

COMBAT AND CONVERGENCE:
FIGHTING THE FIRST WORLD WAR IN AN AUSTRO-HUNGARIAN INFANTRY REGIMENT

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ABSTRACT

Kevin J. Hoeper: Combat and Convergence: Fighting the First World War in an Austro-Hungarian Infantry Regiment
(Under the direction of Chad Bryant)

This thesis examines the various lines of division within a mixed, Czech-German regiment of the Austro-Hungarian Army during the first nine months of the First World War. It focuses on soldiers' experiences while asking how the Army's hierarchical structure and division of labor informed a variety of relationships and loyalties. This approach moves us away from a conventional focus on inter-regimental relationships as the products primarily of nationality. The thesis argues that *military* status created more powerful bonds and divisions than did nationality. It further argues that frontline loyalties and enmities were mutable and fluctuated alongside experiences at the front. These national and military dividing lines proved surmountable, and soldiers described a "convergence" of previously divided social groups through the tempering experience of battle. The thesis will thus contribute to a reappraisal of the Austro-Hungarian Army by offering a more precise understanding of soldiers' motivations and group loyalties.

To my parents. All of my accomplishments are theirs.

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INTRODUCTION

On 27 July 1914, Austria-Hungary¹ called to arms hundreds of thousands of soldiers scattered across its vast and varied lands. One soldier, Jindřich Bejl, hailed from the intermixed Czech- and German-speaking Crownland of Bohemia. Bejl, a convinced Czech nationalist, did not take part in the raucous celebrations that marked Austria's declaration of war. Instead, he filled his diary with excoriations of the German speakers who shared his corner of northeastern Bohemia, depicting them as warlike and bloodthirsty. On that first day of the First World War, Bejl watched as a train full of German-Austrian² reservists from neighboring Bromouva pulled into his town's station. Their cars bore the slogan "Down with Serbia!" and the soldiers drunkenly belted joyous songs. Bejl could not believe his eyes. "Banda!" he called them, "Vermin!"³ A month later, Jindřich Bejl found himself at the Serbian front, conversing with his closest friends in the regiment: Cadet Jüthner, Lieutenant Ascherl, Cadet Pragr, and Reserve Lieutenant Faltin, two of whom were German.⁴ Together, the group commiserated about the war and their senior officers.

Despite the often tense social and political undertones that colored relationships

¹ See: Pieter Judson, *The Habsburg Empire: A New History* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016), pp 259-268. "Austria-Hungary" emerged in 1867 with the constitutional reorganization of the former Austrian Empire in that year. The so-called Compromise [*Ausgleich*] created two constitutionally separate states, referred to briefly as "Austria" and "Hungary." Kaiser Franz Josef I served as both Emperor of the Austrian half of the Monarchy and King of the Hungarian half. Throughout the paper, I shall refer to Austria-Hungary by a number of names: Austria, Dual Monarchy, and Habsburg Monarchy.

² "German-Austrians" refers to those inhabitants of Austria-Hungary who spoke German. Throughout, I refer to them as "Germans."

³ Jindřich Bejl, *Můj deník z 1. světové války* (Unpublished manuscript, in the possession of Nakladatelství PLOT), p 3. For additional information regarding the history of this manuscript, see note 17.

⁴ Bejl, *Deník*, p 14.

between different national groups in the Habsburg Monarchy, Jindřich Bejl formed intense bonds with a diverse group of soldiers based on the shared experience of war. In the following pages, I will argue that *military* relationships at the front played an equal, if not greater, role than did *national* relationships in framing the experiences of Austria-Hungary's soldiers during the First World War.

My argument draws on a broadened framework created by shifts in Habsburg cultural and military studies. For decades after the First World War, historians labored to understand Austria-Hungary's war through a national lens. Habsburg historiography has traditionally placed great emphasis, not unwarranted, on the multinational character of the Monarchy and its army. This tradition began even before the First World War ended. During the war itself, both German and Czech nationalists within the Monarchy told tales of alleged mass desertions of largely Czech regiments to bolster their arguments about what was wrong with the Monarchy.⁵

After the war, former Austro-Hungarian generals co-opted the same narrative, hoping to ameliorate their embarrassment in defeat by drawing attention away from their own, often unsatisfactory, generalship. Their apologetic writings "contended that Austria-Hungary was defeated simply through the unwillingness of its Slavs to fight," in what John Deák has labelled "Austria's own form of the 'Stab-in-the-Back' myth."⁶ These accounts passed unquestioned into broader Western historiography and cemented the national

⁵ John Deák, "The Great War and the Forgotten Realm," in *The Journal of Modern History* 86 (June 2014): p 346. Both Czech and German nationalist politicians found the myth of traitorous Czech regiments beneficial to their political projects. The evidence for both sides centered on the alleged mass desertions of the Czech 28th and 36th Regiments to the Russian side during the war. For German nationalists, the episodes evidenced the untrustworthiness of their Czech-speaking compatriots. For Czech nationalists, it represented heroic resistance to a domineering Habsburg state that represented the interests of Germans but not Czechs.

⁶ Ibid., p 347. Here, Deák compares the Slavic stab-in-the-back myth with the interwar German iteration, which suggested that socialists, Jews, and workers betrayed the army in the field.

framework as the predominant one for analyzing the Habsburg Army.⁷ Thus, John Keegan could write of the Czech soldiers' experience in the Austro-Hungarian Army that "once war ceased to be a brief adventure, the army became for them 'a prison of the nations,' with the ubiquitous German [officers] acting as gaolers."⁸

Several recent trends in Austro-Hungarian sociocultural and military history suggest a revamped framework that places less emphasis on the nation as the fundamental wellspring of self-understanding. In recent decades, historians of the Czech lands have tried to revise our understanding of the way national identity functioned at the individual level. Traditional political histories of Austria-Hungary tended to focus on the fierce political rivalry between nationalist groups within the Monarchy. But recent revisionists have questioned whether such national conflict reproduced itself on the plane of everyday life and social interaction.

The key analytical concept to emerge from this revisionist historiography is that of "national indifference."⁹ The concept suggests that for many Czech- and German-speaking inhabitants of Austria-Hungary, nation did not automatically serve as the primary locus for identity-formation and self-understanding. Identification with region or locale often superseded attachments to a broader "nation." Nationalist activists often ran up against

⁷ James Lyon, *Serbia and the Balkan Front, 1914: The Outbreak of the Great War* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), p 4.

⁸ John Keegan, *The First World War* (New York City: Vintage Books, 2000), p 156.

⁹ The term "national indifference" was made most popular by the works of Pieter Judson and Tara Zahra. See: Pieter M. Judson, *Guardians of the Nation: Activists on the Language Frontiers of Imperial Austria* (London and Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); Tara Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900-1948* (London and Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008). Zarah and Judson drew on a longer tradition of writing about the Czech and German nationality conflict in the Czech lands as well as attempts by nationalist activists to combat national indifference. For other works on the topic, see: Gary B. Cohen, *The Politics of Ethnic Survival: Germans in Prague, 1861-1914* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981); Jeremy King, *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans: A Local History of Bohemian Politics, 1848-1948* (Oxford and Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002); Chad Bryant, "Either German or Czech: Fixing Nationality in Bohemia and Moravia, 1939-1946," *Slavic Review* 61, no. 4 (2002): 683-706, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3090386>; James Bjork, *Neither German nor Pole: Catholicism and National Indifference in a Central European Borderland*, Social History, Popular Culture, and Politics in Germany (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2008).

intransigent communities of Czech and German speakers who, having coexisted for decades, found it puzzling that they would be asked to declare themselves either German or Czech.

This thesis will not argue that the soldiers of the 11th were “nationally indifferent.” Indeed, the authors of my sources were very *clear* about who was a Czech and who was a German. But the national indifference scholarship has proven useful in showing that the close proximity of different language groups does not *necessarily* result in social strife.

At the same time, a trend has emerged in Austro-Hungarian military history that emphasizes military over national factors in explaining the performance of the Army during World War I. John Schindler has argued that shortcomings in supplies and command played a larger role than any national disloyalty in the defeats suffered by the Austro-Hungarian Army.¹⁰ Richard Lein further challenged the existing narrative by deconstructing the myth of alleged Czech mass desertions. Like Schindler, Lein made use of operational and battlefield analyses to explain the shattering of the Czech 28th and 36th Regiments as military, rather than national, failings.¹¹

Informed by social and cultural historical methodologies, military historians have also begun to focus consciously on Austro-Hungarian soldiers’ *experience* of war and military life.¹² István Deák’s now standard history of the Austro-Hungarian officer corps highlights

¹⁰ John R. Schindler, “A Hopeless Struggle: The Austro-Hungarian Army and Total War, 1914-1918” (PhD dissertation, McMaster University, 1995). Schindler’s dissertation uses case studies of Czech, Polish, mixed Magyar-Romanian, and mixed German-Serbian formations to make his argument.

