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Germany's Decisive Victory: Falkenhayn's Campaign in Romania, 1916 [M.A. Thesis: Eastern Michigan University, 2004].

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Romania declared war on the Central Powers on August 27, 1916. The news shocked the German High Command, particularly General Erich von Falkenhayn, chief of the General Staff. He had predicted that if Romania did enter the war, it would only do so after the September harvest. Most German officers agreed. However, the team directing the armies in the east, Field Marshall Paul von Hindenburg and General Erich Ludendorff, had for two years been fighting Falkenhayn's emphasis on the western front and also privately expressing their displeasure with Falkenhayn to German Kaiser Wilhelm II. Wilhelm liked Falkenhayn personally and was himself surprised by Romania's belligerence. However, he now believed the army was losing faith in its commander, and thus agreed to Hindenburg's and Ludendorff's demands for Falkenhayn's dismissal. Wilhelm appointed Hindenburg as Supreme Commander of the German High Command, with Ludendorff as his Chief of Staff.¹ Falkenhayn accepted a command post as chief of the General Staff on the Romanian front.

Once the German High Command recovered from its surprise, the army responded extremely well on the new Romanian front. Although Romania's offensive into Transylvania had initial success, it quickly stalled as Romanian military leaders became increasingly worried about Bulgarian forces on their southern front. This "operational pause" gave Falkenhayn plenty of time to rush in German reinforcements and consolidate the Central Powers' position in Transylvania. In doing so, he also gave the Austro-Hungarian army, which had been driven back by Romanian forces, time to recuperate. Over the next three months, with help from the newly created "Army of the Danube," under the leadership of General August von Mackensen, Falkenhayn led the German 9th Army in a brilliant operational campaign against Romania. By the end of 1916, Germany controlled two-thirds of Romania, including the capital, Bucharest, and had inflicted astonishing casualties on the Romanian army.²

Falkenhayn himself later observed, "In the entire history of war one cannot find many

¹ Robert Asprey, *The German High Command at War: Hindenburg and Ludendorff Conduct World War I* (New York: William Morrow, 1991), 243-52.

² Two major sources pertain to Falkenhayn's Romanian campaign: Germany, Reichsarchiv, *Der Weltkrieg, 1914-1918*, Vol. XI, *Die Kriegführung im Herbst 1916 und im Winter 1916/17* (Berlin: E.S. Mittler & Sohn, 1938) and Erich von Falkenhayn, *Der Feldzug der 9. Armee gegen die Rumänen u. Russen 1916/17*, 2 Vols. (Berlin: E.S. Mittler & Sohn, 1921).

campaigns where the actual course of events deviated so little from the operational plan that had been conceived of earlier.”³ Of course, this was an exaggeration. Moments of uncertainty punctuated the campaign, including several failed attempts by Falkenhayn to break through the Carpathian mountain passes after impressive victories over the Romanian forces in Transylvania. As the weeks dragged by, without a breakthrough into Romania proper, many German officers were preparing for the onset of winter.

Nevertheless, Falkenhayn’s Romanian campaign was a remarkable operation, perhaps even a masterpiece. Although the Romanians at times offered stubborn resistance, the Germans did cross the Carpathians into Wallachia by November, thus accomplishing their first objective. By the time Bucharest fell in December, the Romanian army was largely destroyed and could no longer carry out offensive operations.⁴

In the context of military operations from 1914 to 1916, the Romanian campaign was one of a small number of rapid operational victories by either side. German strategy at the outset of the war relied on the Schlieffen Plan, formulated by the deceased General Graf von Schlieffen, to solve Germany’s problem of a two-front war against Russia and France.⁵ However, the 1914 campaign ultimately failed to knock France out of the war. German leaders had underestimated French resistance, not expected the vacillation of their own Supreme Commander, and failed to solve the difficulty of supplying, commanding, and controlling mass armies. Over the next two years, numerous operations by both the Triple Entente and the Central Powers failed miserably, as the western front developed into trench warfare and neither side came closer to winning the war.⁶ A notable exception to this stalemate was Romania.

This thesis will examine Falkenhayn’s 1916 military campaign against Romania. There are many reasons to study this operation. The major focus will be the Romanian campaign as an example of *Bewegungskrieg*, or “war of movement” on the operational level, a mobile campaign in the midst of World War I trench warfare. Another theme is Falkenhayn’s redemption after his failures as chief of the General Staff. Falkenhayn’s western strategy as German military leader did not break the stalemate on the western front. In particular, his strategy of attrition at Verdun strained German manpower.⁷ Therefore, historians tend to view his military career as a disaster. However, this ignores Falkenhayn’s tremendous ability as a field commander.

In order to discuss German operations in the Romanian campaign, some background of German military doctrine is necessary. Consequently, this work will trace the develop-

³ Falkenhayn, *Der Feldzug der 9. Armee*, I, 8. All English translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

⁴ Glen Torrey, *Romania and World War I: A Collection of Studies* (Portland, OR: Center for Romanian Studies, 1999). Torrey, the leading historian on the Romanian military during World War I, has produced an immense amount of scholarship in his field, including the enormous impact of the 1916 campaign.

⁵ Gerhard Ritter, *The Schlieffen Plan: Critique of a Myth* (London: Oswald Wolff, 1958). The plan called for a six week campaign against France by most of the German military, followed with a calculated attack to the east against Russia. It was based on the premise that Russia would not be fully mobilized for ten weeks, thus giving Germany a short but supposedly attainable amount of time to defeat the French.

⁶ There are seemingly endless works on World War I. Some general accounts include Basil Henry Liddell Hart, *History of the First World War* (London: Cassell, 1970); James Stokesbury, *A Short History of World War I* (New York: William Morrow, 1981); Martin Gilbert, *The First World War: A Complete History* (New York: Henry Holt, 1994); and John Keegan, *The First World War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999).

⁷ For a detailed account of the Verdun disaster, see Alistair Horne, *The Price of Glory: Verdun 1916* (New York: Penguin, 1993).

ment of German operational doctrine before World War I. General Helmuth von Moltke (the elder) was the great figure of nineteenth-century German military history. During his thirty-year career as chief of the Prussian General Staff, Moltke and a small group of staff officers enacted radical reforms within the Prussian military. More than any other figure during the nineteenth century, Moltke balanced the new technology and mass armies with the unchanging characteristics of war.⁸ As a result, Prussia won wars against Denmark (1864), Austria (1866), and France (1870-71) in the so-called German Wars of Unification. In doing so, Moltke created the model for German operations during World War I.

German operations during the first half of the war were largely unsuccessful. While Moltke had developed a successful operational doctrine, faulty implementation of his doctrine resulted in a German defeat on the Marne,⁹ and the armies descended into trench warfare along the western front. Although the Germans drove back the Russians on the eastern front, they did not knock them out of the war. Therefore, this work will provide an overview of German strategy during World War I. Why did the Germans fail to achieve decisive victories such as the ones the great Moltke had accomplished a half century earlier? How did German military leaders attempt to break the stalemate?

While much has been written on the western theater of war, the eastern theater has been relatively neglected.¹⁰ Military campaigns in Romania, Serbia, Hungary, and southeastern Europe in general deserve more attention. Romania is important because it illustrates a successful German operation amid the contemporaneous stalemate of trench warfare on the western front. Moreover, this work will demonstrate that German military leaders did learn something from Helmuth von Moltke. Although it did not win the war, the German army showed great skill under Falkenhayn, winning astonishing victories and restoring mobility to the battlefield. Nowhere was this more evident than in Romania.

⁸ Robert Citino, *Quest for Decisive Victory: From Stalemate to Blitzkrieg in Europe, 1899-1940* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 18-19.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 143-54.

¹⁰ Keegan and Gilbert, for example, largely ignore the eastern front. A good starting point is Norman Stone, *The Eastern Front, 1914-1917* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1975).

CHAPTER 2

A TALE OF TWO MOLTKE

Helmuth von Moltke the Elder

Helmuth von Moltke was the crucial figure in late nineteenth-century European warfare. Following the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars (1792-1815), vast growth in technology, such as the telegraph, railroads, and new weaponry, complicated military operations. In particular, offensives became increasingly difficult, as experienced in the Crimean War (1854-56) and the American Civil War (1861-65). This new technology coincided with the dramatic rise of mass armies.¹¹ More than any other individual, Moltke balanced the new technology and mass armies with the unchanging characteristics of war.¹² He guided Prussia to victories over Denmark (1864), Austria (1866), and France (1870-71), and Prussia became the leader of a new, unified German Empire. His art of war was not based on a strict set of rules but rather followed general outlines which allowed for flexibility.

Moltke was a follower of Carl Maria von Clausewitz, one of the most influential military writers of the modern age.¹³ Clausewitz argued war was too unpredictable to be explained by specific theories. In *On War*, he stated that “everything in war is very simple, but the simplest thing is difficult,” and “no other human activity is so continuously or universally bound up with chance.” He went on to declare “war is thus an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will.”¹⁴ Moltke believed that war was too uncertain to be guided by a strict set of rules. He also followed Clausewitz’s belief that probabilities would determine each encounter while an army adapted to each circumstance as it arose.

Moltke served as chief of the Prussian General Staff from 1857 to 1888. He almost immediately expanded the General Staff’s influence, developing it into a permanent, peacetime war planning organization. To achieve this, he divided the General Staff into several planning divisions. These departments included a Geographical-Statistical Section, a Military History Section, and a Mobilization Section. The Geographical-Statistical Section estimated numerous aspects of specific theaters of war. Some items analyzed included cartography, weather charts, and opposing armies.¹⁵ The Military History Section studied past campaigns, such as the Seven Years’ War (1756-63) and the Franco-Austrian War (1859), distilling important lessons of operational combat.¹⁶ Perhaps the most important department was the Mobilization Section, which organized detailed plans for initial deployments

¹¹ Geoffrey Wawro, *The Austro-Prussian War: Austria’s War with Prussia and Italy in 1866* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 17-19.

¹² Robert Citino, *Quest for Decisive Victory: From Stalemate to Blitzkrieg in Europe, 1899-1940* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 18-19.

¹³ Walter Goerlitz, *History of the German General Staff 1657-1945*, trans. Brian Battershaw (New York: Praeger, 1966), 83.

¹⁴ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), “everything in war...,” 119; “no other human activity...,” 85; “war is thus an act of force...,” 75.

¹⁵ Citino, *Quest for Decisive Victory*, 19.

¹⁶ Lieut-Col. F.E. Whitton, *Moltke* (London: Constable, 1921), 73-75.

of the military in future conflicts.¹⁷ Within this section, a Railway Section was created, which prepared timetables for the quick mobilization of troops towards the frontlines via railroads. Moltke's consistent use of rapid mobilization was a key ingredient of his art of war.

Besides reorganizing the General Staff, Moltke issued a series of rules and regulations for its training, the *Instructions for Large Unit Commanders* (1869).¹⁸ He organized these teachings into maneuvers and war games. Maneuvers, which often included entire divisions, involved simulated war exercises on realistic terrain; war games primarily featured theoretical war situations in huge sandboxes. The most important exercise was the annual staff ride. It included both maneuvers and war games and involved intimate contact between the chief umpire¹⁹ and a small group of officers chosen for combat. These games often resulted in promotions and provided strategy for future wars.²⁰ Since the purpose of maneuvers, war games, and staff rides was to form leaders of one mind, these exercises were taken very seriously. A unique characteristic of warfare quickly developed. The Prussian General Staff was the first organization to formulate a "common body of military doctrine."²¹

Beyond the vast Prussian military reforms, Moltke is historically significant for his great accomplishments as a field commander. Although a Clausewitz disciple, he exhibited definite beliefs on military strategy, operations, and tactics. He balanced the strategic offensive with the rise of technology, which usually favored the tactical defensive. Moltke's art of war can be organized into three distinct characteristics: the importance of the *Aufmarsch* (initial deployment); a preference for the *Kesselschlacht* (cauldron or envelopment battle); and the use of *Auftragstaktik* (mission tactics).²²

Moltke's first constant in war was the *Aufmarsch*, the initial deployment of the army. Efficient orders via the telegraph,²³ as well as proper assemblage of troops, would result in a rapid mobilization of forces. He emphasized that if these demands were not strictly adhered to, the entire campaign could be ruined:

Even the first deployment of the army--assembling the fighting means in readiness--cannot be planned without a previous plan of operations, at least in a very general sketch. One must consider in advance what one intends in the defense, just as for the attack. The first deployment of the army is inseparably connected with the operations themselves.... If the views shaping original deployment are incorrect, the work is completely without value. Even a single error in the original assembly of the armies can hardly ever be made good again during the entire course of the campaign.²⁴

¹⁷ Citino, *Quest for Decisive Victory*, 19.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁹ All maneuvers, war games, and exercises were supervised by a high ranking officer, called an umpire.

²⁰ Arden Bucholz, *Moltke, Schlieffen, and Prussian War Planning* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), 34-35.

²¹ Goerlitz, *German General Staff*, 76.

²² Citino, *Quest for Decisive Victory*, 19-21.

²³ Martin van Creveld, *Command in War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 107-09. Creveld cautions readers that while the telegraph was essential for the initial deployment of forces, it was not very helpful for combat operations. The relevant example is the Austro-Prussian War of 1866, the Prussian campaign into Bohemia.

²⁴ Daniel Hughes, ed., *Moltke on the Art of War: Selected Writings* (Novato, CA: Presidio, 1993), 91.

Moltke's second constant in war was the *Kesselschlacht*, the envelopment of the enemy army. Here, he applied his doctrine that preached the strategic offensive and the tactical defensive.²⁵ Utilizing this formula, one army pinned the enemy in place while another army hit him in the flank and rear:

Another means is to fix the enemy's front with part of our strength and to envelop his flank with the other part. In that case it is necessary for us to remain strong enough opposite the hostile front so as not to be overpowered before the flank attack can become effective. We must also be very active in his front to prevent the opponent from throwing himself with superior numbers on our flank attack.²⁶

He stressed that the goal of *Kesselschlacht* was the complete destruction of the enemy army:

Victory alone breaks the will of the enemy and forces him to submit to our will. Neither the possession of a tract of land nor the conquest of a fortified position will suffice. On the contrary, only the destruction of the enemy's fighting power will, as a rule, be decisive. This is therefore the foremost object of operations.²⁷

Moltke's third constant in war was the use of *Auftragstaktik*, mission tactics for army officers. The supreme commander gave his subordinate commanders a general mission. Then, the application of these orders was left to the field officers. In other words, Moltke's officers carried out his plan, as general headquarters played a secondary role. He devised a simple plan, then trusted his General Staff, which had undergone vast reforms, and placed a staff officer along side the large unit commanders.²⁸ He also stressed that orders must be direct, clear, and concise. Otherwise, the main objective might be misunderstood or even forgotten.²⁹

Moltke stated "strategy is a system of expedients"³⁰ and "no plan survives contact with the enemy's main body."³¹ As Clausewitz had already stated, Moltke understood that war was completely unpredictable. Therefore, planning the entire campaign in immense detail was senseless:

One does well to order no more than is absolutely necessary and to avoid planning beyond the situations one can foresee. These change very rapidly in

²⁵ Larry Addington, *The Blitzkrieg Era and the German General Staff, 1865-1941* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1971), 4.

²⁶ Hughes, *Moltke on the Art of War*, 56.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 176.

²⁸ Crevel, *Command in War*, 119, 121-22.

²⁹ Hughes, *Moltke on the Art of War*, 156-57.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 124.

³¹ Quoted in Citino, *Quest for Decisive Victory*, 20.

war. Seldom will orders that anticipate far in advance and in detail succeed completely to execution. This shakes the confidence of the subordinate commander and it gives the units a feeling of uncertainty when things develop differently than what the high command's order had presumed. Moreover, it must be pointed out that if one orders much, then the important thing that needs to be carried out unconditionally will be carried out only incidentally or not at all because it is obscured by the mass of secondary things and those which are valid only under the circumstances.³²

The 1866 Campaign

The classic example of Moltke's art of war was Prussia's 1866 campaign versus Austria. The Austro-Prussian War began in June, and Moltke was eager to mobilize the Prussian army as soon as possible. However, Prussian King Wilhelm I delayed mobilization orders. Wilhelm finally unleashed Moltke on June 2, empowering him with complete control of Prussian forces.³³ But he was already behind the Austrians, who began troop deployment weeks earlier. Fortunately, he had already finished Prussian mobilization plans. Austria had only one railroad leading into Bohemia, the main theater of war, as opposed to Prussia's five. Consequently, Prussia mobilized in three weeks, while Austria took twice as long.³⁴

On June 22, Moltke ordered the concentric advance of two Prussian armies into Bohemia:³⁵ 2nd Army was commanded by the Crown Prince; 1st Army was led by Friedrich Karl (the "Red Prince"). Thus began the initial stage of Moltke's planned *Kesselschlacht*. His armies, widely separated by several days' marches, were to converge near the town of Sadowa and only link up during battle. One army, whichever was closest to the Austrians, would pin the enemy in place, while the other was to attack from the flank and rear. In the next two weeks, Prussian armies won a series of engagements and were within a day's march of each other on July 2. Even though Moltke thought the Austrians had retreated east across the Elbe river,³⁶ his armies were in solid position to attempt a *Kesselschlacht*.

