command initially refrained from transporting the 1st Reserve Division and the Russians advanced from Mitau, the Commander-in-Chief East wired to Pleß: "We must now know what significance Libau has for the navy. For the time being, we are setting up Libau for defense and want to hold it." The intention to bring an infantry brigade there by sea had to be abandoned, as Admiral Hopman could not guarantee the safety of the crossing. On May 9, the Supreme Army Command replied that the navy had no interest in holding Libau permanently and could not provide troops and combat resources for this purpose. Any reinforcement work could "therefore only serve deception purposes." Consequently, the Commander-in-Chief East decided to hold Libau at least as long as circumstances permitted. The Supreme Army Command agreed, but the general situation currently compelled "to avoid incidents as much as possible, which could be interpreted by our opponents as a serious setback with a semblance of right. Any intended evacuation of the city must be announced by us in a preventive manner beforehand." Troops and material should only be stationed in Libau as far as secure withdrawal was guaranteed. Serious combat for the city should not be engaged in, because it would then be "difficult to portray the Lauenstein operation as a deception raid, which it will probably come to in the current situation."

Under the leadership of Lieutenant General von Pappritz, who was appointed governor of Libau in the meantime, the expansion of the place into a base for the German left army wing began. The Commander-in-Chief of the Baltic Sea forces also continued to attach importance to the possession of the port, but also pointed out that the support

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1) Volume VII, p. 420. — 2) Naval War, Offsee, Volume II, p. 88 ff.

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from the sea due to the withdrawal of part of his ships to the west could no longer be guaranteed.

On May 10, the Russians approached the Dubissa and attacked at Schaulen. In this situation, the Supreme Army Command demanded the provision of the two divisions offered by the Commander-in-Chief East. However, it seemed advisable to at least bring the battle that had just begun at Schaulen to an end; then one would clear the field as a victor, not as a retreating party. The Supreme Army Command agreed.

The Lauenstein Army Group was prepared for defense on the morning of May 10 as follows: The 36th Reserve Division, along with the Sießebd detachment, formed the southern flank over almost 50 kilometers. The Dubissa provided a certain hold to this extremely thinly occupied section, even if the water could be waded through in numerous places. The Richthofen Cavalry Corps was retreating to the river line to close the left flank of the "Morgen Corps," which was to defend the main road at Schaulen. Anchored to the right by marshes and lakes, its 78th Reserve Division held the heights surrounding the city, while the 6th Reserve Division was still far off in its march to the left flank of the corps. In the area of Murawjewo, 60 kilometers northwest of Schaulen, the 6th Cavalry Division had retreated behind the Windau, and east of Libau stood the 3rd Cavalry Brigade. Two more cavalry brigades were advancing from the Memel area towards Telsche; they were followed by the 1st Reserve Division.

At Schaulen, the Russian attack penetrated deep into the northern flank of the 78th Reserve Division during the day. General von Morgen was forced to abandon the city to the enemy with serious losses. On May 11, the German 6th Reserve Division intervened and captured 1400 prisoners. Despite this success, the arrival of the 1st Reserve and 6th Cavalry Division did not manage to break the Russian resistance and advance again on Schaulen. The enemy was estimated at 3½ infantry divisions and one cavalry division, with another division reportedly arriving at Janischki. General von Morgen decided to withdraw the left flank for defense to the Windau and allowed the 1st Reserve Division to retreat to Kurschany.

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1) 18th and 38th R. Br. — 2) The Russians captured several hundred prisoners and seized five guns.

d) Extension of the Battles to the Southern Bank of the Njemen, May 13 to 24.

The northern wing of the 10th Army<sup>1)</sup>, which lay south of the Njemen opposite the large fortress of Kowno, had only accompanied the forward movement of the Lauenstein Army Group as far as Schaki. It consisted north of the Insterburg—Kowno railway of the 39th Cavalry Brigade and some Landsturm companies, securing a front more than 50 kilometers wide. Initially, calm prevailed here. However, since May 13, the enemy seemed to be strengthening in the forest area west of the fortress and drawing forces from the northern bank of the Njemen. On May 14, they advanced to Schaki and thus deep into the southern flank of the German position on the Dubissa. Generaloberst von Eichhorn anticipated a strong attack and took extensive defensive measures.