¹¹ Richard Lein, *Pflichterfüllung oder Hochverrat?: Die Tschechischen Soldaten Österreich-Ungarns im Ersten Weltkrieg*, Europa Orientalis 9 (Vienna: LIT Verlag, 2011).

¹² Wayne Lee, “Mind and Matter – Cultural Analysis in American Military History: A Look at the State of the Field,” in *The Journal of American History* 93, no. 4 (March 2007): 1116-18. According to Lee, while traditional military history has emphasized the role of decision-making on the battlefield, social and cultural historical methodologies have brought their own set of questions to military studies. The so-called “‘war and society’ approach to military history” focuses on “the more humanistic side of war,” asking questions such as “Who was in the military, and what happened to them while they were there?” (117). The newer cultural approach explores the way culture opens up or closes off certain options on the battlefield. Together, these new approaches have generated an interest in the *experience* of soldiers on the battlefield. For recent examinations of soldiers’ experience in the

the insular and unique worldview possessed by professional officers.¹³ The officer corps, argues Deák in the aptly-titled *Beyond Nationalism*, consciously cultivated a supranational loyalty to dynasty and empire, rather than to any one nation. Martin Schmitz and Ernst Zehetbauer have further developed Deák's scholarship by focusing on experiences *within* the officer corps, highlighting the differences between junior and senior, as well as between reserve and professional officers.¹⁴

The scholarship of Rudolf Kučera and Tamara Scheer also investigates the function of nationality within the Army without losing sight of the Army as a military organization with distinct goals and a distinct institutional culture. Rudolf Kučera argues that through the experience of material deprivation, soldiers gradually came to understand their wartime experiences through a national lens. At the beginning of the war, however, soldiers saw the clearest dividing lines between "well cared for and well provisioned officers" and "materially deprived soldiers," rather than between Czechs and Germans.¹⁵ Tamara Scheer focuses her work on the role of language within the Army. She discusses Austro-Hungarian policies designed to accommodate the Army's multilingualism, arguing that while the Army viewed language as a largely practical problem of command and communication, the language

Habsburg context, see: Isabelle Brandauer, *Menschenmaterial Soldat: Alltagsleben an der Dolomitenfront im Ersten Weltkrieg 1915-1917* (Innsbruck: Golf Verlag, 2007); Jiří Hutečka, *Muži proti ohni: Motivace, morálka a mužnost českých vojáků Velké války 1914-1918* (Prague: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 2016).

¹³ István Deák, *Beyond Nationalism: A Social and Political History of the Habsburg Officer Corps, 1848-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

¹⁴ Martin Schmitz, "Als ob die Welt aus den Fugen ginge": *Kriegserfahrungen österreichisch-ungarischer Offiziere 1914-1918*, *Krieg in der Geschichte* 86 (Paderborn, DE: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2016); Ernst Zehetbauer, *Die "Einjährigen" in der alten Armee: Das Reserveoffizierssystem Österreich-Ungarns 1868-1914*, *Militärsgeschichte und Wehrwissenschaft* 4 (Osnabrück, Germany: Biblio Verlag, 1999); Ernst Zehetbauer, *Krieg der Reserveoffiziere 1914-1918: Österreich-Ungarn, die „E.F.“ und das Ende der alten Armee* (Hamburg: Tredition, 2015).

¹⁵ Rudolf Kučera, "Entbehrung und Nationalismus: Die Erfahrung tschechischer Soldaten der österreichisch-ungarischen Armee 1914-1918," in *Jenseits des Schützengrabens, Der Erste Weltkrieg im Osten: Erfahrung-Wahrnehmung-Kontext*, ed. Bernhard Bachinger and Wolfram Dornik, *Veröffentlichungen des Ludwig Boltzmann-Instituts für Kriegsfolgen-Forschung* 14 (Innsbruck, Vienna, Bozen: Studienverlag, 2013), p 136.

question was also influenced by wider political debates about language rights.¹⁶ During the war, both political and practical considerations were taken into account when dealing with the linguistically heterogeneous Army.

Informed by this scholarship and its alternative frameworks, I argue that the relationships created by the Army's hierarchy and division of labor proved far more influential in creating senses of loyalty and animosity than did national relationships. One's position as a soldier or officer, professional or reservist, infantryman or rear-echelon soldier impacted combatants' understandings of their war in a much more immediate way than did nationality. Three types of military relationship, in particular, divided Austro-Hungarian soldiers. First, early on in the war a gulf emerged between soldiers and their officers due to imbalanced material well-being, per Kučera, but also due to divergent attitudes toward the war, combat, and the Serbian enemy. At the same time, *within* the officer corps, dividing lines were drawn between reserve and active officers based on prewar social status and conflicting notions of military service. Ultimately, however, a third and altogether more powerful division emerged that overshadowed all others. Dealing with the war's worst dangers and deprivations, frontline combatants began to see themselves as sharing in a particular experience, distinct from that of rear-echelon support troops.

To make my argument, I shall focus on Jindřich Bejl's unit, the 11th Imperial and Royal¹⁷ Infantry Regiment from south Bohemia. The 11th provides an excellent subject as it

¹⁶ Tamara Scheer, "Habsburg Languages at War: 'The Linguistic Confusion at the Tower of Babel Couldn't Have Been Much Worse,'" in *Languages and the First World War: Communicating in a Transnational War*, eds. Julian Walker and Christophe Declercq, Palgrave Studies in Languages at War (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 62–78. See also Scheer's earlier work, in German: Tamara Scheer, "K.u.k. Regimentssprachen: Institutionalisierung der Sprachenvielfalt in der Habsburgermonarchie in den Jahren 1867/8-1914," in *Sprache, Gesellschaft und Nation in Ostmitteleuropa: Institutionalisierung und Alltagspraxis*, ed. Klaas-Hinrich Ehlers et al. (Göttingen, DE: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 75–92.

¹⁷ Austria-Hungary's armed forces actually consisted of three separate armies and a navy. As a result of the 1867 Compromise, both the individual halves of the Monarchy fielded their own territorial armies (in German, *Landwehr*, in Hungarian, *Honvéd*) similar to the American National Guard. The Monarchy also maintained a Common Army, or Imperial and Royal [*kaiserliche und königliche*] Army, referencing Franz Josef's positions as both Emperor of Austria and King of Hungary. This paper focuses

recruited from the nationally- and linguistically-mixed region of southwest Bohemia, a hotly contested battleground for Czech and German nationalist activists. I have followed the 11th through its first nine months of combat – from August 1914 to March 1915 – on the Balkan and Carpathian fronts. April 1915 serves as an adequate ending point because by then, the prewar 11th had been physically destroyed in combat and supplanted by companies of replacements.

In terms of evidence, diaries have proven especially well-suited because their real-time testimony highlights the often transitory social relationships within the unit. To this end, I have used two wartime diaries and a memoir written by men who fought with the 11th. Egon Erwin Kisch, a German-speaking journalist from Prague, served with the 11th as a reserve NCO. He left behind a substantial war diary that was published in 1922 and in expanded form in 1929.¹⁸ Captain Ludwig Allé began the war as an active-duty, career captain with the 11th's engineer detachment. Allé's war experiences come to us in the form of a postwar memoir written in 1933 from wartime notes.¹⁹ Finally, Czech-speaking Jindřich Bejl, with whom the reader will already be acquainted, served in the 11th as a reserve officer

on a regiment of the Common, or Imperial and Royal Army. "Army" in this thesis refers to the Common Army unless otherwise noted.

¹⁸ Egon Erwin Kisch, *Soldat im Prager Korps* (Leipzig: Verlag der K. Andréschen Buchhandlung, 1922); Egon Erwin Kisch, *Schreib das auf, Kisch!* (Berlin: Erich Reiss Verlag, 1929). *Soldat*, published in 1922, covers Kisch's experiences in the war from 31 July 1914 to 22 March 1915, with a substantial gap between 16 December 1914 and 18 March 1915. *Schreib*, published in 1929, covers the same period, though it includes additional entries for the dates 17 December 1914 to 13 February 1915. The period 14 February to 18 March 1915 is not covered in either edition. In all cases where dates are covered in both editions, I have chosen to rely on the earlier 1922 version. For those dates where entries exist only in the later 1930 edition, I have used those. All translations are my own, except in the case of several entries from mid-September 1914, for which Harold B. Segel has already published English translations. These instances are noted. See: Harold B. Segel, *Egon Erwin Kisch, the Raging Reporter: A Bio-Anthology* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1997).

