

RUSSIAN STRATEGY IN EAST FOILED ALL GERMAN PLANS

First Russian Advance Was Made in Rush to Detach German Forces From France—Russian Retreat a Masterpiece of Strategy Ending in Defeat of Germans

LONDON, Nov. 1.—Exactly one month of operations in the eastern theatre of war decided the second stage of the conflict between the armies of Russia and the armies of Germany and Austria. From every point of view, the advantage is definitely with Russia, as was the case in the determination of the first stage. For comprehension of the second stage, which culminated in the defeat of the German armies advancing on Warsaw and the River Vistula and their rapid withdrawal, it is necessary to review briefly the main operations of the first stage, the campaigns in East Prussia and Galicia.

Amazing Speed.

Early in August, the Russian armies mobilized and advanced with amazing speed, struck at East Prussia, aiming for the fortress of Koenigsburg and the line of Dantzig Thorn. Simultaneously Russian armies advanced on Lemberg, the capital of Galicia. No attempt was made by Russia to develop a central offensive from Warsaw toward Upper Silesia. The purpose of the drive at East Prussia was to clear the Russian right flank from dangers of a turning movement and to strike terror into the hearts of the Germans in the north, thereby

achieving a distinct moral advantage and compelling Germany to detach troops from Belgium and France. The invasion of Galicia was designed to safeguard the Russian flank and to crush Austria's military power, a necessary accomplishment to a serious attack against Germany.

Von Hindenburg's Feat.

In August, Russian armies overran East Prussia, terrified the peasants, alarmed Berlin, occupied important towns and seemed about to astonish the world. But Germany in the full tide of power met the situation brilliantly. One of the ablest of her strategists, Gen. Von Hindenburg, was sent to the East Prussian field. Utilizing her remarkable system of railway she sent army corps to East Prussia.

Von Hindenburg, by daring strategy, enveloped a great Russian army under Genl. Rennenkampf in the marshy region of the Mazurka Lakes and won, early in September, the decisive victory of Tannenberg, which followed a victory of Liebenstein.

Lost Heavily.

The Russians lost heavily, a total, perhaps of 70,000 men, and only escaped annihilation by a rapid withdrawal to the River Niemen. The Germans pressed their advantage and by September 25th had reached the Niemen and were launching a terrific effort to cross that stream.

They were defeated solidly and began retreating on the 25th. Rear-guard actions continued until Oct. 1st, when the Russians made their victory decisive by crushing the Germans right wing in the forests of Augustowo. Every German column fled toward the East Prussian frontier,



reached it after great losses and settled down on a defensive line well within the frontier.

Germans Failed.

But the campaign in East Prussia was decided in fact on September 25, at the Niemen. The Germans' rush had failed as disastrously as the Russians' previous drive. The net result of the whole business was that the Russians were back in territory from which they had been driven by von Hindenburg, were again safeguarding their right flank, and were again alarming Berlin and weakening German military power in the western theatre.

In Galicia matters ran a similar course, although there was no important battle in Western Galicia and the Russian withdrawal from the region of Tarnow was prompted by the strategical necessity of straightening their whole line of battle and shortening lines of communication, which had been enormously extended by a too rapid advance.

New German Offensive.

But about Sept. 25th the Russian plans were checkmated by a new and very powerful German offensive.

General von Hindenburg, hailed as the preserver of Prussia, met the Kaiser and the General staff at Breslau, formulated with them the plan for seizing Poland and occupying Warsaw, hastened to Cracow, put new heart into the drubbed Austrians and inaugurated the advance of a German grand army numbering not less than 800,000 men.

Appreciating the requirements of the situation the Russians in Galicia fell back to the River San, and occupied very strong lines of defence, holding these lines against a new Austrian offensive stiffened by German reinforcements.

Their northern or left wing struck at Warsaw from the direction of Plock. Their centre composed of first-rate Prussian troops, advanced from Lowicz and Rawa, while their southern

or right wing menaced Ivangorod and the Vistula from the direction of Radom and Kielce. The campaign was splendidly conceived, and, as is customary with the Germans, thoroughly organized.