On the same day, Prussian reconnaissance detected Austrian forces west of the Elbe. The Red Prince decided to execute a frontal assault the next morning.³⁷ He sent the Crown Prince a message asking for a corps to attack the Austrian flank. Only after issuing orders to his subordinates did Friedrich Karl inform Moltke, who immediately realized that a golden chance for a *Kesselschlacht* was on the horizon. At 11 p.m., he gave the Prussian 2nd Army the following orders:

According to reports received by the 1st Army the enemy in about the

³² Hughes, *Moltke on the Art of War*, 184-85.

³³ Helmuth von Moltke, *Strategy; Its Theory and Application: The Wars for German Unification, 1866-1871* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1971), 25, No. 79-80.

³⁴ Dennis Showalter, *Railroads and Rifles: Soldiers, Technology, and the Unification of Germany* (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1975), 58-59.

³⁵ Moltke, *Strategy*, 47, No. 135.

³⁶ Crevel, *Command in War*, 132.

³⁷ Gordon Craig, *The Battle of Königgrätz: Prussia's Victory over Austria, 1866* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1964), 84-85.

strength of three corps, which, however, may be still further reinforced, has advanced to and beyond the line formed by the Bistritz at Sadowa and an encounter there with the 1st Army, according to orders, will be tomorrow morning, July 3rd at 2 a.m., with two divisions at Horitz, with one at Milowitz, with one at Gustwasser. Your Royal Highness will be good enough immediately to make the necessary arrangements to be able to advance with all your forces in support of the 1st Army against the right flank of the enemy's probable advance, and in so doing to come into action as soon as possible. The directions given from here this afternoon in other conditions are now no longer valid.³⁸

Moltke also sent a response to the Red Prince, ordering him to attack earlier in the morning and pin the Austrians in place.³⁹ On the morning of July 3, a rain and thick mist enveloped the upcoming battlefield. As a result, 1st Army was able to execute its movements without attracting enemy attention.

Wilhelm I and general headquarters arrived around 8 a.m. German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck asked Moltke the number of Austrians facing the Red Prince. In typical Moltke fashion, he responded, "We don't know exactly; only that it is at least three corps, and that it is perhaps the whole Austrian Army."⁴⁰ Shortly after 8 a.m. on July 3, Friedrich Karl ordered a general attack. The Red Prince now understood the battle would be won on the flanks. He followed his orders despite dissatisfaction with what he considered a secondary role.⁴¹

Prussian 7th Division (Fransecky), under heavy artillery fire, sought cover in Swiepwald forest.⁴² The Austrians immediately concentrated their artillery fire on this location. At this point, Austrian IV Corps,⁴³ under the command of Count Festetics, moved into Swiepwald forest. In order to stay in line with Festetics, Austrian II Corps leader Count Thun had his men follow close behind.⁴⁴ By 11 a.m., 7th Division's situation had become drastic. Its center had broken, its wings were becoming isolated, and the division was nearly surrounded. Fransecky requested assistance from the Red Prince. However, Moltke intervened and convinced Wilhelm not to give Fransecky support.⁴⁵ From 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., Austrian artillery fire pinned down 1st Army. During this time, Friedrich Karl had ordered 5th and 6th Divisions to help near Sadowa. Once again, Moltke stopped the flow of reserves to the front.⁴⁶ He knew it was essential to keep Prussian reserves available for a counterattack near Sadowa upon the Crown Prince's arrival.

Consequently, by noon Prussian headquarters became increasingly worried. Prussian 1st Army was slowly being driven backwards, troop morale was low, and the Crown Prince

³⁸ Moltke, *Strategy*, 55, No. 152.

³⁹ Citino, *Quest for Decisive Victory*, 23.

⁴⁰ Quoted in Craig, *Battle of Königgrätz*, 96.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 97.

⁴³ At this time Austria used corps as its largest combat unit.

⁴⁴ Wawro, *Austro-Prussian War*, 221-22.

⁴⁵ Craig, *Battle of Königgrätz*, 109.

⁴⁶ Crevel, *Command in War*, 137.

had not encountered the main enemy force. An anxious King Wilhelm exclaimed “Moltke, Moltke, we are losing the battle!”⁴⁷ Moltke supposedly responded by telling his master “Your majesty will today win not only the battle, but the campaign.”⁴⁸ Wilhelm was not relieved. A short time later he almost issued an order to retreat, until Moltke told him, “Here there will be no retreat. Here we are fighting for the very existence of Prussia.”⁴⁹ It was clear Moltke alone had complete faith in the success of his *Kesselschlacht*. His belief proved prophetic as early as 3 p.m., when 1st Army spotted 2nd Army forces on the slopes north of Chlum.

Austrian Field Marshall Ludwig Benedek knew that 2nd Army was approaching the battlefield. He was not worried, as he had ordered Festetics and Thun to move their men back to protect Austria's exposed right flank. Therefore, he was all the more stunned when Festetic's chief of staff arrived to argue against evacuating Swiepwald forest.⁵⁰ Not until 12:30 p.m. did II and IV Corps leave the Swiepwald. However, they underwent heavy fire from 2nd Army forces approaching Chlum.

The tide quickly turned towards Prussia's side. Attacking Chlum simultaneously from the south, east, and north, the Prussians took it without a major struggle. By 3 p.m., 2nd Army controlled the central Austrian position, as Moltke's *Kesselschlacht* became reality. The Austrian retreat quickly became a rout.⁵¹

The 1866 campaign effectively illustrated Moltke's art of war. He solved the problems of mass armies and new technology by formulating a simple yet well constructed plan. In achieving this, he enacted his *Kesselschlacht* doctrine, the ultimate goal of the Prussian army. When the 1866 operations began, Moltke's *Aufmarsch* gave Prussia a tremendous advantage over Austria. Furthermore, he utilized *Auftragstaktik*, allowing his subordinates to carry out his general orders. Most important, his consistent use of flexibility saved the Prussian army from several possible disasters. When all else failed, his iron will thrived amid great adversity.

The best way to summarize Moltke's art of war is Clausewitz's famous dictum, “what genius does is the best rule.”⁵² Although he emphasized war's uncertainty, Clausewitz believed great commanders could rise above this “fog of war.” The past is filled with striking examples, from Alexander in ancient Greece to Napoleon in revolutionary France. Whether Moltke belongs in this tiny, elite group of military geniuses is open to question. In any case, he undoubtedly placed his mark on the modern German army. However, it remained to be seen if Moltke's successors could duplicate his astonishing victories.

The 1914 Campaign in the West

World War I opened in August 1914 with the great powers carrying out huge offensives, all

⁴⁷ Quoted in *ibid.*, 137-38.

⁴⁸ Quoted in Craig, *Battle of Königgrätz*, III.

⁴⁹ Quoted in *ibid.*, III.

⁵⁰ Citino, *Quest for Decisive Victory*, 24.

⁵¹ Craig, *Battle of Königgrätz*, 166. The Prussians lost about 9,000 men, while the Austrians suffered approximately 45,000 casualties. No longer able to launch an offensive, the Austrians asked for an armistice, thus ending the war.

⁵² Clausewitz, *On War*, 136.

of which failed miserably. Austria-Hungary invaded Serbia and attacked the Russians via Galicia. Russia launched an offensive into East Prussia to take some pressure away from the German campaign against France. As mentioned above, Germany opened the war by implementing the Schlieffen Plan, that Graf von Schlieffen, chief of the General Staff from 1891 to 1905, had dedicated his career to. In fact, ever since Helmuth von Moltke (the elder) retired in 1888, German strategists had pondered how to solve Germany's dilemma of a possible two-front war. The use of war games and maneuvers, started under Moltke, continued right up to the opening of the 1914 campaign. Schlieffen believed he had solved Germany's problem by formulating a strategy for quick, decisive victory.

Schlieffen drew up the operations for the western campaign.⁵³ The *Schwerpunkt*, or main point of emphasis, would be on the German right wing. Three armies, consisting of fifty-three divisions, would break through the Netherlands and Belgium, invade France, circle around the west of Paris, then come up from the rear and encircle the entire French army in a huge *Kesselschlacht*. Meanwhile, the German left wing would deliberately be much weaker. Noticing this, the French would be enticed to launch a large-scale offensive into relatively strong defensive positions in the province of Lorraine, playing right into the German hands, by creating a larger area of envelopment.

Undoubtedly, it was an extremely aggressive, risky plan. If French forces broke through at Lorraine, Schlieffen's plan might result in a decisive victory--for France. In addition, the strong right wing had to advance adhering to a strict timetable, not easily done in war. Supplying and commanding this force would become increasingly difficult to manage. However, all military commanders have been taught that, although concentration of forces in certain places involves risk by leaving other areas weaker, it offers the best possibility of crushing the enemy. This was certainly the case for Germany in 1914.

The chief of the German General Staff in 1914 was Helmuth von Moltke,⁵⁴ nephew of the nineteenth-century Moltke. Unlike his uncle, Moltke "the younger" was not a gambler. He removed the Netherlands from the operation, refusing to violate its neutrality. As a result, the German right wing would have to pass through the Belgian fortress of Liège.⁵⁵ Perhaps even more important, he placed six out of nine new divisions on the German left wing, thus ignoring an opportunity to strengthen the *Schwerpunkt*.⁵⁶ Consequently, when the Schlieffen Plan failed to knock France out of the war, much of the blame centered on Moltke.

As for France, its plan was much simpler. French strategy centered on Plan XVII, an all-out offensive into Lorraine.⁵⁷ This scheme was predicated on the Franco-Prussian War, when France lost the Alsace-Lorraine provinces during a hasty retreat. French tactics relied on the doctrine of the offensive, a widely-held belief among military generals and theorists

⁵³ Gerhard Ritter, *The Schlieffen Plan: Critique of a Myth* (London: Oswald Wolff, 1958), 129-64.

⁵⁴ For an excellent view of German operations in 1914, with an emphasis on Moltke as supreme commander, see Correlli Barnett, *The Swordbearers: Supreme Command in the First World War* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1963), 13-106.

⁵⁵ Ritter, *Schlieffen Plan*, 165-67. These three pages provide a useful, brief view of the Schlieffen Plan according to Moltke the Younger. See also Robert Asprey, *The First Battle of the Marne* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1962), 11-12.

⁵⁶ Citino, *Quest for Decisive Victory*, 146.

⁵⁷ For an adequate overview of Plan XVII and the French Army, see Asprey, *First Battle of the Marne*, 18-31; Barnett, *Swordbearers*, 39-40; and C.R.M.F. Crutwell, *A History of the Great War 1914-1918* (Chicago: Academy Chicago, 1991), 9-10.

prior to the war. General Louis de Grandmaison, chief of the Third Bureau of French General Headquarters, established a “virtual cult of offensive operations” in the French Army.⁵⁸ His *Regulations for the Conduct of Major Formations* stated “The French Army, returning to its traditions, recognizes no law save that of the offensive,”⁵⁹ and, as one soldier recalled, declared, “Success depends far more upon forcefulness and tenacity than upon tactical skill. Attacks should always be pressed home with the firm intention of engaging the enemy at the point of the bayonet.”⁶⁰ Furthermore, the French proved to be outgunned, as they principally relied on the 75-mm field gun, much less powerful than the 105-mm light field howitzer and the 150-mm heavy field howitzer used by the Germans.

On August 16, German 1st Army (General Alexander von Kluck) and 2nd Army (General Bernard von Bülow) invaded Belgium. The German forces met minimal resistance from the Belgian army under King Albert. Moltke had already ordered forward units to seize the fortress of Liège. This task force, led by General Erich Ludendorff, bombed the fort with heavy artillery and captured it in a few days, well before the major German invasion. However, when Moltke originally issued this order, he had been overruled by Kaiser Wilhelm II. Even though he soon recanted his own ruling, Wilhelm’s actions deeply affected Moltke’s already shaken confidence.⁶¹ Moreover, King Albert and the Belgians retreated to Antwerp, forcing the Germans to leave a corps to guard Kluck’s flank. There were no reserve troops available, since Moltke had placed them behind the German left wing. Therefore, Kluck had to utilize one of his own corps instead.⁶² Nevertheless, 1st and 2nd Army had occupied Belgium on schedule.⁶³

At this point, the “Battle of the Frontiers” began.⁶⁴ On August 14, French 1st Army (General Auguste DuBail) and 2nd Army (General Noël de Castelnau) invaded Lorraine. On August 20, the French armies engaged the Germans at Sarrebourg and Morhange, where they were driven back by artillery and machine gun fire. The French commander, General Joseph Joffre, now ordered French 3rd and 4th Armies into eastern Belgium via the Ardennes forest. On August 22, they crashed into German 4th and 5th Armies, the center of Germany’s advance into France. The French retreated after several hours of fighting in a thick fog. Sensing activity to his right, General Lanrezac, commander of French 5th Army, advanced his men towards Namur. Here, German 2nd and 3rd Armies approached the French flanks and forced them to withdraw. By this time, the British Expeditionary Force (BEF), consisting of 100,000 men under Sir John French, had arrived on the west coast of France. On August 23 it collided with German 1st Army at Mons. Superior German numbers resulted in a British retreat. Soon after, France’s military was re-

⁵⁸ Citino, *Quest for Decisive Victory*, 147.

⁵⁹ Quoted in Michael Howard, “Men Against Fire: The Doctrine of the Offensive in 1914,” in *Makers of Modern Strategy from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, ed. Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 520. For a concise discussion of the doctrine of the French offensive, see Georges Blond, *The Marne* (London: Macdonald, 1965), 18-25.

⁶⁰ Quoted in Blond, *Marne*, 21.

⁶¹ Barnett, *Swordbearers*, 17-21; Asprey, *First Battle of the Marne*, 34.

⁶² Asprey, *First Battle of the Marne*, 44-45.

⁶³ Barnett, *Swordbearers*, 36-37.

⁶⁴ Two excellent reviews of these battles are found in Asprey, *First Battle of the Marne*, 35-61 and Citino, *Quest for Decisive Victory*, 149-51.

treating towards Paris.⁶⁵ On August 23, the German army was exactly where it was supposed to be according to the Schlieffen Plan--at the French border. It appeared Germany's daring strategy might succeed.

But Germany did not knock France out of the war. Unfortunately for the Germans, numerous actions threw the Schlieffen Plan completely off-balance. First, after defeating French armies in Lorraine, German 6th and 7th Armies launched a counterattack near Nancy; 5th Army followed suit toward Verdun. Adopting the elder Moltke's practice of *Auftragstaktik*, the army commanders neglected to inform Moltke beforehand. They did convince him to provide the counterattack with reinforcements previously allotted for the German right wing.⁶⁶ Although the attack failed, an even larger issue loomed. Schlieffen had expected, even hoped for, France to attack Lorraine. He wanted the German left wing to remain on the defensive. Otherwise, a French retreat from this region could result in a much stronger garrison to defend Paris. In any case, Moltke's willingness to implement an offensive along his left wing displayed his obtuseness regarding the Schlieffen Plan.

Second, Russian 1st and 2nd Armies invaded East Prussia on August 12, well ahead of the Schlieffen's prediction. On August 20, General Max von Prittwitz, commander of German 8th Army defending East Prussia, urgently requested reinforcements from Moltke, who immediately agreed to send two corps from the western front. Not only did he again transfer troops from the vital right wing, but the troops arrived after the Germans had won the battle of Tannenberg, thus ending the Russian offensive.⁶⁷ Moltke had wasted approximately 100,000 men.

Third, German 1st and 2nd Armies faced increasing resistance as they marched towards Paris. In particular, French 5th Army counterattacked German 1st Army at Guise.⁶⁸ Although 2nd Army hit Lanrezac's men in the flank and inflicted heavy losses, Kluck was shaken. He decided to stick close to Bülow by directing his army northeast, not west, of Paris.⁶⁹ Even though a climactic battle had not occurred, Kluck's maneuver brought the Schlieffen Plan to an end.

The climax of the 1914 western campaign took place in early September, as French forces stopped their retreat and made preparations along the Marne River. Joffre, unlike Moltke, remained calm despite France's precarious situation. He sacked incompetent and unwilling commanders, shifted troops to weakened areas, and, in general, provided his men with an unwavering confidence. He also formed two new armies: the 6th Army led by General Michel Maunoury and the 9th Army under General Ferdinand Foch. Sixth Army protected Paris while 9th Army filled a gap between French 4th and 5th Armies. Perhaps most important, Joffre insisted Paris be held, placing it under the direction of General Jo-

⁶⁵ James Stokesbury, *A Short History of World War I* (New York: William Morrow, 1981), 40-44; Basil Henry Liddell Hart, *History of the First World War* (London: Cassell, 1970), 78-84; J.F.C. Fuller, *A Military History of the Western World*, Vol. 3, *From the American Civil War to the End of World War II* (New York: Da Capo, 1956), 197-201; John Keegan, *The First World War* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1999), 89-100.