¹⁹ Ludwig Allé, *Aus unserer Familienchronik: Kriegstagebuch von Oberst Ludwig Allé* (unpublished manuscript, 1933, Located in: Manuscript 157, Fondo Diari e memorie, Archivio Storico, Museo Storico Italiano della Guerra, Rovereto, Italy), p 48. Allé's memoir covers the entire war from 25 July 1914 to 22 November 1918. All translations are my own. My sincerest thanks to Bernhard Mertelseder for aiding me in the location and use of the manuscript.

aspirant. Bejl wrote his diary during the war, the text being transcribed in the 1960s.²⁰

Three diaries can never be representative of a regiment comprising over 4,000 men and a couple hundred officers. But the diaries *do* provide glimpses into social circles and interpersonal interactions that extend far beyond the authors themselves. Each at times generalized about the mood and morale of the regiment or specific elements therein. Bejl, Kisch, and Allé in a sense acted as *reporters*; in Kisch's case he *was* a reporter before and after the war. The diaries' immediacy is matched by their real-time character. The diarists often wrote their entries just hours after the action described. Even in the case of Allé's memoir, the specificity of dates, times, names, and interactions suggests that he wrote the memoir using wartime notes.²¹ In addition to the diaries, I have made use of official Army documents held at the state war archives of Austria and the Czech Republic. Among them, personnel lists, casualty reports, and a regimental unit history provide much-needed information on the particulars of the 11th's wartime record.

My analysis begins with biographical information about the three diarists and their relationships with Army service in chapter one. In chapter two, I use the period of mobilization between the declaration of war and the first days of combat to introduce the contours of the regiment as a social and military organization. Chapter three provides a brief outline of the 11th's combat record to contextualize the diarists' experiences.

Chapter four analyzes the various dividing lines present among the men of the 11th,

²⁰ Jindřich Bejl, *Můj deník z 1. světové války* (Unpublished manuscript, in the possession of Nakladatelství PLOT). I first discovered Bejl's diary in its published form, see: Jindřich Bejl, *Deník legionáře* (Prague: Nakladatelství PLOT, 2013). Because of the original diary's length, the editors of the published version abridged the text for publication. I have elected to rely on the earlier, unabridged, manuscript version of the text for the purposes of this thesis. My sincerest thanks to PLOT for allowing me access to the unabridged manuscript. All translations are my own. The unabridged manuscript shall henceforth be referred to in footnotes as "*Deník*."

²¹ Bernhard Mertelseder and Sigrid Wisthaler, "Soldat und Offizier in ihren Erinnerungen: Methodische Überlegungen zu österreichischen Kriegstagebüchern," in *Ein Krieg, Zwei Schützengräben: Österreich – Italien und der Erste Weltkrieg in den Dolomiten 1915-1918*, ed. Brigitte Mazohl-Wallnig et al. (Bozen, AT: Verlaganstalt Athesia, 2005), 69-70. Mertelseder suggests that Allé expressly took notes during the war that would serve as a "memory support" should he decide to "rework" and "reorganize" his experiences into a more complete narrative form.

arguing that national tension proved negligible compared to the resentment bred by differences in rank. Chapter five shows that, nevertheless, even the fraught relationships between soldiers and officers and between reservists and actives could collapse in the face of more all-encompassing divisions into frontline and rear-echelon combatants. In chapter six, I suggest the transitory nature of such frontline cohesion, showing how the temporary convergence of soldiers, officers, actives, and reservists faded when removed from the heat of battle.

CHAPTER 1: THE DIARISTS

Our first diarist, Ludwig Allé, was born in 1873 to a middle-class family in Brno, the Czech lands' second city. Allé was likely marked for military service from birth. His father had served as a reserve officer and sent young Ludwig and his two brothers to military preparatory school in St. Pölten, Austria. From there young Ludwig went to a military-preparatory high school in Mährisch Weiskirchen (today's Hranice na Moravě in the Czech Republic). Allé capped off his professional military education with a three-year program at the Theresian Military Academy in Wiener Neustadt, Austria, the Monarchy's highest military-educational institution.²² Graduating from the Theresian Academy, Allé could be counted among Austria-Hungary's military elite. He was commissioned in 1894 as a lieutenant and by 1914 was a captain serving with the 11th at its headquarters in Prague.

Allé's family life reflected the typical experience of a Habsburg *Berufsoffizier* [career officer] who grew up in the Army, planned to serve his entire adult life with the Army, and hoped to retire with a pension from the Army. Military careers often passed from father to son, as it did in Allé's family.²³ Many military families, like the Allés, spoke German regardless of geographic or ethnic origins. But this rarely indicated a family's German ethnic identity. Students at the Monarchy's military academies "distinguished between those who used 'Army-German' (*Armeedeutsch*) at home, regardless of their family's ethnic origins, and genuine German nationals."²⁴

Officers inhabited the insular social world of military schools and field barracks,

²² Mertelseder and Wisthaler, "Soldat und Offizier," pp 64-5.

²³ Schindler, "Hopeless Struggle," p 21. The term *Tornisterkinder*, or "knapsack children," referred to such sons of officers and NCOs.

²⁴ Deák, *Beyond Nationalism*, p 83.

largely socializing among themselves and each other's families. Allé's life trajectory matched the above exactly and he spent his entire late childhood, adolescence, and early adult life with the Army. This imbued him with a certain sense of self, purpose, and loyalty.

The defining characteristic of the Austrian career officer was a "near-religious attachment" to the ruling Habsburg dynasty and the monarchy.²⁵ István Deák succinctly captures the Habsburg officer's sense of purpose and loyalty:

The officers were the nerve center and spiritual essence of the army. Each of them, of course, had his own particular – or, very often, mixed – ethnic origin, but for them, service to the monarch was the basic commitment, overruling all other considerations. The officers saw themselves even more as direct subjects of Francis Joseph than of the monarchy, if only because, by 1900, there was not a single officer in active service who had not received his commission from that ruler and sworn personal fealty to him. This ultimate connection between officer and monarch [...] fortified the identification of each officer with the highest levels of the state. It offered a further incentive to the officer corps to act as the guardian of the multinational monarchy.²⁶

Ludwig Allé reflected this corporate sense of self. Bernhard Mertelseder, the first historian to work with Allé's war memoir, concludes that Allé "conceived of the officer corps as a factor in the stability and order of the state and presented himself as loyal to his supreme commander, the Kaiser."²⁷ Loyalty to the Kaiser and monarchy filled the emotional space that other Central Europeans reserved for loyalty to the nation.

Long-term service in such an insular institution and the personal fealty officers felt toward the Kaiser created a particular ethos and set of practices. Officers subscribed to a corporate ideology emphasizing honor, both his own and that of the Army. Defense of honor by arms was common and in certain situations, required by service regulations.²⁸ Dueling, though officially outlawed by the military and civil judicial codes, continued unabated during

²⁵ Ibid., p 91.

²⁶ Ibid., p 4.

²⁷ Mertelseder and Wisthaler, "Soldat und Offizier," p 64.

²⁸ Deák, *Beyond Nationalism*, pp 126-30. The practice's German name *Ehrennotwehr*, is translated by Deák as "the urgent necessity to defend one's honor" and came under increasing scrutiny by liberal and anti-military critics during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

the last decades of the Army's existence. Duels between Army officers and nationalist university students, especially German nationalists, were the most common.²⁹ Furthermore, because it affected the honor of the individual officer, and thus, the honor of the Army as a whole, marriage was highly regulated, both in terms of whom officers could marry, and when.³⁰ In sum, "as anational and apolitical representatives of [the] dynasty, [officers] had a strong interest in preserving values different from those of the rest of the population. This alone protected them from the nearly irresistible influence of nationalist and social-political agitation."³¹

When war broke out in July 1914, the idea of fighting did not particularly upset Allé. Quite the contrary, argues Mertelseder, who contends that Allé "surely envisioned the outbreak of war as a short-term and positive professional high point as an officer."³² The prospect of fighting for the Kaiser did, however, distress our second diarist, the young, Czech-speaking officer cadet Jindřich Bejl.

Jindřich Bejl was born on 14 October 1890 in the northeast Bohemian town of Police nad Metují.³³ His home region abutted the German Reich, and German-speakers inhabited many of the neighboring towns and hamlets. From age fourteen to seventeen, Bejl attended a state school of forestry in Prague before returning home to work as a forester. In 1911, Bejl was called up for military service as a conscript.³⁴ Having completed the equivalent of a

²⁹ Ibid., p 134.

³⁰ Ibid., pp 139-42.

³¹ Ibid., p 138.

³² Mertelseder and Wisthaler, "Soldat und Offizier," p 70.