For three weeks the Germans met with little serious opposition from men, but with tremendous opposition from nature. The country through which they advanced, widespread plains characterized by marshes and a web of troublesome streams, became almost impassable from heavy, continuous rains. The country was soaked and sodden. The roads became sloughs. There were only two main lines of railway, from Thorn and Czenstacowa.

Harried the Enemy.

The Russians using Cossacks as vicious and evasive as hornets, struck and retreated, never offering battle, always wasting the country. By the time the Germans were in sight of the Vistula and almost within sight of Warsaw they were wearied. They had lost heavily in stragglers. Batteries had been abandoned in the bogs.

They remained, however, a powerful cohesion and determined force utterly confident of their ability to take Warsaw and drive the Russians eastward from the Vistula. It is apparent at this writing, of course, that the Russian inaction in Poland, and the ability of the Germans to approach the Vistula practically uncontested, was no fortuitous circumstance. On the contrary such passivity was an important part of the whole Russian strategy.

Not making the error of underestimating his opponents, and risking destruction by precipitous action in Poland, the Grand Duke Nicholas concealed his real strength, permitting the Germans to advance, drew them to battle positions chosen long previously by the Russian general staff, and then coolly baited the trap.

The Battle of Warsaw.

On October 13th, the advance of the German left wing was within eight miles of Warsaw. The population of the Capital heard with alarm the booming of heavy German guns, there was something of a panic. German aviators swooped over the city, dropping bombs which did little damage.

A few miles to the south, the German centre, having pressed forward to the west bank of the Vistula, was making a supreme effort to bridge that stream, already at flood rush from the great rains. Still southward, the German right, largely composed of Saxon troops, with a few Austrian corps, were struggling heroically to seize the Tete de Pont of Ivangorod.

Russian Artillery.

But all along the line, Russian artillery devastated the German lines, while the Russian right wing, on the west bank of the Vistula, endured the onslaught of German infantry. The combat from the infantry continued from the 13th to the 18th, with great losses to each side, and with no decisive issue.

On the 18th the Grand Duke Nicholas sprang his trap. He had staked the city of Warsaw and all Poland, possibly upon the strength of its Jews. Avoiding somehow, the observation of German aviators, he concentrated ten divisions of cavalry at Georgiewsk, north-west of Warsaw and near the junction of the rivers Vistula and Bug. Suddenly he delivered a terrific counter attack of infantry against the German lines west of Warsaw.

Simultaneously, while the infantry combat was in full force, he swept the cavalry divisions around the German left wing and hurled them at the German rear.

The movement was the closing of the pincers. The Germans fought with desperation, but their position was hopeless. After leaving many thousands on the field of battle, a retreat was ordered. The centre unable to hold its ground without support from the left, gave way, but in the confusion of the hour neglected to inform the commander of the right wing.

Russians in Pursuit.

The Russians swarming across the Vistula south of Warsaw, began a pursuit which still continues. It is impossible to estimate the losses. The Russian government says merely that they were enormous and that too many prisoners were taken for an estimate to be possible at this time.

Allowing for exaggeration, it appears that the German defeat was overwhelming and that no course is left to them save a retirement behind their outer lines of defence on the Prussian and Silesian frontiers. At Radom, the Austro-Saxon army is attempting a stand, but the Russians are in superior strength at that point and their advance to the north threatens to cut off the Saxons from retreating into German territory.

The collapse of the German invasion of Poland and the German retreat mark, therefore, the end of the second stage of the war in the east. It remains to be seen if Russia in turn, can beat down the defence and enter Silesia. At all events the outcome in Poland must have an important bearing on the war in the west, since Germany, now in danger of losing precisely Silesia, must weaken her armistice in France.

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(Sgd.) A. MacDERMOTT, Lieutenant-Commander. oct27,6i

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