

THE CRISIS ON THE EAST FRONT—SLAV HOPES

The Two Breaks in the Austrian Dike and What May Flow Through—If Germans Hold the Line—The Russian Hopes of a Wide Retirement.

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One week ago I analyzed in detail the earlier phases of the great Russian advance through the Pripiet marshes and the Rumanian frontier. Since that time the advance of the Slav, materially slackened, has still gone forward. At the moment he has taken Czernowitz and is approaching Kovel, which are at the opposite ends of the great southeastern front. In the centre he has reached the frontier at Brody, but has been held up a little west of Tarnopol.

It is plain that the situation in the Galician and Volhynian regions is now approaching a crisis which must involve the safety of the whole front of the Central Powers from the Gulf of Riga to the Rumanian frontier. It is this crisis that I mean to discuss in the present article. I do not desire to be understood as forecasting that the things that have now become possible will happen; what I desire to do is to describe what is now possible if the Russians are not checked, recognizing fully that the check may come at once or before many days.

On the Map.

Turning first to the map, it is now plain what has happened. When the recent attack began the eastern front followed the Dvina River from the outskirts of the city of Riga, speaking very roughly here, to the city of Dvinsk, approximately an east and west front; then it turned sharply south and ran pretty nearly straight through Pinsk, which the Germans held, through the Pripiet marshes, along the Sty River, east of Lutsk and Dubno, which were Austrian, along the Sereth River just west of Tarnopol, which was Russian, to the Dniester River, and thence to the Pruth River just west of the Russian frontier.

Now, from the Gulf of Riga to the Pripiet marshes and to the southern border of this swamp the line still stands, but a little south of the marshes begins a very wide, deep curve which the Russians have driven westward.

This curve amounts to a semi-circle, drawn about Dubno, with a radius of perhaps thirty-five miles, which represents the extreme penetration of the Russian into the Austrian front. Going south again there is a second semi-circle of perhaps twenty-five miles' radius, from the point where the Dniester reaches the Russian frontier. As the northern curve extends toward Kovel and Vladimir Wolynski, the southern passes southwest of Czernowitz and is approaching Kolomea.

These two semi-circles, to use the military parlance, are the wedges which the Russians have driven into the Austrian lines, after having successfully broken the trench front which was in their immediate front. The war in these sectors has thus become a war of movement as contrasted with the trench operation. To use a familiar figure, these two circles represent breaks in the dike the Central Powers had erected against the Slavonic flood; through these breaks the Russian waters are now sweeping and extending not only westward, but tending to swirl round the ends of the dike and expand north and south in the fashion of a fan.

If the Drive Continues.

Now, if this rush continues long it is clear that the centre of the Austrians, still standing relatively firmly before Tarnopol and covering the railroad to Lemberg, will have to draw back to avoid being enveloped on both its flanks by the Russian hosts pouring through the breaks in the dike to the west of Lutsk and to the north of Kolomea.

Exactly what happens when there is a break in a Mississippi levee is now taking place along the eastern front. The Germans and Austrians are trying to build a temporary dike behind the breaks and to circumscribe the area of inundation. Thus we hear of very great concentrations of troops taking place behind the line that was broken and in front of Kovel and Vladimir Wolynski. Similarly, Vienna re-

ports a new stand between the Dniester and the Pruth west of Czernowitz.

If these temporary dikes can be raised in time we shall soon see a retirement of the Austrian centre from the front of Tarnopol behind the Ziota Lipa or the Gnila Lipa; that is, to a position half way between the cities of Tarnopol and Lemberg. The new front will then extend from the Pripiet marshes southward to Kovel and thence to Vladimir Wolynski, thence southward west of the Gnila Lipa to the Dniester and thence east of Kolomea to the Carpathians.

The Possible Check.

Granted that this thing takes place, and it is the thing that the Austrians and Germans are moving heaven and earth to bring about, the new front of the Central Powers will follow the old from the Baltic to the Pripiet marshes; thence it will curve markedly inward toward Kovel; thence it will run straight again to the Carpathians.