³³ Police nad Metují is located in the hilly northeast corner of Bohemia, near today's Polish border. In 1914, Police nad Metují found itself located on the Austrian-Reich German border, as Germany at the time contained large parts of northwestern and southwestern Poland. The area contained large numbers of German speakers.

³⁴ Deák, *Beyond Nationalism*, p 56. Austria-Hungary's age of conscription was set at twenty by the military laws of 1868.

high-school education, Bejl qualified for the Austrian Army's *Einjährig-Freiwilliger* [One-year Volunteer] program.

The idea behind the *Einjährig-Freiwilliger* (henceforth EF) program was simple. In an attempt to attract educated, middle-class sons into the officer corps, the Army offered reduced service lengths and other privileges to conscripted soldiers who met minimum educational and financial criteria.³⁵ Normally, Austrian conscripts served for three years of active duty before passing into the reserve and resuming their civilian lives.³⁶ The EF program reduced this service obligation to *one year* of service (hence the name) and the opportunity, for EFs who could afford it, to live outside the barracks in privately-leased accommodations. Furthermore, at the end of their year of service, EFs took an exam, which, if they passed, would allow them to be commissioned as officers in the reserve. Reserve officers maintained their civilian jobs and only had to participate in a few weeks of refresher training every few years.³⁷

Jindřich Bejl took advantage of the EF program for practical reasons. In the introduction to his war diary, Bejl explained that "I didn't believe in the possibility of war and considered becoming an officer in the reserve only for the benefit of my civilian life; it had the advantage of one year of military service instead of three, and easier duties as well."³⁸ Bejl completed his year of service, passed the reserve officer's exam and review

³⁵ Deák, *Beyond Nationalism*, pp 87-88. Along with universal conscription and the territorial organization and recruitment of the Monarchy's regiments and corps, the liberal Military Laws of 1868 passed by both the Austrian and Hungarian parliaments also created the EF program.

³⁶ From 1868 to 1911, by law conscripts served three years in the armed forces. The military laws of 1912, however, reduced the general requirement from three to two years. See: Gunther E. Rothenberg, *The Army of Francis Joseph* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1976), p 165.

³⁷ For brief treatments of the reserve officer corps and the EF training pipeline, see: Deák, *Beyond Nationalism*, pp 59, 87-88; Rothenberg, *The Army of Francis Joseph*, pp 83, 108. Deák and Rothenberg provide only the briefest outlines of the reserve officer corps, its training, and the political context of the 1868 Military Law creating the corps. For more targeted works on the reserve officer corps, see: Zehetbauer, *Die "Einjährigen."*

³⁸ Bejl, *Deník*, p 3. Bejl's diary manuscript features several sections likely written after the war. The introduction to the diary, with its past verb tense and retrospective tone, was likely among these post-facto contributions.

board, and entered the reserve as a cadet officer aspirant. This was essentially an intermediate position for EF graduates as they awaited promotion to second lieutenant, usually after an older lieutenant gained promotion or retired. After his year of active service, by January of 1913, Bejl returned to his quiet life as a forester, receiving a small paycheck as a reserve cadet in the Kaiser's army.

If the active-duty officer corps represented the ideology and outlook of the dynasty and Army leadership, the EF program and reserve officer corps represented those of more liberal elements of society and government. According to Deák, the liberal Austrian and Hungarian governments that created the EF program clung to a "hope of altering the composition and ideology of the career officer corps through the influx of educated civilians [...]"³⁹ Naturally, tensions quickly developed between career officers like Allé and reservists like Bejl. Career officers dedicated themselves heart and soul to the Army. They spent entire childhoods preparing for entry to an officer's school. They thirstily imbibed the Army's ethos of supreme devotion to the Kaiser and dynasty. They depended on the Army for their social and financial standing. Their fathers often served as officers, as did their sons. Reservists, by comparison, spent only a year with the Army. They generally cared more about their civilian careers, hoping to fulfil their military obligation as soon as possible.⁴⁰ Furthermore, while both reservists and careerists were, by the early twentieth century, of middle-class backgrounds, career officers tended to be the sons of lower-middle-class civil servants and Army officers, and thus resented their often upper-middle-class reservist counterparts.⁴¹

³⁹ Deák, *Beyond Nationalism*, p 88.

⁴⁰ Zehetbauer, *Die Einjährigen*, pp 47-8. According to Zehetbauer, "the relationship [of EFs] to the career officers [...] was not always free of tension; here two contrary worlds collided: the martial self-understanding of the career officer, which was demanding of, and used to, discipline and the pursuit of individuality of the educated bourgeoisie, which was used to a much more casual environment and, in most cases, desirous of returning [to civilian life] as soon as possible."

⁴¹ John Schindler, *Fall of the Double Eagle: The Battle for Galicia and the Demise of Austria-Hungary* (Lincoln, NE: Potomac Books, 2015), p 54. Schindler cites the experience of esteemed Austrian violinist Fritz Kreisler's experience as a reserve officer in the Austro-Hungarian Army. Kreisler claimed that among his fellow reserve officers were "a famous sculptor, a well-known philologist, two

Finally, while loyalty to the emperor gave career officers a high sense of purpose and self, other political ideologies – often national – motivated many of the bourgeois reserve officers who filled the Army's rolls before 1914.⁴²

The twenty-three-year-old Bejl offers a perfect example. As an outright Czech nationalist he despised the war as a Habsburg imperialist adventure. He wrote that "it hadn't crossed my mind that the Czech people would someday be compelled to be slaughtered for interests that were foreign to their hearts [...]"⁴³ His Czech nationalism also soured him to the many German-speaking Bohemians who inhabited his corner of the Crownland. In politics and society, Czechs and Germans competed for state resources; Czechs, in particular, fought to win wider official recognition of Czech as a language of government and administration. After living his young-adult life in the contested national spaces of Prague and his ethnically-mixed home region, Bejl had no problem describing his fellow German comrades-in-arms as "vermin."

One of Bejl's German "vermin" in 1914 was Egon Erwin Kisch, a German-speaking journalist. Born into a wealthy, middle-class, German-speaking, Jewish family in Prague's Old Town in 1885, Kisch enjoyed minor celebrity status by 1914.⁴⁴ His lucid reporting on the Prague underworld earned him recognition in German-speaking Central Europe and landed him a position as a correspondent with the *Berliner Tageblatt*. Compared to Bejl, who

university professors (one of mathematics, the other of natural science), a prince, and a civil engineer at the head of one of the largest Austrian steel corporations." For Kreisler's wartime recollections, see: Fritz Kreisler, *Four Weeks in the Trenches* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1917).

⁴² Rothenberg, *Army of Francis Joseph*, p 121.

⁴³ Bejl, *Deník*, p 3.

⁴⁴ Several Kisch biographies exist, most of them in Czech or German. See: Dieter Schlenstedt, *Egon Erwin Kisch: Leben und Werk* (Berlin: Volk und Wissen Verlag, 1968); Danica Kozlová and Jiří Tomáš, *Egon Erwin Kisch* (Prague: Horizont, 1984); Radko Pytlík, *Pražská dobrodružství E. E. Kische* (Prague: Panorama, 1985); Klaus Haupt and Harold Wessel, *Kisch War Hier: Reportagen Ubern Den "Rasenden Reporter"* (Berlin: Verlag der Nation, 1985). The closest work approaching an English-language biography is Harold Segel's *Bio-Anthology*, which includes a brief biographical essay before providing a selection of representative writings in translation from Kisch's long career as a novelist and journalist. See: Segel, *Bio-Anthology*.

moved from a rocky northern province to attend technical school in Prague, Kisch had been born into the city's urban, wealthy, and educated German-speaking milieu. He attended German-language high school in Prague before enrolling as a philosophy student at Prague's Charles University. Within a semester, he apparently grew bored of the student's life and in 1904, volunteered for the Austro-Hungarian Army at age nineteen.⁴⁵

A high-school graduate like Bejl, Kisch also took advantage of the EF program. One of Kisch's biographers, Harold Segel, suspected that "if not exactly a natural rebel, Kisch nevertheless was uncomfortable with authority and developed a reputation for defying it while a schoolboy. Wearing an army uniform did not make much of a difference [...]"⁴⁶ Kisch spent 147 out of 365 days of service in the brig and, unlike Bejl, did not pass his officer candidate's exam.⁴⁷ Interestingly, none other than Ludwig Allé instructed the young Kisch while he went through EF school. Allé remembered how Kisch "had not been judged at the time as possessing the qualities of an officer for various convincing reasons" and besides, "had himself spurned the promotion to officer [...]"⁴⁸ Kisch thus entered the reserve as a corporal.

Emerging from very different backgrounds, Bejl, Kisch, and Allé all answered the Kaiser's call in 1914 to serve with the 11th Regiment. We shall now proceed to look at the 11th as a social and military body.

