

THE THIRD AUSTRIAN INVASION

OF SERBIA

(KOLUBARA CAMPAIGN)

Nov 6th - Dec 5th 1914.

by

Maj. J. H. Stewart.

This is a well-prepared account
of a very interesting campaign. The
maps are especially praiseworthy.
The material seems to be
especially suitable for use as an
historical illustration of counter-
offensive operations by an army.

This paper is based entirely on the book, "Serbia's Part in the War" by Crawford Price. It is the only source, in English, that I have been able to locate which goes, at all, into the details of the three Austrian invasions. No verification has been possible except on very broad lines. Mr. Price states, however, that his accounts of the military operations were compiled from his own notes (he was a military correspondent attached to the Serbian General Staff), from his contributions to the London Times, from information culled from individual units, and from details and orders placed at his disposal by the Serbian General Staff.

I have carefully traced his account of the 3rd Invasion on the map furnished with his book and checked the results against the positions and maneuvers of the various Armies as shown by the Austrian official maps. Only in minor details do they differ and I am of the opinion, therefore, that he presented as accurate a picture as can be found of the war on that front.

THE KOLUBARA CAMPAIGN

SERBIA

To understand the campaign which follows it might be well to examine briefly the physical geography of the Serbia of 1914. We see that to the west and north it is bounded by the Drina, Sava, and Danube. For 30 miles along the lower Drina there is something approaching a plain, which becomes wider as it approaches the Sava, and extends along the right bank of that river to the Danube. It is never very broad--is flat in its northern half but much broken up with ridges to the south and east. For the rest, Serbia is a knot of hills and mountains which ascent steeply upon the upper Drina and stretch eastward to the main Balkan Range. Except for the Kapaonik Mountains in the center there are few well defined ranges. There are, however, a great many mountain groups and isolated peaks (some of which rise to the height of 7000 feet and over), intersecting the country with deep valleys and towering mountain passes. The principal river is the great Morava, flowing through eastern Serbia from south to north. Its valley, with that of the Vadar, opens the country from one end to the other and forms the main artery of communication.

. pg. 45.
B. pg. 86.
. pg. 730.
C. pg. 106.
D. pg. 260.

The railroads are determined by the river valleys. The one trunk line, Belgrade to Constantinople, runs up the Morava valley to Nish. There it branches east to Constantinople and south, following the valleys of the Morava and Vadar, to Salonika. Kragujevatz, the arsenal, is on a branch line to the west of the Morava valley. A line follows the valley of the Kolubara to Valjevo, and another runs almost due east from Valjevo, connecting with the main line at Mladonovatz. From a station on this latter line there is a short spur following the valley of the Lig. There are a few others but they are of no importance in this campaign.

Of the existent roads--those maintained by the State were metalled and of excellent quality, all weather roads. The others, and they were in the majority, were mere well leveled highways of dirt which inevitably became impossible in wet weather for anything other than oxen transport. For the rest, communications consisted of traffic beaten tracks across the fields or bridle paths over the mountains.

The Serbian Military Organization

The military system was based entirely on universal service, all able bodied males, from twenty-one to forty-five years of age, being liable thereto.

For the purpose of organization the country was divided into five territorial districts, viz. Danube, Shoumadia, Timok, Drina, and Morava. Recruiting or drafting was strictly territorial, with the result that the men of a company often came from the same village and a regiment from the same district. Men were drafted into one or the other of the various branches. One and one-half years were spent in the Infantry and two in the Artillery or Cavalry. The latter arm was recruited from the wealthier town dwellers, each cavalry reservist being required to provide his own mount in event of war.

The 1st line of the active army, known as the 1st Ban, was composed of men from twenty-one to thirty years of age, after which for eight years (thirty-one to thirty-eight) they passed to the 2nd Ban. The 3rd Ban, or territorial forces, were made up of old soldiers and semi-trained and untrained units which were incorporated under stress of war. Strictly speaking, the 2nd Ban was intended to replace the wastage in the active line; but during the Balkan wars many independent units were formed, and in 1914 the only real distinction possessed by the 1st Ban divisions was

a superiority in numbers and armament.

The infantry of the 1st and 2nd Ban were equipped with the mauser rifle. The 3rd Ban carried a Berdan (non-magazine). The armament of the machine gun sections was the Maxim. The mobile artillery was equipped with the Creusot Snider 7,5 cm cannon and a limited number of 7,5 cm guns, captured from the Turks. The siege batteries had 12 and 15 cm Creusot guns and the mountain units the 7 cm Creusot Snider. In addition, there existed a number of old de Bange cannon of 6 cm. The uniform was an olive green mixture, the different branches of the service being distinguished by colour-tabs stitched on the collar--scarlet for staff, brick red for infantry, blue for cavalry, black for artillery, and maroon for engineers.

Uniforms for the 1st and 2nd Ban were furnished by the state. The 3rd Ban took the field in their native costumes of brown horse-spurs. Officers of the Army were recruited from all social classes without distinction, pupils entering the Military Academy at the age of 16. Promotion to the Staff necessitated a further course of study which, for the most part, included a term of instruction in one or the other of the great European Armies.

N.C.O.'s were likewise a specially trained body and eligible on further examination to promotion to the grade of sub-lieutenant. Reserve officers were drawn from among the students of the university and technical schools.

The method of transport, however, was the thing which distinguished the Serbian Army from all others. The roads, or rather the want of them, rendered the automobile and even horse-drawn transport out of the question. The patient ox was, therefore, the pivot of everything. The baggage wagons, pontoon trains, and even the field guns, were for the most part ox-drawn. Nothing else could get through the sea of mud so much in evidence after any rainfall.

The Army service Corps (trains) was made up of peasants!

26
27.
carts, requisitioned by the military authorities. They were of all sorts and sizes. Some had covers--others none. Some were four oxen--others two. The drivers rarely wore any uniform beyond their Serbian military cap, but tramped alongside their teams in the russet-brown homespun costume universally worn.

37.
Thus, on the march, the Serbian Army presented a patriarchal appearance--given it by the thousands of ox-wagons, droves of sheep and countless vehicles piled high with hay and straw. It was, however, as proved, an admirable fighting machine, capable of holding its own, in its own country, against the most up-to-date adversary.

The 3rd Invasion

Kolubara Campaign

A. pg. 43.
L. pg. 166
174.
K. pg. 372.
We have seen that, during the first three months of the World War, Austria had operated two distinct invasions of Serbia. The first was defeated in the valley of the Yadar. The second, scarcely less disastrous, came to an end Sept. 17th, 1914, and left Austria in possession of only two small triangular strips of Serbian territory. In the north, on the Matohva, they held a tract of marshy plain between Ravnje and Jarak. While further south their conquest was limited to a section of sparsely populated mountain land to the east of Zvornik. The Serbs, on the other hand, had secured a footing in Hertzegovina as far as Vishegrad. Honors were, therefore, about even. Both sides dug in and there followed a state of siege warfare, closely resembling, in its principal aspects, the conditions on the western front.

The 3rd Austrian offensive matured toward the end of October and was inevitable for many reasons. German activity in Poland and the appearance of a new Corps there enabled Austria to turn

her attention to the southeast. The punishment of Serbia, which had been nominally the cause of the war, was eagerly demanded by the Austrian people, indignant at two humiliating defeats. Furthermore Turkey had now entered the struggle. If Serbia could be crushed and Bulgaria conciliated, junction might be effected with the Ottoman Armies which would keep Roumania quiescent, and, more important, would open up to the Teutonic Powers a new way to the sea--that old hankering for an Aegean outlet which had for a decade dominated their Balkan policy.