If this takes place we shall then see the check of the Russian offensive. As a result of this drive the Russians will have taken some 200,000 prisoners and an enormous mass of guns and munition; they will have cleared the Austrians out of several thousand square miles of Russian territory and conquered several more thousands in the Austrian provinces of Galicia and Bukovina, but they will not have shaken the whole of the Austro-German front in the east, and they will not have compelled any considerable withdrawal on the part of the Germans between Pinsk and the environs of Riga. In other words, the Russians will have won a great local victory, but they will not have repeated the success of the Germans last summer, when they were able to turn their victory at the Dunajec into an advance for several hundreds of miles along the whole eastern front.

The Russian Hope.

So much for the German and Austrian plan, which is to limit the Russian inundation by building a dike behind the breaks and holding on at the centre between the two breaks until the new line is prepared. Now, turning to the Russian purpose, what is the maximum of possibility here?

At the moment the main objectives of the Russians are the two towns of Kovel and Stanislaw, north and southeast of Lemberg. They are sweeping forward on both flanks with the purpose to envelop the centre and compel the retirement of the Germans and Austrians from Lemberg. In this they are exactly following their successful campaign of August and September, 1914.

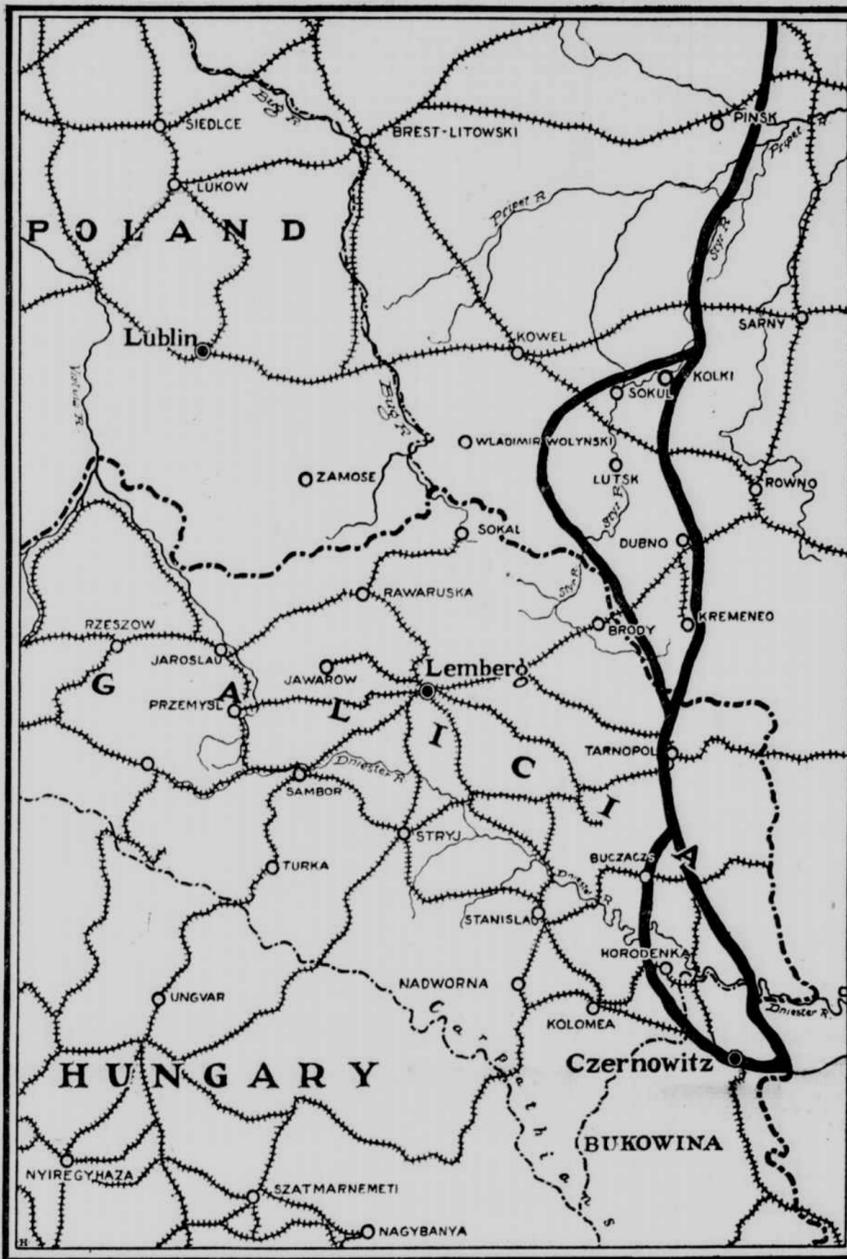
If the Russians can get to Kovel, and they are not more than twenty miles from it now, they will obtain the most important railroad junction along their southern front, the point of intersection between lines from Lublin and Kiev and Rowno and Brest-Litovsk; their northern flank will then be protected by the Pripiet marshes, they will command the railroads down which the Germans could send troops to take them in the flank and they will be at least a hundred miles west of the present German position at Pinsk and in a position to attack the German flank and rear from the Pripiet marshes to the Dvina.

