

## THE 15<sup>TH</sup> CORPS OF THE IMPERIAL OTTOMAN ARMY ON THE EASTERN GALICIAN FRONT (1916-1917)

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The presence of the Ottoman 15<sup>th</sup> Corps on the Eastern Galician Front in 1916 to 1917 is one of the most poorly documented episodes in the history of the Ottoman Empire's participation in the First World War. This results as equally from a lack of interest on the part of historians, who have most wrongly marginalised the subject, as the fairly modest and difficult access to source base.

Most certainly the largest collection of documents on this subject to be found in Turkey is held at the ATASE Arşivi in Ankara. However, access to the said institution is especially difficult for foreign historians (the author of the present article is still waiting for a reply to a request submitted in 1997...). Even though Turkish researchers are most certainly not confronted with such obstacles, the number of source and academic publications they produce is most modest in scope and may be boiled down to three items. The first of these and the most valuable, though small in size and never republished, is the work by the General Staff Publishing House from the series "Birinci Dünya Harbi"<sup>1</sup>, while the second are the most interesting reminiscences of Mehmet Şevki Yazman entitled *Kumandanım Galiçya ne yana düşer? Mehmetçik Avrupa'da*<sup>2</sup>. Unfortunately, this text is almost completely devoid of any academic structure (in the form of an analytical introduction or any footnotes). In addition a significant part of the dates it contains have not been correctly adjusted for the Gregorian Calendar. These inadvertences have meant that Yazman's recollections, constituting an extremely valuable source, have not found the place they deserve within Turkish historiography.

The third work, one partially devoted to the 15<sup>th</sup> Corps' participation in the Galician conflict, is the work by Selma Yel entitled *Yakup Şevki Paşa ve Askerî Faaliyetle-*

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<sup>1</sup> *Birinci Dünya Harbi*, VII nci Cilt, *Avrupa Cepheleeri*, I nci Kısım, (*Galiçya Cephesi*), T.C. Genelkurmay Başkanlığı Harp Tarihi Dairesi Resmî Yayınları, Seri No.: 3, Gnkur. Basımevi, Ankara 1967.

<sup>2</sup> Mehmet Şevki Yazman, (hazırlayan: Kansu Şarman), *Kumandanım Galiçya ne yana düşer? Mehmetçik*, İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, İstanbul 2011.

n<sup>3</sup>. Even a cursory glance at the biography is enough to confirm that the methods employed by a historian of military affairs were rather not known to its author. In addition at times the clearly visible emotional approach adopted with regard to the personage of Staff Lieutenant Yakup Şevki (Subaşı) means that the evaluation of his achievements on the said front is a long way from being objective.

A certain amount of information on the subject of the 15<sup>th</sup> Corps in Galicia may be equally obtained from the publication *Harb Mecmuası*<sup>4</sup>, although it needs to be emphasised that the majority of the texts herein contained are propaganda in character, and consequently require of the researcher especial care. Undoubtedly worthy of note is the iconographic material accompanying the articles – the most extensive so far known.<sup>5</sup>

Within Poland, in whose present borders a significant part of Western Galicia lies, even many professional historians are completely unaware of the subject. During the inter-war years the matter was most briefly referred to by, most probably, only Jan Dąbrowski in his recollective work on the Brusilov Offensive.<sup>6</sup> Laconic references, ones on the whole cited after the German or Austrian press (thereby not bringing anything of note), on the presence of Turks in Galicia may be found in the reminiscences of Polish authors,<sup>7</sup> or in the daily press of the period.

One had to wait until 1998 for the first monograph on the subject of Turkish military involvement in the Galician conflict; this being a light academic text by Beata Nykiel and Piotr Nykiel entitled “Półksiężyc w Galicji” [The Crescent in Galicia].<sup>8</sup> This text, despite its non-committal form, was in subsequent years to constitute

<sup>3</sup> Selma Yel, *Yakup Şevki Paşa ve Askerî Faaliyetleri*, Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi, Ankara 2002.

<sup>4</sup> From the issues of *Harb Mecmuası* available to the author of this article texts on the subject of the Eastern Front are to be found in the following: Ağustos 1332 [August/September 1916] (Yıl: 1, Sayı: 12); Teşrin-i evvel 1332 [October/November 1916] (Yıl: 1, Sayı: 13); Teşrin-i sani 1332 [November/December 1916] (Yıl: 1, Sayı: 14); Kanun-u evvel 1332 [December 1916/January 1917] (Yıl: 2, Sayı: 15); Kanun-u sani 1332 [January/February 1917] (Yıl: 2, Sayı: 16); Mart 1333 [March 1917] (Yıl: 2, Sayı: 17); Nisan 1333 [April 1917] (Yıl: 2, Sayı: 18); Mayıs 1333 [May 1917] (Yıl: 2, Sayı: 19); Ağustos 1333 [August 1917] (Yıl: 2, Sayı: 21).

<sup>5</sup> Nykiel Piotr, "The 15<sup>th</sup> Corps of the Ottoman Army on the Galician Front in the Light of the "Harb Mecmuası" Biweekly Magazine", *Discussions on Turkology. Questions and Developments of Modern Turkology Studies / Türkoloji Tartışmaları. Başarı ve Zaafılarıyla Çağdaş Türkoloji*, (edit. Öztürk Emiroğlu, Marzena Godzińska, Filip Majkowski), Department of Turkish Studies and Inner Asian Peoples, Faculty of Oriental Studies, University of Warsaw, Warsaw 2014, p. 128-134

<sup>6</sup> Jan Dąbrowski, *Wielka Wojna 1914-1918*, Trzaska, Ewert i Michalski, Warszawa 1937.

<sup>7</sup> E.g., Maria Lubomirska, *Pamiętnik księżnej Marii Zdzisławowej Lubomirskiej 1914-1918*, Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, Poznań 1997, or also A. Steiner, *Brzeżany na widowni bojowej. Wspomnienie dziejowe od 26. sierpnia 1914. r. do 9. lutego 1918 r.*, no date or place of publication.