At this time, the Russian front in southern Poland was already in retreat<sup>2)</sup>. The Commander-in-Chief East expected, if the movement also extended to the area north of the Pilica, as preparation for this, strong Russian relief attacks on both sides of the Njemen. This was the view of Generaloberst von Eichhorn, who dispatched the 29th Landwehr Brigade from the 9th Army and other available smaller units to the northern wing of the 10th Army. Between the Njemen, the border position was fortified as a fallback and equipped with artillery from East Prussian fortresses; the only reserve of the Dubissa section was moved against the Njemen to Jurborg. On May 15, contrary to expectations, the Russians attacked the Lauenstein Army Group against the Dubissa and established themselves north of Ciragola on the west bank of the river. However, the 10th Army saw the situation much more favorably on May 16 than two days before and intended to go on the offensive itself as soon as all reinforcements arrived. Even the Commander-in-Chief East felt "a certain relief"<sup>3)</sup>. Nevertheless, it was questionable whether the forces would be sufficient to continue holding the front at Schaulen. First, the situation on both sides of the Njemen was to be secured with all available forces, and the 78th Reserve Division stationed at Schaulen was to be incorporated. The Commander-in-Chief East agreed that General von Morgen should continue to withdraw further westward in the face of strong Russian attacks.

May 17 brought clarity to the 10th Army. The attack led by General Litzmann on the northern wing was successful. The Szeszup from Pilwiski to Schillebnen and at Jurborg already

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<sup>1)</sup> p. 104, 106 and 108. — <sup>2)</sup> p. 132 f. — <sup>3)</sup> Ludendorff, *Memories*. p. 115.

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The assembled German forces, all in all about two mixed divisions of infantry, whose core was the "Division Bechtmann," and one and a half cavalry divisions<sup>1</sup>), pushed the enemy back without difficulty and captured 1700 prisoners. Further successes were expected for the following day. When the Commander-in-Chief East was asked by the Supreme Army Command on the morning of May 18 about his intentions in the area north of the Njemen, he confidently replied: "The intention remains to hold the line of the Dubissa and Windau, as well as Libau, at least until the rich national supplies are transported away and the fortified border position is completed, which will take a considerable amount of time." However, on May 18, the overall situation with the Army Group Lauenstein became more difficult again. The enemy also entrenched themselves immediately south of Ciragola on the western bank of the Dubissa. To intercept the Russians, if possible, the 78th Reserve Division was to advance east across the river. Meanwhile, General von Lauenstein had the security line south of Ciragola withdraw about ten kilometers westward during the night of May 19, as the left wing of the 10th Army was still behind. At the same time, the situation north of Schaulen intensified. Airmen had identified about one and a half Russian divisions in Bornarsk advancing from the northeast against the line Kurschany—Libau. General von Morgen withdrew his troops on May 19 to the line Bubje—Windau Canal—Trischtj and northwest; he was to cover the rear of the impending German attack on the Dubissa. In any case, the less mobile parts of the artillery deployed in Libau began to be withdrawn.

On the night of May 20, Major General von Müller led his 78th Reserve Division, reinforced by cavalry, northeast of Rossienie through a ford across the Dubissa to attack. The surprise succeeded; 800 prisoners were taken. Before the advancing new enemy, General von Lauenstein withdrew the division back to the west bank the following night. Meanwhile, the left wing of the 10th Army approached behind the retreating enemy at the mouth of the Dubissa.

Meanwhile, General von Falkenhayn had urged on May 20 that it had become known to him that the Commander-in-Chief East at

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1) 1spl. Div. of Major General Bechtmann (Commander of the 80th R. D.), reserves of the Dubissa section, 1st R. D., 17th and 39th R. Er.

Reinforcement by two army corps is considered possible to "force the final decision in our struggle against Russia." Such a configuration of circumstances would be of utmost value given the threat from Italy, as he need not elaborate further. He therefore asked how the implementation was planned and whether it could be foreseen when significant forces would again be available for other tasks. The Commander-in-Chief East immediately replied that a final decision against Russia could not be guaranteed even with the transfer of two additional army corps. However, it would be possible to conduct "effective vigorous strikes" through the deployment of at least three newly formed divisions at his front. An attack to destroy the Russian forces north of the Njemen, estimated at seven to eight divisions, or a breakthrough on the Kalvarja—Marjampol line was conceivable. He also expected much from their deployment with the 9th Army, where a gas attack was being prepared. However, he could not specify an exact time when these forces would again be available for other tasks. If he received no reinforcements, the 9th Army could free up at least one division after the gas attack; another division could be released if the currently occupied Russian territory north of the Njemen, including Libau, were evacuated. Given the current strong Russian troop concentration, an entire corps could only be spared there if the surrender of the Memel district were accepted. For an oral discussion of all these issues, Lieutenant General Ludendorff would come to Pleß if desired.