⁶⁶ Citino, *Quest for Decisive Victory*, 150-51; Barnett, *Swordbearers*, 58-62.

⁶⁷ Dennis Showalter, *Tannenberg: Clash of Empires* (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1991), especially pages 193-96, which discuss Moltke's decision to reinforce East Prussia.

⁶⁸ Asprey, *First Battle of the Marne*, 74-79.

⁶⁹ Barnett, *Swordbearers*, 71-74.

seph Galliéni.⁷⁰

During the battle of the Marne (September 6-9),⁷¹ Moltke lost his nerve. French 6th Army engaged the right wing of Kluck's 1st Army, which swung around and faced west in response. This left a gaping, twenty mile hole between German 1st and 2nd Army, which the BEF gradually exploited.⁷² Meanwhile, Moltke sat back at general headquarters at Koblenz, more than 100 miles from the fighting and left clueless about the situation. On September 8, he sent an aide, Colonel Hentsch, to the front to order a withdrawal if he deemed it necessary.⁷³ After visiting Bülow, who insisted that Kluck should retreat, riding behind the German line, and conferring with Kluck's chief of staff, Hentsch received news that Bülow had ordered a retreat. Hentsch ordered a general withdrawal of the five German armies along the Marne River.⁷⁴ The Germans moved towards the Aisne River while the French breathed a sigh of relief.

Analyzing the Schlieffen Plan

Historians have provided various explanations for the Schlieffen Plan's failure.⁷⁵ Many blame ineffective German preparations to take Paris. In particular, German leaders neglected the French railroad network surrounding the city, which carried a huge quantity of French reserve units and supplies.⁷⁶ Other scholars have blamed Schlieffen himself, claiming:

The great Schlieffen Plan was never a sound formula for victory. It was a daring, indeed an over-daring, gamble whose success depended on many lucky accidents. A formula for victory needs a surplus of reasonable chances of success if it is to inspire confidence--a surplus which tends quickly to be used up by "frictions" in the day-to-day conduct of war.⁷⁷

Moltke has received far more criticism than anyone else for Germany's inability to defeat France in 1914.⁷⁸ Indeed, Moltke himself expressed doubts about the plan, thus lack-

⁷⁰ Citino, *Quest for Decisive Victory*, 151; Asprey, *First Battle of the Marne*, 126-29, 140-41.

⁷¹ Two standard works on the Battle of the Marne are Asprey, *First Battle of the Marne*, and Blond, *Marne*.

⁷² Barnett, *Swordbearers*, 90-92.

⁷³ Much has been written about this still controversial topic. Cyril Falls, *The Great War* (New York: Capricorn, 1959), 68-69; Fuller, *Military History of the Western World*, 3:225-227; and Keegan, *First World War*, 120-23, are good introductions.

⁷⁴ Asprey, *First Battle of the Marne*, 142-53; Barnett, *Swordbearers*, 94-101.

⁷⁵ There has been an amazing amount of scholarship critiquing the plan. For a few representative examples, see Ritter, *Schlieffen Plan*; Buchholz, *Moltke, Schlieffen, and Prussian War Planning*, 158-213; Holger Herwig, *The First World War: Germany and Austria-Hungary, 1914-1918* (London: Arnold, 1997), 56-62; and Creveld, *Command in War*, 148-55.

⁷⁶ Barnett, *Swordbearers*, 82-86, 103-04. Although Barnett states Moltke deserves some blame, he emphasizes that Germany should have concentrated on cutting off French supplies by seizing and destroying the railroads around Paris. Also consult Ritter, *Schlieffen Plan*, 60-62.

⁷⁷ Ritter, *Schlieffen Plan*, 66.

⁷⁸ Asprey, *First Battle of the Marne*, 164-73. Asprey indicts Moltke and rebuts Ritter's blame for Schlieffen by countering two objections he made to the plan. First, Asprey states that Ritter's argument that the BEF and Lanrezac's 5th Army would never have put themselves in a vulnerable position if they had known of the German advance is invalid. He claims the German attack simply did what it was supposed to do--achieve complete surprise. The French and Brit-

ing the aggressive attitude required to carry out Schlieffen's doctrine.⁷⁹ Furthermore, he lost control over his subordinate generals. Of course, he believed he was following in his uncle's footsteps by utilizing *Auftragstaktik*, giving his army commanders a mission and then letting them implement the plan. However, he was not entirely correct. The elder Moltke was much more involved during the Königgrätz campaign, joining the Prussian armies on the morning of the battle to exert his command. On the contrary, the younger Moltke received seemingly endless, conflicting reports at Koblenz. He consequently had little idea what was going on, and lost control over the German forces.⁸⁰

However, a larger issue than Moltke was present in 1914. The vast growth of new technology made commanding, supplying, and controlling mass armies extraordinarily difficult.⁸¹ By 1914, armies of the great European powers contained more than a million men, a far greater number than ever before. Railroads enabled these forces to cover huge distances quickly. Therefore, military leaders had to not only implement pre-war planning but also display adequate leadership in order to maintain control over their men. Few generals were able to follow the elder Moltke's example. In addition, advancements in artillery, coupled with the prevalence of the machine gun, made battles of envelopment nearly impossible. Although German troops inflicted enormous casualties on the French and British during the 1914 campaign, they were never able to encircle the French army and thus did not achieve a decisive victory.

ish never expected the scale of the German right wing offensive. Second, Asprey admits the Germans overran their supplies as their advance progressed, but counters that many campaigns have been won without adequate supplies.

⁷⁹ Barnett, *Swordbearers*, 33-35.

⁸⁰ Asprey, *First Battle of the Marne*, 15-17; Barnett, *Swordbearers*, 53-55.

⁸¹ Citino, *Quest for Decisive Victory*, 152-54.

CHAPTER 3

ROMANIA ENTERS THE WAR

Following the defeat at the Marne, German operations were largely unsuccessful from 1914 to 1916. The western front quickly changed from a *Bewegungskrieg* (war of movement) into a *Stellungskrieg* (war of position),⁸² and although the Germans drove back the Russians on the eastern front, they did not knock them out of the war. One way Germany and the other great powers tried to break the stalemate was to recruit allies. When the war began, Germany certainly did not expect to be fighting Romania. However, Turkey (Nov 1914), Italy (May 1915), and Bulgaria (Oct 1915) all chose sides before the end of 1915.⁸³ Both the Triple Entente and the Central Powers placed increasing pressure on Romania to join the conflict. Despite being ruled by the Hohenzollern dynasty, Romanian public opinion favored an alliance with the Entente. The vast majority of Romanians desired the Habsburg province of Transylvania, which contained an irredentist Romanian majority. When the Central Powers' military situation seemed dubious during the summer of 1916, Romania formed an alliance with the Triple Entente and invaded Transylvania.⁸⁴

Stalemate

On September 14, 1914, less than a week after Moltke approved the German retreat from the Marne, Wilhelm II replaced him as chief of the General Staff with General Erich von Falkenhayn.⁸⁵ The next day, Falkenhayn ordered a flanking maneuver along the British and French left wing. Allied forces responded with flanking attempts of their own, until a general "race to the sea" was in full progress.⁸⁶ Within weeks, these counter movements resulted in a front line that extended from the Belgian coast to Switzerland. Well before the end of 1914, both sides had erected a series of trenches and barbed wire, bolstered by machine guns and artillery. Thus began the well known period of trench warfare, huge artillery battles in which the attacking infantry were ground to pieces by artillery shells and ma-

⁸² Robert Citino, *Quest for Decisive Victory: From Stalemate to Blitzkrieg in Europe, 1899-1940* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), xvi.

⁸³ Glen Torrey, *Romania and World War I: A Collection of Studies* (Portland, OR: Center for Romanian Studies, 1999), 138.

⁸⁴ For an excellent account of the political and military situation during the summer of 1916, which led to Romania's alliance with the Entente, see *ibid.*, 95-120.

⁸⁵ Erich von Falkenhayn, *The German General Staff and Its Decisions, 1914-1916* (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1920), 1-9; Correlli Barnett, *The Swordbearers: Supreme Command in the First World War* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1963), 102.

⁸⁶ Gordon Craig, *The Politics of the Prussian Army, 1640-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955), 301; Jehuda Wallach, *The Dogma of the Battle of Annihilation: The Theories of Clausewitz and Schlieffen and their Impact on the German Conduct of the Two World Wars* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986), 128-32. Both authors claim that Falkenhayn's abandoning of a general, mobile offensive against the French and the British was a turning point of the war. Craig states the move was a "momentous change in strategy and the effect it was certain to have on the duration of the war...was not appreciated by the German public." Both men quote Herbert Rosinski, an expert of German military strategy. See Herbert Rosinski, *The German Army* (New York: Praeger, 1966) for details.

chine gun fire.⁸⁷ Faced with this *Stellungskrieg*, Falkenhayn had to reassess Germany's war strategy.

During his two years as supreme commander, Falkenhayn believed Germany could only defeat the western allies through a war of attrition. Using an *Ermattungsstrategie* (strategy of exhaustion), "he hoped that a series of limited operations, aimed at tactical objectives, would gradually weaken the enemy and force the Entente to sue for peace."⁸⁸ His attrition strategy culminated in the 1916 Verdun campaign.⁸⁹ In February 1916, the German army launched its greatest offensive since the battle of the Marne. Unlike previous German military operations, which had been conceived to achieve battles of envelopment, *Operation Gericht*, as the offensive was named, "was intended from the start as an exercise in attrition, not as a decisive operation."⁹⁰ Falkenhayn did not want to take Verdun, but rather to place enough pressure on the fortress city that the French would send in reserves to defend it. Although French soldiers became susceptible to German artillery, Falkenhayn soon lost control of the battle. As the French enacted a series of counterattacks, his plan for an attack along a narrow front quickly expanded into a general offensive encompassing the entire Verdun region. Consequently, both the French and the Germans suffered high casualties, as Falkenhayn's strategy of attrition failed.⁹¹

While the western front degraded into a stalemate, the German army gained the upper hand on the eastern front. In the summer of 1914, utilizing its superior rail network as well as the concept of *Auftragstaktik*, German 8th Army crushed Russian 1st and 2nd Armies in the Tannenberg campaign.⁹² In May 1915, the newly created German 11th Army, commanded by General August von Mackensen, spearheaded a grand offensive into the Polish salient. By September, German and Austrian forces had advanced 300 miles, captured thousands of Russian guns, and inflicted two million casualties.⁹³ Of course, Germany did

⁸⁷ Much has been written about trench warfare and its origins. Wallach, *Dogma of the Battle of Annihilation*, 160-64, on the one hand, provides a traditional argument: that western armies simply were familiar with offensive warfare and were consequently unprepared to exploit a breakthrough along the trenches. On the other hand, Citino, *Quest for Decisive Victory*, 162-67, states "it was the inadequacies of the mass army that rendered a decisive victory impossible," and notes that there had been wars fought in the trenches in which the attacking armies won huge victories. See, for example, his chapter on the Russo-Japanese War, 65-99. Perhaps the best evocation of the horrors of trench warfare is Erich Marie Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*, trans. A.W. Wheen (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1958).

⁸⁸ Martin Kitchen, *The Silent Dictatorship: The Politics of the German High Command under Hindenburg and Ludendorff, 1916-1918* (London: Croom Helm, 1976), 19.

⁸⁹ Falkenhayn, *German General Staff*, 255-75. The general's memoirs focus on the German offensive; for an easily readable account, see Alistair Horne, *The Price of Glory: Verdun 1916* (New York: Penguin, 1993); Holger Herwig, *The First World War: Germany and Austria-Hungary, 1914-1918* (London: Arnold, 1997), 183-98, is an adequate, scholarly work.

⁹⁰ Citino, *Quest for Decisive Victory*, 164.

⁹¹ Falkenhayn has been sharply criticized for his Verdun strategy. A few representative works include Wallach, *Dogma of the Battle of Annihilation*, 170-79; Craig, *Politics of the Prussian Army*, 305-06; and Citino, *Quest for Decisive Victory*, 164-67. While placing some blame on "Falkenhayn's ill-conceived plan," Citino notes how the problem of commanding large armies affected the course of the campaign, and provides grim casualty statistics—542,000 French and 434,000 Germans.

⁹² Dennis Showalter, *Tannenberg: Clash of Empires* (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1991), is still the best account. For an in-depth analysis of *Auftragstaktik* during the Tannenberg campaign, consult Randy Talbot, "General Hermann von Francois and Corps-Level Operations During the Tannenberg Campaign, August 1914" (master's thesis, Eastern Michigan University, 1999).

⁹³ Falkenhayn, *German General Staff*, 96-100; James Stokesbury, *A Short History of World War I* (New York: William Morrow, 1981), 131-34.

encounter problems on the eastern front, in large part because of the inferiority of the Austro-Hungarian Army.

In marked contrast to the Germans, Austria-Hungary could not achieve decisive victories without help from its allies. When the war began, Habsburg forces confronted four Russian armies in Galicia and two in Serbia. The Austrian supreme commander, Field Marshall Franz Conrad von Hötzendorf, had divided his armies into A-Staffel, three armies opposite Russia; Minimalgruppe Balkan, two armies against Serbia; and B-Staffel, one army as a "strategic reserve."⁹⁴ After initially deploying B-Staffel in Serbia, Conrad changed his mind and ordered its transfer to Galicia upon Russia's declaration of war. Unfortunately for the Central Powers, the army arrived too late and the outnumbered Austrians were routed.⁹⁵ Furthermore, the Serbs defeated Minimalgruppe Balkan, driving Habsburg 5th and 6th Armies out of Serbia.⁹⁶ Austria-Hungary's humiliating defeats in 1914 strained German-Austrian relations, as Conrad became increasingly reliant on Falkenhayn for reinforcements.⁹⁷ Much worse for Falkenhayn, however, was his tumultuous relationship with Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg and General Erich Ludendorff, the two German commanders on the eastern front.

Hindenburg and Ludendorff disagreed with Falkenhayn's emphasis on the western front.⁹⁸ Moreover, they outwardly criticized his policy of attrition. Hindenburg and Ludendorff were convinced a *Kesselschlacht* could be won against the Russian army. Hindenburg stated that the eastern strategy was essential:

West or East? That was the great question, and on the answer to it our fate depended.... Even to me the decisive battle in the West, a battle which would

⁹⁴ If Russia remained neutral, as Conrad believed it would, then B-Staffel would join Minimalgruppe Balkan in a large-scale assault against Serbia while A-Staffel remained on the defensive in Galicia. In contrast, if Russia declared war on the Central Powers, then B-Staffel would link up with A-Staffel and carry out a general offensive against Russia while Minimalgruppe Balkan committed only limited attacks against Serbia. For further details of Austria's strategy in 1914, see Norman Stone, "Moltke and Conrad: Relations Between the Austro-Hungarian and German General Staffs, 1909-1914," *The Historical Journal* 9, no. 2, 1966, pp. 201-228, and Holger Herwig, "Disjointed Allies: Coalition Warfare in Berlin and Vienna, 1914," *Journal of Military History* 54, no. 3, July 1990, pp. 275-280.

⁹⁵ For the 1914 Galicia campaign, see Stokesbury, *Short History of World War I*, 69-71; Herwig, *Germany and Austria-Hungary*, 89-95; Winston Churchill, *The Unknown War: The Eastern Front* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931), 144-73; Norman Stone, *The Eastern Front, 1914-1917* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1975), 70-91; and Citino, *Quest for Decisive Victory*, 160-62.

⁹⁶ For the Austrian campaign against Serbia, see Gunther Rothenberg, "The Austro-Hungarian Campaign Against Serbia in 1914," *Journal of Military History* 53, no. 2, April 1989, pp. 127-146, and Citino, *Quest for Decisive Victory*, 158-60.

⁹⁷ Basil Henry Liddell Hart, *Reputations Ten Years After* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries, 1968), 59-60; Horne, *Price of Glory*, 277-83; and Gordon Craig, "The World War I Alliance of the Central Powers in Retrospect: The Military Cohesion of the Alliance," *Journal of Military History* 37, no. 3, Sept. 1965, pp. 336-344. Each of these writers demonstrates the unpleasant relationship between Falkenhayn and Conrad. There are contrasting views of Conrad's ability as a military commander: Gunther Rothenberg, *The Army of Franz Joseph* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1976), 178, argues that Conrad followed a grand doctrine but lacked an army capable of Napoleonic victories. Robert Citino, *Quest for Decisive Victory*, 158, counters that "the description begs the question of what to call a general who designs plans too complex for his own men to execute."