Unfortunately, this appreciation of the military situation did not make a very pressing appeal to the allies, for whereas a recognition of its potentialities would have led to the strengthening of the Serbian Army by every means possible, the fact is that, while the Serbs were daily dispensing a very moderate amount of shell in an effort to preserve the inviolability of their frontiers, the allies failed to make good even the deficiency in ammunition created. (This failure to see the military situation on the Serbian front in its true light cost the allies forever the chance to strike the Central Powers in the rear).

By this time the Serbs held a continuous line running from a point on the Drina about 15 kilometers below Liubovia--along the heights of the Jagodnia and Gouchevo Mountains--through Lonznita to Ravnje--across the Matchva to a point on the Sava about 10 kilometers above Shabatz--through Shabatz and thence along the Sava to Obrenovatz. The obvious disadvantages of the open positions on the river, as compared with the comparative security of the foothills of the Tser, were fully appreciated by the Serbian staff but the Matchva Plain, being one of the richest districts in the country, it was deemed necessary to hold it as long as possible. This so extended the line, however, (it was now approximately 100 miles in length) as to be utterly beyond the power of so small

an army to hold. Troops were forced to remain in the trenches day and night without relief--often without repose and the nerve racking strain thus imposed became almost insupportable. Matters were not helped by the absence of cover, clothes, boots and sufficient food and with the coming of winter the difficulties of the situation increased. The Austrian attacks increased in intensity. The preponderance in numbers and weight possessed by them grew daily while the Serbian stocks of gun, and especially artillery ammunition, fell lower and lower (so marked did this shortage become that, toward the end of the six weeks of siege warfare, the ratio of shells spent by the Austrians and Serbians were as 10 to 1.) and her men began to show clear evidence of mental and bodily fatigue.

On Oct. 28th, the Austrians opened with an intense bombardment apparently with the hope of unmasking the disposition of the Serbian Armies. This provoked no reply but was accepted as notification of the impending attack, and, it having become necessary to subordinate local political considerations to the dictates of military strategy, the order was given on Nov. 1st, to retire the Serbian 2nd Army from the exposed Matchva Plain to the foothills of the Tser Mountains and the watershed of the Dobrava River. During the night of the 5th and 6th of November, the hostile bombardment recommenced over a more extended area, being particular violent in the neighborhood of the Gouchovo Mountains (3rd Army), and gradually increased in its intensity throughout the day of Nov. 6th. This day may be fixed therefore as the date of the beginning of the 3rd Invasion of Serbia.

There had been a considerable regrouping of forces and upon the date in question the two armies faced each other as follows:

Serbian Armies

Field Marshal Radomir Putrik Cndg.

Along the Danube, East to West, to include Skela.

Detach. of Kraina 4 Bn. Inf.-- 1 2/3 gun Batteries,
 Detach. of Branitchavo 8 Bn. Inf.--3 gun Batteries
 Detach. of Belgrado 17 Bn. Inf.-- 6 gun Batteries
 3 How. Btries.-- 1 Siege Btry.-- 1 squadron cavalry.
 Detach. of Oranovatz--6 Bn. Inf.--3 gun Batteries.
 Total 36 Bns. Inf.-- 18 Btries. Artillery--1 squadron Cavalry.

2nd Army

Marshal Stepanovitch Cndg.

Concentrated Shabatz to Lyoshnitsa, both inclusive.

Divisions. Independent Cavalry Div. Shoumadia I--Timok I--Morava I--
Timok II.

Total 63 Bns. Inf.-- 34 Btries. Artillery--27 squadron Cavalry.

3rd Army

General Yourishitch Sturn Cndg.

Concentrated Lyoshnitsa (exclusive) to Kostainik.

Divisions. Drina II--Combined Div. -- Drina I.

Total 40 Bns. Inf.-- 16 Btries.-- 6 squadrons Cavalry.

1st Army

General Boyovitch Cndg.

Concentrated Kostainik to vicinity of River Triyeshnitsa.

Divisions. Morava II--Danube II (arrived on the front Nov. 7)--
Danube I and the Detach. of Liubovia .

Total 44 Bns. -- 24 1/2 Btries.-- 8 squadrons.

Ushitza Army

General Aratitch Cndg.

River Triyeshnitsa to River Lim.

Units -- Ushitza Brigade -- Shoumadia II. Lim Detach.

Total 34 Bns. Inf.-- 12 Btries.-- 2 squadrons.

Total--Serbian Armies, with addition of sundry Corps troops and
reserves not recited in the above disposition and excluding the
Detach. of Kraina and Branitchavo--216 Bns. Inf. -- 41 squadrons

Cavalry -- 67 Btries F.A. -- 9 Btries. Mt. Artillery -- 9 Btries.
Horse. -- 26 Btries, de Bango

Austrians

General Potiorek, Cndg.

5th Army

General Ritter V. Frank, Cndg.

Along the Danube east to west to Shabatz

Banar Detach. -- 11 $\frac{1}{2}$ Bns, Inf.

Syrien Detach. -- 26 $\frac{1}{2}$ Bns, Inf. -- 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ Btries. -- 7 squadrons.

Concentrated -- Shabatz to Jania.

Combined Corps (Krauss). Divisions -- 7th and 29th.

VIII Corps. Divisions -- 21th and 9th. 8th Landstrum Brigade --

Total 5th Army 127 $\frac{1}{2}$ Bns, Inf. 53 $\frac{1}{2}$ Btries. -- 20 squadrons Cavalry.

6th Army

General Potiorek, Cndg.

Concentrated along upper Drina from Jania south.

XIII Corps -- Divisions 42nd and 36th.

XV Corps -- Divisions 40th -- 48th -- 1st.

XVI Corps -- Divisions 18th -- 50th and Combined Div.

17th Brigade)

Detach. Hausor)

Total 6th Army -- 160 Bns, Inf. -- 64 Btries -- 12 $\frac{1}{2}$ squadrons

Total Austrian forces, including full complement of field, siege and
mt. artillery -- 287 $\frac{1}{2}$ Bns, Inf. -- 137 $\frac{1}{2}$ Btries. Art. -- 32 $\frac{1}{2}$ squadrons
Cavalry.

Note. Just how the front of the XVI Corps was held I have not been
able to determine. The 18th Div. (4th, 5th, 6th and 13th Brigades)
and the 8th Landstrum Brigade (50th Div.) were at Vlasenica opposing
the Shoumadia II Div. of the Uzhitze Army. The 109 Landstrum Brig.
(Combined Div.) was at Srebrenica.

Again⁺ this great Army Serbia, even though she called every peasant from the plow and every shepherd from the hills, could not bring forward anything approaching equal numbers. Her first line troops numbered less than 200,000 men while the combined Austrian 5th and 6th added to at least 300,000. Her (Serbia) Army, to be sure, was composed largely of veterans but her supplies, especially ammunition, were terribly depleted and the arsenal at Kragujevatz was all but empty.