The result of a meeting held on May 23, the day of Italy's declaration of war on Austria-Hungary, in Pleß was that large new undertakings in the area of the Commander-in-Chief East were not currently feasible. The need to hold the current front line had to be reconciled as much as possible with the necessity of freeing up more troops for the Supreme Army Command, for which General Ludendorff was quite willing. In accordance with his offer, the three newly formed divi-

Negotiations with the Supreme Army Command. 125

pions (101st, 103rd, and 105th Infantry Division) in the coming days were to be withdrawn, with five more to follow gradually, namely: the 3rd Infantry Division from the Army Group Gallwitz and the 41st from the 8th Army after the arrival of 15 to 18 mobile Landsturm battalions, which General von Falkenhayn had promised, a newly forming 107th Infantry Division, a division of the 9th Army after the execution of the gas attack, a division after the expansion of the border defense position Jurg—Tauroggen—Polangen. After the transfer of the last five divisions, the Commander-in-Chief East emphasized in a report on May 25, he would have "no reserves available to balance difficult operations." He then had only about 34 divisions for the approximately 850-kilometer stretched front, which mostly counted only three regiments, while in April for 750 kilometers he had 38 divisions with four regiments and correspondingly stronger artillery<sup>1</sup>). This weakening could be compensated less by the increased allocation of machine guns and advances in position, especially obstacle construction, as with the beginning of the dry season many previously impassable terrain sections for attacks by the knowledgeable Russians no longer posed obstacles. Despite these extensive troop withdrawals, the battle north of the Njemen was to continue according to the Supreme Army Command. The enemy had advanced west of the lower Dubissa in recent days and had also entrenched north of Rossienie on the

western riverbank. At the same time, he had attacked the Morgen Corps in the front and from the north comprehensively. The leader had thought of retreating, but General von Lauenstein insisted on holding and counterattacking with his own left wing. The operations brought 1,400 prisoners on May 22. The danger at this point was initially averted. Meanwhile, north of Rossienie on the Dubissa, the Beckmann Division, assigned from the 10th Army, had also intervened. On May 24, they managed to push the enemy back across the river; 200 prisoners and ten machine guns remained in German hands. General von Lauenstein now also wanted to clear the situation at the lower course of the Dubissa. Meanwhile, a change in command occurred. With the growth of the Lauenstein Army Group, more and more

the need arose to replace the commanding general command with a higher authority. In the report that the Commander-in-Chief East submitted to the Supreme Army Command, he particularly expressed that General von Lauenstein had conducted the previous operations to full satisfaction. In four weeks of uninterrupted, strenuous marches and battles, his troops had captured a total of about 20,000 prisoners, 16 guns, and 40 machine guns. About five and a half German infantry and three and a half cavalry divisions had, as far as was known, drawn eight to nine Russian infantry and four and a half cavalry divisions upon themselves.

e) Battles of the 10th and Njemen Army, May 25 to July 2.

On May 25, the Commander-in-Chief East transferred command to General Otto von Below with the staff of Army High Command 8 over the now-called "Njemen Army" troop formation north of the Njemen. Initially, this was only thought of as a temporary state, which was to be changed again after the conclusion of the battles on this front. The command of the 8th Army was transferred for this time to the commanding general of the XX Army Corps, General of Artillery von Scholtz. General von Below received verbal instructions during the passage through Lück to "hold and exploit the area north of the Njemen as long as possible, to inflict as much damage as possible on the enemy"; if the current line became untenable, the army should fall back to the border position, which could only be fortified in about 14 days; the fortress of Libau should not be abandoned without the express permission of the Commander-in-Chief East.

When General von Below took command in Tilsit on the evening of May 26, a serious setback had just occurred on the right wing of the Morgen Corps, as the 6th Reserve Division had lost the strong position at Buhße and had retreated about six kilometers westward; they had lost over 2000 men, most of them prisoners. General von Morgen intended to retake the lost ground the next day through a counterattack. Parts of the cavalry corps Richthofen, which was connected to the south, were to participate. But also against the southern flank, the Russian pressure had increased so much that General von Lauenstein had already ordered the 36th Reserve Division on May 24 to retreat further west if necessary and at the same time to create space for an attack, which was now to be carried out by the 78th Reserve-



Division on the western bank of the Dubissa from north to south. The command over the parts deployed south of the cavalry corps (36th Reserve Division, Siebel Detachment, 78th Reserve Division, and Bedtmann Division) and thus also the execution of the impending attack was now taken over by General von Lauenstein himself. More than four Russian infantry divisions seemed to be facing him.

On May 27, the counterattack against Bubie was unsuccessful. General von Morgen wanted to further withdraw his heavily exhausted southern flank, but General von Below refused permission; the current line was to be held. It ran roughly halfway between Bubie and Szawlany from southeast to northwest from the Dubissa to the Windau. In the Lauenstein group, the attack on May 27 brought some successes, and on the 28th, the enemy retreated significantly, losing more than 3000 prisoners; however, his southern flank was still able to hold about 20 kilometers west of the Dubissa. The German line was now at the same level as the left wing of the 10th Army. Otherwise, the days passed with skirmishes now at this, now at that point of the more than 200-kilometer-long army front. The enemy had already re-established himself on the western bank of the Dubissa southeast of Kielmy on May 28 and had taken four guns from the German Landsturm. On the other hand, he evacuated the western bank of the lower Dubissa on May 30. On June 1, he unsuccessfully attempted to advance further at Szawlen, losing 500 prisoners in the process.