⁹⁸ Many historians have debated whether Germany would have won the war if its forces had concentrated against Russia. For an introduction to the west vs. east strategy, consult Craig, *Politics of the Prussian Army*, 302-04; Wailach, *Dogma of the Battle of Annihilation*, 163; Liddell Hart, *Reputations*, 58-59; and Kitchen, *Silent Dictatorship*, 18-23.

have meant final victory, was the *ultima ratio*, but an *ultima ratio* which could only be reached over the body of a Russia stricken to the ground. Should we ever be able to strike Russia to the ground? Fate answered this question in the affirmative, but only two years later, when, as was to be made clear, it was too late.⁹⁹

However, Falkenhayn remained undeterred even though the Russian army gave ground in 1915 while the *Stellungskrieg* continued in the West:

This argument paid no heed either to the true character of the struggle for existence, in the most exact sense of the word, in which our enemies were engaged no less than we, nor to their strength of will. It was a grave mistake to believe that our Western enemies would give way, if and because Russia was beaten. No decision in the East, even though it were as thorough as was possible to imagine, could spare us from fighting to a conclusion in the West.¹⁰⁰

By the summer of 1916, neither the Central Powers nor the Triple Entente had broken the stalemate along the western front. Even the entrance of three new powers-- Turkey, Italy, and Bulgaria--did not seem to give either side the upper hand. Nevertheless, many observers on both sides felt neutral Romania was strategically important and thus could turn the tide.

Romanian Neutrality

On August 3, 1914, Romania shocked the Central Powers by declaring its neutrality.¹⁰¹ Many German and Austrian politicians had believed not only that Romania would declare war on the Entente, but that it was obligated to do so. On the one hand, Romania was ruled by a member of the Hohenzollern dynasty, King Carol I, who naturally favored the Central Powers. Moreover, Romania joined the Triple Alliance in 1883 and had renewed its membership most recently in 1913. On the other hand, Carol was not an absolute monarch, but rather held powers secondary to the Romanian parliament. Many Romanian political leaders noted that the military agreement was defensive in nature and claimed that Austria-Hungary was the belligerent power.¹⁰² It soon became apparent, however, that Romanian public opinion favored an alliance with the Entente.

⁹⁹ Paul von Hindenburg, *Out of My Life*, Vol. I, trans. F.A. Holt (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1927), 161-63. For a full reading of the quote and a more detailed explanation of Hindenburg's analysis, see 161-66.

¹⁰⁰ Falkenhayn, *German General Staff*, 61.

¹⁰¹ Kurt Treptow, ed., *A History of Romania* (Iasi: Center for Romanian Studies, 1996), 366-67; Torrey, *Romania and World War I*, 9-10.

¹⁰² A good starting point for Romanian political history before and during World War I is Marie, Queen of Romania, *The Story of My Life*, Vol. I (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), 549-96. For a brief discussion of King Carol's declining influence, consult Torrey, *Romania and World War I*, 46-48. As for the deterioration of Romania with the Triple Alliance, see Barbara Jelavich, "Romania in the First World War: The Pre-War Crisis, 1912-1914," *The International History Review* 14, no. 3, ed. Edward Ingram, 1992, pp. 441-42, and V.N. Vinogradov, "Romania in the First World War: The Years of Neutrality, 1914-1916," *The International History Review* 14, no. 3, ed. Edward Ingram, 1992, pp. 453-54.

Romania's relations with the Triple Entente improved rapidly before World War I. Following the Balkan Wars (1912-13), Romania gained territory from Bulgaria, which had been supported by Austria-Hungary.¹⁰³ In addition, Romanians were displeased with the increasing "magyarization" of Transylvania. Despite continuous pressure by Germany and Austria, Count Stephen Tisza, the Hungarian premier, granted only limited reforms to the Romanians living in the province.¹⁰⁴ As a result, disgruntled Romanians began clamoring for national unity.

Irredentism was an integral feature of Romania's attitude during the war. In 1914, millions of Romanians were living under foreign rule: "approximately one million in Bessarabia under Russian rule; two hundred fifty thousand in the Bukovina under Austria; about two million, five hundred thousand in Transylvania, the Crisana, the Banat of Temesvar, and Maramaros under Hungary; and more than a half million scattered in Bulgaria, Macedonia, Serbia, and the Ukraine."¹⁰⁵ Before 1913, Romanian irredentism focused on southern Bessarabia, which had been annexed by Russia in 1878. However, Austria's friendship with Bulgaria during the Balkan Wars and Hungary's "magyarization" policy shifted Romania's orientation. By 1914, Romanian leaders sought a rapprochement with Russia, and Transylvania became the centerpiece of irredentist agitation.¹⁰⁶

After the war began, Romanian foreign policy passed almost exclusively into the hands of Ion Bratianu, prime minister and leader of the National Liberal Party. Bratianu was a practitioner of *Realpolitik*,¹⁰⁷ a policy of realism in which diplomacy is decided by the way things are, not the way they should be. In other words, he based his decisions on self-interest rather than moral considerations. Bratianu knew public opinion favored the Entente, as Romanian irredentism turned towards Transylvania. However, he realized that Romania, which had a comparatively weak army and bordered the Central Powers on three sides, should not intervene until the most favorable opportunity arrived. Therefore, he negotiated with both sides, gradually increasing Romania's demands from 1914 to 1916. Although many political opponents criticized his political strategy, Bratianu's diplomatic brilliance gained Romania several concessions from the Entente, with which he had intended to sign an agreement from the very start of the war.¹⁰⁸

In the first few months of the war, Bratianu established closer relations with the Entente. On September 23, 1914, Romania signed a friendly agreement with Italy, which also had irredentist claims against Austria-Hungary.¹⁰⁹ Less than two weeks later, in early October, Romania signed a friendship treaty with Russia. According to the agreement, Russia recognized Romania's claim for Transylvania and southern Bucovina in return for benevolent neutrality.¹¹⁰ The only tangible gain for the Entente was Romania's denial of muni-

¹⁰³ Jelavich, "Romania in the First World War," 450-51; Torrey, *Romania and World War I*, 9-10.

¹⁰⁴ R.W. Seton-Watson, *A History of the Roumanians* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1963), 486; Torrey, *Romania and World War I*, 14, 40-41.

¹⁰⁵ Sherman Spector, *Romania at the Paris Peace Conference: A Study of the Diplomacy of Ioan I.C. Bratianu* (New York: Bookman, 1962), 16.

¹⁰⁶ Torrey, *Romania and World War I*, 9-10, 29-34; Vinogradov, "Years of Neutrality," 452-53.

¹⁰⁷ Torrey, *Romania and World War I*, 48-50.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 10-11; Treptow, *History of Romania*, 368-70; Vinogradov, "Years of Neutrality," 452-53.

¹⁰⁹ Torrey, 75-94; Treptow, *History of Romania*, 372. Italy demanded Trentino and Trieste.

¹¹⁰ Torrey, *Romania and World War I*, 15-16, 48-50; Treptow, *History of Romania*, 370-72; Vinogradov, "Years of Neutrality," 453-55.

tions shipments from Berlin to Constantinople.¹¹¹ On October 10, 1914, another blow to Romania's relations with the Central Powers occurred when King Carol died. Ferdinand, Carol's nephew and successor, stated that he would not honor his German background. More important, Ferdinand was not a charismatic figure, and Bratianu established firm control of Romanian diplomacy.¹¹² By the spring of 1915, it appeared Romania would join the Entente.

Bratianu considered entering the war after Italy signed the Treaty of London (April 1915) and joined the Triple Entente.¹¹³ At this point, however, he stiffened his terms, demanding not only Transylvania and the southern Bucovina, but also "northern Bucovina, populated mainly by Ukrainians, Hungarian regions along the Tisza River, and the primarily Serbian Banat."¹¹⁴ Shocked, Russian foreign minister Sergei Sazonov initially rejected Bratianu's claims. In the summer of 1915, Sazonov's position softened after the Gorlice-Tarnow offensive pushed Russian forces back hundreds of miles. After Sazonov accepted Romania's stiff demands, however, Bratianu still refused to join the Entente, claiming that his colleagues would not allow him to sign.¹¹⁵ This was certainly not the case. Other Romanian politicians and public opinion alike favored entering the war. Nevertheless, Bratianu stayed undeterred, convinced that Romania could not afford to join the Entente while the Russians were on the defensive. The ensuing stalemate in diplomacy between Bratianu and Sazonov did not end until the summer of 1916.¹¹⁶

Romanian Intervention

The turning point in Romania's status occurred in the summer of 1916. Bratianu had made two specific demands from the Entente for Romania to enter the war. He expected the Allies to supply munitions for its war effort, as well as "unconditional security" against an attack from Bulgaria.¹¹⁷ Unknown to the Entente, Bratianu also waited for a favorable opportunity to intervene. The "Brusilov Offensive" gave him this chance.¹¹⁸ In June 1916, four armies, led by Southwest Front commander Alexei Brusilov, launched Russia's largest offensive of the war. The assault drove the Austro-Hungarian armies back well over one hundred miles in one month.¹¹⁹ On July 4, 1916, Bratianu told Jean-Camille Blondel, the French foreign minister, "I am ready to sign immediately a military convention whose de-

¹¹¹ Torrey, *Romania and World War I*, 19.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 17, 64-65. While Ferdinand was not a powerful figure, his wife, Queen Marie, was charismatic, influential, and pro-Entente. See Marie, *Queen of Romania, Story of My Life*, 2 Vols.

¹¹³ Torrey, *Romania and World War I*, 20-21.

¹¹⁴ Vinogradov, "Years of Neutrality," 456.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 455-57; Treptow, *History of Romania*, 373-74; Spector, *Rumania at the Paris Peace Conference*, 26-29.

¹¹⁶ Vinogradov, "Years of Neutrality," 457-58; Treptow, *History of Romania*, 374; Spector, *Rumania at the Paris Peace Conference*, 29-32.

¹¹⁷ Torrey, *Romania and World War I*, 25.

¹¹⁸ Two works that emphasize the importance of the Brusilov offensive are *ibid.*, 25, and Vinogradov, "Years of Neutrality," 458.

¹¹⁹ For respectable accounts of the Brusilov offensive, see Stokesbury, *Short History of World War I*, 159-64; Stone, *Eastern Front*, 232-63; Churchill, *Unknown War*, 358-70; and John Keegan, *The First World War* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1999), 302-06.

tails need to be discussed...."¹²⁰ To ensure against a Bulgarian attack, Bratianu demanded the Allies launch an offensive from Salonika, reinforce the Dobrudja with 200,000 Russian troops, and continue attacking in Galicia, Verdun, and the Somme.¹²¹ By this time, however, Bratianu's bargaining position was slipping. He realized the Allied statesmen's patience was running out. In addition, there was talk of peace throughout Europe as neither side appeared close to victory.¹²² If the war ended without Romanian intervention, irredentist claims would still exist, and Bratianu's political career would be ruined. Consequently, after six weeks of haggling, he signed a treaty with the Entente.

On August 17, 1916, Romania joined the Triple Entente. The Allies promised Romania Transylvania, the Banat, and Bucovina, weapons and ammunition, Russian support in the Dobrudja, a Russian attack in Galicia, an Anglo-French assault from Salonika, and equal status at peace negotiations. In return, Romania declared war on Austria-Hungary and attacked the Central Powers.¹²³ On August 27, King Ferdinand summoned a crown council, which resulted in Romania's declaration of war.¹²⁴

Romania's intervention shocked the Central Powers, especially the German High Command. Although Falkenhayn noted that Romanian sympathy did not lie with Germany, he stated

It was thought that Rumania's entry into the war need not be expected until the end of the harvest, and then only if Austria's position grew still worse in the meantime. Otherwise the very cunning politicians in Bukarest would find it difficult with Bulgaria in the rear to throw for such high stakes.¹²⁵

Further complicating matters were Hindenburg and Ludendorff, who had for several months demanded his dismissal over his emphasis of the western front.¹²⁶ Consequently, Romania's intervention was the final straw for many disgruntled German officers. On August 28, 1916, Kaiser Wilhelm II, albeit reluctantly, dismissed Falkenhayn;¹²⁷ Hindenburg replaced him as Supreme Commander and Ludendorff became his Chief of Staff.¹²⁸ While Germany prepared to send troops to help Austria-Hungary and Bulgaria, Romania invaded Transylvania.

The Romanian Offensive

¹²⁰ Quoted in Torrey, *Romania and World War I*, 95.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 25, 109.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 26-27, 118-20.

¹²³ The full text of the agreement is located in Charles Clark, *United Roumania* (New York: Arno Press, 1971), 134-40. Other works that discuss the treaty include *ibid.*, 26; Spector, *Rumania at the Paris Peace Conference*, 35-37; Treptow, *History of Romania*, 375; and Seton-Watson, *History of the Roumanians*, 490-91.

¹²⁴ Clark, *United Roumania*, 130-34, and Spector, *Rumania at the Paris Peace Conference*, 37-39, both give detailed descriptions of the crown council.

¹²⁵ Falkenhayn, *German General Staff*, 292.

¹²⁶ Kitchen, *Silent Dictatorship*, 26-41.

¹²⁷ Falkenhayn, *German General Staff*, 323-24; Hans von Zuehl, *Erich von Falkenhayn, General der Infanterie. Eine biographische Studie* (Berlin: E.S. Mittler & Sohn, 1926), 213.

¹²⁸ Officially, Ludendorff invented his own title, First Quartermaster General. For the appointment of Hindenburg and Ludendorff, see Robert Asprey, *The German High Command at War: Hindenburg and Ludendorff Conduct World War I* (New York: William Morrow, 1991), 251-52.

Romania's strategic position for a war against the Central Powers was dubious. It formed an elongated L, which contained Wallachia stretching west to east, and Moldavia to the east and north. Along the northwest border stood the Carpathian Alps, a forbidding mountain region. Furthermore, Romania was surrounded by enemies on three sides: Austria-Hungary to the north and west; Bulgaria to the south. Therefore, it had to defend about 1,400 kilometers while facing a war on two fronts.¹²⁹ As a result, the Allies naturally wanted Romania to attack the comparatively weaker Bulgarian army and remain on the defensive against Austria-Hungary. Unfortunately, Romania's military strategy was based on its irreverentism.¹³⁰

The strategy Romanian leaders developed to resolve their military dilemma was Hypothesis Z:

Hypothesis Z foresees the undertaking of a war on two operation fronts, namely: a) On the North-North-West front, against the Central Powers; b) On the Southern front, against Bulgaria. The general purpose of the war which we will undertake is the realization of our national ideal, that is to say the integration of the fatherland. The conquest of the territory inhabited by Romanians which today is found included in the Austro-Hungarian monarchy must be the fruit of the war. In order to achieve this aim, the majority of our forces, Armies I, II, and North will operate offensively in Transylvania, Banat, and Hungary, attacking in the general direction of Budapest. The Southern Army (III) will assure liberty of action for the major forces, defending the national territory and repulsing attacks which the Bulgarians should undertake from the South.¹³¹

According to Hypothesis Z, Romanian 1st, 2nd, and 4th (North) Armies, which contained approximately 360,000 men and 60,000 reserves, would advance to the Mures River in Central Transylvania, repel Austro-Hungarian resistance, then march on Budapest. Simultaneously, 3rd Army, which consisted of about 143,000 men, would remain on the defensive for ten days while Russian reinforcements arrived. Thereafter, the southern forces would attack from the Dobrudja into Bulgaria and establish a tenable position, thus providing the northern armies operational freedom.¹³²

On August 27, Romanian 1st, 2nd, and 4th Armies invaded Transylvania. Facing them was Austro-Hungarian 1st Army, commanded by Arz von Straussenburg. Romanian forces brushed aside the token Austrian force of 34,000 men, and were ten kilometers inside

¹²⁹ Several historians have noted Romania's precarious geographical position. See Torrey, *Romania and World War I*, 139-40; Stone, *Eastern Front*, 274; C.R.M.F. Cruttwell, *A History of the Great War 1914-1918* (Chicago: Academy Chicago, 1991), 293-94; Basil Henry Liddell Hart, *History of the First World War* (London: Cassell, 1970), 276; Hanson Baldwin, *World War I; An Outline History* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 83; and Cyril Falls, *The Great War* (New York: Capricorn, 1959), 228.

¹³⁰ Torrey, *Romania and World War I*, 141; Cruttwell, *History of the Great War*, 294.

¹³¹ Quoted in Torrey, *Romania and World War I*, 141.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 141-42; Germany, Reichsarchiv, *Der Weltkrieg, 1914-1918*, Vol. XI, *Die Kriegführung im Herbst 1916 und im Winter 1916/17* (Berlin: E.S. Mittler & Sohn, 1938), 190-93; Herwig, *Germany and Austria-Hungary*, 218.

Hungary by the beginning of September.¹³³ However, mountainous roads and supply problems hampered the advance. Many Romanian officers feared not only outmarching their supply lines, but also the prospect of encountering German reinforcements.¹³⁴ On September 6, upon learning that the Central Powers were advancing in the Dobrudja, Romania set in motion the transfer of a division from the northern front to the south.¹³⁵

Romania's offensive failed largely because of its own ineptitude. After shrewdly waiting for the best opportunity to intervene in July 1916, Bratianu then waited six weeks to sign an alliance. By then, the Russian offensive had broken down, and Germany could send plenty of reserves to Transylvania. Furthermore, Romania attacked Austria-Hungary instead of Bulgaria, much to the chagrin of the Allies.¹³⁶ Of course, Romanian leaders had expected the British and French to launch an offensive against Bulgaria from Salonika. Bulgaria anticipated this, however, and attacked Salonika first, delaying any possible Allied response until mid-September. Despite this setback, it was clear Romania's strategic position favored an offensive into Bulgaria. This would enable Russian reinforcements to strengthen Romanian defenses for the upcoming German attack. By early September, Romania was on the defensive in both the north and south, as Germany prepared its counterthrust.

