

WILLIAM BELLOC'S WEEKLY SUMMARY OF THE WAR

BRITAIN'S MOST DISTINGUISHED CRITIC WRITES OF EVENTS IN EASTERN THEATRES

Important Results To Follow Allied Successes in Macedonia and Palestine—The Plan of Campaign Analyzed—Bulgaria's Purpose in Entering War Has Been Completely Upset By Recent Events in Which Serbs Played Important Part.

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The two chief military events this week have both taken place in minor subsidiary theatres of the war, one in Macedonia and the other in Palestine. The first thing to appreciate in regard to such operations is their necessity. There has been a great deal of criticism delivered against the use of troops in distant operations who might, apparently, be more useful if concentrated on the Western front, where alone the war can be decided and where, in fact, it is being decided at this moment.

This criticism certainly has been justified in the past, when considerable expeditions have been launched, sometimes with insufficient object and often with ill success. There was in the past a school which really believed the situation on the Western front was a deadlock and that the war could be won by turning the Central Empires by the east. It was an error and productive of disastrous results. But the present situation is not that at all. The troops operating in Mesopotamia and Palestine are bodies sufficient enough to do more than their task. They are based upon neighboring countries, and largely recruit themselves from the east.

The forces in Macedonia are forces holding what is essential to preserve from the enemy the outlet he would have from the Balkans to the Aegean at Salonica. It was vital to the Allied interest to send an expeditionary force to Salonica when they did, though now it will be seen that it has new and added value. That value is political and we shall understand nothing of the Turkish Empire at Mesopotamia, Palestine and Macedonia unless we appreciate how greatly the political situations have changed since all three expeditions were undertaken. The two extraneous allies of the Central Empires, Turkey and Bulgaria, were each attached to the Prussian dominion in Europe for reasons which dissociated from the cause of Prussia, and each again was moved by motives quite separate from the other. Each was an enemy to the other, and the worst quarrels of the west, the Turkish Empire came in simply because the Allied victory would put an end to the Turkish possession of Constantinople and the Straits, while the Prussian victory promised the retention of both.

The Prussian Empire was still in existence and the Allies had a definite compact to hand over to that empire control of the entries to the Black Sea. Bulgaria came into the war as a government because its scheming and rascally monarch saw dynastic opportunity for himself; but as a nation it came in because of the profound wrong the Bulgarians felt they had suffered when Austria, after the first Balkan war some years ago, egged on Serbia and Greece to occupy what is the Bulgarians' eyes national territory.

The Bulgarians also desired to recover what they regarded as national territory taken from her in extreme need by Roumania at the same time. As long as the cause of the Central Empires seemed victorious the strain of war thus entered into by Turkey and Bulgaria, for reasons which had nothing to do with the main quarrel, was borne, though not cheerfully; but now that the tide has turned and Prussia cannot win the strain is becoming intolerable. Not only is this so, but the various circumstances which made each party enter the alliance have changed, notably in the case of Turkey, for the Russian Empire no longer exists.

The result is that in both Turkey and Bulgaria the popular feeling against the continuance of the war has become very strong indeed. The operations we are watching quite as much political as military and each of them further shakes the rapidly waning adherence to the enemy's cause which these two countries so long maintained.

To return from these general political considerations to the operations themselves, we first note the apparent ease with which the Bulgarian front is broken by the French and Serbian attack this week. It was the political condition in Bulgaria probably which accounted for this, but it was certainly something we in the west hardly expected.

The situation is as follows: The great tangle of mountains of which Southern Serbia is composed terminates above the Macedonian Plain in a long, rather regular, steep and wooded ridge, stretching from the Vardar to the great bend of the Cerna. It is a range of mountains from five to six thousand feet high and on the southern slopes this range is facing the plain where the main Bulgarian defensive position is drawn up. It was quite as strong as anything in the west prepared with the help of the Austrian and German engineers over a period of more than two years. This line was broken in a sector of six miles, and the mountain positions behind it were carried with such rapidity that in thirty-six hours the gap was already twenty-five miles broad and the French and Serbians advancing through it had reached the Cerna River and proceeded down its valley over twenty miles. Before the end of the week the main Vardar line was reached and success appeared complete.

As a manifestation of the political state in Bulgaria and her possible collapse as a belligerent, the French

and Serbian success is of great interest, but as a military operation proper it needs more qualification. The whole line across Macedonia is something like 160 miles in length as the crow flies, and if you make a breach in such a line of not more than twenty-five miles and penetrate deeply through the breach while the country is such that you cannot rapidly move your tanks, then you are in danger of forming a pocket where you may suffer disaster. It was on this account that immediately following the French and Serbian success the British and the Greeks attacked on the right of the line by Lake Doiran. But this attack, unfortunately, did not meet with success.

The consequence was a curious situation in which two balanced elements, good and bad, were present. The bad element was the possible action of the Bulgarians to the east, where now they had staved off the British and the Greek attack and were coming down on the flank of the French and Serbians, who had thrust so far forward in so short a time and had consequently imperilled their flanks.

The good element was the possibility that before any such Bulgarian reaction the French and Serbians would reach the Vardar Valley in force and cut the railway upon which the Bulgarian front at Lake Doiran depends. At the moment of writing a somewhat confused situation seems on the whole to suggest the latter rather than the former.