Here, General von Below expected further attacks. He intended to prepare reinforcements arriving from the border (2nd Cavalry Division, 72nd Reserve Infantry Brigade of the I Reserve Corps, and some independent units) on the northern flank of the Morgen group, so they could intervene as soon as the enemy continued his offensive. At the same time, he withdrew the Bedtmann Division from the front at the Dubissa to also capture the expected Russian attack from the south. However, if the enemy delayed until all reinforcements had arrived, General von Below intended to launch an attack himself and lead it in the direction of Szawlen. The fact that the enemy re-established himself at several points on the western bank of the lower Dubissa on June 2 and 3 did not change these intentions. Since he remained calm in front of General von Morgen's group, General von Below now wanted to attack from the south. Generalleutnant von Richthofen was entrusted with the leadership. On June 4, the Bedtmann Division advanced over the Dubissa at Budwiany to attack, but initially had only five battalions at hand and therefore faced stubborn resistance again.

## The Front of the Commander-in-Chief East until July 2.

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to gain only a little ground on the eastern bank. By the evening of June 6, however, the Richthofen Group had established a foothold on the eastern Dubissa bank over more than 20 kilometers in width and about 10 kilometers in depth. Meanwhile, on the night of June 5, both wings of the Morgen Group had also launched an attack and were successful. Above all, by the evening of June 6, the commanding heights of Bubie east of the Dubissa were encompassed and retaken; 5000 prisoners were brought in.

At the same time, south of the Njemen, the left wing of the 10th Army under General Litzmann (79th Reserve Division, 1st and 4th Cavalry Division) had penetrated the Kowno Forest. Generaloberst von Eichhorn hoped to force further parts of the Russian front to retreat by swinging this group south.

General von Below now wanted to expand his successes into a breakthrough through the Russian front, with the Richthofen Group turning south and the Morgen Group carrying out the attack on Schaulen. To this end, the Commander-in-Chief East recorded in his war diary: Even if a concentrated deployment of all available forces on the northern wing (left wing of Morgen) had promised greater success from the outset, he did not misjudge the development of the situation. If the Njemen Army, which now reported an apparent weakening of the enemy, wanted to achieve a decision by pushing southeast and northeast, the Commander-in-Chief did not want to intervene; but only against a defeated enemy could the breakthrough with these weak forces have lasting success. General von Below himself was full of confidence and hoped, in further operations, to gain support with the left wing at Mitau from the lowland area of the Aa and thus from the Gulf of Riga, in order to then concentrate forces for further operations behind the center of his entire front. The Commander-in-Chief East agreed with these thoughts. The northern wing of the 10th Army had also made further progress and approached the positions of the fortress in the Kowno Forest. A new gas attack was imminent with the 9th Army. In Galicia, Przemyśl was recaptured, and now Lemberg was reached. Thus, the Commander-in-Chief East now viewed the overall situation with hope. Lieutenant General Ludendorff explained to Colonel Tappen: After the decisive victories in Galicia and the recent successes of the

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It seems to me beyond doubt that by deploying even just two more divisions north of the Niemen, we can achieve a success there that will significantly contribute to the destruction of the Russian army. I request that my opinion be reported to the Chief of the General Staff of the Field Army, with which the Field Marshal agrees." Since General von Falkenhayn had traveled to the Western Front at that time, the response came only on June 11; it referred the Commander-in-Chief East to the 3rd and 41st Infantry Divisions, which were to be withdrawn after the arrival of the assigned Landsturm battalions. He agreed with this as well, although about ten more days had to pass before the divisions became available.

Meanwhile, the success of the 10th Army had expanded southward, with 3,000 prisoners taken in the Kowno Forest. On June 9, the front ran from the Niemen bend near Sapieszki (15 kilometers west of Kowno) south to Szeszupa north of Marjampol. General Litzmann proposed, under the impression of this success, to concentrate all available heavy artillery against the positions of Kowno and demand the fortress's surrender after overwhelming bombardment. However, the army's resources were insufficient to carry out this idea. Therefore, the Army High Command decided that the attack should continue southward to roll up the Russian front. By June 13, it was possible to advance about ten kilometers south of Marjampol.