A German Retirement.

This would inevitably compel the Germans to draw back on all their eastern front, now extending from Pinsk to the environs of Riga; it would mean the surrender of all the Russian territory that has been occupied, save only Russian Poland and possibly a portion of the Courland. It would mean a retirement to the line of the Niemen and the Bug. Russia would by a single blow recover more than half of what she lost last summer.

Turning south, the situation would be this: Having taken Kovel, the Russians would be able to push westward to the Bug, which offers the next strongest de-

THE GALICIAN AND VOLHYNIAN FRONTS.



The two bulges in the heavy black lines show where the Russians are making their greatest gains.

fensive position. But on the east bank of the Bug they would be westward of Lemberg. If at the same time they had succeeded in pushing westward along the Dniester beyond Stanislaw from the south—that is, by a double envelopment—and reproduced the situation of 1914, when the Austrian armies fighting in a wide semi-circle before the Galician capital were outflanked to the north and south and forced to retire, in a disorder that became a rout, upon the San and Przemysl, thus abandoning more than half of Galicia.

The Great If.

It is fair to say, then, that if the Russians are able to keep up their advance, which is still unchecked on June 20, when these lines are written, until they reach Kovel and pass Stanislaw, then the Austrian army in Galicia will have to go back out of Lemberg and to the San, the German army will have to come back upon Brest-Litovsk, Bielowostok and Kovno and the map of Eastern Europe will have been brought back a long way toward its form of just a year ago, with the further detail

that the offensive will still belong to the Slav and not to the Teuton.

The best way to explain the present movement in its widest possibilities is to turn to the great German offensive of last summer. That began by a far smaller immediate and local victory than the Russians have already achieved. Mackensen at the Dunajec broke the Russian line on a front of less than twenty miles, originally. Through this gap he poured huge forces, just as the Russians are pouring huge forces through the two great gaps that they have cut in the Austrian lines. The Russians then began to draw back their troops on both sides of the break and endeavored to make a stand at the San River.

Last Year.