⁴⁵ Segel, *Bio-Anthology*, p 11.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Allé, *Kriegstagebuch*, p 48.

CHAPTER 2: MOBILIZATION

On 25 July, Austria-Hungary declared war on the Kingdom of Serbia. Two days later, Kaiser Franz Josef I announced his army's mobilization for war. This mobilization order serves as the starting point for the story of the 11th Imperial and Royal Infantry Regiment as a combat outfit. As a baseline, we shall here examine the social cohesion of the regiment prior to its entry into combat.

Whether one was an active-duty or reserve soldier greatly influenced one's experiences during mobilization. At wartime strength, Austro-Hungarian line infantry regiments comprised 4,600 men and officers, just over 4,000 of whom were riflemen.⁴⁹ Only a fraction of these men and officers were on active duty with their regiments when war broke out. The rest, like Bejl and Kisch and thousands of others from all over the empire, streamed to their regimental depots where they were issued uniforms, packs, and rifles. For Bejl and Kisch, this meant making their way to the town of Písek, where the 11th Regiment assembled, outfitted, and departed for the front.⁵⁰

For the majority of the 11th, including Bejl and Kisch, mobilization represented an "abrupt wrenching" from civilian into military life.⁵¹ For reservists, this meant leaving behind families, jobs, and homes and reacquainting themselves with the military day-to-day. While

⁴⁹ James S. Lucas, *Austro-Hungarian Infantry 1914-1918* (London: Almark Publications, 1973), p 24.

⁵⁰ The 11th's recruitment district, located in southwestern Bohemia, centered on the town of Písek. While the 11th had been headquartered there since the reign of Maria Theresia, since the late nineteenth century, the unit also maintained a two of its battalions in Prague. Hence Captain Ludwig Allé's being stationed there at the outbreak of war in 1914.

⁵¹ Kučera, "Entbehrung," p 125. Kučera identifies this shock of being pulled from civilian life as more traumatic than the experience of ethnic heterogeneity, with which many of the region's soldiery probably dealt with on a near daily basis anyway.

reservists were required to take part in occasional training refreshers or corps-wide maneuvers, financial restrictions often meant that these did not take place.⁵² For many reservists then, mobilization also meant reuniting with comrades they had not seen in years. Kisch described the experience on 31 July 1914:

Innumerable old acquaintances. Indeed, how the most of them had changed since our time together in service! Those who hadn't then dared to leave the barracks without a perfumed moustache and who had even proven the wearing of [rank insignia] to be a form of coquetry, now no longer considered it worthwhile to stitch down a loose button or to fringe an overly long sleeve. They looked shabby; civilian life, which they'd so longed for, had made them even more objectionable [...] They had aged, wore full beards, and had become heads of families, and it especially affected me when an erstwhile company colleague, who had been a colossal scallywag and who had sat with me in month-long confinement, told me that he had become a father of five children.⁵³

Besides a sideways admission of his days in the brig during EF school, Kisch's passage here reveals just how long it had been since he had seen some of his regimental comrades.

2.1: National Differences

Kisch, Bejl, and Allé noticed and commented on the national differences that divided the regiment during mobilization. The national heterogeneity of many of Austria's regiments and corps reflected a conscious decision made by Army leadership. Some within the Army felt that nationally-homogeneous units would have mitigated communications difficulties introduced by multilingualism. The critics of the idea, and those who ultimately won out, suggested that the creation of "nationally pure" regiments and corps would result in field units more sensitive to specifically national goals than to the general needs of the Army.⁵⁴

Thus, Austro-Hungarian Army units at the corps and regimental level drew conscripts from, and were stationed within, defined geographical regions. As a result, regiments took

⁵² Schindler, *Double Eagle*, p 36.

⁵³ Kisch, *Soldat*, p 11.

⁵⁴ For the arguments made within the Army for and against the creation of nationally-homogeneous units, see: Schmitz, *Kriegserfahrungen*, pp 26, 34-6.

on some of the demographic characteristics of their regions' populations.⁵⁵ Since both German and Czech speakers inhabited southwestern Bohemia, the 11th became a bilingual regiment. A majority of the Czech lands' soldiers fought in such bilingual units. Of the thirty-one infantry regiments recruited out of the Czech lands, twenty-three contained both Czechs and Germans.⁵⁶ Though German served as the official language of command in the Army and all recruits learned a set of eighty basic commands in German regardless of national origin, the Army also recognized so-called *Regimentssprachen* [regimental languages]. If 20% or more of a regiment's men spoke a language, that language received official recognition as a regimental language and officers were more or less required to demonstrate competence in it.⁵⁷ According to Army statistics compiled just before the outbreak of war, 80% of the 11th spoke Czech; the remaining 20% spoke German.⁵⁸

Forced by Austria's liberal constitution to make concessions regarding the rank-and-file's language rights, the Army kept statistics on common soldiers' mother tongues in order to calculate which languages met the 20% minimum for official recognition. But they refused to keep statistics on *officers'* mother tongues. The Army recorded only the languages in which officers demonstrated proficiency, grading that proficiency on a scale from "native fluency," to "adequate to the needs of service," and finally to "poor/inadequate."⁵⁹ Using the detailed officers' rolls that each regiment kept, we can

⁵⁵ Schindler, *Double Eagle*, p 41.

⁵⁶ Maximilian von Ehn, *Ergänzungswerk zum Werke Österreich-Ungarns letzter Krieg. 9. Die österreichisch-ungarische Landmacht nach Aufbau, Gliederung, Friedensgarnisonen, Einteilung und nationaler Zusammensetzung im Sommer 1914* (Vienna: Verlag der militärwissenschaftlichen Mitteilungen, 1934), esp. "Tabelle 1." Here, I have included both Common Army and *Landwehr* infantry regiments in my calculations.

⁵⁷ Deák, *Beyond Nationalism*, p 99. Of the Army's 142 "major military formations" in 1914, 142 listed one official regimental language, while 162 listed two languages, 24 units three languages, and several listed four. For a detailed investigation of the Austrian regimental language system, see Scheer, "Habsburg Languages at War."

⁵⁸ von Ehn, *Ergänzungswerk*, p 19.

establish some idea of the language skills of the 11th's officer corps. From the list drawn up on 1 July 1914, we can see that of the 237 officers and cadets serving with the 11th, 223 (93.7%) spoke Czech that was either of "native fluency" or "adequate to the needs of service." Of those, 176 (78.9%) spoke Czech fluently, forty-seven (21.1%) adequately. Only fifteen of the regiment's officers (6.7%) spoke no Czech at all.⁶⁰ Familiarity with the regimental language was required for promotion, and of those officers who spoke no Czech at all, none served at a rank higher than first lieutenant. German served as the language of command and the Army assumed knowledge of German on the part of all officers; thus, I cannot provide equivalent statistics on the degree of familiarity with German, as is possible with Czech.

80% of the 11th's enlisted personnel reported Czech for their language of daily use, compared with 78.9% of officers listed as demonstrating "native fluency" in the language. Captain Ludwig Allé's entry in the officers' roll grades his Czech capability as "adequate to the needs of service."⁶¹ His own testimony supports this mark; he expressed regret that he "had not mastered the Czech language" as well as he would have liked.⁶² Bejl, a native Czech-speaker, and Kisch, a native German-speaker, both demonstrated familiarity with the other language, though Bejl's German surpassed Kisch's Czech.⁶³

Thus, in the bilingual 11th Regiment, language provided a shorthand for identifying

⁵⁹ The corresponding original German translations are as follows: *vollkommenes Sprachkenntnis, zum Dienstgebrauch genügend*, and *notdürftiges*. Translations given in Deák, *Beyond Nationalism*, p 99.

⁶⁰ "Rang- und Einteilungsliste der Stabs- u. Oberoffiziere, dann Fähnriche und Kadetten des Soldatenstandes. mit 1. Juli 1914," (Officers' roll, Located in: Folio 11. Infanterieregiment, Karton 3 [Infanterieregiment 9.-12.], Rang- und Einteilungsliste [1914-1918], Personalunterlagen, Kriegsarchiv, Staatsarchiv, Vienna). Henceforth, I shall refer to this document as "Einteilungsliste 1 July 1914."

⁶¹ Ibid., p 2.

⁶² Allé, *Kriegstagebuch*, p 131.

⁶³ For information regarding Kisch's Czech-language skills, see: Segel, *Bio-Anthology*, p 9. According to Segel, Kisch never wrote in Czech and was reportedly "less than perfectly fluent in the language, having used it so rarely in his life."