In the meantime, the Niemen Army had gained further ground east of the Dubissa and against Schaulen, capturing about 7,000 prisoners since June 4. However, the enemy had strengthened so much that the prospect of further major successes had diminished. General von Morgen was tasked with temporarily securing a position that leaned on the right to Lake Rakieno and controlled the Schaulen—Libau railway with the northern wing. This goal was achieved in part through stubborn fighting by June 13; again, more than 5,000 prisoners could be reported. Meanwhile, the left wing, consisting almost exclusively of cavalry (6th and 2nd Cavalry Divisions), had been significantly pushed back from the Kurschany—Popeliany line.

On June 14, the Commander-in-Chief East of the Niemen Army ordered that the current position be held until the reinforcements, expected in about a week, arrived, then

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1) p. 123.

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but the army should "by a wide-ranging encirclement of the enemy's right wing defeat the forces in front of it while securing against Riga" and further destroy the railways leading eastwards from the Janow—Mitau line up to and including the Wilna—Dünaburg—Riga route. Whether only cavalry divisions reinforced by infantry or the entire army should be used for this would depend on the war situation; however, "the last possibility should be considered to prepare an advance of the army north of Kowno." On June 16, it was already doubtful again whether the two promised divisions would not still be claimed by the Supreme Army Command for other purposes<sup>1</sup>).

In the 10th Army, the German attacks continued and increasingly extended southwards. On June 15, an operation led by Lieutenant General Elstermann von Elster of the 76th Reserve Division at Kalwarya captured 2000 prisoners. In accordance with the assigned task, General Litzmann repeatedly set new attack targets in mobile warfare. However, the strength of the troops began to wane. The attempt to break through south of Kalwarya to roll up the Russian position to the south led on June 18 only to minor territorial gains but to heavy losses.

On June 20, the Commander-in-Chief East reported on the overall situation to the Supreme Army Command: The gas attack of the 9th Army, on which the release of another division depended, had to be postponed due to unfavorable winds<sup>2</sup>). The operations assigned to the Army Group Gallwitz<sup>3</sup>) to tie down the enemy remained ongoing, the 8th Army<sup>4</sup>) was no longer capable of attacking after its reorganization. "10th Army has encountered strong enemy positions; however, it will be able to hold the gained ground. Njemen Army has strong enemy forces in front of it." Further Russian troop movements against the army were to be expected but could not be prevented. Under these circumstances, the Commander-in-Chief East again requested the right of disposition over the 3rd and 41st Infantry Divisions, whose gradual replacement in the current section begins today, and added: "I would thereby be able to hold the land north of the Njemen, in the best case to strike here; otherwise, I would likely be forced to give up territorial gains north of the Njemen." Now General von Fal-

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1) p. 244. — 2) pp. 123 and 136 ff. — 3) p. 137 f. — 4) p. 104.

The railway freed the two divisions. In the staff of the Commander-in-Chief East, there was renewed hope, and preparations for future operations in the Njemen area began. According to the war diary on June 20, the enemy was "slowly but inexorably shifting his forces to our left wing." The thrust of the Njemen Army was to be directed against the enemy's right wing with the two divisions, not before early July. Whether the 1st Guard Reserve Division from the Gallwitz Army Group could also be deployed was being considered. "Assessment of the overall situation: This pressure on the Russian northern flank is all the more promising because the main forces of the enemy are tied up and severely shaken in Galicia."

The Commander-in-Chief East also considered the possibility of taking the fortress of Kowno. For a discussion on this idea, first suggested by General Litzmann, the First General Staff Officer of the 10th Army, Major Keller, was called to Lötzen on June 21. There he was informed that the 3rd Infantry Division, heavy batteries, and siege formations could be made available so that they would be ready before the fortress by early July. In view of reports on the small number and combat strength of the garrison, the inferiority of the artillery equipment, and the moral impact of the heavy blows suffered in Galicia, the Commander-in-Chief East considered it possible to take the fortress by coup de main and strong artillery preparation. However, no noticeable setback should occur; the operation should be initiated in such a way that, in the event of the coup de main failing, the troops seemed ready to initiate a planned siege. Major Keller, on behalf of Generaloberst von Eichhorn, acknowledged the possibility of a coup de main, but the forces seemed very small in the face of the danger of flanking on both sides. He therefore suggested rolling out the enemy front over Simno to the south or breaking through over Preny towards the Bialystok—Wilna railway; for both operations, the deployment of a fresh army corps was necessary. The latter operation, incidentally, had a quicker effect against the Russian front in Poland than the deployment of strong forces north of the Njemen. However, the Commander-in-Chief East ordered the coup de main against Kowno to be prepared, subject to any changes.