<sup>8</sup> *Komandos*, 1998, Part 1 no. 11(75), pp. 43-46; Part 2 no. 12(76), pp. 40-41.

the indicator of knowledge on the matter.<sup>9</sup> In 2010 the information was expanded upon in P. Nykiel's article "Słów kilka o tym, co łączy Wernyhorę z krakowską turkologią" [A Few Words on What Links *Wernyhora* with Turkish Studies in Cracow].<sup>10</sup>

Although the Ottoman 15<sup>th</sup> Corps fought in Galicia within the framework of the German Southern Army, it appears impossible to find any record of this fact in German archives, for – as has been ascertained by the author of the present work – almost all documents on German First World War fronts were burnt during the Second World War.

During their stay in Galicia the Turkish units made use of artillery and logistic support provided by the Austro-Hungarian forces there stationed. Laborious research in Austrian archives could therefore bring to light a certain number of documents connected with the question, though it would be fair not to expect there to be too much material or that qualitatively that which might be discovered to being something of significance to the knowledge we already possess.

The fact that the battlefields of the 15<sup>th</sup> Corps lie within the territory of the present-day Ukraine does not have its reflection in the archive resources of this country. In accordance with what the author has ascertained that if there were any documents whatsoever on the matter in Ukraine then following the incorporation of Ukraine to the Soviet Union they would have been taken to Moscow, where they quite possibly await discovery.

Therefore, as can be seen, for anyone outside of Turkey research into this question is extremely difficult and consequently has to be limited to a critical analysis of the generally accessible sources and the highly limited number of works about the Turkish presence in Western Galicia. It seems that this effort – even within such a dimension – is worth undertaking and here for two reasons: firstly, in as far as involvement on the Galician Front brought the Ottoman Empire no tangible benefits, then the gritty determination displayed by the Ottoman troops was to have a significant influence on the course of the battles fought in this part of Europe, significantly contributing to the breaking of the greatest offensive launched by the Russian mili-

<sup>9</sup> Based on the mentioned article and in a not entirely reliable manner were to arise the texts by Piotr Galik ("Gdy Turek w Dniestrze napoi swe konie...", *Odkrywca. Skarby – Wojna – Historia*, no. 2 (109), February 2008, pp. 48-50) and Krzysztof Bassara ("Turecka odsiecz – historia walk tureckiego XV korpusu w Galicji w latach 1916-1917", *Przegląd Tatarski* No. 1/2011, pp. 7-10) as well as a plagiarism constituting the introduction to a certain book published in Turkey.

<sup>10</sup> In: *Od Anatolii po Syberię. Świat turecki w oczach badaczy* (ed.: Siemieniec-Gołaś E., Georgiewa-Okon J.), Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 2010, pp. 143-148.

tary on the Eastern Front in the whole duration of the First World War.<sup>11</sup> And secondly, the episode under discussion had a really symbolic significance for the Polish nation. Both of these two aspects will be dealt with in more depth in the ensuing paragraphs. For now it follows to describe what the circumstances were in which the decision to send the 15<sup>th</sup> Corps to Galicia was taken, as well as presenting its consequence within the chronological order of events.

When on the 9<sup>th</sup> of January 1916 the last Allied soldier withdrew from the Gallipoli Peninsula, the Ottoman General Staff gained the possibility to divert onto another front at least a part of the units comprising the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Armies that had been defending the Dardanelles.

Because the situation on the Iraqi and Palestinian fronts did not appear at the time to be as drastic as it was to during the course of the second half of the same year, the minister of war, Enver Pasha, undertook the authoritarian and ill-considered decision – from the point of view of the interests of the Ottoman Empire – to support the war efforts of Germany and Austro-Hungary on one of the European fronts.

Though Enver had at his disposal units of unquestionable valour and frontline grit, which had been obtained in the Balkan wars of 1912-1913 as well as during the nine-month trench conflict that had been fought out at Gallipoli, these soldiers were undernourished and dreadfully equipped.<sup>12</sup> So when on the 4<sup>th</sup> of June 1916 the German General Staff expressed its willingness to accept Turkish assistance on the Eastern Galician Front to the tune of a single corps<sup>13</sup>, there was undoubtedly a sign of relief in Istanbul. For all those officers of the Ministry of War who had their feet firmly on the ground were painfully aware that for any greater number whatsoever

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Report of gen. von Bronsart ("1914/1918 Dünya Savaşında Türk Askeri Hareketlerinin Kısa Tasviri") published in: Akdes Nimet Kurat, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı Sırasında Türkiye'de Bulunan Alman Generalerin Raporları*, Türk Kültürünü Araştırma Enstitüsü, Ankara 1966, pp. 32-33 and 36.

<sup>12</sup> We should remember that the German input into the defence of the Dardanelles was limited almost exclusively to – and here not always competently – the command of a part of the forces, while the entire manpower and material burden of conducting the fight fell on the shoulders of the Turks. The first regular rail transports of ammunition and military equipment were to only reach Istanbul after the 17<sup>th</sup> of January 1916. One may therefore confidently state that the Ottoman Empire defended the straits out of its own resources, having at its disposal that which had been rescued from the annihilation of its army in the Balkans (cf.: Veli Yılmaz, *1 nci Dünya Harbi'nde Türk-Alman İttifakı ve Askeri Yardımlar*, İstanbul 1993, pp. 118-132).

<sup>13</sup> The Germans unwillingly consented to Enver's offer, for they were fully aware of the difficult situation the Ottoman Empire found itself in, being forced to fight simultaneously on several fronts. In Berlin it was feared that an acceptance of the Turkish offer could bring with it a claim on the part of Istanbul for new political demands on Germany during the peace negotiations (cf. Ulrich Trumpener, *Germany and the Ottoman Empire 1914-1918*, Caravan Books, Delmar, New York 1989, p. 131; Jehuda L. Wallach, *Bir Askeri Yardımın Anatomisi. Türkiyede Prusya-Alman Askeri Hejyetleri 1835-1919*, Gn.Kur. Basımevi, Ankara 1985, p. 187).

the military would have been unable to muster within the territory of the Ottoman Empire sufficient regulation uniforms, equipment, tents, horses, literally everything which Turkish soldiers should have had in order not to have appeared as an embarrassment for the country in the eyes of their allies and the civilian population inhabiting both Galicia itself as well as the deployment route. The equipping of hand-picked Ottoman units at the cost of others had unfortunately become a rule out of necessity, for in 1912 Turkey had lost in Macedonia its main weapon arsenals together with its equipment warehouses and means of operational logistics.<sup>14</sup>

An equal problem was that of unifying the weaponry of the soldiers. Finally they were equipped with Mosin rifles, taken earlier from Russians on the Caucasus Front.