Czechs and Germans within the ranks. After assembling its battalions in Písek, the 11th departed for Bosnia by train. As the troop train pulled out of the station on 2 August 1914, Bejl noted that the Czech soldiers in their cars sang “our sad songs” while the Germans sang a more raucous “Wann i’ komm, wann i’ komm, wann i’ wieder wieder komm...” [“When I return, when I return, when I return, return, return”]⁶⁴ Not only did Czechs and Germans apparently sequester themselves in their cars according to tongue, but their general modes of expression displayed different political conceptions of the war and military service.

For soldiers who entered the war with a preexisting nationalist perspective, the war offered yet more evidence for their preconceived ideas about the relationship between the Habsburg state and its constituent nations. Bejl, as a Czech nationalist, interpreted Austria’s war against Serbia as an immoral, imperial adventure. Bejl indeed sympathized more closely with the Serbian enemy than with his own state and army. On 27 July, he wrote: “Our Czech nation has been thrown in, hamstrung, with clenched fists. War with our little brother Serbia, whom we admired in its war with Turkey [...] and to whom we had wished victory. [The war] is against our conviction, and now we have to go against them?”⁶⁵ For Bejl, Slavic Serbia seemed more a natural ally than enemy to the Czech people.

Bejl also commented on the nature of the Czech-German relationship. With his anti-Habsburg and pro-Serbian sympathies, Bejl chafed at the lust for war he saw displayed by German reservists as they prepared for the campaign against Serbia. At the beginning of

⁶⁴ Bejl, *Deník*, p 4. The song Bejl referred to here is likely “Muss i denn, muss i den zum Städtele naus,” a Swabian folksong first published by composer and academic Friedrich Silcher in 1827. During the nineteenth century, “Muss i denn” spread to other German-speaking parts of Europe after attaining great popularity in southern Germany. The song, which depicts the departure of a draftee (or draftees) for the front, was hugely popular during the First World War. The origins of the popular marching song are unknown, though one scholar has identified it as an “old Württemberg melody.” See: Tobias Widmaier, “Muss i denn, muss i den zum Städtele naus,” *Historisch-kritisches Liederlexikon*, 2010 (Accessed April 2018), http://www.liederlexikon.de/lieder/muss_i_denn_zum_staedele_hinaus.

⁶⁵ Bejl, *Deník*, p 3.

the war, Bejl clearly identified all Germans as stooges of a Habsburg state that ignored Czech interests. Travelling across the empire in early August, Bejl took time to comment in his diary about the plight of other Slavic nations 'imprisoned' in the Monarchy. Passing through Budapest, Bejl jokingly wrote "So there are still Slovaks here!" referencing Magyarization policies which aimed to forcibly assimilate Slovaks by closing their native-language schools and churches.⁶⁶ He drew an explicit connection between the fate of the Slovaks and that of the Czechs: "How vile is their fate – and such a fate the Germans would like to inflict upon us!"⁶⁷

Symbolism and ritual played an important role in the Austro-Hungarian Army and at times provided spaces that divided Czechs from Germans. A telling episode occurred on 1 August, the day before the regiment departed for the front. The regiment held a field mass on the city square in Písek, followed by a public renewal of the soldiers' oaths to Kaiser Franz Joseph I and a solemn speech by regimental commander Colonel Wokoun. Kisch's diary provides the most detailed description:

After a short field mass, Captain Turner read the oath aloud with pathos and surprising force, in German for the German men, who repeated after him; then came the Czech oath. It was poorly organized, since they had not formed a battalion out of the Germans alone which could be sworn in separately. So during each oath, the men of the nation not then [being sworn in] stood at parade rest. Thereafter followed a speech, with hand on the imperial manifest, by the new regimental commander, Colonel Karl Wokoun, which was then translated into Czech by Major Laška.⁶⁸

This important symbolic moment signified the unity of the regiment in its fight for the Kaiser, but inadvertently displayed the national divisions between the regiment's fighting men. Captain Ludwig Allé described the scene similarly:

At 7 in the evening, the entire regiment is on the city square, formed up in battalions, with the people of Písek and the surrounding environs ringed around them. First comes the swearing-

⁶⁶ For an introduction to Magyarization/Hungarianization policies of the nineteenth century, see Judson, *Habsburg Empire*, especially pp 264-268, 309-310, 366-367. "Magyar" refers to an ethnic Hungarian. It, like the word "Ruthenian" (Ukrainian), has largely fallen out of use in popular English-language histories. I prefer "Magyar," as it was used by contemporaries.

⁶⁷ Bejl, *Deník*, p 5.

⁶⁸ Kisch, *Soldat*, p 14. See also: Kučera, "Entbehrung und Nationalismus," p 125.

in, after which the field curate blesses [our] arms. Then the regimental commander, Colonel Wokoun, gives a patriotic speech, which he then has repeated in Czech by a staff officer; then comes the Bürgermeister who gives a speech and wishes the regiment success and glory.⁶⁹

Allé, less concerned with the testy nature of the Army's symbolic rituals, did not remark critically on the bilingual swearing-in as Kisch had done.

2.2: Rank-based Divisions

Rank also created visible dividing lines between the men of the 11th. Immediately upon mobilization, soldiers realized that a stark soldier-officer division existed within the regiment. For many soldiers returning to the ranks after a long period in the civilian world, rejoining the Army reminded them that officers and men lived in separate worlds. The structure and regulations of the Army produced the bifurcated social landscape of the regiment. The Army banned private contacts between officers and their men beyond the strict requirements of service; infractions were punishable under military code.⁷⁰

The perceptions of difference held by men toward their commissioned leaders also rested in large part on the different material standards the groups enjoyed. Rudolf Kučera rightly points out that material provision, including food, lodging, clothing, and access to luxury goods, caused resentment among the relatively worse-off soldiery.⁷¹ Spaces associated with these privileges also set officers and men apart physically. Commissioned officers were entitled to separate messes, both at their peacetime barracks and at the front, and were given wide travel and accommodation privileges when not in combat. Awaiting departure for the front in Písek, Allé recalled how on 29 July, "the companies were quartered in the old city barracks and all [of the town's] schools. The officers entered into private quarters. I stayed at the Hotel Dworaček. We also ate there, at the hotel

⁶⁹ Allé, *Kriegstagebuch*, p 11.

⁷⁰ Deák, *Beyond Nationalism*, p 103.

⁷¹ Kučera, "Entbehrung," p 126.

restaurant.”⁷² While the small town of Písek’s hotels and restaurants did not dazzle, they were nevertheless more desirable than the town’s improvised military barracks.

The officer corps earned greater leeway in material matters due to the responsibility of command and discipline they bore as figures of authority. From the outset, reservists especially chafed at the military discipline they had not been subjected to since their days as recruits. Kisch recalled his battalion’s departure from Písek, when his commander had the streets forcibly cleared of civilians so that the formation could march out. Many of the civilians were reservists’ wives who had traveled to Písek to see them off. “The measure did not seem to me particularly opportune and not urgently necessary,” opined Kisch. “Tears appeared in the eyes of the reservists as they saw their women hunted away.”⁷³ Military necessity could also inspire leniency. During that same episode, Kisch noted that “some [soldiers] had gotten sloshed, which the officers in general ignored.”⁷⁴ The most urgent matter for officers was getting all their soldiers on the troop trains, sober or otherwise.

Officers’ command responsibilities also required greater cognizance of the military situation. For example, Kisch recounted how many of the men figured they were headed east, to fight in Russia. The officers, he suggested, knew otherwise: “The officers and railway officials, however, believe – on account of other evidence – that we are heading against Serbia.”⁷⁵ Officers’ access to such tidbits of information contrasted sharply with the confusion and uncertainty that characterized the typical soldier’s war experience.

Finally, officers and men conceived of their military service in very different ways. For conscripts, most saw service as a legal requirement, as a hurdle to be passed on the way to adulthood and financial independence. For officers, and particularly career-minded

⁷² Allé, *Kriegstagebuch*, p 11.

⁷³ Kisch, *Soldat*, p 16.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p 15.

ones, military service was a lifelong undertaking, and one that demanded a particular warrior's ethos. Captain Allé offered one illustrative story. On 6 August, during a particularly rigorous march toward the front under a Bosnian summer sun, Captain Michal, commander of a machine-gun detachment, fell unconscious from a heatstroke and was sent to the rear to convalesce. At the thought of missing out on the invasion – which, according to most, would be a quick affair – Michal crept off to a cabin in the woods and shot himself.⁷⁶

2.3: The Reserve Officer-Professional Officer Divide

While soldiers observed the material and ideological gulf separating them from their officers, *within* the officer corps, the old tensions between reserve and active officers made themselves apparent. Austrian infantry regiments operated on a cadre system, with a small core of active-duty officers serving year-round. Upon mobilization, reserve officers and officer cadets joined their active-duty counterparts to expand the regiment's complement of officers to around 250. Reserve officers, mainly second lieutenants and cadets, were responsible for many command positions at the lowest levels. Promotion for reserve officers generally did not proceed past the rank of second lieutenant. In this respect, the 11th was not exceptional.