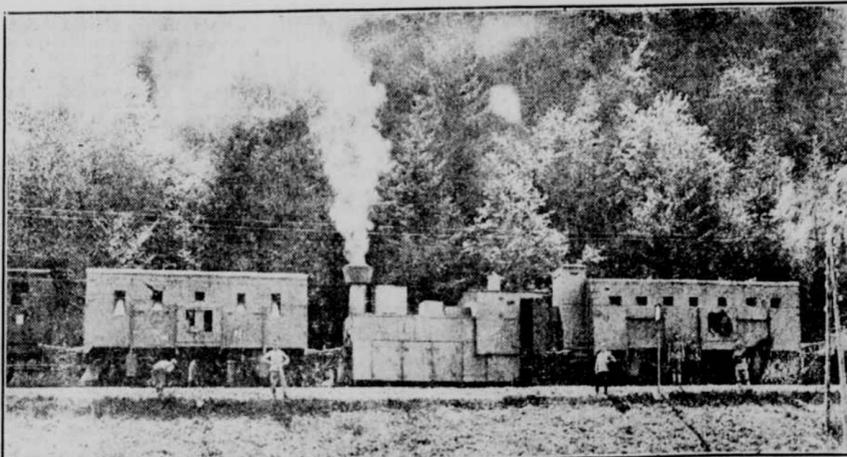
This stand was made for some days, long enough to permit a reconcentration of Russian armies and prevent the envelopment of the forces in the Carpathians, but not long enough to consolidate a position that could be held indefinitely. This phase exactly corresponds to the present attempt of the Germans and Austrians to

consolidate a new position from Kovel to the Gnila Lipa and save Lemberg and the northern front.

When Lemberg Fell.

Forced to leave the San, the Russians went back to the Grodek Lake line before Lemberg; but again they were unable to make a long stay here and were obliged to retreat again until they stood behind the Sereth, and having lost Dubno and Lutsk, reached the lines that they subsequently held until the present operation. But this retirement uncovered the centre in Poland, and it was compelled to retreat first from Warsaw and then from Brest-Litovsk. If the Russians are able to turn the Austro-German forces out of Kovel and Lemberg, the parallel will be patent and the results will be felt along the whole German front.

Here you have a plain evidence of the consequences of a successful breaking of trench lines on a wide front and at two separated points. The situation in the west would have been similar if last September the French and British had got through in Champagne and in Artois. Then



Austrian armored train, similar to that captured by Russians in the present drive.

The Crucial Points at Kovel and Stanislaw and the Issue of the Next Few Days—The Effect Upon the West—Italy's Failure and Rumanian Delay.

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the German armies between the two points would have been compelled to draw back to avoid envelopment, and the western front might have been carried back at least to the French frontier from the Meuse to the Scheldt.

In the Next Few Days.

In the next few days the important thing to watch is the situation of the two flanks of the Austrian armies from Pripiet to the Carpathians. If the Russians get Kovel, then it is clear that the whole eastern front will be compromised and the Germans will have to draw in to the Bug. If the Russians get round to the south of Lemberg, then the Austrian line will have to retire to the San, surrendering all of Eastern Galicia and most of Bukovina once more.

Meantime the Germans are sending new masses of troops down the railroad from Brest-Litovsk to Kovel to attack the northern flank of the advancing Russians; they are sending troops east along the Lublin-Kovel railroad for the same purpose, and they are making a concentration at Vladimir Wolynski, south of Kovel and considerably east of the Bug. Away to the south the Austrians are making a new concentration east of Stanislaw, between the Dniester and the Carpathians. Finally, they are successfully holding back the Russian centre west of the Sereth, although there are clear evidences that they will very soon have to go back behind the Ziota Lipa and probably ultimately behind the Gnila Lipa.

Will the New Dike Hold?

There is nothing yet to indicate that the Germans and Austrians will not succeed in erecting their new dike; that is, nothing convincing. But the huge number of Austrians who have been captured, the great loss of artillery and munitions and the relatively rapid rate of Russian advance all suggest that there is a demoralization in the Austrian armies far greater than that in the Russian after the Dunajec last year and comparable to the Austrian débacle in 1914, which could not be checked until the Austrians were driven across the Carpathians and in upon the outer forts of Cracow.

Yesterday there was a significantly pessimistic comment reported as published in a German newspaper which was interpreted as designed to prepare Teutonic public opinion for new retreats. But it is not wise to lay too much stress upon such details. The German reinforcements seem to be getting into line east of Kovel and to be holding up the Russian thrust at this decisive point, although there is not yet any evidence of a definitive check.