The Austrian objective was Nish and the main line to Bulgaria. However, before these could be reached there were various secondary objectives. The obvious route to Nish was by an advance up the Morava from Semendria on the Danube, but to this there were two insuperable objections. The first was the Morava valley which, at two places, contracts to narrows where the ground falls steeply and forms a strong natural defense. The second were the lateral valleys entering the Morava from the west, which would enable a Serbian force from the center hills to strike at the flank of any Austrian advance. It was, therefore, clearly the path of wisdom to occupy the central knot of hills and especially the upper valley of the western Morava. With these hills in their control they could advance on Nish with an easy mind because their communications would be safe. The 1st objective was Valjevo on the Kolubara, the terminus of two railways and the starting point for the passes to the horse shoe range to the south, which was the way to the western Morava. The second was Kragujevatz, the Serbian Arsenal, and a point from which the main Morava route could be seriously menaced. It will be observed that the Austrian Staff, with this plan, were remaining true to their determination to strike across the Drina but that on this occasion they had concentrated their principal forces in the southern sector, between Lonznita and Liuhovia --thus deliberately choosing a theater where the operations would, of necessity, partake strictly of the nature of

mountain warfare. In doing this there can be no doubt but that General Potiorek was relying greatly upon his superiority in heavy and mountain artillery and upon his XV and XVI mountain Corps which were superbly equipped for this type of fighting while the Corps were not.

The voluntary withdrawal of the 2nd Army from the Haidava Plain has already been recorded (beginning Nov. 2nd). The first shock of battle, however, was felt in the southern sector where, on Nov. 7th, the Austrians, after subjecting the front of the Combined Division (3rd Army) to an intense artillery preparation, attacked, and after seven attempts, drove the defenders--handicapped by shortage of artillery ammunition--back on the Shtira River. This retirement, coupled with general pressure, involved the whole of the 3rd Army in a withdrawal in order to defend the Yadar road in the direction of Zavlaka. Further south the 1st Army, despite reinforcement by the Danube II Division, gave way under similar circumstances and in order to conform, those forces of the Uchitsa Army, between the River Triyeshnitsa and Kogachitsa, fell back some four miles to the vicinity of Zapolie.

A. pg. 49.
B. pg. 181.
C. pg. 275.
D. pg. 414.

On Nov. 8th the Austrians were approaching the positions occupied by the 2nd Army, which, with the exception of a salient thrown out to protect Shabatz, was entrenched in the foothills of the Tser range and the watershed of the Dobrava River. Here Marshal Stepanovitch was ordered to stand but, if driven out, to fall back to the right bank of the Dobrava and swing his left back along the Tser.

A. pg. 49.
B. pg. 182.

No sooner had the 3rd Army occupied (Nov. 8th) its position for the defense of the Yadar Road than the Austrians pierced its liaison with the 1st Army by capturing Kostainik--thus forcing another retirement. The 1st Army was, likewise, doing badly. The enemy were attacking strenuously, with artillery which far out-classed

B. pg. 182

that at the disposal of the Serbs, and their infiltration was greatly facilitated by a thick fog, under cover of which, they were able to penetrate down ravines and mass for attack unseen by the defenders.

B. pg. 183. As the invasion developed, Marshal Poutiuk found no alternative to the plan of again falling back to positions more favorable to defense, and, while harassing the enemy, to draw him further from his base. It was felt too that the conditions of the roads would make it difficult for the Austrians to bring up their heavy artillery--supplies and ammunition.

B. pg. 183. Accordingly a general retirement of the 3rd and 1st Armies was ordered to the line; Kosarograd--Strazha--Zavlaka--Bashtavsko--
B. pg. 414. Petrina Stona--Proclap. The Ushitza Army, though it had hitherto put up a firm opposition to the invaders, was instructed to conform to this plan and retire to a new line for the defense of Ushitza.

B. pg. 185. On Nov. 9th, the Austrians attempted a strong diversion in the vicinity of Semendria with the object of ascending the Morava valley. The weak outposts stationed there were unable to oppose the crossing and fell back while awaiting reinforcements. A detachment of 3rd Ban troops was immediately dispatched from Belgrade. After a forced march of 28 miles this detachment attacked that evening, completely destroying the hostile force of 4,000 which had crossed (2,500 were taken prisoners and the remainder were either killed or drowned in the attempt to reach the north bank of the Danube).
B. pg. 414.

B. pg. 49. The withdrawal of the 3rd and 1st Armies was successfully carried out and, there is little doubt, that on anything like equal terms, the Serbs would have been able to check the Austrian advance, at least, for sometime. However the superiority in men, guns and munitions possessed by the enemy far exceeded even the most extravagant estimates of the general staff, and this fact, added to the increasing demoralization apparent in the Serbian
B. pg. 183.
B. pg. 375.
B. pg. 334.
B. pg. 414.

ranks, decided Marshal Poutnik to refuse decisive battle and order a general retirement of the Serbian armies to the line: Oub--Karaula--Visovi--Inoutina--Kamonitza--Stove--Kik, the last line of defense protecting Valjevo.

B. PG. 185.

In ordering the retreat to the Valjevo line the general staff had every confidence that a determined resistance could there, for the first time, be made. The position was strong and the importance of the town was so well understood by the rank and file of the Army that it was assumed that every effort would be made to prevent its falling into the hands of the enemy.

A. PG. 49.

B. PG. 185.

C. PG. 375.

D. PG. 414.

No sooner were the troops established on these newly fortified positions, however, than it became evident that these hopes must be abandoned. The moral of the men, strained as it had been by physical exhaustion, constant exposure to severe weather without adequate clothing and equipment, and absence of artillery support (due to lack of ammunition), finally snapped entirely under the continued retreat. The raw levies which were now coming in possessed no equipment save a mess tin, a Russian rifle and a Serbian service cap. Thus their presence in the firing line instead of adding strength to the armies and raising the moral thereof, merely added to the confusion. And, finally, the presence of masses of refugees trekking back in a state of utter misery unmanned the troops, the effect being particularly noticeable among the men of the Drina Divisions who were recruited from the evacuated territory.

A. PG. 49.

B. PG. 185.

C. PG. 375.

D. PG. 334.

The only remedy for such a situation lay in a vigorous offensive but, since this was impossible without artillery ammunition, Valjevo was hurriedly evacuated (Nov. 11th) and Marshal Poutnik ordered the armies back to the celebrated Kolubara positions.

During the days which intervened between the completion of the original concentration and the 1st Austrian invasion the line, generally referred to as the Kolubara line, had been strongly entrenched and, even prior to the actual evacuation of Valjevo, it

had been understood that the supreme effort to check the Austrians would be made there. Roughly the new front followed the Kolubara to the zig, thence along that stream to its watershed where it entered a country of exceedingly rugged nature and, proceeding in . . . 40. southwesterly direction, followed the Yelak and Melyen Ranges with . . . 187. strong entrenchments on the Koukovi, Varda, Yelova and Boukovic, . . . 276. The entire country of subsequent operations was a jumble of . . . 34. mountains and valleys, possessing scarcely a square mile of flat . . . 114. country and practically devoid of anything in the nature of a military road. However it was adapted to defense and the line chosen was naturally formidable. The field of view was good and at no place were approaches so screened as to favor surprise. (The Kolubara was not an insurmountable obstacle but its approaches were at most points devoid of cover and at others commanded by the mountain heights--making it easy to defend).

Retirement to this line was no easy matter. As far as the staffs were concerned the orders issued were carefully thought out and models of calm deliberation. All bridges, telephone and telegraph lines were systematically destroyed, cattle evacuated and nothing left undone to render the advance of the enemy as difficult as possible. There was nothing precipitate about the retreat but the roads were not only limited in number but now . . . 188. almost impossible because of recent rains. This naturally led to . . . 336. much confusion and to make matters worse the armies were hampered by fleeing civilians who plodded back side by side with the soldiers. The moral of the men, too, suffered further by the continued withdrawal. They were physically worn out and the long arduous marches along highways ankle deep, and often knee deep, in mud, coupled with the work of fortifying new positions, had greatly reduced their powers of resistance.