¹³³ Reichsarchiv, *Der Weltkrieg*, 192, 217. This work gives a wonderfully detailed breakdown of Romania's army organization in 1916. Also consult Stone, *Eastern Front*, 274, and Seton-Watson, *History of the Roumanians*, 496.

¹³⁴ Reichsarchiv, *Der Weltkrieg*, 190; Stone, *Eastern Front*, 274-75.

¹³⁵ Torrey, *Romania and World War I*, 159-60.

¹³⁶ Stokesbury, *Short History of World War I*, 165-66.

CHAPTER 4

FALKENHAYN CROSSES THE CARPATHIANS

Germany Prepares Its Counterthrust

Romania's offensive into Transylvania initially surprised the Central Powers. In fact, several German leaders later claimed that Romania missed a golden opportunity to knock Austria-Hungary out of the war. Paul von Hindenburg and Erich Ludendorff, the new German supreme commanders, criticized Romanian operations. Ludendorff stated

The Rumanians were to open the Carpathian passes for the Russians from the rear, by a vigorous irruption into our concentration area. They did the opposite. Unaccustomed to war on a large scale, they made no use of the chances offered them again and again of forcing our divisions up against the Dniester and the Carpathians. They advanced extraordinarily slowly and lost time. Every day was a day gained to us!... Rumania's participation in the whole campaign followed no definite plan. No common scheme of operations had been settled.¹³⁷

Hindenburg attached a great historical significance to Romania's failure:

It is certain that so relatively small a state as Rumania had never before been given a role so important, and, indeed, so decisive for the history of the world at so favorable a moment. Never before had two great Powers like Germany and Austria found themselves so much at the mercy of the military resources of a country which had scarcely one twentieth of the population of the two great states. Judging by the military situation, it was to be expected that Rumania had only to advance where she wished to decide the world war in favor of those Powers which had been hurling themselves at us in vain for years. Thus everything seemed to depend on whether Rumania was ready to make any sort of use of her momentary advantage.¹³⁸

Whether or not the Central Powers were actually susceptible to annihilation, the German High Command believed a serious Romanian threat existed.

Romania's war entry and advance into Transylvania confronted the German army with a challenging task. In early September, three Romanian armies were approximately ten miles inside Transylvania: 1st Army (General Culcer) stood in the region of Hermannstadt; 2nd Army (General Crainiceanu) had advanced to Kronstadt; and 4th Army (General Presan) had penetrated eastern Transylvania through the Gyimes and Oituz Passes. The Romanian forces held strong defensive positions at the numerous mountain passes that connected to

¹³⁷ Erich Ludendorff, *My War Memories*, Vol. I (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1919), 281-82.

¹³⁸ Paul von Hindenburg, *Out of My Life*, Vol. I, trans. F.A. Holt (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1927), 243.

Wallachia and Moldavia. The Carpathian Mountains¹³⁹ further inhibited a German offensive, as did the primitive railroads and road conditions throughout the region.¹⁴⁰ In addition, the Romanian 3rd Army (General Averescu) stood in the Dobrudja basin.

By mid-September the German High Command assembled its forces for two theaters of war. In the south, Hindenburg and Ludendorff established an army group, often referred to as the "Army of the Danube," under the command of Field Marshall August von Mackensen.¹⁴¹ Stationed in northern Bulgaria, Army Group Mackensen consisted of the Bulgarian 3rd Army, which included mostly Bulgarian troops (roughly four divisions) and two German-Austrian detachments.¹⁴² In the north, German-Austrian forces formed an army group led officially by Charles, the Habsburg Archduke. However, he only held nominal control, as Hindenburg and Ludendorff asserted themselves as supreme commanders of the entire campaign. They sent reinforcements to bolster the Austro-Hungarian 1st Army (General Arz), which was on the verge of collapse after Romania implemented its notorious war strategy, Hypothesis Z.¹⁴³ Even though the German High Command ordered Arz to crush the Romanian North Army and force it back into Moldavia, the most important assignment was left to a newly formed German army.

The new German 9th Army had the pivotal task of defeating the Romanian 1st and 2nd Armies. The German High Command appointed General Erich von Falkenhayn as its field commander.¹⁴⁴ Falkenhayn, who had just been relieved as chief of the General Staff, thus had an opportunity to achieve some degree of redemption against Romania. Even Ludendorff, one of his greatest rivals throughout the war, noted the importance of Falkenhayn's new role. He stated, "In this most important sector General von Falkenhayn had an opportunity of giving practical proof of his military ability as a leader of troops in the service of his country," and claimed "the 9th Army was capable of an offensive, and it was the centre of gravity of the whole operation."¹⁴⁵ Falkenhayn's 9th Army contained German and Austro-Hungarian troops divided into two main groups, the XXXIX Reserve Corps, commanded by General von Staabs, and the Schmettow Corps, named after its leader.¹⁴⁶ The German Supreme Command instructed Falkenhayn to break through the southwest Carpathians (Transylvanian Alps) and invade the Wallachian plain, in the process trapping the

¹³⁹ Although the Carpathian mountains extend throughout the entire northern theater of war, the name "Transylvanian Alps" is often used to describe the mountain region in northern Wallachia and southern Transylvania.

¹⁴⁰ Erich von Falkenhayn, *Der Feldzug der 9. Armee gegen die Rumänen u. Russen 1916/17*, Vol. I (Berlin: E.S. Mittler & Sohn, 1921), 25-28.

¹⁴¹ Mackensen served in various command posts along the eastern front during World War I. His war experiences are portrayed in August von Mackensen, *Briefe und Aufzeichnungen des General Feldmarschalls aus Krieg und Frieden* (Leipzig: Bibliographisches Institut AG, 1938). His outlook on the Romanian campaign is on pages 280-321.

¹⁴² Germany, Reichsarchiv, *Der Weltkrieg, 1914-1918*, Vol. XI, *Die Kriegführung im Herbst 1916 und im Winter 1916/17* (Berlin: E.S. Mittler & Sohn, 1938), 202.

¹⁴³ See, for example, Glen Torrey, *Romania and World War I: A Collection of Studies* (Portland, OR: Center for Romanian Studies, 1999), 183-84; Gerard Silberstein, *The Troubled Alliance: German-Austrian Relations 1914 to 1917* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1970), 329-30; and Ilie Ceausescu, "The Romanian Army in World War I," *War and Society in East Central Europe*, Vol. XIX, *East Central European Society in World War I*, ed. Bela Kiraly, Nandor Dreisziger, and Albert Nofi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), pp. 515-16.

¹⁴⁴ Falkenhayn, *Feldzug der 9. Armee*, I, 9; Holger Herwig, *The First World War: Germany and Austria-Hungary, 1914-1918* (London: Arnold, 1997), 218; C.R.M.F. Cruttwell, *A History of the Great War 1914-1918* (Chicago: Academy Chicago, 1991), 295; and Cyril Falls, *The Great War* (New York: Capricorn, 1959), 229.

¹⁴⁵ Ludendorff, *My War Memories*, "in this most important sector..." 280; "the 9th Army was capable..." 282.

¹⁴⁶ Reichsarchiv, *Der Weltkrieg*, 220.

Romanians in a *Kesselschlacht*. Once inside Wallachia, the 9th Army was supposed to move east towards Bucharest and defeat the remaining enemy troops.

Disagreements emerged among Central Powers leaders, however, about the method of German operations against Romania. The first debate occurred over how the German 9th Army should coordinate its offensive with the Army of the Danube. On the one hand, Conrad, the Austrian Supreme Commander, believed Mackensen's army group should cross the Danube quickly to draw Romanian forces from Transylvania.¹⁴⁷ On the other hand, Hindenburg and Ludendorff believed this maneuver would isolate the Danube Army from Falkenhayn's 9th Army. The German High Command thus counteracted Conrad's intentions and gave Mackensen the following directive: "For the present the execution of the Danube crossing has to be given up. The first task of the army group will be to draw to itself enemy forces and to beat them, by breaking into the Dobrudja while securing the Danube line."¹⁴⁸ Hindenburg and Ludendorff stated the Danube crossing would only occur after Mackensen had secured his right flank in the Dobrudja simultaneously with a breakthrough by Falkenhayn's 9th Army over the Carpathians.¹⁴⁹

The second debate pertained to German operational planning in Transylvania. How would Falkenhayn's 9th Army cross the Carpathians and invade Wallachia? Of course, Hindenburg and Ludendorff viewed the Romanian campaign with particular interest, after having served as the command team on the eastern front the previous two years. However, General Falkenhayn was the field commander of German forces in Transylvania, the main theater of war against Romania. Therefore, Hindenburg and Ludendorff implemented *Auftragstaktik*, and permitted Falkenhayn to conduct his own operations.¹⁵⁰ The former chief of the General Staff immediately began to organize the German counteroffensive. Before his troops could invade Wallachia, however, Falkenhayn had to lead an attack to expel the Romanians from Transylvania.

The Liberation of Transylvania

By the time Falkenhayn arrived at main headquarters on September 18, Romanian 1st, 2nd, and 4th Armies temporarily slowed their advance inside Transylvania. The Romanian High Command panicked after Mackensen's army group invaded the Dobrudja earlier that month, and thus rethought its war strategy.¹⁵¹ While Falkenhayn prepared the German counterattack, minor skirmishes occurred. Both the XXXIX Reserve Corps and Schmet-

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 200-01; Ludendorff, *My War Memories*, 249; Torrey, *Romania and World War I*, 165.

¹⁴⁸ Quoted in Reichsarchiv, *Der Weltkrieg*, 201.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 201; Ludendorff, *My War Memories*, 249-50.

¹⁵⁰ Robert Asprey disagrees, stating "perhaps avenging the frustrations of two years, Ludendorff attempted to direct the offensive from Pless by streams of telegrams that Falkenhayn found 'equally superfluous and annoying.'" See Asprey, *The German High Command at War: Hindenburg and Ludendorff Conduct World War I* (New York: William Morrow, 1991), 274. Indeed, Ludendorff sent numerous messages to Falkenhayn. However, that does not mean Falkenhayn did not have a fair amount of independence conducting operations against Romania. As explained above, Ludendorff admitted Falkenhayn had an opportunity to demonstrate his ability as a field commander. Even though he notes Ludendorff's involvement in his memoirs, Falkenhayn's writings indicate he exhibited firm control over his own troops, the 9th Army forces. See Falkenhayn, *Feldzug der 9. Armee*.

¹⁵¹ Ludendorff, *My War Memories*, 281; Norman Stone, *The Eastern Front, 1914-1917* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1975), 277. The Dobrudja-Danube theater is described later in this chapter.

tow's Corps stiffened their resistance against attacks by the Romanian 1st and 2nd Armies.¹⁵² By September 19, Romania's offensive had failed, and Falkenhayn's 9th Army had been formed.

The 9th Army was a combined German/Austro-Hungarian force consisting of approximately five divisions. On its left wing and center, Schmettow's Corps comprised the German 3rd Cavalry Division, and the Austro-Hungarian 1st Cavalry and 51st Infantry Divisions.¹⁵³ This group stood north of Hermannstadt, facing most of Romanian 1st Army and the left wing of 2nd Army. The Romanians were especially fearful of Schmettow's Corps because of its proximity to Bucharest, and consequently placed strong forces in that region. Falkenhayn, for his part, realized Schmettow's Corps was the pivot linking 9th Army and the Austro-Hungarian 1st Army on its left. The right wing of the 9th Army comprised the XXXIX Reserve Corps (Staabs), which included the German 76th Reserve Division and 187th Infantry Brigade, the Austro-Hungarian 145th Infantry Brigade, and the Alpine Corps.¹⁵⁴ Staabs' Corps stood northwest of Schmettow's Corps, north of Petroseny, and west of Orsova, opposed by the left wing of Romanian 1st Army.

The Alpine Corps played an important role in the 9th Army. Created by German military leaders in the spring of 1915, this elite unit consisted of a Bavarian and Prussian Jäger infantry, contained cavalry and artillery forces, and was spearheaded by Bavarian light infantry. These troops fought in Italy, Serbia, and France before being transferred to Hungary; they were prepared and equipped for mountain warfare.¹⁵⁵ Falkenhayn understood that the Alpine Corps, commanded by General Krafft von Dellmensingen, amounted to a mobile unit amid the obstacles posed by the Transylvanian Alps: "The Transylvanian campaign could not have been led the way it had been without the Alpine Corps."¹⁵⁶

To drive the Romanians out of Transylvania, Falkenhayn surmised, the 9th Army had at least to gain a foothold in the mountain passes that connected Hungary and Wallachia, threatening the enemy rear and forcing a retreat. The Szurduk and Vulcan Passes south of Petroseny, the Red Tower Pass south of Hermannstadt, and the Predeal, Tömöser, and Törzburger Passes south of Kronstadt immediately became critical targets of German operations.¹⁵⁷ Falkenhayn stressed the importance of the 9th Army linking up with Army Group Mackensen in western Wallachia. The Szurduk and Vulcan Passes, near Mackensen's crossing site at the Danube River, offered the best opportunity for success: "the first attack could only be led against the enemy force that was approaching over the Vulcan and Szurduk Passes."¹⁵⁸ On September 19, six battalions of the 187th Infantry Brigade and three of the Alpine Corps captured Petroseny and the Szurduk Pass; the Vulcan Pass fell three days later. However, these achievements were short-lived, as a reinforced Romanian group of

¹⁵² Reichsarchiv, *Der Weltkrieg*, 220-21.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 220; Falls, *Great War*, 229.

¹⁵⁴ Reichsarchiv, *Der Weltkrieg*, 220.

¹⁵⁵ Falkenhayn, *Feldzug der 9. Armee*, I, 17-18.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 17. Historians also have emphasized the Alpine Corps' crucial role. See Herwig, *Germany and Austria-Hungary*, 217-27, who bases much of his research for the Romanian campaign on diaries of Bavarian soldiers within the Alpine Corps. Also General Waldemar Erfurth, "Surprise," *Roots of Strategy*, vol. 3 (Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1991), 458-59; Basil Henry Liddell Hart, *History of the First World War* (London: Cassell, 1970), 348; and Cruttwell, *History of the Great War*, 295.

¹⁵⁷ The Predeal, Tömöser, and Törzburger Passes are often named collectively as the Kronstadt Passes.

¹⁵⁸ Falkenhayn, *Feldzug der 9. Armee*, I, 14.

twenty-two battalions reclaimed the entire region on September 25.¹⁵⁹

While the first German attack began in the Szurduk Pass, Falkenhayn planned a much larger offensive in the direction of Hermannstadt. On September 19, he ordered that the Alpine Corps be transferred east to outflank Romanian forces and endanger their supply lines. Meanwhile, the XXXIX Reserve Corps would execute a frontal assault while the Schmettow Corps guarded its left flank.¹⁶⁰ Falkenhayn received reports that the Romanian 1st Army doubled the size of the attackers, and thus did not expect a *Kesselschlacht*.¹⁶¹ Ludendorff disagreed, and gave Falkenhayn orders for a double outflanking. In a plea for *Auftragstaktik*, Falkenhayn pointedly wired the Supreme Command:

A quick and possibly destructive attack against the enemy forces at Hermannstadt had already been in preparation before the arrival of the directive. Because it depends on the behavior of the opponent and the result of reconnaissance of the terrain, I ask the grouping of forces for that purpose and the execution of it be left up to me.¹⁶²

Hindenburg allowed Falkenhayn to conduct the operation, which “has to adapt to the behavior of the opponent and the terrain.”¹⁶³

On September 20 Falkenhayn met with Generals Dellmensingen, Staabs, and Schmettow and issued directives that outlined German operations for the upcoming offensive. Staabs’ Corps had the thankless task of directly attacking the Romanian 1st Army. Staabs’ men would utilize superior artillery to pin the Romanians in place, while to the west the Alpine Corps crossed the Sibin Mountains,¹⁶⁴ pivoted east, and occupied the Red Tower Pass. Moreover, Falkenhayn stipulated that Schmettow’s Corps cover Staabs’ left flank east of Hermannstadt. He asked for help from Conrad, who obliged by supporting the transfer of the German 89th Infantry Division from the Austro-Hungarian 1st Army to Schmettow’s left wing.¹⁶⁵

The attack against Hermannstadt occurred as scheduled on September 26.¹⁶⁶ Staabs’ Corps employed its artillery to pin down the Romanian 1st Army. In a stunning display of *Bewegungskrieg*, the Alpine Corps marched fifty-five miles in three days across the Sibin Mountains and established a foothold in the Red Tower Pass.¹⁶⁷ Romanian military leaders ordered reinforcements to Hermannstadt from Kronstadt, but Schmettow’s Corps, greatly

¹⁵⁹ Reichsarchiv, *Der Weltkrieg*, 222, 227.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 223; Falkenhayn, *Feldzug der 9. Armee*, I, 29.