The really important thing that every one can see is that the Russians have now pushed a very great victory to the point where it may prove one of the decisive incidents in the war. We see what they are driving at and we see what they may accomplish. We see with equally clear vision what the Germans must do and what they are trying to do with characteristic vigor and skill. What we do not see and cannot forecast is whether the new line that is being built will hold or not and whether the Austrian armies are still in shape to make a further resistance.

Looking Westward.

Since it is essential to view the war as a whole, let us now look westward for a moment. We know that the British are ready to strike, or will be ready by next month. We know that they have had until quite recently to face a concentration of German troops which was so great as to hold out little promise of success for a drive. Some of these troops have now been drawn down to Verdun.

If Germany is presently compelled to draw upon her troops in the west to meet the peril in the east, then we shall soon see a further reduction of troops before the British or a complete cessation of the Verdun operation, or both, because the Verdun operation has never called for great numbers at any considerable moment, its cost having come from the ne-

cessity to renew very frequently the relatively small army making the great attack.

It is a perfectly safe conjecture that any reduction of the German effectives before the British below the safety point will be followed by the same sort of attack that struck the Austrians in Galicia and Volhynia, when they had sent their reserves to Italy and the Germans had drawn out their "stiffening" corps for use in the west.

Conceivably, Germany has free reserves sufficient to meet the eastern situation without making any considerable draft upon her western armies. This is unlikely, but it is entirely possible. In that case the British are unlikely to move until a more favorable moment comes. Otherwise we may be on the eve of decisive events in the west.

Italian Inaction.

Meantime the Austrians have moved troops away from the Trentino front and the Italians are again on the offensive and have regained a little of their lost territory. Further reductions of Austrian armies on this front will certainly lead to more aggressive action on the part of the Italians along the Isonzo, for if the war is entering into a decisive stage Italy has still to demonstrate her claim to what she expects to get if the Allies win. Nothing is less likely than that Russia, France or Britain will refuse to make a peace otherwise satisfactory if Italy has still failed to get Trieste or Dalmatia.

Finally, there is patent stir in the Balkans. If the Germans and Austrians are compelled to draw their troops out of Bulgaria it is certain that there will be a thrust from Salonica in overwhelming numbers which may put Bulgaria out of the war in a brief campaign and cut the life line that binds Turkey to the Central Powers. The value of Salonica is now becoming patent and the real extent of the menace of the Allied army here is unmistakable.

Rumania.

As to Rumania, she wants Bukovina and Russia is again getting it. She also wants Transylvania, and Russia can again offer it to her as the price of coming in and conquering it. If the war is entering a decisive stage, Rumania is likely to come in, because all her profit lies in making an alliance with the Allies before the war is over and thus establishing a claim to her "lost provinces." Nowhere will the events of the next few days be watched more closely than in Bucharest, save, perhaps, in Athens.

The entrance of Rumania would not be as important from the military side as from the moral, although it would have real military value. This is because the world has decided that Rumania does not mean to come in until the outcome of the war is assured and then to "rush to the succor of the victor." Were Rumania to come in, Europe would say: "It must be about over, because the Rumanians have decided to enlist."

It is very easy to sit down with a map and the early reports of a success in the field and build up a whole edifice of success consequent upon these first successes. But it is equally dangerous. I do not mean to be understood as forecasting that any of the things that I have discussed will happen. But I am anxious to make clear that any one or several of them may happen, that the Germans may be able to put the Austrians on their feet in the next few days and build up a new dike against Russian inundation or that the inundation may sweep on for a few days more and compel a general retirement of the Central Powers from the Gulf of Riga to the Carpathians.

Not since last summer has there opened any such wide horizon of possibility; not since the Lemberg days have the Allied prospects been so materially brightened; not since the Battle of the Carpathians has the general Allied situation been so favorable. To say more is idle.