Fortunately the Austrians did not press their pursuit and the Serbs were able to reach the Kolubara positions, according to plan,

on Nov, 16th. The Armies, in a sadly depleted state both as to men and material, were disposed as follows:

Detachment of Obrenovatz. Obrenovatz to Konatitza. Independent Cavalry. Konatitza to Volouyak.

2nd Army Volouyak--Lazarevatz--Tohovka.

3rd Army. River Lig to the Goukoshi Range.

1st Army Goukoshi--Modnik--Batchinatz Rouda--Malyen.

Ushitza Army Boukovi-Varda--Frishado--Yelova--with its flanks resting on Ieska Gora,

For a fortnight the Austrians lay in Valjevo and along the skirts of the hills and did nothing and it was not until Nov. 17th that attack on certain sectors of the new line commenced. In the north, important forces appeared at Konatitza and, in the south, enemy units were making toward Kosyeritch, driving in the Serbian rear guards.

The 3rd Army was not disturbed in its work of consolidation but on the 17th the enemy advanced in strength against the 2nd Army south of Lazarevatz and the right wing of the 1st Army (Goukoshi--Batchinatz). Tohovka summit was subjected to heavy shell fire and repeated infantry assaults but reinforcements sent from the 3rd Army enabled the 2nd to hold and successfully beat off all attacks. On the 18th the 1st Army was shelled from a part of the Goukoshi range. However, it resisted a heavy attack against the Malyen and the Batchinatz, though once lost, was retaken by a counterattack.

The night of Nov. 18th saw both combatants with formations established on their respective lines. The Austrians had brought up their main forces and the Serbs had dug themselves in more or less solidly in their formidable positions.

Henceforth the Austrian offensive, though it extended over the whole Serbian front, was noticeable chiefly for its determination to break through the 2nd Army at Lazarevatz (to work along the

railroad toward Bladenovatz) and to drive the 1st Army back on Milanovatz. The plan as conceived would, if successful, have separated the main Serbian Armies from the forces around Belgrade, permitted an easy outflanking movement of Kragujevatz and perhaps the rounding up of the entire Serbian forces. It was strategically sound but the tactics employed in front of the 1st Army to carry it through were most faulty. The Goukoshi road was the shortest and most direct route to Milanovatz and every allowance must be made for the excessively difficult nature of the terrain but the fact remains that, if General Potiorek had brought his pressure to bear on the extreme left of the 1st Army, he could, at that time, have pierced the breach between the 1st and Ushitza Army (20 miles separated them)--outflanked the dominating range of Souvobor and forced the evacuation of both it and Goukoshi. This maneuver would have forced the Serbs to operate a speedy retreat to the positions before Milanovatz itself and might have cut the Ushitza Army from the main Serbian forces.

On Nov. 19th the attack against Tchovka and Vratche was re-
rowed with such energy that the Division in possession (Morava I)
was greatly imperilled and only timely reinforcements saved it
from disaster

Arrangements were made with the 3rd Army to create a diversion by counterattacking the following day but this had to be abandoned when it was found (next day, the 20th) that the enemy had extended his offensive not only to the 3rd Army but to the Drina I Division, 1st Army (up until this time Drina I had retained control of the summit of Milovatz). By night the Austrians had secured a footing on the western slopes of Vratche and entire mastery of Milovatz and Strazara.

General Potiorek now began to make more decisive use of his 15th and 16th mountain Corps which, in equipment suitable for fighting over mountainous terrain, far surpassed anything possessed by the Serbs. Early on the 21st, under cover of a thick fog, they attacked

with the main effort directed against the right of the 1st Army. By dawn heavy fighting had become more or less general, the Serbian outposts were driven in and the combat developed with great violence against Modnik, the key to all positions covering the Lig valley. Due to their middle columns the Austrians speedily carried the summit and then turned against the flank of the defenses on Batohinatz and Rouda. Here the fighting was terrific in its intensity but the Serbs, though greatly outnumbered, held tenaciously to their positions and it was not until about 8:00 P.M.--when completely worn out--that they gave ground before a final assault. There were no fresh troops available and no option save to fall back on strong position, Goukoshi--Palezh--Prostrouga--Rayatz--Yelak--Malyen.

The enemy immediately turned his attention to the Malyen position and on the 22nd, with 5 battalions, drew a semicircle around the defending outposts on Yelak and after a daylong battle drove the survivors of a single Serbian battalion stationed there back on the main position. The next day, under cover of a heavy fog, the Austrians succeeded in working around the summit but the Serbs, reinforced by a battalion from the Souvobor, held their ground until afternoon of the 24th when the position was evacuated, the defenders falling back to the line Babina--Podovi. On this same day, in the northern sector, the 29th Division (Combined Corps) succeeded in penetrating in front of Konatitza almost as far as Progon but was driven back

It is remarkable that, having achieved this particular objective, General Potiorek did not continue the attack vigorously. Had he done so, especially in the direction Goyna Gora, he would have obliged the Ushitza Army to retire immediately and forced the evacuation of Souvobor by the 1st Army--a development which might have proved fatal for the Serbs at this time. He did attempt a half-hearted flanking movement down the Kamenitza valley, which

was now open before him, but a detachment from the Ushitsa Army, on Zeloni Brey, very effectively stopped the maneuver.

The reason which spared the Serbian Army this disaster were two-fold. On the one hand, the Austrians themselves had been badly disorganized and depleted by long marches over almost impassible roads and the incessant fighting which had followed; on the other hand, the stubborn resistance of the 3rd and 2nd Armies had decided the Austrian Staff to throw the weight of their Armies in that direction in order to prosecute more vigorously the attack on Lazarevatz, in the direction of Mladenovatz, while their center and right continued the pressure toward Kragujevatz and the western Morava Valley.

The heights of Tchovka and Vratche were naturally, therefore, singled out for special attention. On Nov. 25th, after an intense artillery preparation, the Austrians attacked. The Serbs put up a heroic defense but were finally forced to abandon their positions--forcing the left of the 2nd Army and the whole of the 3rd, to give way. To the north Konatitza was taken. On the 26th pressure on this front was continued while an attempt was made to cross the Sava near its junction with the Kolubara. Forced inland by the bombardment, the defenders awaited the landing, and, taking advantage of the natural cover, ambushed the invaders and wiped out half of the contingent. The remainder surrendered and the diversion was abandoned.

Desperate efforts were made by the 1st Army to hold the crests of Goukoshi and three determined attacks (26th) were successfully repulsed. In the end, however, numbers and materiel told and the staff was forced to order a withdrawal of the right back to Goloubatz. On the left the Ushitsa Army was falling slowly to the rear on the Ovtchar--Kabljar positions in order to protect Tchatchak and the western Morava valley--a maneuver rendered exceedingly difficult by the persistent attempts of the Austrian Mountain Brigades to slip in between the retreating columns on the one hand, and to destroy liaison with the 1st Army on the other.

On Nov. 27th the 2nd and 3rd Armies counterattacked, re-captured Tohovka and Strazha and threw the enemy back on the River Lig. (nothing can better illustrate the magnificent spirit which still animated the ranks of the 2nd and 3rd Armies. Tohovka had only been abandoned after a desperate fight which had cost the Serbs heavy casualties and just a few days before Marshal Stopanvitch had asked permission to send his munitionless cannon to the rear as their inactive presence was having a demoralizing effect upon his men. Yet the men responded to the order to counter-attack by with such elan that they retook their former positions and captured a considerable number of prisoners). They were too weak, however, to consolidate and hold the positions gained and the retreat to new positions continued--the two armies falling back on the general line; Sabnitza--Kromenitza--Kelaneyevtsi.