The Turkish minister of war, in treating the Galicia mission as one of prestige, decided to detail to the front the 15<sup>th</sup> Corps, which was comprised of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Divisions. This had entered earlier into the composition of the 5<sup>th</sup> Army that had taken the brunt of the defence of the Dardanelles for the period 1915-1916. During the positional battles that had occurred on the Gallipoli Peninsula, the corps had suffered such enormous losses that its personnel had on two occasions been rebuilt almost from zero.

The 19<sup>th</sup> Division was not already at this time a part of the 15<sup>th</sup>, but of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps of the 5<sup>th</sup> Army. It was famed for the fact that under the command of Staff Lieutenant Colonel Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) the 19<sup>th</sup> Division twice had saved the situation on the front. Mustafa Kemal did not, however, travel to Galicia, for Enver Pasha, jealous of his successes, preferred to despatch him first shortly to Edirne (Adrianopol), and then to Diyarbakır, where he had to engage the Russians, who – to a large degree thanks to Enver's incompetencies – had reached there from the Caucasus Front.

On the 10<sup>th</sup> of June 1916 the numerical strength of the 15<sup>th</sup> Corps was 30,000. As a result of reinforcements carried out from mid July, each of the two divisions was to receive an additional 5,000 soldiers.<sup>15</sup> The cavalry units that entered into the corps composition in August 1916, that is just after arriving in Eastern Galicia, numbered 300 horses. The structural divide for both divisions was similar: for the 19<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division was comprised of three regiments – the 57<sup>th</sup>, the 72<sup>nd</sup> and the 77<sup>th</sup>, while for the 20<sup>th</sup> Division – the 61<sup>st</sup>, the 62<sup>nd</sup> and the 63<sup>rd</sup>. Moreover, both

<sup>14</sup> The most drastic example of such *cannibalism* was the taking of weapons from soldiers fighting on the Syrian Front and transferring them to the Turkish-Azeri Volunteer Islamic Army, created in August 1918. This decision undertaken by Enver Pasha, gripped with the utopian idea of creating a Greater Turan, was to influence to an enormous degree the loss of Damascus and the final defeat of the Ottoman forces on the Syrian Front (cf. Dariusz Kołodziejczyk, *Turcja*, Wydawnictwo Trio, Warszawa 2011, p. 91).

<sup>15</sup> Finally 32,018 soldiers and 535 officers set off for Galicia (Yel, *op. cit.*, p. 27).

divisions possessed two companies, each with heavy machine guns, one squadron of cavalry, one regiment of artillery (in the 19<sup>th</sup> Division – the 25<sup>th</sup> and in the 20<sup>th</sup> Division, the 20<sup>th</sup>), one engineer and medical company, and one communication unit together with auxiliary units.

The first commander assigned to the Galicia corps was Staff Colonel Yakup Şevki (Subaşı).<sup>16</sup> In November 1916 he was replaced, however, by General Cevat (Çobanlı), the famous Cevat Pasha, who in the battles for the Dardanelles had directed the defence of the Dardanelles Fortified Region on behalf of the Turkish Ministry of War.<sup>17</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Hayri was appointed head of staff. Command of the 19<sup>th</sup> Division was taken by Lieutenant Colonel Mehmet Şefik (Aker), while the 20<sup>th</sup> Division was headed by Lieutenant Colonel Yasin Hilmi.<sup>18</sup>

The order for preparations to be undertaken for departure to the Eastern Galicia Front were given to the commanders of the subunits of the 15<sup>th</sup> Corps on the 9<sup>th</sup> of July. At the turn of August the first units left the railway station at Uzunköprü.<sup>19</sup> In the initial phase of deployment their route wound through Belgrade, Budapest, Kraków, Przemyśl and Lwów right up to Podwysokie.<sup>20</sup> Later, for unknown reasons, this underwent change and the final deployment of units of the 15<sup>th</sup> Corps in Budapest was diverted to Stryj, and further on via Lwów was to reach Podwysokie.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Following in the generally accepted norm in Turkish historiography, in the case of individuals whose careers had started still in Ottoman times, the surnames that were only given them in 1934 we give in brackets.

<sup>17</sup> We will say something about the causes and circumstances of this change a little later in talking about the course of the 15<sup>th</sup> Corps conflict in Galicia. For a biography of General Cevat (Çobanlı) as well as further information on the subject of his role in the defence of the Dardanelles see Piotr Nykiel, *Wyprowa do Żłotego Rogu. Działania wojenne w Dardanelach i na Morzu Egejskim (sierpień 1914 – marzec 1915)*, (Kraków – Międzyzdroje: Wydawnictwo Arkadiusz Wingert, 2008).

<sup>18</sup> This officer was transferred to Galicia from the Middle East as a result of him being suspected of sympathy for the Arabs incited to revolt against the Ottoman Empire by Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Edward Lawrence. Towards the end of the First World War he moved over to the British side and served them loyally in Iraq (it being no coincidence that it was to be exactly there, for Yasin Hilmi Salman was an Arab born in Baghdad). In the years 1924-25 and 1935-36 as Yasin al-Hashimi he held the post of Iraqi prime minister. He died in 1937 (Mesut Uyar, Edward J. Erickson, *A Military History of the Ottomans: From Osman to Atatürk*, Greenwood Publishing Group, Santa Barbara 2009, p. 277).

<sup>19</sup> The appearance *shortly* of the Turkish forces in Galicia was announced by the Cracow newspaper *Czas* of the 27<sup>th</sup> of July 1916, referring to a report of the Berlin Wolff Agency.

<sup>20</sup> Duchess Maria Lubomirska mentions in her memoirs the short stopover of the Turkish soldiers in Cracow and their visit to Wawel Castle, the entry being dated the 31<sup>st</sup> of July 1916 (*Pamiętnik księżnej Marii Zdzisławowej Lubomirskiej 1914-1918*, Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, Poznań 1997, pp. 387-388). The author here cites press accounts though unfortunately she fails to give sources.