Analysis of the regiment's officers' roll for July 1914 shows the balance of reserve and active-duty elements. Of the 237 officers and cadets listed on the roll, ninety-four were active duty (*Berufsstand*) and 143 were reservists (*Reservestand*). The 11th's upper command echelons lay exclusively in the hands of career officers. The regiment's one colonel, five lieutenant colonels, and three majors all came from the active-duty officer corps along with thirty-one captains (of thirty-three total) and twenty-nine first lieutenants (out of thirty). The lower levels of command generally drew on the reservists. Of the

⁷⁶ Allé, *Kriegstagebuch*, 43. Apparently, Michal survived his suicide attempt, and Allé visited himself in the hospital several days later.

regiment's ninety-six second lieutenants, twenty-four were actives, seventy-two reservists. Finally, thirteen of fourteen ensigns and all of the regiment's cadets came from the reserve.⁷⁷

A look at Jindřich Bejl's 7th Company shows how command of companies, comprising about 250 men during wartime, was shared between active-duty and reserve officers and between Czechs and Germans. Assigned to lead 7th Company's 3rd Platoon, Bejl commanded thirty-eight reserve infantrymen.⁷⁸ He proceeded to identify the other officers in the company: "The commander of the company is Captain Wenzel, commander of 1st Platoon active First Lieutenant Štika (a Czech), of 2nd Platoon Cadet Mottl (a Jew from Vrchlabí), and of 4th Platoon active Ensign Hocke (a German)."⁷⁹ Bejl took care to identify the national origins of his fellow platoon commanders – a Czech, a German, and a Jew – while interestingly declining to provide an ethnic descriptor for his company commander, the active-duty Captain Wenzel.

The responsibility of command acted as the single most important unifying factor between reserve and active-duty officers. Reserve officers also shared the active officer's accoutrements. In addition to rank insignia, Bejl received officers' sidearms. The Army issued him an M1912 Steyr-Mannlicher semiautomatic pistol. Upon receiving it, he noted that it was "very heavy" in his hands.⁸⁰ Even more unwieldy than the pistol was his new saber. "But what's with this saber, I don't know," he mused. "I don't know what I'm going to be slashing with it; and these [...] half-meter-long tassels on it! And garishly golden, so that it can be seen well even from a distance!"⁸¹ Bejl predicted all too accurately that the

⁷⁷ "Einteilungsliste 1 July 1914," pp 1-8.

⁷⁸ Bejl, *Deník*, p 3.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Bejl, *Deník*, p 4.

⁸¹ Ibid.

flashy Austrian officer's uniform would soon provide the perfect target for Serbian snipers.⁸²

Though they wore the trappings of the active officer, reserve officers and cadets faced informal social barriers erected and maintained by their active-duty peers. Military obligations only rarely interrupted reserve officers' civilian careers and social lives. By contrast, active-duty officers lived and socialized together year-round, their wives and children socializing with other officers' families. Within their relatively isolated social spheres, active officers' closest friends were their fellow active-duty officers.

As a result, social spaces technically open to reserve officers and cadets served to inculcate a social and professional divide between them and their active-duty colleagues. Heading south from Písek to České Budějovice on 2 August, Bejl recounted how he "[rode] together with Cadet Nettl in a passenger car in a compartment for cadets."⁸³ "In a neighboring compartment," he continued, "the officers enjoyed themselves in a lively fashion, drinking and playing cards."⁸⁴

The officer's mess was an even more important space, serving as the center of social life for the Habsburg officer. Each battalion established its own officers' mess hall, which fulfilled both material and social functions. Referring to the officer's mess, Captain Allé wrote that "the coffee was of course only of secondary importance. The main thing was the much sought-after conversation about experiences and perceptions and the reading of newspapers, which could be gotten according to taste."⁸⁵ Three days after Allé wrote the above lines, Bejl entered one such officers' mess and felt let down: "The active-duty officers shun us, as if we were something third-rate. Why? I can't see any reason for it."⁸⁶

The 11th Regiment thus began its war as a group tied together by its military

⁸² Schindler, *Double Eagle*, pp 130-1.

⁸³ Bejl, *Deník*, p 4.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p 5.

⁸⁵ Allé, *Kriegstagebuch*, p 13.

⁸⁶ Bejl, *Deník*, p 7.

function, but riven by a number of divisions. Bejl, Kisch, and Allé all commented on both national and military divisions between the regiment's personnel. But here we must distinguish between the ways soldiers wrote about these dividing lines. The three diarists all noted the bi-national, bi-lingual character of the 11th Regiment. But they did so in neutral terms, as if stating something they viewed as a matter of course. Even Bejl's anti-German writing focused mainly on an abstract notion of Czech-German rivalry, rather than any real conflict among the regiment's soldiers.

The diarists commented more negatively on the state of officer-soldier and reserve-active relations. These relationships, as opposed to the national one, were loaded with animosity and resentment. Bejl grumbled at the imbalance in provisioning and privilege enjoyed by the officers and wondered at the sometimes strange behavior of the officer corps. Meanwhile, Bejl also commented on the way he, a reserve cadet, felt excluded by the tight-knit group of active-duty officers that commanded the regiment.

As the regiment entered combat in mid-August of 1914, these national and military differences evolved in separate ways. The national dividing line between the regiment's Czechs and Germans retained its largely neutral character, while the divides between officers and men took on increasingly negative overtones.

CHAPTER 3: THE 11TH'S COMBAT RECORD, AUGUST 1914 TO APRIL 1915

During 1914 and early 1915, the 11th Regiment undertook three failed invasions of Serbia, suffered three catastrophic defeats, and dissolved into chaos during three separate retreats. To analyze the experiences of Jindřich Bejl, Egon Kisch, and Ludwig Allé, one must appreciate the military situations facing these men at various points in the war. It is to this task we now turn.

On 12 August 1914, Austro-Hungarian troops crossed the Sava and Drina Rivers and invaded Serbia. Two armies (normally comprising between four and six divisions each) formed the main brunt of the Austrian invasion: Fifth Army in the north, Sixth Army in the south. The 11th, a sub-unit of Fifth Army and VIII Corps, took part in an eastward drive into northwestern Serbia, aimed at capturing the city of Valjevo (see Appendix V, map 1).⁸⁷

The 11th's crossing of the Drina was fairly uneventful, as the Serbian Army ceded the riverbank and stood ready to counterattack farther inland. Nevertheless, Serbian artillery and small-arms fire did cause a few casualties as the men trudged across the river on an improvised bridge constructed by Allé and his engineers. Moving steadily inland, by 14 August, the 11th Regiment entered the Cer plateau, the dominant topographical feature of northwestern Serbia. A rocky outcropping jutting out of the vast cornfields of Serbia's breadbasket region, the Cer presented a substantial barrier to the Austrian advance.⁸⁸ In the days between 14 and 17 August, the 11th took part in numerous attacks on the Cer's ridgelines and hilltops. They were usually opposed by experienced Serbian veterans of the Balkan Wars. The Serbian Army almost always had good artillery support and well-placed

⁸⁷ Schindler, *Double Eagle*, pp 118-9.

⁸⁸ Ibid., pp 133-4.

machine guns; the Austrians usually lacked both.

Attacks on these positions generally involved thin skirmishing lines of Austrian riflemen advancing at a jog or run, making “hopping” advances of a hundred meters or so toward the enemy. Soldiers punctuated these rushes every couple hundred meters by hitting the ground and firing on the Serbian positions in hopes of weakening the defense. Invariably, the goal of these attacks was to close with the enemy at bayonet’s point, oust the position’s defenders, and inflict deadly casualties with rifle and machine-gun fire as the enemy fled. In the first days of the invasion, the Austrian attacks carried out in this manner *succeeded*, though they resulted in extremely high casualties for the attackers.⁸⁹

By 16 August, the 11th had pushed almost all the way through the river valley that coursed down the middle of the Cer mountain plateau. That night, however, a well-executed Serbian counterattack caught the neighboring 28th *Landwehr* Regiment by surprise and put the largely Czech regiment to flight.⁹⁰ As Serbian infantry poured into the resulting gap, they threatened to flank and encircle Austrian units isolated in the rocky hills to either side. Though the attack had been proceeding well in other sectors, this setback forced Field Marshal Oskar Potiorek – commander of all Austrian units in the Balkans – to order a general retreat on 17 August. Columns of exhausted, poorly-fed Austro-Hungarian soldiers streamed back to the Drina, accompanied by a breakdown in military discipline and chain of command. The 11th for its part fought a number of bloody rearguard actions against

⁸⁹ For more on the Austrian infantry assault methods in 1914, see: Kevin Hoeper, “A Book, a Battalion and a Battle: The Infantry Assault and the Culture of Accepted Casualty in the *k.u.k. Armee*,” (undergraduate honors thesis, Indiana University-Bloomington, 2015).