The situation of the 1st Army was now serious. The enemy had secured a firm footing on the right bank of the river Lig. The extreme right wing of the Army was in danger of being thrown into the Katchar valley where its flanks would have been exposed to easy attack and its communications with the 3rd Army threatened. Losses had reduced the Servian Divisions to an average of 4,000 to 5,000 bayonets each--there were no reserves with which to fill the gaps and the moral of the men had weakened almost to the vanishing point.

On the 28th Shilyak and Babina fell and had the Austrians pushed their success toward the flank and rear of Prostrouga, dis-organization would have inevitably followed, for the Serbs had not a single man at their disposal with which to parry such a maneuver. The action of the enemy was progressive, however, rather than energetic. His slackness again permitted the Serbs to escape disaster but the relief afforded was necessarily of a fleeting nature and the general staff, realizing that fatigue and demoralization of their troops demanded a temporary cessation of fighting, ordered a general retirement to new positions.

By midday of the 28th the Souvobor--Rayatz sector and part of the Prostrouga crest had been abandoned and the main body of the 1st Army had reached the line; Motika--Shtolitso--Vaskana. That night Belgrade was evacuated (the order had been given on the 28th) and the detachment withdrawn to the line Varovnitza--Kosmai as a barrier against the Combined (Krauss) and 6th Corps which were working in the direction of Mladenovatz. The 2nd Army with the Independent Cavalry Division occupied the line; Sibnitza--Novagn--Medvodniak--Vazan; 3rd Army the line; Braniar--Kalanyevstina--Kanal to Motika, while the Ushitza Army, which had done such wonders with the meager forces available--contesting every inch of ground while it fell back slowly--was astride the western Morava River on the line; Kita--Kablaz--Ovtchar--Markovitza.

The end of November marked a very critical stage not only in the history of the battle but also in the military situation in southeastern Europe. The Serbian nation, though fully aware of the fact that its very existence was in jeopardy, on the whole faced the facts with admirable calm and stoicism. They were a little nation fighting a great Empire, they were worn out and short of everything and, perhaps more tragic than all, the ammunition promised by the richer allies had been delayed too long. Thus they felt that, even if complete defeat followed, it would be no disgrace.

Much has already been said about the state of the army. Lack of food, clothing, tents and transport, incessant fighting and marching under arduous conditions, heavy casualties which it was beyond the power of the staff to make good, and, above all, the absence of ammunition, had done their work. Their previous success had been due to patriotism and elan which counted for more than military discipline; but now, the one had become broken and the other enfeebled, and retreat upon retreat, combined with the sufferings incidental to unsuccessful operations in such a country,

had spread a wave of dire depression throughout rank and file.

1. pg. 204. Little news reached the outside world during these dark days
1. pg. 382. for it was not customary to report defeat. Yet the public learned
from Vienna and Sofia that the Serbs had broken and there was great
rejoicing in the German and Austrian Capitals. The Entente powers
fully appreciated the gravity of the situation and went so far as
to invite Greece to step in to the assistance of her ally. which,
however, she refused to do on the ground that she would be exposed
to a flank attack from Bulgaria and the communications of both her-
self and Serbia with Salonika jeopardised.

1. pg. 204. However despite the apparent hopelessness of it all, there
205. remained deep in the hearts of the Serbian leaders a conviction
7. pg. 382. that the decisive engagement had yet to be fought. (It may be
1. pg. 415. pointed out that as yet no battle had been fought to a finish).
Day after day Colonel Pavlovitch of the general staff, had analysed
the statements of the Austrian prisoners and, from these, coupled
with the slowness of the enemy to advance, he concluded that serious
difficulties of transport were being encountered and that the
demoralization in the ranks of the Austrians was no less marked
than in those of the Serbs. Further, small consignments of ammunition
were at last, in spite of interference by the Bulgarians, beginning
to arrive from Russia and France. (The Russian contribution was
brought down the Danube to the mouth of the Timok River, whence
ran a narrow gauge railway to Kish. The ships were fired on from
Bulgarian shore, and an unsuccessful attempt was subsequently made
by armed Bulgarian bands to blow up a tunnel near Zaitchar. Both
efforts failed. The Port of Entry for the French shells was
Salonika, and thence they had to be transported up the railway
running through Macedonia along the Vadar. Here a band of Bulgarian
irregulars, invaded Serbian territory, blew up the bridges over
the river, and burned its wooden pillars. Some trains were already
over but others were delayed for over a week.)

The arrival of munitions removed the principal cause of retreat and it had become necessary, at all costs to restore the moral of the soldiers. This could only be done by a vigorous counteroffensive. King Peter, old, deaf and sick, joined his Army in the field and addressed his men as follows: "Heroes," he said, "you have taken two oaths--one to me, your King, and the other to your country. I am an old, broken man, on the edge of the grave, and I release you from your oath to me. From your other oath no one can release you. If you feel that you cannot go on, go to your homes, and I pledge my word that after the war, if we come out of it, nothing shall happen to you. But--I and my sons stay here." This appeal had its effect and not a man left the ranks. The staff had already set about the organization for the one last bid for victory and on Dec. 2nd, Marshal Poutnik ordered that on Dec. 3rd, the three Serbian Armies, together with the Ushitza Army, should attack along the whole front.

Up to this point the strategy of the Austrian Staff had been planned on broadly conceived lines and was within reasonable distance of successful execution. Employing Souvobor as a pivot, with their right wing holding a very strong position on Maljen and their left firmly established south of Belgrade, they were attempting to swing their right in the direction of Tohatchak and Milanovatz and their left down the Morava River through Mladenovatz. This plan, if successfully carried out, would have rendered untenable the heights of Motika and enabled them to round up the Serbian forces together with the arsenal at Kragujevatz and the capture of Nish would have followed as a matter of course. The maneuver, though sound enough, had certain disadvantages. It involved an extension of front which could be accomplished only by weakening the center, and the right wing (XV and XVI Corps) had already been pushed far from its base and was even now served by very inferior communications. Under the circumstances, however, General Potiorek

considered a Serbian revival highly improbable and the risk justified. As we shall presently see though his strategy was never allowed to develop, for it was precisely at that period when the Austrian left was being strengthened and moved to the right bank of the Kolubara, that Marshal Poutnik launched his great counteroffensive.

The Serbian plan had for its object the piercing of the Austrian center and then falling up^{on} and crushing the separate parts of the two Armies in detail. The 2nd and 3rd Armies, by reason of the ground before them were in a comparatively favorable position for attack. The task which lay before the Ushitza and 1st Army, however, was much more difficult. The entire success of the counterattack hinged on the ability of the 1st Army (now commanded by General Viskitch) to reach the line; Malyen--Souvobor--Prostrouga. While the Ushitza Army was charged with the protection of the left flank of the 1st Army and its failure to do so would mean irretrievable disaster.

At this time the four divisions of the 1st Army mustered only 22,000 bayonets but the several days rest permitted them by the enemy coupled with the fact that artillery ammunition had commenced to arrive, served to improve the moral of the troops. Physically rested and encouraged by the stirring message from the King they attacked on the morning of Dec. 3rd with such fury that the Austrians were taken completely by surprise. They appeared to have been so absorbed with their success--so confident of a triumphal march forward--that they had neglected the most elementary precautions for their security, and, as a result, were caught moving leisurely along the roads, not in the open country, but in valleys and passes commanded by the heights above. By 9:00 A.M. an advance on the whole front had been registered and a number of officers--men and considerable material captured. Recovering from the first shock the Austrian resistance stiffened somewhat but by nightfall the 1st Army had advanced to the line; Koshtouniche--Teechin--Vranovitza. The Ushitza Army reached the line; Godoun--Hill 879

with its right but its left, meeting strong opposition was unable to do more than hold its own.