<sup>21</sup> This route was taken, during the first days of August 1916 together with one of the companies of the 20<sup>th</sup> Division, by 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt Mehmet Şevki Yazman, who wrote about the said in his recollections (*op. cit.*, pp. 6-41).

The transports of Turkish soldiers converged on Galicia on a timescale of over a week, undergoing on route at Zemun a several day period of quarantine. After a short rest in the environs of Podwysokie the units moved off to the front line.

The commander-in-chief on this section was the heir to the Austrian throne, Archduke Karl von Habsburg, while the Turkish units were to fight within the framework of the Southern German Army to the south-west of Brzeżany, in the fork of the rivers Złota Lipa and Narajówka, which constituted the northern tributaries of the Dniestr. The 19<sup>th</sup> Division, which arrived on location as the first, was deployed along the length of the Złota Lipa, on the line of Potutory – Bożyków, with headquarters at Mieczyszczów. However, the 20<sup>th</sup> Division was allocated, a second somewhat longer section of trenches along the Złota Lipa, between the settlements of Bożyków and Łysa. The division's command was located at Lipnica Dolna, from where after a time it was transferred to Szumlany. The command of the entire corps arrived on the 20<sup>th</sup> of August and installed itself at Podwysokie.

The positions officially taken up by the Turks at the end of August were located in a gap vacated by the Austro-Hungarian 54<sup>th</sup> Division. From the left wing (from the north) this section also bordered with the 55<sup>th</sup> Division of the Austro-Hungarian Corps under General Max Hoffmann, while from the right (from the south) with the 1<sup>st</sup> Bavarian Reserve Division.<sup>22</sup>

When the 15<sup>th</sup> Corps reached the Eastern Galician Front the previously stationed Allied forces had been engaged, with varying success, since June 1916 with a gigantic offensive led by the Russian general Aleksei Brusilov. Consequently, already in the first days of September, the Ottoman soldiers were made to realise that the specifics of combat as conducted on the Galician Front significantly differed from that which they had been used to on the Dardanelles.

The first unpleasant surprise was the climate, characterised by much lower temperatures and a significant amount of precipitation. The second thing was the extent of the front and the much greater distances between the trenches of both opposing sides. This was in turn connected with the incomparably greater danger from massed artillery fire (most often in the form of destructive fire) after which there occurred a frontal attack of dominant infantry and cavalry forces. These elements of combat on European fronts surprised nobody. For the Turkish soldiers, of whom many had only the experience of Gallipoli, these were something new. For in the Dardanelles the limited topography of the peninsula had dictated a form on the front line of narrow sections characterised by trenches situated often not more than a few metres in distance from the first line of one's own dugout and those trench positions of the enemy.

<sup>22</sup> *Birinci Dünya Harbi... (op.cit.)*, p. 31-33.

The above specifics of the field of battle had excluded the use of artillery on the scale it was employed in Galicia (as a result of the danger of shelling one's own positions) as well as cavalry which on both sides was dismounted out of necessity.

The size of the Galician theatre of war and the greater predictability of winds also enabled both sides to employ various types of gas, something the Turks had never encountered before. All of these elements demanded a much greater degree of mobility from the Ottoman soldiers than had been the case hitherto. The elements that they were well acquainted with were for all that bayonet clashes and the significant use of hand-grenades.<sup>23</sup>

The often noticeable lack of experience amongst rank-and-file troops and lower ranking officers was compensated for by an incredible determination and willingness to fight.<sup>24</sup> The Turks, fighting for the first time in decades beyond the borders of their empire, experienced serious re\problems at first with the change in mentality. Each meter of Galician trench was defended by them with a level of sacrifice as if it was their own soil. An order given by the German command for a tactical withdrawal of several kilometres was capable of completely ruining the morale of officers and men. Hence, in defending so ferociously each and every inch of ground and remembering that on Gallipoli the first line was often the one and only, they manned the trenches with far too many people, which during the initial period of combat resulted in huge and completely unnecessary losses as a result of artillery fire.<sup>25</sup>

The first significant clashes involving Ottoman soldiers occurred at the beginning of September 1916. From the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 6<sup>th</sup> of September, in the battles that occurred on the Narajówka the 57<sup>th</sup> and 77<sup>th</sup> Regiments excelled, successfully repulsing several times the Russian attacks on the German Hoffmann Corps. On the 6<sup>th</sup> of September it was a near thing that both Turkish divisions were not cut off. They were saved by an order of army command, which at the last moment was able to stop the 1<sup>st</sup> Bavarian Reserve Division, withdrawing at a breakneck speed on the section Sarańczuki – Lipnica Dolna.<sup>26</sup> However as a result of the mass artillery fire

<sup>23</sup> The above described difference in specifics of combat between the Dardanelles and the Galician Fronts is evident and very clearly visible when any sources or books related to the topography and strategy of the both fronts are compared.

<sup>24</sup> Let us not forget that the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Divisions, so praised in their battles for the Dardanelles, set off for Galicia with over a fifty percentage change in personnel. Many of the recruits, representing the entire range of the Ottoman Empire's ethnic composition, did not even speak Turkish. The question of condition of the Ottoman troops in mid 1916 and the way the 15<sup>th</sup> Corps was formed before its dispatch to Galicia was raised by many authors, but most of them repeated the words of gen. Otto Liman von Sanders (*Five Years in Turkey*, Baillière, Tindall & Cox, London 1928, pp. 122-124).