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1) Diary entry of the current Colonel von Baldow from June 21, 1915

## The Front of the Commander-in-Chief East until July 2.

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With the 10th and Njemen Army, the days until July 2 were spent preparing for the deployment of the anticipated reinforcements. In the 10th Army, a well-executed local attack operation by the brigade of Colonel Baron Digeon von Monteton on July 1 at Kalwarya captured more than 700 prisoners. In the Njemen Army, the enemy was slightly pushed back on the northern flank of Group Morgen at the middle Windau with the deployment of the newly arrived 8th Cavalry Division from the 9th Army. Here, the enemy seemed to be preparing for further retreat. A General Staff officer of the Commander-in-Chief East wrote on June 27: "A report from yesterday we cannot yet explain: In the area of Frauenburg, everything is supposed to be burning, and everything is being hastily removed from Windau. Either the Russians are retreating there and destroying all goods and supplies, or a revolutionary movement is being diverted onto the poor Germans... In Riga, all factories are being relocated to the interior of the Reich."

The Navy also prepared for the continuation of operations in Courland, where it could play an important role. On June 23, it was pointed out by the Supreme Army Command that "later action against Riga is within the realm of possibility." With this and in view of the absence of any rail connection from the German border to the Russian cross-line Wilna-Schaulen-Libau, the importance of Libau now came more to the forefront. The place was developed to such an extent that it was able to withstand any Russian attack and thus was an important base for the left army wing as well as for the Baltic Sea forces. The Commander-in-Chief East wanted to hold it under all circumstances, as he reported to the Supreme Army Command on June 21, constantly placing two older line ships there.

However, it was also considered to direct future supplies for the left wing of the Njemen Army via Libau. The commissioning of the railways leading from here to Schaulen and Mitau could facilitate the deployment of stronger forces in this army and an advancing offensive. However, since the enemy had secured almost all rolling stock, German locomotives and freight cars were brought over the sea to Libau from June 28. A danger remained the route to there, which was occasionally made unsafe by Russian submarines. Otherwise, the Russians showed themselves to

The sea was somewhat more active, so that on July 2nd, off the east coast of the Swedish island of Gotland, there was a naval battle at Östergarn, which was not decisive, but brought unpleasant losses for the German side<sup>1</sup>).

f) Measures of the Russians.

The task of the Russian "Riga-Schaulen Group"<sup>2</sup>), deployed north of the Njemen and gradually reinforced, was to prevent the Germans from advancing in the coastal area, especially against Riga, which, with 400,000 inhabitants and an industry rich by Russian standards, was politically and economically significant. It simultaneously protected the route to Petersburg. When the German advance began at the end of April, cavalry was added to the Riga-Schaulen Group as reinforcement, then infantry, and finally, as the forces grew, a special army command was established north of the Njemen, similar to the German side.

A proven army leader, General Plehwe, received command on June 5th over the troops now consolidated into the "5th Army," at this time comprising a total of 8½ infantry, 7 cavalry divisions<sup>3</sup>), and the fortress Dünamünde. The army, which was to be reinforced by another 3½ divisions in the coming weeks, was to "protect as large an area as possible against exploitation by the enemy with relatively weak forces" and, if possible, gradually push them back.

By mid-June, about 5½ German divisions faced more than 13 Russian divisions, and five against eight cavalry divisions. The German leadership succeeded in withdrawing far superior enemy forces from the main theater of war with minimal own effort and capturing about 40,000 prisoners from them<sup>4</sup>). The battles were conducted by both sides over a wide area and without a pronounced focus. On the Russian side, General Alexeyev, the commander-in-chief of the Northwestern Front, sharply criticized this type of warfare and attributed the lack of success to it. On the German side, the commander-in-chief East expressed a similar opinion on June 7th<sup>5</sup>). However, given the massively increased Russian

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Whether a decisive or even significantly better result could be achieved with the sharpest concentration of German forces remains uncertain. It repeatedly became apparent that the material strength of the deployed troops was not sufficient for blows that penetrated quickly into the depths. Supported by his railways, the enemy was able to move his troops relatively quickly, supply them comfortably, and support threatened positions in time, while on the German side every man, every shell, and every supply portion had to cover about 100 kilometers of land from the German railway to reach the front.

3. Events with the 9th Army, Army Group Gallwitz, and 8th Army in May and June.

Maps 5 and 6, Sketch 12.

After the victory at Gorlice and the German breakthrough into the area north of the Njemen, the 9th Army had been waiting with the utmost attention for the moment when these successes would also affect the Russian front advancing far to the west, west of the Vistula. Vigorous aerial reconnaissance, patrol activity, and monitoring of enemy radio traffic, however, only revealed the picture of increased movements behind the positions up to the Vistula and offered no indication that the enemy intended to retreat or significantly weaken his front. He continued to occupy his combat positions. A strong day's march behind these, aircraft had long identified strongly expandable rear installations at Grojec and Blonie, which broadened the approach against the Vistula and Warsaw and had forward connections to the large fortress of Nowogeorgiewsk.