To the north the 3rd Army was subjected to a strong attack but held and directed a turning movement against the hostile right with such success that the Combined Division eventually established
p. 211. itself on Kamal--seized a portion of the heights Vrlaya and threatened
p. 384. the Austrian rear. From these positions the attack was renewed at
p. 415 10:30 P.M. in a desperate effort to throw the enemy back on the River Lig.

On the front of the 2nd Army the Morava I captured Shtaratch (379) and Balin Grob (329)--the outlying defenses of Kremenzta Range. Timok I, after a short but strenuous attack, secured the
p. 211. heights of Bistritza Vis (286) and Ivkovatoha (271) while Shoumadia
p. 385. I, driving in hostile opposition reached the general line: Kapar (261)--Okresak--Hill 187. The Independent Cavalry Division began working up the valley of Touria.

Dec. 4th.

In front of the 1st Army the enemy were observed evacuating Prostrouga but further advance in that direction and Souvobor was held back due to the difficulty the Ushitza Army was having in holding its ground under terrific counterattacks delivered by the
p. 213. Austrian XVI Corps. The 3rd Army was also checked by enemy
p. 415 resistance but made some progress. The Vrlaya was occupied with the exception of its highest point--the Austrians pulling up on the line Kik--Tchiker--Vrlaya--Lipet.

Concerning the 2nd Army, there was little to report. The Kremenzta range presented a very formidable obstacle to the advance toward Lazarevatz and all attacks by the Morava I and
p. 213. Timok I broke down before a stubborn defense. The right column
p. 415 of the Shoumadia I failed to reach Arapovatz but the left, finding Hill 187 strongly fortified, attacked at 4:00 P.M. and captured it. The Independent Cavalry Division made some additional progress up the Touria Valley, while to the east, strong hostile forces

approaching from the north, came in contact with the detachment of Belgrade.

Dec, 5th

During the course of the day the Austrian turning movement against the northern front of the Serbs developed into a serious menace and the Timok I was relieved and dispatched (Dec, 5th) to the assistance of the Detachment of Belgrade--its abandoned front being taken over by elements of the Morava I and Shoumandia I. The Morava I pushed its attack on the Kromeritza Range which, though desperately defended, was finally captured with the exception of Hill 371. Apparently, this result was somewhat unexpected by the Austrian High Command for, although obvious preparations for a counterattack were observed, it failed to materialize.

An assault undertaken by the right of Shoumandia I against Hill 212 yielded no results save a few prisoners but its left progressed as far as Hill 173 and effected liaison with Timok I near Zeoke (as noted this division did not move to the assistance of the Detachment of Belgrade until the 6th).

- A. pg. 52. The 3rd Army continued to hold Tchiker and the rest of its front against repeated assaults.
- E. pg. 215.
- K. pg. 385. The 1st Army pressed forward with such vigor that it soon regained its former positions of Prostrouga--Rayatz--Souvebor--Babina, piercing the Austrian center and making it impossible for their forces in the Kolubara and western Morava Valley to render mutual assistance to one another.

On its part the Ushitza Army was engaged in heavy fighting on both banks of the western Morava and, despite stubborn resistance, it was forced to give ground at some points. However such local set backs were no longer fraught with danger as it was now obvious that even a partial success would throw the Austrians in full retreat. This was obtained later in the day by the Ushitza Brigade on Mt. Krstats and under the influence of this tactical victory the whole of the hostile forces commenced to retire.

Dec. 6th

There was little doubt now but that the 3rd Austrian Invasion would prove an even greater failure than the first. Their right had been badly cut up during the struggle on Mt. Krstata and, having followed up the victory by a night attack (Dec, 5th) the Ushitza Army succeeded in regaining possession of Gogna Gora and Zeleni Brog.

Before the 1st Army, all evidence of organized resistance had now disappeared and the battle degenerated into a mere chase of the enemy along the muddied roads. Entire battalions were rounded up and sent to the rear and the capture of cannon and materiel became so common place that General Mishitch ceased even to collect or report his booty. By nightfall the last remaining chain of fortresses (Malyen--Rouda--Mednik--Goukoshi) was in Serbian hands and the Austrians in full flight toward Valjevo.

The effect of this rout was not lost on the forces facing the 3rd Army, and, once pressure was relieved, it took up the pursuit. First was taken early, to be followed shortly by Tshikor. However

. 22. the Austrian forces on the sector of Kromenitza Range still occupied
. 210 by them. Second firm and in order to break down this obstacle to the
. 223. capture of Lazarevatz, the Drina II (3rd Army) was deployed on the
. 285. left of the position.

. 415. On the north the enemy directed a violent attack against the extreme right on Varovnitza. This wing was at once strengthened by the introduction of the Reserves of the detachment of Belgrade. These proved insufficient, however, and the situation became so precarious that the Timok I (as already mentioned) was taken from the 2nd Army and dispatched by force marches to Kosmai.

Dec. 7th

The pursuit continued relentlessly throughout the day. The Ushitza Army was following closely its adversary in the sector Bozhara--Kosyeritch--Ushitza, while the troops of the 1st Army, leaving their supply columns far in rear, rushed forward and

succeeded in isolating "large lodges" of hostile troops by cutting the communications between Gukoshi and Lonitzza and between Kalyen and Valjevo. The 3rd Army cleared the enemy in its front and, after a stubborn fight, the 2nd Army, with the assistance of Drina II, occupied the Krotentza heights.

In front of the Belgrade Detachment, fighting of a very severe nature continued throughout the day and, though numerous assaults were beaten off, the Austrians gained some ground.

Dec. 8th

On December 8th the two pursuing Armies arrived before Ushitzza and Valjevo. Ample time had been available for the garrisons to prepare additional defensive works and a stand was expected. The Ushitzza Army met with considerable resistance but nothing now could stop them and the famous 16th Corps soon turned tail and were fleeing toward the border. At Valjevo the approaches had been entrenched and guns were in position. However the Serbs refused a frontal attack but worked around the flanks and struck at the Austrian rear--taking them as completely by surprise as if they had never heard of their coming. Resistance broke immediately and the main Serbian forces were shortly marching through the town toward Loznitzza and Shabatz. Part of the 1st Army pushed along the Loznitzza road, part toward Shabatz, while the 3rd Army, with its left already over the Kolubara south of Oub, began to wheel to the north, pivoting on Lazarovatz with its outer flank following the direction Oub--Ohrenovatz. The battle on the western front was now virtually over. The Austrians, split up into divers columns, were speeding toward the border with no thought or inclination even for rear guard action, yielding prisoners in masses and shedding field guns and costly equipment with less compunction than the crew of a sinking ship jettison mobile dead weight.

By Dec. 10th the Ushitzza Army had seen the last of its foes over the Drina and three days later the 1st Army occupied the lower reaches of the Drina and Sava from Loznitzza to Shabatz.