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Yazman, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

<sup>26</sup> This retreat was, however, a tactically planned manoeuvre, which the Turkish command did not adhere to. The losses incurred by the 15<sup>th</sup> Corps on that day and the following was to a large degree the direct responsibility of the commander, Colonel Yakup Şevki (Subaşı) (Cf.: *ibidem*, pp. 77-90, 94-95).



and the effect of bayonet combat, the 20<sup>th</sup> Division lost 600 men. Two companies of the 19<sup>th</sup> and one of the 20<sup>th</sup> Division were taken prisoner.<sup>27</sup>

On the night of the 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> of September the Russians again attacked the Turkish positions with the forces of the 26<sup>th</sup> and 47<sup>th</sup> Divisions. After bloody counterattacks the 15<sup>th</sup> Corps was able to push back the enemy, but at a terrible cost of 1500 dead, wounded and missing in action.<sup>28</sup>

Subsequent large scale action took place along the banks of the Złota Lipa on the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> of September after both sides had regrouped. On the first day the central military positions were attacked by 13 regiments from 4 Russian divisions (the 3<sup>rd</sup> Turkestan, the 26<sup>th</sup>, the 41<sup>st</sup> and the 47<sup>th</sup>). On the section occupied by the Turkish 62<sup>nd</sup> Regiment, the Russians used gas. The entire 15<sup>th</sup> Corps repelled for 12 hours the attacks of an enemy with a numerical advantage of two fold. Both sides suffered heavy losses. In some Turkish companies all the officers were killed. Already on that day the 15<sup>th</sup> Corps was forced for the first time to utilise German reinforcements in the form of the 65<sup>th</sup> Brigade.

The following day, after the inclusion in battle of all reserves, even the regiment commanders fought in the trenches. In total, up until the 17<sup>th</sup> of September losses on the Turkish side numbered 95 officers and seven thousand men who were killed, wounded, or missing.<sup>29</sup>

The report drafted for the general staff at the end of the month spoke of 45 officers and five thousand men. Even though only a mere twelve thousand men were under arms in the entire corps, the Turks had much greater respect for the "English" and in particular Australians than for the Russians, this being a result of the resistance they had shown on the Gallipoli peninsula year earlier.<sup>30</sup>

The final Day of September is remembered as the a day of bayonet engagement, during which four Turkish regiments (the 57<sup>th</sup>, the 61<sup>st</sup>, the 72<sup>nd</sup> and the 77<sup>th</sup>) defeated, among others, units of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Caucas Corps. As a result of the large numbers of casualties the Ottoman command once again was forced to make use of German reinforcements.<sup>31</sup>

At the beginning of October 1916 another redeployment of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Divisions occurred. This manoeuvre was to protect the 61<sup>st</sup> regiment from the huge losses incurred on the 5<sup>th</sup> of October. A day later the 15<sup>th</sup> Corps lost a further three

<sup>27</sup> *Birinci Dünya Harbi...* (*op. cit.*), p. 38.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 40.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 42-46., Yazman, *op. cit.*, pp. 94-98.

<sup>30</sup> Cf.: *Harb Mecmuası*, Yıl 1, Sayı 12, Ağustos 1332 [August/September 1916], p. 178.

<sup>31</sup> *Birinci Dünya Harbi...* (*op. cit.*), p. 48.

thousand men and 15 officers, as a result of which a total of 10 companies were without commanders. The entire 20<sup>th</sup> Division lost operational capability and was once again forced to make use of German reinforcements. Temporarily its place was taken by the 36<sup>th</sup> Reserve Division. Russian losses were 4 to 5 four to five times higher but unlike the Turks they had no reason to fear a staffing shortfall. From the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 22<sup>nd</sup> of October as well as on the 30<sup>th</sup> fierce battles took place along the Narajówka.<sup>32</sup>

November 1916 was to bring a visible decrease in Russian activity, which allowed the 15<sup>th</sup> Corps to undertake necessary redeployment.<sup>33</sup> Thanks to this the soldiers also had a chance to regenerate their strength resulting from the exceptionally heavy battles of the previous two months. Due to the fact that the Ottoman infantry battalions at the time numbered on average 600 soldiers each (when their German equivalents – 900) it was decided to reduce the number of companies. The Germans also gave the Turks as a reward three machine guns per battalion.<sup>34</sup>

On the 17<sup>th</sup> of November there was a change in the command situation within the 15<sup>th</sup> Corps. The place vacated by the dismissed Colonel Yakub Şevki (Subaşı) was taken by General Cevat (Çobanlı).

The circumstances surrounding this staff reshuffle arouse controversy to this day. Official Turkish historiography and biographers of Yakub Şevki claim that this officer from the very beginning had a problem with forging partnership cooperation with the Germans, with which the entire blame is laid for the state of affairs on the German side, which is reproached for cowardliness, arrogance, a failure to understand cultural differences as well as interfering in the way the corps was commanded.

At the same time the Germans were accused of duplicity, proof of which was to be that, at the same time, Colonel Yakup Şevki was honoured with medals by both them and the Austrians for the particular contribution made by the 15<sup>th</sup> Corps on the field of battle.<sup>35</sup> It does appear, however, that such an evaluation of the situation by Turkish historiography reflected the still widespread dislike on the part of Turks to criticism originating from foreign quarters. The official tokens of recognition that the 15<sup>th</sup> Corps command met with were really directed towards its subordinates, the frontline officers and men who carried out orders with the greatest of dedication and degree of effectiveness. They paid for this, however, with enormous losses which could have been avoided if Colonel Yakup Şevki had, from the very beginning, cooperated harmoniously with the allies and put into effect their tactical principles that were applicable to the specifics of conflict within the Galician theatre. The Turkish

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 51-56.

<sup>33</sup> Yazman, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

<sup>34</sup> *Birinci Dünya Harbi...* (*op. cit.*), p. 58.

<sup>35</sup> Cf.: Yel, *op. cit.*, pp. 23-28.

commander unfortunately preferred to fight like at Gallipoli and at the cost of his own soldiers in a quest to teach his allies heroism.

It is therefore hard to be surprised at the pressure exerted by the Southern Army command and the attempts made by them to influence the way the 15<sup>th</sup> Corps fought, given a situation whereby within the course of not even a full three weeks of its presence in Galicia the Germans were forced to help it with their own reinforcements. In as far as those officers closest to Yakup Şevki stood firmly behind him<sup>36</sup>, those of lower ranking Turkish frontline officers evaluated the situation far more objectively and although not directly they did agree with the views of their allies and not those of their own command.<sup>37</sup>

It follows to postulate that in such a situation the German side was the first to raise the matter of a change in command for the 15<sup>th</sup> Corps and that they suggested replacement by Cevat Pasha. This officer had completed the Berlin military academy graduating in second place and as a result of his achievements in the Dardanelles was held in extremely high regard by the Germans. In opposition to his predecessor he was also able to act tactfully in every situation and did not loathe German as a language, which he knew perfectly.<sup>38</sup>

With the onset of December 1916 pacifist leaflets flooded over from the Russian trenches to the other side, and then observers began to warn of armoured vehicles 'sneaking' across behind their lines. The appearance of tanks in January 1917 (in too small a number for the tsarist staff to actually make use of them) did, however, force certain structural changes on the German command of the Southern Army. Assault and bombing companies were quickly formed in all divisions. The morale of the subordinates also became of greater concern. These measures were to turn out to be unnecessary after all for together with the approaching February Revolution the Russians day by day lost their fighting spirit. For three months neither side emerged from beyond its trenches.<sup>39</sup> In the middle of April the chief command informed the 15<sup>th</sup> Corps of plans to use it in a planned counterattack.