¹⁶¹ Reichsarchiv, *Der Weltkrieg*, 225; Erfurth, “Surprise,” 458. Battle statistics in fact show an almost even number of troops, about 35 battalions on each side. Details are provided in Reichsarchiv, 232.

¹⁶² Quoted in Reichsarchiv, *Der Weltkrieg*, 223-24.

¹⁶³ Quoted in *ibid.*, 224.

¹⁶⁴ The Sibin mountains, one of many mountain areas within the Transylvanian Alps, are situated west of the Red Tower Pass.

¹⁶⁵ Reichsarchiv, *Der Weltkrieg*, 224-26; Falkenhayn, *Feldzug der 9. Armee*, I, 28-29; Erfurth, “Strategy,” 458-59.

¹⁶⁶ For excellent accounts on the “battle of Hermannstadt” (September 26-29), including preparations, the course of the fighting, and analysis, see Reichsarchiv, *Der Weltkrieg*, 221-33; Falkenhayn, *Der Feldzug der 9. Armee*, I, 30-61; Ludendorff, *My War Memories*, 283-84; and Erfurth, “Strategy,” 458-61.

¹⁶⁷ Liddell Hart, *History of the First World War*, 348; Asprey, *German High Command*, 274; Cruttwell, *History of the Great War*, 295.

bolstered by the 89th Division, hindered their rescue mission. On September 28, with its supply line threatened and no immediate help imminent, Romanian 1st Army began its retreat. Later that day, Staabs' Corps occupied Hermannstadt.¹⁶⁸ The 9th Army had won its first major victory of the Romanian campaign.

The 9th Army displayed shrewd use of *Bewegungskrieg* against the Romanian 1st Army. Although Falkenhayn's forces failed to trap the Romanians, and the two Romanian divisions that protected Hermannstadt escaped without significant casualties, he had not expected a *Kesselschlacht* since his forces were too weak for that.¹⁶⁹ But the troops did achieve his stated objectives: outflank the Romanian 1st Army, threaten its supply lines, and liberate Hermannstadt. Perhaps more fruitful in the long term, speed of movement had forced the Romanians to react to German maneuvers. For the second time in approximately ten days, the Romanian High Command ordered the transfer of entire divisions from other mountain passes along the Carpathians.¹⁷⁰ The loss of Hermannstadt compelled Romanian 2nd Army to move further south to align with 1st Army. Falkenhayn had gained the initiative, which he sought to maintain via a new offensive.

Falkenhayn changed the 9th Army's focus to the east against Kronstadt. First, he sought to reinforce the 89th and Austro-Hungarian 71st Divisions (right wing of Austro-Hungarian 1st Army), both of which faced heavy attacks from the majority of Crainiceanu's 2nd Army.¹⁷¹ He acquired Conrad's agreement to move the 89th and 71st Divisions, commanded by General Morgen, from the Austro-Hungarian 1st to the 9th Army. Once rescued and placed under Falkenhayn's control, Group Morgen could be a valuable asset. Staabs' Corps, which comprised the 187th, 76th Reserve, and Austro-Hungarian 51st Divisions, quickly marched east from Hermannstadt to engage Crainiceanu's 2nd Army.¹⁷² By October 2, the Romanian advance against Group Morgen had been stifled, and 2nd Army retreated southeast towards Kronstadt.¹⁷³

Second, Falkenhayn ordered an offensive against the 2nd Army at Kronstadt. He did not expect to succeed in a breakthrough across the Kronstadt Passes. Because of its operational value in regards to Bucharest, he expected the Romanians to fortify this region. He did, however, expect larger enemy casualties. A telegram sent by Kaiser Wilhelm II embodied the wishes of the Supreme Command: "His majesty expresses his expectation, that the allied troops will follow the retreating enemy troops restlessly so that the Romanians will only be able to leave Transylvania completely beaten."¹⁷⁴ Staabs' Corps marched towards Kronstadt while both Group Morgen and Schmettow's Cavalry Corps covered its left flank. On October 4, the 9th Army reached the outskirts of the *Geisterwald*, a wooded mountain area northwest of Kronstadt. Falkenhayn wired Supreme Headquarters in Pless, "the Romanian 2nd Army is in a retreat in a southeast direction. Whether it will show resistance on

¹⁶⁸ Hindenburg, *Out of My Life*, 247; Liddell Hart, *History of the First World War*, 348; Herwig, *Germany and Austria-Hungary*, 219; Stone, *Eastern Front*, 278; Cruttwell, *History of the Great War*, 295; Kurt Treptow, ed., *A History of Romania* (Iasi: Center for Romanian Studies, 1996), 375.

¹⁶⁹ See Reichsarchiv, *Der Weltkrieg*, 232, and Erfurth, "Strategy," 460-61.

¹⁷⁰ Reichsarchiv, *Der Weltkrieg*, 231-32.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 242-43.

¹⁷² The Alpine Corps remained in the Red Tower Pass to protect against an advance by Romanian 1st Army. See Falkenhayn, *Feldzug der 9. Armee*, I, 64-65, and Ludendorff, *My War Memories*, 284.

¹⁷³ Reichsarchiv, *Der Weltkrieg*, 234-37.

¹⁷⁴ Quoted in *ibid.*, 240.

the west and southwest slopes of the *Geisterwald*, will be decided on October 5.”¹⁷⁵

The battle for the *Geisterwald* came to fruition when the Romanian 2nd Army halted its retreat.¹⁷⁶ The 76th Reserve and Austro-Hungarian 51st Divisions utilized heavy artillery in a frontal barrage against Craininescu’s troops. When the 187th Division turned the right flank of 2nd Army, it withdrew from the region. In the evening, reconnaissance planes observed “that the roads leading to the east were covered with marching convoys.”¹⁷⁷ Morgen’s 71st and 89th Divisions, as well as Schmettow’s Cavalry Corps, advanced southeast alongside Staabs’ Corps. Once the 9th Army occupied the *Geisterwald*, it prepared its pursuit march towards Kronstadt.

The next day the 9th Army opened its offensive at Kronstadt.¹⁷⁸ Fighting lasted three days on a much wider front than in the *Geisterwald*. The situation was serious for Romania. If Kronstadt fell into German hands, Romanian 2nd Army would be knocked out of Transylvania. The *Schwerpunkt* remained on the right side of 9th Army with Staabs’ Corps. Furthermore, the course of the fighting closely resembled the 9th Army’s previous engagements. Staabs’ Corps entered the city and traded artillery fire with 2nd Army as Group Morgen and Schmettow’s Corps outflanked the opponent’s right wing. On October 9, Craininescu’s men abandoned Kronstadt and retreated into the mountain passes along the Transylvanian-Wallachian border.¹⁷⁹ The 9th Army had liberated Transylvania.

Falkenhayn viewed the seizure of Kronstadt with cautious optimism. Certainly, he was disappointed the 9th Army had not destroyed Romanian 2nd Army. The Germans had taken roughly 1,200 prisoners, far short of their own expectations. Ninth Army had advanced over fifty miles from Hermannstadt and thus was reaching the limits of its supply lines. However, Falkenhayn’s troops did gain much needed weapons, trucks, and supplies at Kronstadt, and after Romanian 2nd Army retreated south to Campolung,¹⁸⁰ 1st and 4th Armies also withdrew from Transylvania. The Romanians had transferred troops in the direction of Kronstadt, as they had for Petroseny and Hermannstadt. Most of these Divisions arrived late or missed the action altogether. The Romanian High Command was, at best, uncertain where the Germans’ next strike would be. Falkenhayn had firmly seized the initiative not only for the 9th Army, but also for Army Group Mackensen.

The Struggle in the Dobrudja

The Army of the Danube invaded the Dobrudja before Romania could execute the second part of Hypothesis Z. According to its war strategy, Romanian 3rd Army would not march into Bulgaria until the Russian XLVII Corps, commanded by General Zaionchkovsky, had arrived. Even though this Russian-Serbian force fortified Romania’s position in the Do-

¹⁷⁵ Quoted in *ibid.*, 239.

¹⁷⁶ The “battle for the *Geisterwald*” (October 5) deserves attention. A couple brief accounts are *ibid.*, 239-40, and Falkenhayn, *Feldzug der 9. Armee*, I, 78-83.

¹⁷⁷ Reichsarchiv, *Der Weltkrieg*, 240.

¹⁷⁸ The “battle of Kronstadt” (October 6-9) is examined adequately in *ibid.*, 240-42, and Falkenhayn, *Feldzug der 9. Armee*, I, 61-96.

¹⁷⁹ Ludendorff, *My War Memories*, 285; Hindenburg, *Out of My Life*, 247-48; Herwig, *Germany and Austria-Hungary*, 219; Stone, *Eastern Front*, 278; Falls, *Great War*, 229; Liddell Hart, *History of the First World War*, 349; Treptow, *History of Romania*, 375.

¹⁸⁰ Ludendorff, *My War Memories*, 285-86.

brudja before September, cooperation between the Russians and Romanians was horrendous.¹⁸¹ Ziaonchkovsky claimed that “to make the Romanian army fight a modern war was asking a donkey to perform a minuet.”¹⁸² This lack of coordination made Mackensen’s offensive even more effective. While one Bulgarian division and a German detachment secured its left flank along northern Bulgaria, most of Mackensen’s army group stormed the fortresses of Tutrakan and Silistria in the first week of September. On September 6, the Romanian garrison at Tutrakan surrendered and consequently lost 27,000 men as prisoners, about one-fourth the force assigned to the Dobrudja.¹⁸³ Two days later, the Bulgarian 3rd Army pushed the Romanians out of Silistria.¹⁸⁴ Mackensen now ordered his troops to pursue the enemy, who began a hasty retreat northeast.

In response to these events in the southern theater, Romanian military leaders held a war council on September 15, agreeing to dispose of Hypothesis Z and change the focus of offensive operations from Transylvania to the Dobrudja-Danube front. Consequently, multiple divisions from 1st, 2nd, and 4th Armies were ordered to stop their advance, turn around, and march south to the Dobrudja.¹⁸⁵ This “operational pause” undoubtedly aided the Central Powers in Transylvania, although the Romania advance had already lost most of its momentum. At the very least, it gave Falkenhayn breathing space to finish preparations for the 9th Army’s counterthrust. Meanwhile, General Averescu received command over a newly formed 3rd Army and devised a counterpunch of his own.¹⁸⁶

For the next couple weeks, Averescu procured troops for the “Flamanda Maneuver,” which began on September 30.¹⁸⁷ Romanian 3rd Army attempted to cross the Danube directly south of Bucharest near Flamanda. The Romanian-Russian “Army of the Dobrudja,” which had halted the Bulgarian 3rd Army’s advance southwest of Constanza, launched a counterstrike. The Dobrudja army made little progress, however, and Romanian 3rd Army’s river crossing failed due to “Austrian gunboats and floating mines.” In addition, “a heavy and prolonged wind and rain storm turned the terrain and its primitive roads into a quagmire and twice broke up the pontoon bridge.”¹⁸⁸ Romania’s revolving war strategy was a huge blunder. By October 5, when the Flamanda offensive ended, Falkenhayn’s 9th Army had taken Hermannstadt and pursued Romanian 2nd Army in the direction of Kronstadt. The Romanian High Command thus altered its war plan yet again and transferred whole

¹⁸¹ The Russian war leadership complained that Romania’s troops were poorly trained and prone to surrendering to Russians, having mistaken them for Bulgarians; the Romanian High Command protested Russian looting of Romanian supply depots. For a thorough analysis of Russo-Romanian relations during the 1916 campaign, see Torrey, *Romania and World War I*, 231-51.

¹⁸² Quoted in Stone, *Eastern Front*, 277. Herwig also refers to Ziaonchkovsky’s comment in *Germany and Austria-Hungary*, 219.

¹⁸³ Herwig, *Germany and Austria-Hungary*, 218-19.

¹⁸⁴ Torrey, *Romania and World War I*, 158-59, 163-64; Mackensen, *Briefe und Aufzeichnungen*, 285-87; Ludendorff, *My War Memories*, 286; Hindenburg, *Out of My Life*, 245-46; Stone, *Eastern Front*, 276-77; Treptow, *History of Romania*, 375; Ceausescu, “Romanian Army,” 516.

¹⁸⁵ Torrey, *Romania and World War I*, 164-65; Hindenburg, *Out of My Life*, 246; Stone, *Eastern Front*, 277; Liddell Hart, *History of the First World War*, 348.

¹⁸⁶ Torrey, *Romania and World War I*, 164-65, 238-39.

¹⁸⁷ The “Flamanda Maneuver” (Sept 30-Oct 5) is given acceptable treatment in Mackensen, *Briefe und Aufzeichnungen*, 290-92; Ludendorff, *My War Memories*, 286-87; Hindenburg, *Out of My Life*, 246-47; Torrey, *Romania and World War I*, 167; Stone, *Eastern Front*, 277-78; and Ceausescu, “Romanian Army,” 517.

¹⁸⁸ Torrey, *Romania and World War I*, 167.

divisions back to the northern theater of war.¹⁸⁹ Although Romania hoped to stabilize a defensive position in the Dobrudja-Danube region, Mackensen realized that his opponent's shift of focus had given him a vital opportunity.

On October 19, Mackensen ordered a forward march intended to knock Entente forces out of the Dobrudja. Though resistance by the enemy was minimal, the advance was not easy. General Tappen, Mackensen's Chief of Staff, later noted: "Bad roads. Large herds of water buffalo, oxen, horses. Many buzzards. Dust, heat. Then tropical rains."¹⁹⁰ Nevertheless, on October 23 the Army of the Danube captured Constanza, the vital Black Sea port that contained vast supplies of oil and grain.¹⁹¹ By the end of October, Mackensen's army group had also taken possession of the Constanza-Cernavoda railroad and had driven the Romanians and the Russians out of the Dobrudja altogether.¹⁹² Although it was the secondary theater of the Romanian campaign, events in the Dobrudja aided operations for Falkenhayn, whose next objective was to break through the Carpathians.

The Breakthrough

A sense of urgency pervaded within the German High Command over where the *Schwerpunkt* in the Transylvanian Alps should be placed. German leaders surmised the only way to destroy the Romanian armies completely and ultimately win the campaign was in the vast Wallachian plain. Only here could the 9th Army and the Army of the Danube coordinate operations in an open flat terrain to trap Romanian forces in a decisive *Kesselschlacht*. The 9th Army also had to cross the western Carpathians before the winter season arrived, or Romania would retain a capable field army into the following year.¹⁹³ Falkenhayn seemingly had several options: the Szurduk and Vulcan Passes, the Red Tower Pass south of Hermannstadt, and the Kronstadt Passes.¹⁹⁴ Complicating matters considerably, however, was Falkenhayn's disagreement with Hindenburg, Ludendorff, and Conrad about which location was best suited for the breakthrough.

The Austrian Supreme Commander, Conrad, suggested to Hindenburg and Ludendorff that the *Schwerpunkt* should be Kronstadt, where the bulk of 9th Army was stationed. The duo agreed with Conrad, who predicted "a decisive success in the operational direction Kronstadt-Bucharest will open the western breakthrough lines across the Red Tower and Szurduk Passes automatically, free our forces there, and bring Wallachia into our hands."¹⁹⁵ Hindenburg and Ludendorff wired Falkenhayn orders to concentrate a large-scale attack against the Kronstadt Passes.¹⁹⁶

Unlike his superiors, Falkenhayn believed the Szurduk and Vulcan Passes were the appropriate paths for a decisive German offensive. Undeterred, he responded with several

¹⁸⁹ Reichsarchiv, *Der Weltkrieg*, 243. Nearly all of these troops arrived too late to save Kronstadt.

¹⁹⁰ Quoted in Herwig, *Germany and Austria-Hungary*, 219.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 219; Ludendorff, *My War Memories*, 295; Hindenburg, *Out of My Life*, 249; Cruttwell, *History of the Great War*, 295-96.

¹⁹² Mackensen, *Briefe und Aufzeichnungen*, 293-96; Torrey, *Romania and World War I*, 239-40; Stone, *Eastern Front*, 278-79; Asprey, *German High Command*, 275.

¹⁹³ Cruttwell, *History of the Great War*, 296.

¹⁹⁴ Ludendorff, *My War Memories*, 296.