In the north the enemy attack continued with unabated fury, being directed principally against Agram, and, as the whole issue hung upon successful resistance in this area, additional units (Shoubadia

7) were transferred thither from the 2nd Army. Nevertheless,
 despite these reinforcements, Malovagn (520) was taken and a little
 later Kosnai itself fell. For a few hours the fate of the whole
 Serbian victory hung in balance, and the consequences of the set
 back which had been disastrous had not some troops from the detach-
 ment of Obrenovatz arrived on the Rogatcha Brdo where they were
 able to take the attack in flank and check its progress. This re-
 lief enabled the Serbs to reform and, under protection of artillery
 on Koshovitz (465) they immediately counterattacked. The Austrians
 defended with great stubbornness but by 3:00 P. M. Malovagn was
 stormed and retaken, due principally to a flanking attack from the
 valley of the Kossoline. A hostile counterattack, undertaken a half
 hour later, failed and by 4:00 P.M. Kosnai was again in Serbian hands.
 The battle continued throughout the night in the Varovnitza sector
 but, despite periods of crisis, the Serbs held their ground,

Dec. 9th

All day the Austrians made repeated attacks against the whole
 of the Serbian front (north) and, in particular, against Varovnitza,
 where the struggle developed into one of great ferocity, for both
 sides realized that the final issue of the 3rd Invasion was now at
 stake. No spectacular progress was registered but the Serbs
 eventually secured the upper hand and the Hapsburg forces gradually
 commenced to give way. A Brigade of Cavalry was at once dispatched
 along the Polashnitsa River and northward toward Obrenovatz to
 prevent any passage of the Kolubara and to crowd the hostile forces
 into the ever narrowing triangle which had its apex at Belgrade.

Dec. 10th

The order for general pursuit was issued on the evening of Dec.
 10th--the advance to begin at 7:00 A.M. Dec. 11th. The 3rd Army
 (now consisting of the Combined Division, Drina II, Timok II and the
 Independent Cavalry Division) was to advance by the road Stepcovatz--

I, 3, 10, 1, the Detachment of Obrenovatz and the 3rd

B. pr. 227.
H. pg. 416.

Bar troops belonging to the Detachment of Belgrade which were then concentrated in the Kosmaj Sector, were placed under the command of Marshal Stepanovitch (2nd Army) and given the mission of driving the enemy toward the capitol along the road Sibnitza--Tsighanski Koutche (360) and over territory lying to its left. The detachment of Belgrade (now consisting of the Morava I and the 3rd Bar troops concentrated on the Varevnitz a sector) was to proceed by the main Belgrade road and over terrain to its right, occupy Grodska and maintain liaison, on the left, with reorganized 2nd Army and, on the right, with the detachment of Branitchevo, which had come up and occupied Soudarsti, and was guarding the entrance to the Morava valley. Timok II (3rd Army) was ordered to occupy Cub and Obrenovatz for protection of the left flank, while the Morava II was detached from the 1st Army and instructed to join the 3rd Army by crossing the Volubara between Konatitza and Stepovevatz.

Dec. 11th

B. pr. 230.
H. pg. 438.

The Belgrade detachment, advancing in two columns, the left on Koviona and the right on Strazha, early came in contact with the Austrians along the general line Strazha--Lypa--Koviona, which, though but hastily fortified, was a very formidable position. The Serbs immediately deployed and attacked along the whole line with the main effort directed toward Strazha. Such was the fierceness of the attack that the Austrians precipitately abandoned the mountain, exposing Lypa to flank attack--an opportunity which the Serbs immediately attempted to take advantage of but were stopped by heavy artillery fire from Hill 305.

Dec. 12th

The attack continued on both sides of the Strazha--the enemy defending stubbornly and counterattacking repeatedly but by night the Serbs had succeeded in working up to within 50 yards of the Austrian positions, from Koviona to Hill 304, in preparation for an assault at dawn. On the left the Timok I Division (2nd Army) secured the heights of Hill 410 while the enemy in front of the

H. PG. 228
229.

K. PG. 388.

3rd Army, after a morning of hard fighting, gave way completely and were soon in flight toward the north. The Drina II immediately took up the pursuit and entered Borak at 3:00 P.M., at which time a cavalry brigade was rushed up from Vreosti and dispatched via Konatitsa toward Kostaritsa in an effort to cut off the hostile forces.

Dec. 13th

H. PG. 229.

K. PG. 388.

At 9:45 A.M. Lypa was carried by a frontal assault. This exposed the defenders on Kovioma to flanking fire from both Lypa and Hill 418--with the result that this commanding ground was immediately abandoned, the artillery and infantry retreating along the road, toward the commanding heights of Avala, with the Serbs in close pursuit. At 12:40 P.M., after an intense artillery preparation, Hills 305 and 304 were attacked and taken. This success destroyed completely any idea that the Austrians might have cherished of retrieving the position and once more pursuit, along the whole front, began.

The two armies were now entering a smaller triangle with its apex at Belgrade and its base stretching from the mouth of the Kolubara to Grodska. The terrain encompassed therein was generally mountainous and very favorable for defense but so rapid was the pursuit of the Serbs that by evening one column of the Timok I Division (2nd Army) had passed around Avala, while the other got in rear of the Austrian rear guard retiring from Kovioma and rounded it up, together with a battalion of Chasseurs. The Shounadia I (2nd Army) reached Crlovatz, astride the Topchidere River at approximately the same time.

The detachment of Belgrade, in order to maintain contact, dispatched three strong flying columns. On the right, by Bolatch-- in the center, by Vrtchin toward Kratchane (Hill) and on the left by Alava toward Torlak.

On the front of the 3rd Army, the Drina II attacked at 5:00 P.M. and captured the heights of Maroula and then turned toward the

the heights of Petrovgrad. This obstacle they approached at mid-
night, in a downpour of rain, and immediately deployed for attack.
The progress of the left wing had been less rapid than headquarters
would have liked. Every effort had been made to hurry the Cavalry
Division along the Sava valley with the mission of cutting com-
munications between Belgrade and Semlin but the nature of the
ground and shell fire from the river monitors, which raked the
Makish Plain, considerably retarded the advance. Nevertheless
before nightfall the Austrians were driven out of Moshtanitsa and
forced to fight their way toward Jarkovo.

Dec. 13

At 3:30 A.M. Dčina II (3rd Army) captured Petrovgrad with a
bayonet charge. In front of the 2nd Army the Austrians were
occupying very strong positions on the heights around Torlak and
between Rakovitza--Yayentse and Strazhevitz. The Shoumadia I
advanced against the left of this line while Timok I maneuvered
for an assault against Torlak (The ground in front of Timok I was
open and offered the enemy an unbroken field of fire. The whole
morning was used by the division in getting into position for attack).

At 10:00 A.M. Strazhevitz was taken and later Rakovitza. On the
left, the 3rd Army was following the retreating enemy along the
roads Petrovgrad--Hill 208 and Moshtanitsa--Jeleznik, while a
Brigade of Cavalry was working along the Makish Plain in an attempt
to reach the bridges and cut off the retreat.

By noon the center column of the detachment of Belgrade reached
the Kretovar (hill) sector while its left was approaching Strazhara.
At 2:30 P.M. Timok I, assisted on its left by the right of Shoumadia
I, went forward to the attack of Torlak and almost immediately over-
ran the hostile first line. On the left elements of the Combined
Division (3rd Army) had reached Jarkovo while, on the right, the
detachment of Belgrade proceeded to the assault of Strazhara. At

2

3:00 P.M. Kretchan (town) was hurriedly abandoned. At 4:00 P.M. Torlak was carried at the point of the bayonet and Shoumadia I turned to the assistance of the 3rd Army. At 4:50 P.M. Valour fell to Shoumadia I and at the same time Strazhara, in spite of strong resistance, was taken by the detachment of Belgrade. The

. 320. only check administered during the day was to the cavalry brigade which
. 322. was stopped by cross fire from the Austrian positions and the
. 323. river monitors.
. 324.

. 368. Night saw no arrest to the action. The Serbian batteries continued firing on the retreating forces while the center of the detachment of Belgrade fought its way steadily toward Ekmeklouk and its right pushed toward Erino and Kloupe.