Meanwhile the political changes occurring to the rear of the Russian front line started to manifest themselves in the form of a demonstration of attitudes not expected from soldiers. On the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> of April, two Tatars presented letters of friendship to the Turkish trenches. The Russians and the Germans started to pay

<sup>36</sup> Cf.: *ibidem*.

<sup>37</sup> Cf.: Yazman, *op. cit.*, pp. 77-90, 94-95 and onwards.

<sup>38</sup> Also Colonel Yakup Şevki apparently knew German fluently, though no one had an opportunity to verify this as *in contacts with Germans, being directed by a sense of national pride and not agreeing to German despotism, he simply did not use the language* (Yel, *op. cit.*, p. 14; the most surprising is the fact that this quote is not that of someone from Yakup Şevki's circle but a fragment from a contemporary biography).

<sup>39</sup> Yazman, *op. cit.*, p. 217-220.

each other visits, the frequency of which resulted in the German head command issuing a ban on such practices. In May, in the face of failures on the Western Front, the German Southern Army received an order to save ammunition. While the Russians undertook the last attempt to reverse their unfavourable situation. The manifestation of this was an intensification in artillery fire, the bringing up of new equipment, particularly aeroplanes, and finally visits by the then minister of justice Aleksandr Kerenskii and General Brusilov, who through their presence attempted to raise the fading fighting spirit of the Russian troops.<sup>40</sup>

Towards the end of the month the 15<sup>th</sup> Corps received information as to its planned recall from the Galician Front. In June the 19<sup>th</sup> Division received the order to return home. Before the withdrawal of the 20<sup>th</sup> Division could take place however the final Russian offensive began on the 19<sup>th</sup> of June. On the first day the positions occupied by the Turks found themselves under mass artillery fire. Before the offensive itself the Russians again employed gas. The fierce fighting that lasted on this section for several days was to take a similar course. In total the tsarist forces lost in the Brzeżany region around thirteen thousand men. In mid July the Russian command started a general retreat.<sup>41</sup>

On the 15<sup>th</sup> of July the command of the 15<sup>th</sup> Corps headed home. The 20<sup>th</sup> Division was therefore to be now directly under German command. It was to still to take part in the initial phase of the German-Austro-Hungarian offensive fighting against, among others, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Kazakh Caucasus Division and the Cavalry Corps of General Piotr Nicholaevich Wrangel as well as preparation to force the Zbruch River. The discontinuing of the offensive at the beginning of August determined the division's return to Turkey. On the 16<sup>th</sup> of August the artillery and the 22<sup>nd</sup> Foot set off on the route home. The last units of the 29<sup>th</sup> Division arrived in Istanbul on the 26<sup>th</sup> of September.<sup>42</sup>

In the course of the year long stay in Eastern Galicia the 15<sup>th</sup> Corps took prisoner twelve officers and 853 soldiers. Its presence on this front became a pretext for several fairly high level official visits. From the 10<sup>th</sup> to the 11<sup>th</sup> of September 1916 it hosted in Galicia Enver Pasha. The Cracow press noted his half hour or so walk around the town, his not much longer visit to Przemyśl<sup>43</sup>, his inspection of several

<sup>40</sup> Dąbrowski, *op. cit.*, p. 716; Ian F. W. Beckett, *Pierwsza wojna światowa 1914-1918*, Książka i Wiedza, Warszawa 2009, p. 226.

<sup>41</sup> *Birinci Dünya Harbi...* (*op. cit.*), pp. 68-74; Yazman, *op. cit.*, pp. 220-230.

<sup>42</sup> *Birinci Dünya Harbi...* (*op. cit.*), pp. 74-83; Yazman, *op. cit.*, pp. 230-232, 236-254, 258-267, 300-312.

<sup>43</sup> The photographs of Enver Pasha in Przemyśl were also included by the illustrated military bulletin *Harp Mecmuası* (front page of Yıl 1, Sayı 12, Ağustos 1332 [August/September 1916]).

hours of the Ottoman forces on the front as well as his courteous luncheon with Archduke Charles.<sup>44</sup> It is also worth recalling the somewhat longer visits of the Ottoman princes Abdürrahim and Osman Fuat (4<sup>th</sup> of January 1917) as well as of Ömer Faruk (18<sup>th</sup> April 1917). The first of the mentioned was to return again in May to take up training in the command of the 15<sup>th</sup> Corps.<sup>45</sup>

The withdrawal of the Ottoman units from Galicia was linked to the catastrophic situation of the Sultan's forces on the Mesopotamian Front, where in March 1917 the Turks lost Baghdad. From the point of view of the interests of the Ottoman Empire the involvement of even a single corps in the conflict in Galicia was a huge mistake. Not only did it fail to bring any strategic or political advantages – not mentioning territorial – it was paid for at the price of heavy losses, which in total reached eighteen thousand dead, wounded and missing, which constituted over a half of the almost 33,000 men from the initial elite units of the Ottoman army that had made up the corps.

Devotion of the Turkish soldiers was however very much appreciated by the Germans and Austrians who objectively noticed that would not have been able to hold their positions during Brusilov and Kerensky offensives without help of their allies from the shores of Bosphorus.<sup>46</sup>

The presence of the Turks in Galicia for the period 1916-17 was to have, however, a particular symbolic meaning for the Polish people, who had lived since the last quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century under partition. For over a hundred years Poles had found solace in the prediction of the Ukrainian bard Wernyhora, the content of which (severely distorted by folk transfer) announced that Poland would be reborn *when Turkish horse drink in the Vistula River*.<sup>47</sup>

The presence of the 15<sup>th</sup> Corps in Galicia may be linked with the fulfilment of this prophecy for somewhat over a year after the withdrawal of the last Turkish soldier Poland was indeed to gain its independence. A sceptic would surely point out that the 15<sup>th</sup> Corps fought in the basin of the River Dniester and not on the Vistula.