At the beginning of May, the transport of a Russian division became known. The necessary contributions for the formation of new divisions of their own balanced at least what the enemy withdrew. The question of whether one could transition to the offensive oneself was denied, as the forces were not sufficient for a major offensive, but small local successes would not be worth the inevitable sacrifices. Above all, there was a lack of ammunition, as supplies had been extremely restricted due to the increased demand from other fronts. By May 12, the success in Galicia had extended so far that the enemy also before the Army Detachment Woyrsch to





2½ army corps were to break through at Blonie. In contrast, the Commander-in-Chief East determined that "pushing forward to the Blonie position" was less important than "achieving the greatest possible tactical success by pushing southward." The main thrust of the attack was assigned to the XVII Army Corps, with divisions from neighboring sectors joining on the right and left. The Army High Command held an infantry division and a cavalry brigade in reserve. The Gallwitz Army Group was instructed to engage the enemy with its own operations to prevent them from sending reserves to the breakthrough point. By May 22, preparations were complete, but the attack had to be postponed due to east winds. It was not until the afternoon of May 30 that the weather conditions promised favorable winds for the coming night. The order to prepare for the attack was given; about 12,000 gas cylinders were installed. Of the 52 heavy batteries available to the army, about 20 were ready to operate in the entire twelve-kilometer-wide attack area. Field Marshal Prince Leopold moved to the command post west of Bolimow. On May 31, at 2:30 a.m., the gas was released; the cloud moved towards the Russian positions. Half an hour later, however, the XVII Army Corps reported that the gas had apparently passed over the enemy too quickly, and grenade teams had been halted by Russian fire. To advance, the infantry demanded thorough artillery preparation. The Army High Command called off the attack. Expectations had been disappointed. As early as May 28, the Supreme Army Command had stated to the Commander-in-Chief East in another context: "To carry out our operations against Warsaw, the forces now stationed at Bzura and Rawka will suffice if the gas agent holds up reasonably well, as can be expected from its previous performance." However, it had not had nearly the effect that the troops had hoped for based on the experiences communicated to them. They were only equipped with very imperfect gas protection means and had 56 gas casualties out of a total loss of 374 men. It was considered possible that the Russians had been warned in advance and had used protective measures. The main reason for the failure of the still little-tested combat agent was seen in the fact that stronger, gusty winds dispersed the already insufficiently dense gas cloud due to too slow a release.

torn and just driven too quickly over the foremost enemy trenches).

The Commander-in-Chief East considered it expedient, in agreement with the Supreme Army Command, to repeat the gas attack as soon as possible; by June 7th, refilled bottles could be ready again; the goal was to inflict as many losses as possible on the enemy. To prevent another failure, he obtained the allocation of ample ammunition to supplement the gas effect if necessary. The Army High Command 9 pointed out to its divisions that "not the entire success can be expected from the gas and that the path to victory is most securely paved by the determined initiative of leaders of all ranks and the death-defying bravery of the troops." The use of the gas bottles was limited to a three-kilometer-wide area at the Sucha, directly before the confluence into the Bzura. After the 22nd Infantry Division had meanwhile been transferred to the front in Galicia, General von Pannewitz was to lead the attack only with the XVII Army Corps and ½ 5th Reserve Division from the Beseler Group. However, significant sapper work was still necessary to create favorable conditions for the release, so the execution was postponed by a few days.

On June 12, at 3 a.m., after prolonged artillery fire, General von Pannewitz gave the order to release the gas, but withdrew it five minutes later due to a change in wind direction. Meanwhile, about 4500 of the installed gas bottles, a good third, had already been emptied. Despite these inconsistencies, the operation was successful. By noon, infantry of the XVII Army Corps and the 5th Reserve Division had broken into the enemy position in the Sucha-Bzura angle over a width of six kilometers and advanced up to three kilometers. 1660 prisoners, eight guns, and nine machine guns were captured. With a total own loss of 1100 men, about 350 gas casualties were counted again. However, the moral impact on the Russians seemed

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1) According to a statement by a prisoner brought in later, the Russians reportedly had 1200 dead and 3100 other gas casualties; other statements mentioned even higher numbers.

2) See p. 123.

to have been large; they had fled when they saw the gas cloud coming<sup>1</sup>).

Upon receiving the report on the outcome, the Commander-in-Chief East inquired on the evening of June 12 about further intentions and offered the choice: either a determined continuation of the attack or the provision of strong forces for transport, considering use north of the Njemen. After the 9th Army had spoken in favor of continuing the attack, the Commander-in-Chief East limited their tasks to the 8th Cavalry Division<sup>2</sup>) and ordered the attack to be "vigorously continued." However, gas should only be released in the future when the wind is truly favorable.