¹⁹⁵ Quoted in Reichsarchiv, *Der Weltkrieg*, 250.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 250-52.

sharply worded telegrams to Hindenburg and Ludendorff,¹⁹⁷ stressing the increasing supply difficulties that confronted the 9th Army. The distance from Hermannstadt, the southernmost supply base in Transylvania, to the Kronstadt Passes was approximately 100 km and a six-day march. Falkenhayn also noted the Szurduk and Vulcan Passes were narrower and shorter than the Kronstadt Passes and thus less suitable for the defensive. Perhaps most important, he knew the Romanians would position most of their forces in Kronstadt because of its proximity to Bucharest.¹⁹⁸ Hindenburg and Ludendorff, to their credit, soon changed their minds and supported Falkenhayn's position.¹⁹⁹

Although Falkenhayn now had the freedom to carry out his plan, he sought to confuse the Romanian High Command about his true objective. For the next few weeks, beginning in mid-October, Falkenhayn's 9th Army executed a number of small-scale offensives throughout the Carpathian border passes. The Alpine Corps instigated skirmishes with the Romanians guarding the exit to the Red Tower Pass. Further east, Staabs' Corps drew 2nd Army's attention via numerous artillery bombardments on the north side of the Kronstadt Passes. Even the Austro-Hungarian 1st Army, which had largely remained stagnant against Romanian 4th Army, launched spirited offensives against the Oituz Pass defenders.²⁰⁰ Falkenhayn, who had also ordered an attack into the Szurduk and Vulcan Passes,²⁰¹ remained confident even though the 9th Army had not advanced into the Wallachian plain before November. In fact, he had accomplished his initial task, namely to disorient the Romanian war leadership.²⁰²

In early November, Falkenhayn made detailed preparations for another advance into the Szurduk and Vulcan Passes. He assigned General Kühne four infantry divisions (4Ist, 109th, 301st, and 11th Bavarian) and Schmettow's Corps. By November 10, "Group Kühne" had received plentiful mountain equipment, motorized vehicles, and heavy artillery.²⁰³ On that day, Falkenhayn declared the 9th Army ready "for the decisive attack that was to open the invasion gates of Romania."²⁰⁴ He then issued orders for a general offensive in front of the Carpathian border passes, which figured to provide Group Kühne breathing space to advance.²⁰⁵

On November 11 Group Kühne entered the Szurduk and Vulcan Passes. Facing it were only two Romanian divisions (1st and 11th), as the 9th Army's feints in other border passes had successfully occupied the enemy's main forces. Group Kühne, which consequently en-

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 251-52; Falkenhayn, *Feldzug der 9. Armee*, II, 40-41.

¹⁹⁸ Lieutenant-Major Ponath, "Aus großer Zeit vor zwanzig Jahren. Der Einbruch in die rumänische Ebene," *Militär-Wochenblatt* 121, no. 2 (December 4, 1936), 1101; Reichsarchiv, *Der Weltkrieg*, 248-52; and Cruttwell, *History of the Great War*, 296.

¹⁹⁹ Reichsarchiv, *Der Weltkrieg*, 252; Ludendorff, *My War Memories*, 296-97.

²⁰⁰ Ludendorff, *My War Memories*, 296; Liddell Hart, *History of the First World War*, 348; Treptow, *History of Romania*, 375.

²⁰¹ Ponath, "Aus großer Zeit," 1102; Ludendorff, *My War Memories*, 297; Liddell Hart, *History of the First World War*, 348.

²⁰² Historians have praised Falkenhayn's feints. Cyril Falls states "Falkenhayn probed one pass after another and by marching and countermarching bewildered the defense," and Norman Stone explains "the Central Powers' action here was more important for the troops that it pinned than for the ground it gained." See Falls, *Great War*, 229, and Stone, *Eastern Front*, 278.

²⁰³ Ponath, "Aus großer Zeit," 1103; Asprey, *German High Command*, 275.

²⁰⁴ Reichsarchiv, *Der Weltkrieg*, 264.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 264-65; Falkenhayn, *Feldzug der 9. Armee*, II, 41.

joyed a remarkable superiority in both men and weapons,²⁰⁶ employed its artillery and shattered the Romanian defenders. During the course of that day, the 41st and 109th Divisions cleared the pass exits, and the 301st and 11th Bavarian, as well as Schmettow's Cavalry Corps, followed close behind.²⁰⁷ Roughly 60,000 soldiers and 30,000 horses had advanced through the 40 km pass.²⁰⁸ By November 14, Group Kühne had established a strong position south of the Szurduk and Vulcan Passes near Targu Jiu.²⁰⁹ The floodgates were opened.

²⁰⁶ The Germans had 33 Battalions and 43 Batteries; the Romanians utilized 18 Battalions and 16 Batteries. See Reichsarchiv, *Der Weltkrieg*, 266, for details.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 266; Ponath, "Aus großer Zeit," 1102-03.

²⁰⁸ Ponath, "Aus großer Zeit," 1103; Herwig, *Germany and Austria-Hungary*, 219, 221.

²⁰⁹ Reichsarchiv, *Der Weltkrieg*, 266.

CHAPTER 5

TOWARDS THE ARGES: BATTLES IN WALLACHIA

“Group Kühne” broke through the western Carpathians just in time. On November 11, its four infantry divisions (41st, 109th, 301st, and 11th Bavarian) crossed the Szurduk and Vulcan Passes, with Schmettow’s Corps (6th and 7th Cavalry Divisions) close behind. Over the next few days, these units of the German 9th Army established a strong foothold near Targu Jiu. While it seemed that the worst was over for the Germans, a sudden change in the weather came to Romania’s aid. Huge snowfalls transformed already shoddy roads into sloppy, muddy quagmires. Group Kühne had no choice but to halt its advance. Utilizing this breathing space, the Romanian command ordered the 17th Division to the region to support 1st and 11th Divisions.²¹⁰ The Germans had accomplished a major feat by breaking through the mountain passes before winter. However, 9th Army commander Erich von Falkenhayn realized that much work remained unfinished, as the Romanians still possessed a capable field army. He ordered his right wing to continue its march through the Wallachian plain. In doing so, Group Kühne would flatten the Romanian army’s left flank and thus draw enemy forces from the Red Tower and Kronstadt Passes. Once the bulk of 9th Army reached the relatively flat terrain in Wallachia, Falkenhayn knew that he could trap the Romanians in a *Kesselschlacht*.

From Targu Jiu to the Alt River

Group Kühne attacked Romanian 1st and 11th Divisions in front of Targu Jiu on November 15.²¹¹ The assault was a complete success. The 41st Division reached Targu Jiu while the 301st guarded its left flank; the 109th and 11th Bavarian advanced approximately ten kilometers to the east. Schmettow’s Corps covered the most territory, fifteen kilometers, until it was southwest of Targu Jiu.²¹² The Romanians withdrew southeast in the direction of Petresti, where the 17th Division had already begun to arrive. Falkenhayn ordered Kühne to push his troops forward for another offensive.

Kühne’s forces gave the Romanians little time to rest with a spirited assault the very next day. Once again, the 41st, 109th, and 11th Bavarian Divisions attacked the Romanians frontally, while the 301st and Schmettow’s Corps marched on their flanks. However, more heavy snowfall hampered the attackers’ vision and lessened their effectiveness. General Hans von Seeckt, chief of the General Staff for the eastern front, arrived at Targu Jiu that afternoon and reported his assessment of the situation to headquarters in Pless:

The change in weather, with strong, thawed snow, will slow down the fighting actions; the roads are only useful to a degree, especially in the east and

²¹⁰ Germany, Reichsarchiv, *Der Weltkrieg, 1914-1918*, Vol. XI, *Die Kriegführung im Herbst 1916 und im Winter 1916/17* (Berlin: E.S. Mittler & Sohn, 1938), 267-68.

²¹¹ Cyril Falls, *The Great War* (New York: Capricorn, 1959), 229; Basil Henry Liddell Hart, *History of the First World War* (London: Cassell, 1970), 349.

²¹² Reichsarchiv, *Der Weltkrieg*, 267.

southeast directions. The early winning of the railway Orsova-Craiova was necessary for further operations. Therefore, the advance march should be strongest initially to the south.²¹³

Falkenhayn agreed, and had Kühne alter his attack formation. Kühne ordered Schmettow's Corps to cease its assault on the Romanian left wing and instead march west, where the enemy could not spot it. This time the harsh weather aided the 9th Army, as the thick snowfall screened the movements of Schmettow's Corps as it broke contact with the enemy. The next day, November 17, 41st and 109th Divisions punched a hole in the Romanian center. The three Romanian divisions suffered huge losses, having lost about 8,500 men from November 11 to 17.²¹⁴ Moreover, Romanian leaders realized Schmettow's Corps was in the midst of a 45-km-march to the south, and consequently ordered a hasty retreat to the southeast.²¹⁵

Group Kühne began a rapid pursuit of the left wing of the Romanian 1st Army. By November 18, these 9th Army units were on the open plain of Wallachia, and thus could march much more efficiently than two months previously. The Romanian 1st, 11th, and 17th Divisions were in no shape for counterattacks. On November 21, parts of the 6th Cavalry and 41st Divisions entered Craiova.²¹⁶ The front General Seeckt sought had been won. Falkenhayn acknowledged Group Kühne's accomplishment, stating "considerable marching distances were covered despite soaked roads."²¹⁷ Yet Kühne's men were not finished, as they continued to pursue the Romanians toward the Alt River. From left to right, the 301st Division pushed east to Dragasani; the 41st and 11th Bavarian Divisions advanced in the direction of Slatina; and Schmettow's Corps and the 109th Division pressed southeast to Stoenesti.²¹⁸ By November 23, Group Kühne approached all of these locations and reached the western shore of the Alt.²¹⁹

Group Kühne's mobility placed Romania in a precarious strategic position. Ninth Army's right wing stood south of the Romanian 1st Army right wing, which was defending the Red Tower Pass, and posed an imminent danger to Bucharest. First Army had been pummeled so severely, that the Romanian command had to "double number" its divisions. For example, the 1st and 17th Divisions merged and the new unit became the 1/17 Division. Further reinforcements were necessary to stop Group Kühne from simply marching into Bucharest. Two divisions were pulled from Romanian 4th Army in Moldavia to solidify the

²¹³ Quoted in *ibid.*, 268.

²¹⁴ The "battle of Targu Jiu" (November 11-17) receives fair treatment by Erich von Falkenhayn in *Der Feldzug der 9. Armee gegen die Rumänen u. Russen 1916/17*, Vol. II (E.S. Mittler & Sohn, 1921), 46-56, and in *ibid.*, 266-70. Battle statistics, showing the Germans suffered roughly 800 casualties, are on page 269.

²¹⁵ For the Romanian retreat following its defeat at Targu Jiu, consult Charles Clark, *United Roumania* (New York: Arno Press, 1971), 151, and Ilie Ceausescu, "The Romanian Army in World War I," *War and Society in East Central Europe*, Vol. XIX, *East Central European Society in World War I*, ed. Bela Kiraly, Nandor Dreisziger, and Albert Nofi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), pp. 518.

²¹⁶ Reichsarchiv, *Der Weltkrieg*, 269; Robert Asprey, *The German High Command at War: Hindenburg and Ludendorff Conduct World War I* (New York: William Morrow, 1991), 275.

²¹⁷ Quoted in Reichsarchiv, *Der Weltkrieg*, 269.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 274.

²¹⁹ Asprey, *German High Command*, 275-76; Clark, *United Roumania*, 151; Liddell Hart, *History of the First World War*, 349.

Red Tower and Kronstadt Passes.²²⁰ The Romanians combined their reserves into four divisions, the 2/5, 9/19, 10th, and 21st. The latter three were responsible for protecting the capital while the 2/5 Division was assigned to the Alt River near Dragasani.²²¹

Despite these efforts, the 9th Army broke through at the Red Tower and Kronstadt Passes. In early November Falkenhayn created "Group Krafft," which consisted from west to east of the Goiginger Division (named after its leader), the 216th Infantry Division, and the Alpine Corps. He installed Krafft von Dellmensingen, already commander of the Alpine Corps, as the leader of this new German corps, a large force containing 33 battalions and 31 batteries.²²² Group Krafft struck repeatedly at the Romanian 1st Army right wing defending the Red Tower Pass. Although he initially failed to crush Romanian resistance, Krafft drew additional Romanian forces to him and thus eased the successful breakthrough attempt of Group Kühne at the Szurduk and Vulcan Passes on November 11. Over the next two weeks, Kühne's troops returned the favor by advancing into the heart of the Wallachian plain, thus once again switching Romania's focus. By November 23, Krafft's troops stood well inside Wallachia and controlled the cities of Curtea de Arges and Ramnicu-Valcea. During these two weeks of heavy fighting, Group Krafft captured more than 6,000 prisoners and twelve artillery pieces.²²³

Meanwhile, Groups Morgen and Staabs were engaged in fierce battles with Romanian 2nd Army at the Kronstadt Passes. Here the Romanians resisted on the southern side of the mountain passes with nearly 100,000 soldiers.²²⁴ Once Group Krafft advanced into the Wallachia plain, however, 2nd Army's left flank became exposed. The Romanians withdrew the bulk of their forces south and established a concentric position northwest of Bucharest.²²⁵ Groups Morgen and Staabs reached Campolung and Sinaia by November 25. The Romanians had abandoned every major mountain pass along the Transylvanian Alps. Falkenhayn's feints the previous month, as well as the skillful use of Group Kühne to endanger the Romanian left wing, had borne fruit as the entire 9th Army stood inside Wallachia in late November.²²⁶

Still, all was not perfect with the German dispositions. On the one hand, Schmettow's Corps and the 109th Division crossed the Alt River and threatened the Romanian 1st Army's left wing.²²⁷ Groups Staabs, Morgen, and Krafft linked up and positioned themselves along the line Pitesti-Sinaia.²²⁸ On the other hand, neither the 41st and 11th Bavarian Divisions near Slatina nor the 301st at Dragasani had crossed the Alt. As a result, a gaping hole had opened in Group Kühne's center. Before the Romanians could capitalize on

²²⁰ The Russians replaced these troops in Moldavia with their own forces and also sent units to the endangered Dobrudja theater.

²²¹ Reichsarchiv, *Der Weltkrieg*, 271-73.

²²² *Ibid.*, 270.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 270; Erich Ludendorff, *My War Memories*, Vol. I (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1919), 298-99.

²²⁴ Clark, *United Roumania*, 151.

²²⁵ Ludendorff, *My War Memories*, 299.

²²⁶ Norman Stone, *The Eastern Front, 1914-1917* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1975), 279; Falls, *Great War*, 229.

²²⁷ For a detailed account of the struggle at the Alt river, see Falkenhayn, *Feldzug der 9. Armee*, II, 56-76. Holger Herwig mentions the Alt crossing very briefly. See *The First World War: Germany and Austria-Hungary, 1914-1918* (London: Arnold, 1997), 221.

²²⁸ Reichsarchiv, *Der Weltkrieg*, 276-77; Ludendorff, *My War Memories*, 299.

this opportunity, German troops executed another bold operation to enhance their chances of a *Kesselschlacht*.

Mackensen Crosses the Danube

Since early November, the German High Command had accelerated plans for Army Group Mackensen to execute a Danube river crossing. Hindenburg and Ludendorff expected the Danube Army to enter Wallachia and link up with the 9th Army before the onset of winter. Even though Falkenhayn's troops had liberated Transylvania and broken through the Carpathians by mid-November, a sense of urgency prevailed in German headquarters. Mackensen needed to reach the Wallachian plain in order to form the right wing of an offensive against Bucharest. General Kosch and other German staff officers selected Sistova as the crossing site after careful reconnaissance. One notable advantage Sistova offered was that its higher southern shore would better enable artillery support.²²⁹ In addition, its location west of the Dobrudja in northern Bulgaria placed Army Group Mackensen nearly as close as the 9th Army to Bucharest. During the first half of November, Mackensen transferred most of his army group from the Dobrudja to the Sistova region.²³⁰

By November 20, the Army of the Danube had completed its movement to Sistova and outnumbered the Romanian 3rd Army defending the region. Mackensen had under his command five divisions, the 217th, "Division Goltz" (named after its leader), the Turkish 26th, and the Bulgarian 1st and 12th Divisions, as well as the Austro-Hungarian Danube flotilla and pioneer forces that specialized in bridge construction. The Romanian defenders consisted of only two full divisions, the 18th Infantry and 2nd Cavalry, and individual battalions as border troops.²³¹ The Romanian High Command had understandably diverted most of its soldiers back to the northern front. Consequently, 3rd Army's manpower was woefully inadequate, as "there were only eighteen battalions to forty, and forty-eight guns to 188 when the Germans crossed."²³²

Army Group Mackensen's attack began on November 23.²³³ A thick fog hindered German artillery observations but disguised (and thus aided) troop movements.²³⁴ Additional Central Powers units enacted numerous diversionary assaults along the Danube, which confused the Romanian defenders about the Germans' intentions. By late afternoon, seventeen battalions from the five divisions around Sistova had established a strong foothold

²²⁹ Reichsarchiv, *Der Weltkrieg*, 277-78.

²³⁰ Paul von Hindenburg, *Out of My Life*, Vol. I, trans. F.A. Holt (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1927), 249; Ludendorff, *My War Memories*, 296; C.R.M.F. Cruttwell, *A History of the Great War 1914-1918* (Chicago: Academy Chicago, 1991), 296; Liddell Hart, *History of the First World War*, 349.

²³¹ Reichsarchiv, *Der Weltkrieg*, 280-81.

²³² Stone, *Eastern Front*, 279-80.

²³³ For a firsthand and detailed analysis of the Danube operation, see August von Mackensen, *Briefe und Aufzeichnungen des General Feldmarschalls aus Krieg und Frieden* (Leipzig: Bibliographisches Institut AG, 1938), 296-302.