<sup>44</sup> Enver Pasha's visit to Galicia was described in detail, by Josef Pomiankowski (Austria-Hungarian military attaché in Istanbul) who accompanied the Turkish Minister of War in this journey (Josef Pomiankowski, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun Çöküşü. 1914-1918 I. Dünya Savaşı*, Kayhan Yayınevi, İstanbul 1990, pp. 206-207).

<sup>45</sup> *Birinci Dünya Harbi...* (*op. cit.*), pp. 91; *Harp Mecmuası*: Yıl 1, Sayı 12, Ağustos 1332 [August/September 1916], Yıl 2, Sayı 17, Mart 1333 [March 1917], Yıl 2, Sayı 19, Mayıs 1333 [May 1917].

<sup>46</sup> Cf. daily order No: 12321 issued on June 13, 1917 by the high command of the Southern Army and printed *in extenso* in the monograph published by the Turkish General Staff and titled *Birinci Dünya Harbi...* (*op. cit.*), p. 112-114.

<sup>47</sup> For more on this subject see: Nykiel, "Słów kilka o tym, co łączy Wernyhorę z krakowską *turkologią*", (*op. cit.*), pp. 143-148.

We should not forget however that a part of its soldiers travelled via Cracow, which lies on the Vistula. In private collections there have even been preserved photographs of Turks waiting for food at the railway station in Cracow. Given that the soldiers ate here then the horse must have drunk from the Vistula as well...

A direct effect of the Turkish presence in Galicia is the oldest Turkish department in Poland which has been in operation at the Jagiellonian University since 1919.<sup>48</sup> Its founder, the Cracow Orientalist Prof. Tadeusz Kowalski was from 1916 to 1917 employed by the Austrian authorities as a translator for wounded Ottoman soldiers in hospitals in Cracow and Vienna. The contacts the professor had with the patients of his wife, Zofia neé Medwecka – a doctor at the Cracow military hospital, were used by him to assemble linguistic and literary materials which later became worked into the formal beginnings of Turkish research at the Jagiellonian University.<sup>49</sup>

A part of those Turkish soldiers hospitalised in Cracow were, unfortunately, never to recover and were buried at the Rakowicki Cemetery in Cracow at the so-called *Muslim Quarter* (no. XXVI). Six earth graves, existing at least until the end of the 1950s, contained the remains of eight Turks.<sup>50</sup> These graves, forgotten by the Turkish state and by unappreciative Poles, have unfortunately not survived to our day.<sup>51</sup> Only in 1996 did the then president of Turkey, Süleyman Demirel, during an official visit to Poland, carry out the unveiling of a symbolic tombstone at the Rakowicki Cemetery. This was not possible at the former Muslim Quarter No. XXVI, as this was already now filled with tightly packed contemporary Christian graves. The tombstone remembering those Turks who had fallen in Galicia in 1916-1917 was consequently situated in the former Bosnian Quarter (No. XXIII), where, during the First World War, Muslim soldiers of the Austro-Hungarian army were buried.

<sup>48</sup> At present it is the Department of Turkish Studies, operating within the framework of the Jagiellonian University's Institute of Oriental Philology.

<sup>49</sup> More on this subject is in: *ibidem* as well as Ewa Siemienieć-Golaś, *Krakowska turkologia – historia, terażniejszość i perspektywy*, <http://www.filg.uj.edu.pl/ifo/turkologia/Teksty/Turkologia.pdf>

<sup>50</sup> A more detailed analysis of the cemetery acts conducted in 1996 allowed the supposition that there could have been even eleven. Their names are as follows: Osman İsmail Edilmez (died on September 11, 1916), Hüseyin Raşid (died on September 12, 1916), Ahmet Abdürrahman (died on September 24, 1916), Lieutenant Mehmet İsmail Hakkı (died on October 6, 1916), Mehmet Raşid (died on October 16, 1916), Abidin Şaban (died on November 16, 1916), Ahmetoğlu Ahmet (died on March 8, 1917), Mustafa Ahmet (died on July 5, 1917), Mehmetoğlu Ömer (died on September 20, 1917), Nazımoğlu İsmail (died on August 17, 1918) and İsmail Hasa(n) (died on April 14, 1919). According to the cemetery acts this last soldier served in the 10<sup>th</sup> company of the 9<sup>th</sup> infantry regiment (a unit which operated not in Galicia but on the Caucasian front).

<sup>51</sup> The last documents confirming the existence of the ottoman soldiers' graves on the Rakowicki Cemetery are dated January 23, 1959 (Prezydium Miejskiej Rady Narodowej w Krakowie, Miejski Urząd Gospodarki Komunalnej i Mieszkaniowej, akta sprawy nr GK-UK-2-e/1/59 dot. "Cmentarze mahometzańskie tureckie").

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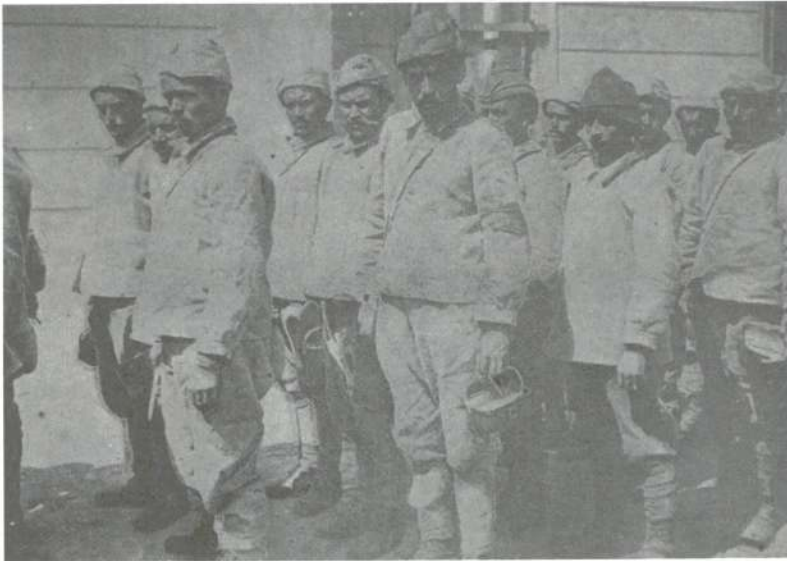
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Field Marshal August von Mackensen (fifth from the left) and the commander of the Ottoman 20<sup>th</sup> Division, Colonel Yasin Hilmi (seventh from the left) on a photograph taken in 1917 (Source: *Collections of Piotr Nykiel*)