It looks as though the main communication of the Bulgarian army by road and railway down the Vardar Valley is going to be cut before the Bulgarian units round the lower part of the valley near Lake Doiran could send support to their colleagues further west. One of the features of the situation which seems curious is the small numbers with which the Bulgarians appear to have been holding the part of the front that broke.

The complete local success in the

breach of the line over twenty-five miles and the very rapid advance beyond it produced no more than 8,000 prisoners and 100 guns and that looks as though the Bulgarians are keeping considerable reserves up in the country.

I have to leave the strategic situation at Macedonia this week with the most interesting point still undecided, but before these lines are in print we shall know whether the main line in the Vardar Valley has been thoroughly cut or not, and shall see what the consequences of that operation will be if it is accomplished.

In Palestine we have had another example, but far more striking of the effects upon the army morale when the country behind is getting wobbly. There can be no doubt at all that the collapse of the Turkish defence stretched across Palestine was the collapse of forces not properly supported by public opinion and the government. And it is probable that this collapse will in turn breed further trouble for those who still continue the policy of war in Constantinople.

Merely to hang on as an ally of Prussia when you have nothing to gain by it, when you are suffering continuous and now severe defeats, is something that those ruled by the present committee of Constantinople cannot submit to. The Young Turk government rule in terror is desperately unpopular, and certainly won't survive defeat.

Now the defeat that the Turkish forces have suffered in Palestine has been very complete. Already seems to have had in front of him six divisions, two on the far side of the Jordan and four holding the line between the Jordan and the sea. If further would seem that no considerable reserves were present immediately behind the line. It is one of the curious features in the situation that after the victory in the rapid advance no shock with the arriving of reserves took place.

Against these six divisions the plan of the British General Command was to leave unmenaced, for the moment the two divisions east of the Jordan and attack strongly the Turkish left between the main trunk road and the Jordan, and, while his left was thus being held and the menace of defeat appeared, there to strike with extreme vigor on the much easier ground of the open sea plain on the Turkish right. The desired effect was reached immediately and completely. The Turkish lines between the foothills of the Judean Highlands and the Mediterranean were broken so thoroughly that the cavalry could be sent through at once, and they got northward and behind the retreating Turks, capturing at a blow the equivalent to two divisions.

BRITISH AIRMEN CONTINUE TO BOMBARD ENEMY CITIES

Tons of Bombs Dropped in Vicinity of Metz-Sablon—Railways and Airdromes Attacked—German Machines Beaten To Earth.

London, Sept. 27.—The following official communication dealing with the operations of the British independent air force was issued this evening:

"In conjunction with the Franco-American operations Thursday our machines in the afternoon attacked the railways of Metz, Sablon and Audun, on the Metz-Sablon region. Large numbers of enemy airplanes were encountered and bitter fighting took place."

"Two enemy machines were destroyed and one was sent down out of control. Six of ours failed to return. On the night of Thursday, in heavy attacks, on the Metz-Sablon region many direct hits were observed. Railways of Metz and Thionville and the Frescati airdrome were attacked. There were several direct hits on the

Thionville Station and Junction. All our machines returned."

Another communication dealing with operations over other parts of the fighting front and behind the lines, says: "Our machines Thursday carried out a large number of reconnaissance flights and manoeuvres for observing the effect of our artillery fire."

"More than twenty tons of bombs were dropped on railroads and billets, in a raid on an enemy airdrome several hangars were set on fire and a hostile machine was destroyed on the ground and seven others, which attempted to repel the attacking squadron were shot down. Four hostile machines were destroyed on other parts of the front. Five of our machines are missing during the day. Little flying was possible at night."

ions, with the artillery and nearly all the wheeled transport of the Turkish forces between the Jordan and the sea. Unfortunately, the pursuit did not manage to get to Nablus in time to destroy the whole Turkish army west of the Jordan. Had Nablus been reached in the first thirty-six hours not a man or a gun would have escaped, for Nablus is the meeting point of all the roads in that region. The pursuit was held up in the Valley of Samariya. The enemy covered Nablus for at least three days, and appears to be covering it still at the moment of writing. Consequently the retirement of the Turks on the left will take place up the main road from Jerusalem and then on northward by the road which passes the Jordan and fords that river. It is true that such a retirement can only take place with the utmost disorganization, and the saving of vehicles and guns across the Jordan valley will be for the most part impossible. But half or more than half of the men may be able to get away by this gate, which remained open to the enemy. There was a moment when it seemed as though the two divisions to the east of the Jordan would be caught in a trap also, but now it is too late for this to be a probable result.

CONFERENCE OF BEST BRAINS IN ALLIED RANKS

Ex-Premier Asquith Says Such a Gathering Should Attack Problem of League of Nations.

London, Sept. 27.—(Canadian Press Despatch from Reuters, Ltd.)—The national liberal federation which has just opened a convention in Manchester, adopted a resolution advocating the prosecution of the war until a just and lasting peace is assured and urging the establishment of a league of nations. The motion that the liberal party favors the exploration of the possibilities of peace, and should sympathetically consider any suggestions



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offered by enemy countries was defeated by an overwhelming majority. Its mover was constantly interrupted. The national liberal federation also unanimously adopted a resolution supporting such constitutional reforms in India as would secure the gradual development of self-governing institutions with a view to the progressive realization of responsible government as an integral part of the British Empire. It also supported measures to enable the dominions and India to exercise their due share in the control of the foreign policy of the empire and other matters of common concern to war.

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