Dec. 15th

The right column of the detachment of Belgrade met with strong rear guard action in front of Erino and Kloupe but at 2:00 A. M. the resistance weakened and by 3:30 A. M. the heights had been taken. Ekmeklouk was occupied before dawn and the Serbs with their guns now on the heights before Belgrade began shelling the pontoon bridges.

. 270. At 7:00 A.M. a detachment of Cavalry (2nd Army) entered Belgrade
. 280. to be followed later by the Infantry of the detachment of Belgrade.
. 310. Street fighting of the fiercest nature continued throughout the day but by night the last of the Austrian forces were either across the river or had surrendered. Thus ignominiously ended the 3rd Austrian invasion.

Of the Army of 300,000, which crossed the Drina and Sava Rivers, certainly not more than 200,000 returned. 323 officers and 41,215 men were taken prisoners, approximately 60,000 were killed or wounded and the equipment, abandoned in the headlong flight to the border, incalculable. There were successes more vast but it is doubtful whether any had a more important bearing upon the immediate progress of the war. The victory of the Kolubara

F. pg. 237.

F. pg. 393.

constitutes one of the greatest deeds in military history, and is unique in its example of the manner in which an army, ill equipped and without reserves, was able, notwithstanding the absence of material--the fatigue of almost incessant fighting--and with almost certain defeat staring it in the face, to rise up and snatch a brilliant victory out of a menacing and disastrous situation.

B. pg. 237.

K. pg. 393.

The presence of the King at the front, the strategy of the staff, the timely arrival of ammunition and the leadership of Mischitch (General Mischitch was made a Field Marshal on the battlefield in reward for the magnificent achievement of the 1st Army under his command), all contributed to the glorious result of this great battle; but the chief honor must go to the Serbian soldiers, who, worn out by years of warfare, suffering from hardships unheard of in other armies and demoralized by weeks of defeat, rose with renewed courage at their country's call, and with unsurpassed valour, drove the well armed and disciplined armies of the Hapsburgs beyond their frontiers in utter rout.

ANALYSIS

A brief analysis of this campaign may, perhaps, best be made by a comparison of the methods--tactics and maneuvers used by both the Austrians and Serbians--with the principles outlined in our Field Service Regulations and taught at this school, F.S.R.--para. 580--page 119.

"Unless the situation and strength of the available forces indicate the advisability of holding the river line as a line of resistance, it is usually best to hold the mass of the forces in a position in readiness at such distance to the rear that they can intervene at any point where a crossing may be attempted. The river line is then held by relative weak detachments; stronger detachments with reserves are posted at the most probable points of crossing."

The Serbs attempted to hold some hundred miles of river front (Drina and Sava) by a cordon defense. This was far beyond the capabilities of her small army.

Result--When the Austrian attack came, their positions were easily carried and they were forced to fall back. Thus began a retreat that they were not able to stop until they had reached their final positions before Milanovatz. Had they held the river front with weak forces--with strong reserves stationed at strategic points--they would, in all probability, have been able, at least, to delay the Austrian advance for days.

F.S.R.--para.490--page 490.

"Pursuit of a decisively defeated enemy must be pushed to the utmost limit of the physical endurance of the troops and no opportunity given him to reorganize his forces and reconstitute his defense. This cannot be accomplished by a straight pushing back of the hostile forces on their lines of communication. Direct pressure is combined with outflanking maneuver etc."

While the Serbs were never decisively defeated--their numerically inferior army--their lack of all necessary supplies, particularly ammunition, and their low state of moral, once they began to fall back, places them in the above category,

The Austrians were invariably slow to follow up their success. Result--The Serbians were always able to extricate themselves--at times from dangerous positions--fall back and reconstitute their defense.

On the other hand the Serbian 1st and Ushitza Armies--once they had the Austrian XV and XVI Corps on the run--were relentless in pursuit.

Result--Two well equipped--and numerically superior forces were decisively defeated and their retreat turned from an orderly withdrawal to an utter rout. Had General Poutwik followed the same tactics in the north by pushing the advance of his 3rd Army west of the Kolubara, they results might have been the same.

F.S.R.--para. 473--page 96.

"The object of a major attack in a stabilized situation is to force the enemy into open ground with a view to his subsequent defeat by the application of the methods of open warfare. The objective and direction of the attack are so selected that a successful offensive action will render the enemy's general position untenable and force a withdrawal on a wide front."

General Pofiorek's plan of attack (double penetration) against the Kolubara position was strategically sound but his selection of an objective, on the front of the Serbian 1st Army, was faulty. Had he deployed his mass further south and struck the extreme left of the 1st Army, there is no doubt but that he could, at that time, have pierced the breach between the 1st and Ushitza Armies--outflanked the dominating range of Souvobor and forced the evacuation of both it and Goukoshi--a maneuver which would have forced the Serbs to operate a speedy retreat to the positions before Milanovatz itself

and night have cut the Ushitzu Army from the main Serbian forces,

This failure to properly appreciate the terrain--necessitated eight days of strenuous fighting to drive the Serbs from their positions. It presented the Serbian Commander in Chief with some very precious time and in the final analysis defeated the Austrian plans of rounding up the little Serbian Army in its entirety.

F.S.R.--para, 205--page 41.

"Information is the basis not only of plans of operation but also of measures taken by a command for its security."

Para, 206--page 41.

"A command protects itself against the surprise attack of hostile ground troops by reconnaissance, by the employment of security detachments, and by the adoption of the necessary measures to insure the readiness for action of its component units."

Apparently the Austrians were so absorbed in their success, so sure and accustomed to victory, so confident of a triumphal march forward that on Dec. 3rd, when the XV and XVI Corps began to move toward the Serbian final positions before Milanovatz, they neglected the elementary precautions mentioned above. Result--They were caught, by the 1st Army, moving leisurely along the roads--not in open country--but in valleys and, before they could recover from the shock and deploy for defense the Serbs had inflicted heavy casualties upon them and created a state of panic from which they never recovered.

It has been stated that an ounce of optimism is worth a large reserve. On the other hand, however, to carry this to the point of blinding oneself to the enemy's capabilities, invites disaster.

There can be no doubt but that the repeated failure of the Austrian leaders to properly evaluate the little Serbian Army contributed, in no small part, to the defeat of the 3rd Invasion.

F.S.R.--para, 426--page 86.

"No terrain can, in general, definitely stop an aggressive advance equipped with adequate means etc."

As stated, Serbia, with the exception of the Matohva Plain, is a knot of hills and mountains, intersected with deep valleys and practically devoid of roads and railroads. Yet two large hostile armies were able to penetrate inland some sixty miles-- get up their supplies--ammunition and heavy artillery and successfully maneuver.

The logistics of this campaign should make an interesting study and is recommended.

F.S.R.--para, 381--page 77.

"Numerical inferiority does not necessarily commit a command to a defensive attitude. Superior hostile strength may be overcome through greater mobility, higher morale, and better leadership. Superior leadership often enables a numerically inferior force to be stronger at the point of decisive action."

Mr. Price in his book states as follows: "The victory of the Kolubara constitutes one of the finest deeds in military history, and is unique in its example of the manner in which an army, ill equipped, was able, notwithstanding the absence of material and the fatigue of unceasing work in the trenches and with certain defeat staring it in the face, to rise up and snatch a brilliant and decisive victory out of a menacing and disastrous situation. Credit for this must be accorded the gallant Serbian soldiers and to their superior leaders."

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THE BALKANS 1915.

Map A



Scale

0

100 miles

Principal Railroads. —