Field Marshal Leopold Prince of Bavaria intended to extend the current breach to the south up to Humin. The fact that the enemy, according to prisoner statements, had brought about two new divisions into the attacked section was welcomed from the standpoint of the overall situation on the Eastern Front. It also did not influence the decision of the 9th Army. They wanted to continue the attack using the gas, from whose effect they had now gained such a favorable impression that they expected a possibly even greater success than on June 12. However, on June 17 and again on June 19, the already initiated preparations for the attack had to be abandoned due to a change in the wind. Waiting for the wind with filled gas cylinders in the trench became a severe test for officers and men.

After Lemberg was taken on June 22,<sup>3</sup>) the Commander-in-Chief East anticipated the possibility of further Russian retreats also in West Poland; the 9th Army was to keep them at bay initially through increased artillery fire. While the Russians then retreated further on June 24 in front of the right wing of the Army Detachment Woyrsch and the southern adjoining Austro-Hungarian 1st Army, they still stood before the main front of Colonel General von Woyrsch and the 9th Army. Thus, they still held a line west of the Vistula, which in its overall course ran from Ilza via Domaniewice to Socha-

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1) The VI Siberian Corps, which had been stationed there, was soon withdrawn. According to the war diary of the Commander-in-Chief East on July 3, it seems to have suffered so much from the gas attack that it was initially no longer considered for tactical use. However, it was actually transferred to the combat troops near Lublin and was already deployed there again from July 5.

2) See p. 130. — 3) See p. 234. — 4) See p. 254.

czew represented a slightly westward-curved arc and could hardly be effectively encompassed. Since this line was still about 60 kilometers away from the Vistula and had the strong reception positions of Grojec, Blonie, and Nowogeorgiewsk behind it, there was hardly any prospect of decisive successes west of the river. The Supreme Army Command therefore recommended, after another unsuccessful preparation for the gas attack on June 28, the following day a "ruthless" weakening of the 9th Army. The Commander-in-Chief East ordered the withdrawal of an army corps as soon as the Woyrsch Army Detachment gained more ground. If the withdrawal was made dependent on this condition and was still limited to one army corps, although three active and three reserve divisions stood in the army's front alongside others, the leadership now had a different idea than in mid-May; it wanted to follow the expected general retreat of the Russians with parts of the 9th Army in a broad front, similar to the Woyrsch Army Detachment set by the Supreme Army Command. The Commander-in-Chief East wanted to keep other parts for later, for the planned offensive over Kowno, being concerned that if they were immediately withdrawn, they might likely be claimed by the Supreme Army Command for purposes that seemed less urgent to him. When Generaloberst von Woyrsch already announced on June 30 that the enemy was retreating before his right wing, the XVII Army Corps was withdrawn. Considerations about its use were still pending.

The months of May and June were significantly quieter for the Gallwitz Army Group and the 8th Army, which were increasingly weakened by withdrawals for the 10th and Njemen Army and for newly forming divisions.

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1) In total, apart from the newly formed units, the following had been withdrawn since mid-April: 6th R. D. to Army Group Lauenstein, 29th Ldw. Br. to 10th Army, 22nd I. D. to Supreme Army Command, 8th R. D. to Njemen Army. In the front, among others, still stood: 35th, 36th I. D., 49th and 50th R. D., 5th and 6th Ldw. Br.

2) So assumes General Ludendorff in a note from December 1931 to the Reichsarchiv. Other reports are missing.

3) G. 104 and 106. — Withdrawals were made: from Army Group Gallwitz at the end of May 9th Ldw. Div. to 10th Army, 2nd R. D. to Njemen Army, end of June 3rd Ldw. Br. to 10th Army; from the 8th Army at the end of April parts of the 8th R. D. to Army Group Lauenstein and eastern front; in May about one reinforced Br., end of June 41st Ldw. Br. to Njemen Army.

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In June, when Przemysl was retaken, the attack on both sides of the Njemen made progress and the new gas attack of the 9th Army was imminent, the Commander-in-Chief East had also ordered the Army Group Gallwitz and the 8th Army to undertake offensive operations to "hold the enemy and thereby cause him damage." By the end of June, they brought the Army Group Gallwitz, in addition to some territorial gains, a total of 1500 prisoners, but also suffered significant own losses. The gain for the 8th Army was even smaller. It was also not possible to prevent the evacuation of enemy forces. Overall, the Russians were able to withdraw five divisions of infantry from the East Prussian southern front in June, and a total of 15 divisions since the beginning of May, and redeploy them to other fronts.