Soldiers of the Ottoman 19<sup>th</sup> Division waiting for the meal on the railway station in Cracow on their way to the front (Source: *Collections of Władysław Klimczak*)



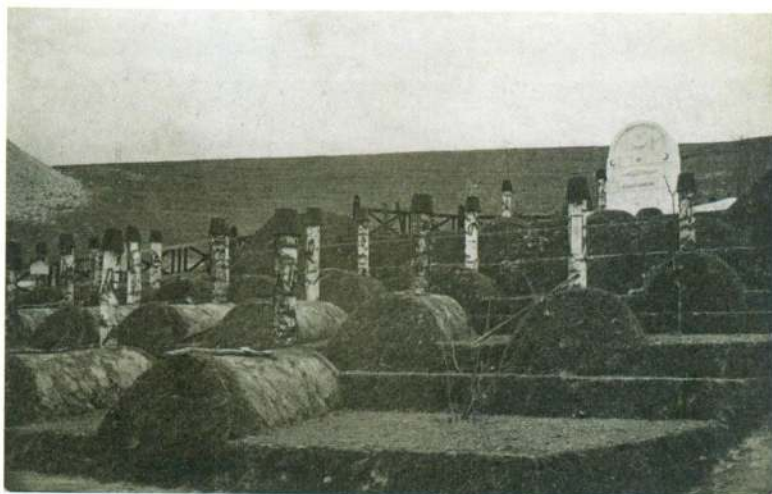
In September 1916 the Ottoman minister of war, Enver Pasha (second from the left) stopped off in Przemyśl on route to the front. Right behind him is standing his aide-de-camp Major Kâzım (Orbay). The commander of the Przemyśl Fortress Marshal Stowasser is explaining to his Turkish guests how the German and Austro-Hungarian forces were able to take the town from Russian hands. (Source: *Harp Mecmuası*)



Soldiers from the Turkish assault brigade on the Galician Front  
(Source: *Collections of Piotr Nykiel*)



The creator of Turkish studies in Cracow Prof. Tadeusz Kowalski  
(Source: *Collections of Anna Kowalska-Lewicka and Kazimierz Kowalski*)



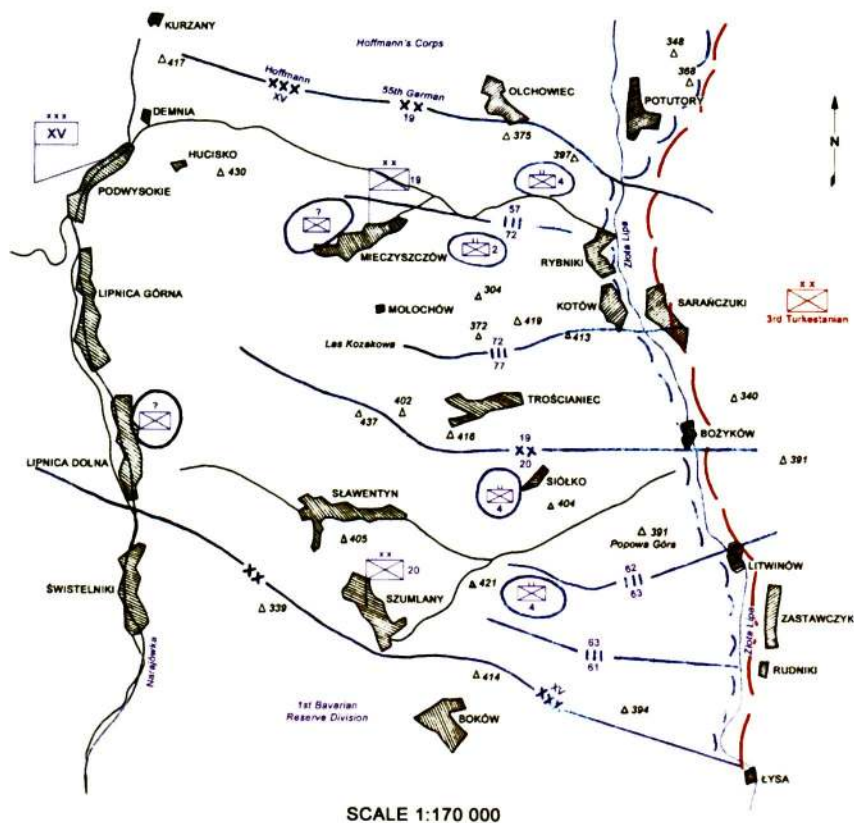
Cemetery of the Ottoman 15<sup>th</sup> Corps in the East Galician village of Łopuszna on a photograph taken in 1916 or 1917 (Source: *Collections of Piotr Nykiel*)



The Rakowicki Cemetery in Cracow. Symbolic grave remembering the Turkish soldiers who fell on the Galician Front. Every year on the 18<sup>th</sup> of March there is held a ceremony here to mark the Day of the Fallen (Şehitler Günü), in which participate the representatives of the Turkish Embassy in Warsaw and students and staff of the Cracow Turkish Department. (Photograph: Piotr Nykiel)



A First World War badge commemorating the participation of the Ottoman 15<sup>th</sup> Corps in the engagements along the Galician Front. (Source: *Collections of Piotr Nykiel*)



Map: The positions of the 15<sup>th</sup> Turkish Corps on the 28<sup>th</sup> of August 1916.  
 (Source: *Birinci Dünya Harbi*, VII nci Cilt, *Avrupa Cephesi*, I nci Kısım,  
 (Source: *Galiçya Cephesi*), T. C. Genelkurmay Başkanlığı Harp Tarihi Dairesi  
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