²³⁴ Many sources note the weather along the Danube. For example, see Reichsarchiv, *Der Weltkrieg*, 282; Hindenburg, *Out of My Life*, 249; and Cruttwell, *History of the Great War*, 296.

on the northern shore, and two days later, Army Group Mackensen was positioned firmly in southern Wallachia.²³⁵

The Romanians were in trouble. First Army's forward units guarding the Alt River scrambled back towards the capital, having no choice but to permit Kühne's center and left wing to push forward.²³⁶ The careful planning and splendid operations of the Danube Army not only resulted in another example of *Bewegungskrieg*, but also helped Falkenhayn execute his much more dazzling maneuvers in the northern sector.²³⁷ Army Group Mackensen was apparently on the verge of forming the right wing of a huge *Kesselschlacht*. At this point, Romania attempted a last, desperate counterattack.

The Arges: the Battle for Bucharest

By November 29, the 9th Army and Army Group Mackensen had advanced within thirty miles of Bucharest. Falkenhayn's forces stood in a concentric line west-northwest of the capital.²³⁸ Group Staabs, which formed its left wing east of Sinaia, was to engage Romanian 2nd Army and prevent it from rescuing 1st Army west of Bucharest. Falkenhayn ordered Groups Krafft and Kühne to attack 1st Army head on and Group Morgen to outflank its right wing.²³⁹ For the upcoming assault, the 9th Army enjoyed a crucial edge in manpower,

²³⁵ Mackensen, *Briefe und Aufzeichnungen*, 299-301; Hindenburg, *Out of My Life*, 249-50; Asprey, *German High Command*, 276; Clark, *United Roumania*, 152; Herwig, *Germany and Austria-Hungary*, 221.

²³⁶ Reichsarchiv, *Der Weltkrieg*, 298.

²³⁷ Some scholars disagree in their assessment of whether Mackensen or Falkenhayn deserves more credit for the Germans' apt use of *Bewegungskrieg*. Gerard Silberstein believes Mackensen's army was pivotal to the campaign. In *The Troubled Alliance: German-Austrian Relations 1914 to 1917* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1970), 331-32, he claims that "once the (Danube) crossing was accomplished the Central Powers were on their way to a smashing victory. The Rumanians pulled back large numbers of their armies in the north to defend their capital city. Once this happened, Falkenhayn could successfully thread his way through the mountain passes of the Transylvanian Alps leading to the Rumanian plain. He had probed those passes earlier but they were two to three thousand feet deep and very difficult to take when defended by the Rumanian armies at their full strength. Once reduced to take care of Mackensen's attack in the south, the Rumanian forces could not hold against Falkenhayn, who plunged through the Vulcan Pass, a real gateway, to link up with Mackensen's group." Silberstein errs in several ways. First, Mackensen did not cross the Danube until after Falkenhayn's 9th Army broke through at the Vulcan and Szurduk Passes and entered Wallachia. Second, Romania's main focus in November was the Transylvanian Alps rather than the Dobrudja-Danube theater. Romania had transferred troops to the Dobrudja in September after Tutrakan and Silistria fell into German hands, but moved even more forces back to face the 9th Army when it approached the Carpathian mountain passes in October. Norman Stone, *Eastern Front*, 279, notes correctly that "on 23rd November the Germano-Bulgarian force crossed the Danube, and found the task easy enough, since the Romanians had now diverted most of their forces back to the Carpathian front." A third point of view is given by Hajo Holborn, who states in *A History of Modern Germany 1840-1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 442 that "in a campaign that was a masterpiece of military skill...the major credit for this success must go to Falkenhayn, who led one of the two armies which forced their way into Rumania from Tansylvania, and to Field-Marshal von Mackensen, who managed to cross the Danube with his army from Bulgaria." Although Mackensen definitely deserves some credit, three of the four Romanian armies were placed in the northern front, two of which opposed 9th Army. Falkenhayn's task was not only the *Schwerpunkt* (point of main emphasis) of the campaign, but also included the crossing of the forbidding Carpathian Alps.

²³⁸ Reichsarchiv, *Der Weltkrieg*, 284-89, offers a detailed explanation of both Falkenhayn's and Mackensen's progress in late November. Also consult Clark, *United Roumania*, 151-54.

²³⁹ In addition, Falkenhayn assigned Schmettow's Corps to join the center of Group Kühne and screen its advance.

nearly 250,000 men versus approximately 150,000 Romanians.²⁴⁰ Mackensen's forces had simultaneously made stunning progress--they stood within twelve miles of Bucharest.

Despite Romania's calamitous strategic position, its leaders spotted one last opportunity: a gaping, twenty-mile hole between Army Group Mackensen and Group Kühne. A French military mission to Romania had formulated a last minute plan, drawn up by French General Henri Berthelot. Berthelot had been General Joseph Joffre's Chief of Staff during the battle of the Marne. He now attempted a "Balkan Marne: a flank-attack on the Germans as they approached Bucharest, crossing the Arges River."²⁴¹ The Romanian command followed Berthelot's advice, dragooning thousands of peasants into a hastily trained final reserve.²⁴² General Presan, formerly commander of 4th Army in Moldavia, was given control over the capital's defenses. He immediately ordered seven divisions to converge against Mackensen's Danube Army. The 18th and 21st Divisions opened a frontal assault; the 2/5, 9/19, and 2nd Cavalry Divisions attacked Mackensen's exposed left flank; and two newly arrived Russian divisions, the 8th Cavalry and 40th, marched against his right flank.²⁴³ Thus the struggle for Bucharest began in earnest on November 30.²⁴⁴

For a couple days General Presan's offensive "threatened danger to Mackensen's force and almost enveloped his flank."²⁴⁵ Ludendorff believed the situation was serious:

On December 1st the left wing of the Danube Army was very heavily attacked south-west of Bucharest and pushed back. The German troops who had already crossed the Nejlou were cut off. The situation was certainly very critical.²⁴⁶

Romanian forces took thousands of German prisoners, as well as various weapons and supplies during their eleventh-hour counterstrike.²⁴⁷ However, the Turkish 26th Division on Mackensen's vital left wing managed to prevent the attempted encirclement, giving the Germans time to turn the tide.²⁴⁸

The 9th Army intervened and saved Mackensen on December 2. A few days earlier, two Romanian staff officers stumbled upon a German encampment and were taken prisoner. The soldiers carried plans for the upcoming counterattack, which was now in Falkenhayn's

²⁴⁰ See Clark, *United Roumania*, 151-52.

²⁴¹ Stone, *Eastern Front*, 280.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 280.

²⁴³ Reichsarchiv, *Der Weltkrieg*, 298; Cruttwell, *History of the Great War*, 297-98; Ceausescu, "Romanian Army," 517.

²⁴⁴ The battle for Bucharest, more commonly known as the "battle of the Arges" (November 30-December 3), receives significant attention from both historians and contemporaries. See Reichsarchiv, *Der Weltkrieg*, 290-301; Falkenhayn, *Feldzug der 9. Armee*, II, 77-87; Mackensen, *Briefe und Aufzeichnungen*, 302-308; Ludendorff, *My War Memories*, 299-300; General Waldemar Erfurth, "Surprise," *Roots of Strategy*, vol. 3 (Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1991), 454-58; and Glen Torrey, *Romania and World War I: A Collection of Studies* (Portland, OR: Center for Romanian Studies, 1999), especially pages 246-50.

²⁴⁵ Liddell Hart, *History of the First World War*, 349.

²⁴⁶ Ludendorff, *My War Memories*, 299-300.

²⁴⁷ Clark, *United Roumania*, 154.

²⁴⁸ The Turkish 26th Division receives well-earned praise from Ludendorff, *My War Memories*, 300, and Asprey, *German High Command*, 276.

capable hands.²⁴⁹ He realized that Group Kühne was within striking distance of Presan's right wing, which he immediately ordered Kühne's 11th Bavarian and the recently created 115th Division to attack. These troops not only parried the Romanian advance against Mackensen, but also turned Presan's right flank. Moreover, Group Staabs blocked 2nd Army's route to the capital while Morgen and Krafft's troops crushed 1st Army, whose remnants fled north to link up with their comrades.²⁵⁰ The road to Bucharest was open.

The German Supreme Command was shocked to discover that Romania's army had abandoned the capital. Hindenburg stated

It must be admitted that we had imagined the capture of the Rumanian capital as a rather more military affair. We had thought Bucharest was a powerful fortress, brought up our heaviest siege artillery to reduce it, and now the famous *place d'armes* had turned out to be no more than an open town.²⁵¹

Ludendorff had likewise been concerned that the Romanians would defend their capital:

No sooner had this crisis been surmounted than we found ourselves faced with another. Would Bucharest be defended as a fortress or not? Such a defence would have been very awkward for us, for it would have prolonged the campaign in Rumania considerably.²⁵²

In fact, Ludendorff and Hindenburg were not entirely correct. Romanian troops did not flee the capital without a fight. They had launched a counterblow against Mackensen along the Arges River which, albeit briefly, appeared ominous to German leaders. However, once the 9th Army arrived on the scene, the Romanian army's destruction was inevitable. No longer capable of offensive operations, the Romanian High Command ordered a complete withdrawal from Wallachia north to the Sereth River.²⁵³ On December 6, Mackensen entered Bucharest.

²⁴⁹ There is dispute about who was captured by the Germans. The fact remains, however, that Falkenhayn gained knowledge of Romania's strategy. For more information about this fiasco, check Reichsarchiv, *Der Weltkrieg*, 288, and Erfurth, "Surprise," 455-56.

²⁵⁰ Reichsarchiv, *Der Weltkrieg*, 291-301; Stone, *Eastern Front*, 280; Ceausescu, "Romanian Army," 518.

²⁵¹ Hindenburg, *Out of My Life*, 250.

²⁵² Ludendorff, *My War Memories*, 300.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 301-04; Asprey, *German High Command*, 276-77; Cruttwell, *History of the Great War*, 297; Falls, *Great War*, 229; Silberstein, *Troubled Alliance*, 332.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The Germans' capture of Bucharest on December 6 was the culmination of the 1916 campaign. During the first week of December alone, Romania suffered tremendous casualties: 60,000 soldiers, 85 artillery pieces, and 115 machine guns fell into German hands.²⁵⁴ Ninth Army pursued the Romanians northeast into Moldavia. By January 1917, the Central Powers had possession of Wallachia and advanced to the Sereth River, where the depleted Romanians had fortified a defensive position. At this point, the German advance came to a halt. Bad weather, pummeled roads, and exhausted troops--factors that occur frequently in campaigns--contributed to a newly established stalemate on the Romanian front.²⁵⁵ Much more problematic for the Germans, however, were the difficulties of controlling, commanding, and supplying its mass armies. Roughly 400,000 troops had covered significant distances in a brief period and simply outmarched their supply lines. Germany had won an enormous victory against the opposing field army; it had not knocked Romania out of the war.

Several historians have therefore noted that Germany's victory was incomplete. By the end of the 1916 campaign, the eastern front had been extended approximately 250 miles, which the Germans had to man with dwindling numbers. The Central Powers' strategic situation, many scholars claim, deteriorated as a result.²⁵⁶ In addition, Romania not only remained in the war, it even executed limited offensives against Germany in the summer of 1917.²⁵⁷ Romania finally capitulated in early 1918, signing the Treaty of Bucharest in May.²⁵⁸ But its prolonged resistance thwarted German intentions of a quick, victorious campaign.

However, this traditional argument does not stand up to deeper analysis. First, the strategic problems of a wider front were commensurate with Germany's gains. By taking control of Wallachia, the Germans earned the spoils of Romanian oil fields and abundance of wheat.²⁵⁹ Second, Romania's frontline stabilized in January 1917 only because the Russians

²⁵⁴ See Germany, Reichsarchiv, *Der Weltkrieg, 1914-1918*, Vol. XI, *Die Kriegführung im Herbst 1916 und im Winter 1916/17* (Berlin: E.S. Mittler & Sohn, 1938), 306.

²⁵⁵ C.R.M.F. Cruttwell, *A History of the Great War 1914-1918* (Chicago: Academy Chicago, 1991), 297; Norman Stone, *The Eastern Front, 1914-1917* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1975), 280.

²⁵⁶ Advocates of this view are Cruttwell, *History of the Great War*, 298, and Hanson Baldwin, *World War I; An Outline History* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 85.

²⁵⁷ Consult Glen Torrey, *Romania and World War I: A Collection of Studies* (Portland, OR: Center for Romanian Studies, 1999), 269-90; Charles Clark, *United Roumania* (New York: Arno Press, 1971), 157-70; and Ilie Ceausescu, "The Romanian Army in World War I," *War and Society in East Central Europe*, Vol. XIX, *East Central European Society in World War I*, ed. Bela Kiraly, Nandor Dreisziger, and Albert Nofi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), pp. 518-23.

²⁵⁸ For terms of the treaty, check Martin Kitchen, *The Silent Dictatorship: The Politics of the German High Command under Hindenburg and Ludendorff, 1916-1918* (London: Croom Helm, 1976), 189-207; Holger Herwig, *The First World War: Germany and Austria-Hungary, 1914-1918* (London: Arnold, 1997), 384; Clark, *United Roumania*, 175-77; and Cruttwell, *History of the Great War*, 484-85.

²⁵⁹ See Basil Henry Liddell Hart, *History of the First World War* (London: Cassell, 1970), 350, and Cruttwell, *History of the Great War*, 297.

spearheaded its defense by sending vast reinforcements to southern Moldavia.²⁶⁰ In doing so, the Russians inherited the same extended front as the Germans. It is difficult to comprehend, therefore, why historians have stated that the Romanian campaign damaged Germany's strategic position without noticing a similar liability for the Entente.

On the operational level, General Erich von Falkenhayn's Romanian campaign was a masterpiece. He orchestrated a series of feints that disoriented Romanian forces and allowed 9th Army to break through the Carpathian Mountains before the onset of winter. Once inside Romania proper, Falkenhayn's forces easily trapped the Romanians inside a huge *Kesselschlacht* and captured Bucharest in the process. Romanian losses in 1916 were catastrophic: "Casualties numbered at least 250,000, including 100,000 dead or missing, 50,000 wounded, and 100,000 prisoners. Of the remaining 250,000 who had gone to the front so enthusiastically just a few months before, less than 100,000 remained in recognizable units."²⁶¹

German military commanders and thinkers alike believed that Falkenhayn's campaign provided crucial lessons for war on the operational level. As a result, they spilt a plethora of ink covering the 1916 triumph. Falkenhayn, August von Mackensen, Paul von Hindenburg, and Erich Ludendorff each included a detailed analysis of the Romanian operation in his memoirs.²⁶² The *Militär-Wochenblatt*, the German interwar journal, featured numerous articles that stressed the importance of the Romanian campaign as a lesson for future operations. Topics ranged from Group Kühne's advance through the Vulcan and Szurduk Passes to German tactics in Orsova.²⁶³

During the First World War, military commanders attempted to break the stalemate of trench warfare and restore mobility to the modern battlefield. For Germany, this meant a rebirth of the operational art embodied in the great nineteenth-century field commander Helmuth von Moltke. More often than not, however, German generals failed to implement Moltke's doctrine properly, as the western front remained deadlocked until 1918 and Russia presented a viable threat for much of the war. One notable exception was Falkenhayn, who utilized Moltke's art of war to win a decisive victory against Romania. German military thinkers of the interwar period looked back precisely to his campaign as an archetype of operational art, an art fully exploited in the opening years of World War II.

²⁶⁰ Torrey notes that in January 1917, "a mere 30,000 Romanian troops were at the front, with only 23,000 in the line." See Torrey, *Romania and World War I*, 270.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 270.

²⁶² Falkenhayn wrote two volumes on the Romanian campaign. See Erich von Falkenhayn, *Der Feldzug der 9. Armee gegen die Rumänen u. Russen 1916/17*, 2 Vols. (Berlin: E.S. Mittler & Sohn, 1921). No less valuable are August von Mackensen, *Briefe und Aufzeichnungen des General Feldmarschalls aus Krieg und Frieden* (Leipzig: Bibliographisches Institut AG, 1938); Paul von Hindenburg, *Out of My Life*, Vol. I, trans. F.A. Holt (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1927); and Erich Ludendorff, *My War Memories*, Vol. I (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1919).

²⁶³ The engagement at Orsova provided German troops with an opportunity to outmaneuver a much larger Romanian unit and destroy it with superior firepower. See Erich von Falkenhayn, "Truppen-kriegsgeschichte. Beispiel 9. Turnu Severin 1916," Teile I and II, *Militär-Wochenblatt* 123, no. 17 (October 21, 1938), 1078-81, and no. 18 (October 28, 1938), 1146-50, and Lieutenant-Major Ponath, "Feuerüberfälle gegen lohnende Augenblicksziele," *Militär-Wochenblatt* 112, no. 35 (March 18, 1928), 1344-46. For details of Group Kühne's breakthrough, see Lieutenant-Major Ponath, "Aus großer Zeit vor zwanzig Jahren. Der Einbruch in die rumänische Ebene," *Militär-Wochenblatt* 121, no. 2 (December 4, 1936), 1101-03.

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