⁹⁰ *Landwehr* denotes the separate field army units recruited from the Austrian half of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. In 1867, the Austrian Empire officially reorganized constitutionally into the dual state Austria-Hungary. Hungarian politicians, in exchange for their acquiescence to the deal, demanded that Hungary be allowed its own, independent National Guard. The Compromise of 1867 indeed allowed Hungary its own National Guard (*Honvéd* in Hungarian) and, for the sake of parity, established a National Guard (*Landwehr*, in German) in Austria as well. In times of war, the National Guards served in equal combat capacities as the units of the Austro-Hungarian Army, otherwise known as the *k.u.k. Armee*, Joint Army, or Common Army. In contrast with the Common Army, the National Guards drew its recruits *only* from their respective halves of the Monarchy, i.e. either Austria or Hungary.

oncoming Serbian attackers, finally crossing the Drina back into Austria on 20 August.⁹¹

The 11th sustained a huge number of casualties⁹² during this first, failed invasion of Serbia. Many had fallen during the costly frontal assaults on Serbian positions. The 11th had originally consisted of roughly 4,350 men and 237 officers for a total of around 4,600. Official Army statistics show that the 11th lost 978 men and officers (roughly 21.3%) within the first eight days of the war, most losses coming from the 4,000 or so riflemen in the regiment's field companies (see Appendix IV, Figure 1).⁹³ Jindřich Bejl's 7th Company, for example, which at full strength consisted of 250 men and officers, suffered eighty-four casualties (33.6%) during the invasion. Egon Kisch's 15th Company of similar size suffered forty-nine casualties (19.6%) during the same period.⁹⁴

Casualties among officers were also high. Of the regiment's 237 officers, cadets, and ensigns, forty-seven (19.8%) became casualties during the first invasion of Serbia.⁹⁵ The

⁹¹ Schindler, *Double Eagle*, pp 135-40.

⁹² "Casualties" refers to men incapacitated due to death, wounding, or capture. Also included were soldiers who had "gone missing." Missing soldiers often turned out to have been killed or captured.

⁹³ *Dějiny bývalého c. a k. pěšího pluku čis. 11. za dobu světové války 1914-1918* (Unpublished manuscript, prepared by Zdeněk Novák, Located in: Karton č. 3 [chronika a deníky], Sbíрка c. a k. pěšího pluku č. 11 [Infanterieregiment Nr. 11], Rakouské fondy do roku 1918, 1. oddělení VHA [fondy a sbírky do roku 1945], Vojenský historický archiv, Vojenský ústřední archiv, Prague), p 57A. Document henceforth referred to as *Dějiny*. Please note that every other page in the manuscript bears a page number. Each set of left and right leaves are labelled together as one number. Thus, left-hand leaves are labelled A, right-hand leaves B.

⁹⁴ Various authors, "Daily casualty reports, August to December 1914" (Unpublished manuscripts, Located in: Folio 11. Infanterieregiment, Karton 2 [Infanterieregimente 7.-13. 1914], Verlustliste der Truppenkörper [1914-1918], Kriegsverluste [1914-1918], Kriegsarchiv, Staatsarchiv, Vienna). During this period, losses were reported by the regiment each day, as the combat situation permitted. Soldiers were listed by name, date of birth, place of birth, and subunit. In order to establish the company-level losses, I paged through each of the regimental casualty reports for the appropriate days, tallying the number of casualties reported for 7th and 15th companies, respectively. In some cases, such as during periods of sustained and heavy combat or low levels of combat activity, the regiment did not certify casualty reports by day, but grouped them together for stretches of up to several weeks.

⁹⁵ *Dějiny*, p 57B. Calculating the number of casualties among officers presents somewhat of a problem. In the regimental history's tabulation of casualties, it is unclear whether cadets and ensigns counted toward the casualty numbers for officers or soldiers. However, since daily casualty lists found in the regiment's archival files include the names of ensigns and cadets on separate reports drawn up for commissioned officers, I have concluded that the category "officers" included both commissioned officers as well as non-commissioned cadets and ensigns.

commanders of 1st and 2nd Battalion died in the first days of battle. Both Bejl and Kisch lost their company commanders to wounds. Five days into the war, reported Bejl, all three of his company's active-duty officers were out of commission. As a result, throughout the regiment junior officers stepped in to fill holes left by senior officers who had been killed or wounded. Captains took command of battalions, lieutenants took command of companies, and NCOs took command of platoons. Some units were dissolved and their survivors used to bring less-affected companies to strength.

The combat-weary 11th retreated to its former positions in Habsburg Bosnia to refit, resupply, and receive replacements. For the next two weeks, the 11th rested, awaiting further orders. The first order of business was to reorganize the regiment's muddled command and unit structure. Heavy losses, particularly among officers, meant that junior officers now occupied commands above their pay grade. Captain Allé replaced an injured major at the head of 4th Battalion, taking over a command that at full strength consisted of roughly one thousand troops. Three first lieutenants and one second lieutenant commanded his battalion's four companies, commands generally held by captains.⁹⁶ The situation lasted only a few days, and on 27 August, per a new officers' list issued by 18th Brigade, Allé handed over command of the battalion to a Lieutenant Colonel Steinsberg. Allé moved down to command 15th Company, which happened to be Kisch's. Thus, within a few days of war, Allé had not only briefly commanded a battalion, but had also been transferred from his role as an engineer to command of an infantry outfit.

At the end of the first week of September, Field Marshal Potiorek again called on the 11th to cross into enemy territory. Whereas the Serbs had ceded the riverbank to the Austrians during the first invasion attempt, they now dug positions almost immediately at the water's edge. On 8 September, the Austrian Fifth Army crossed into Serbia at the confluence of the Sava and Drina rivers. The 11th crossed the Drina, employing small

⁹⁶ Allé, *Kriegstagebuch*, p 21.

pontoons that carried no more than twenty men at a time. Allé by this point had reported himself sick with dysentery and returned to Prague for convalescence. He did not take part in the river crossing. Bejl's 7th Company did not cross either, as their battalion was tasked with securing the Austrian side of the river in case of retreat. Kisch's 15th Company *did* cross, however, and he bore witness to the terrible night of 8 to 9 September.

8 September saw three of the regiment's four battalions cross the Drina River. Precise Serbian artillery fire poured in on the river and succeeded in destroying a number of the pontoons before they unloaded their men on the opposite bank. The scouts rowing Kisch's pontoon hesitated and only resumed rowing after his first lieutenant brandished a pistol in their faces.⁹⁷ Those who made it to the Serbian side of the river found themselves in a dire situation. Kisch and his comrades hurtled off the boats and onto the sandy bank before pressing forward to reinforce their embattled 91st and 102nd sister regiments pinned down just off the river's edge. Wounded men streamed from the woods, some helped by comrades, prompting Kisch to wonder at "that species of good Samaritan that emerges in war and helps the wounded to the dressing station so as not to have to advance with the line of battle."⁹⁸

Kisch and his comrades established a new defensive line at the edge of a forest, separated from the opposing Serbian positions by a dense cornfield. Defending this sector was hugely important, noted Kisch; if they broke or were overrun, the three Austrian regiments cooped up at the river's edge would be "wiped out in the woods or driven into the water."⁹⁹ There, at the forest's edge, Kisch and the men of the regiment dug in. Kisch, having lost his field spade in the first invasion and failing to secure a new one, scratched a

⁹⁷ Segel, *Bio-Anthology*, p 144.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p 147.

pitiful foxhole with his hands.¹⁰⁰ The situation was tense. Kisch estimated that 10,000 Austrian soldiers were crammed into a space less than a mile square, hemmed in to the left, right, and rear by the Sava and the Drina, and to the fore by a well-entrenched Serbian line.

Unbeknownst to Kisch at the time, while the 11th made its crossing successfully, Serbian defenders had thrown back the neighboring Austrian units to the right and left. The 11th and its parent unit, 9th Division, lay in a terribly exposed position. By 2:00 am, the 11th Regiment began to pull out of their untenable positions. While the Serbs had not pursued the Austrians too doggedly during the retreat of 19 and 20 August, this time they did, pressing the 11th Regiment and the rest of the 9th Division all the way to the water's edge. With only a few small pontoons to carry men across and Serbian artillery and rifle fire causing casualties at the river's edge, the retreat turned into chaos. Some men tried to ford the deep, wide Drina, the swift current carrying many off to drown. Others clung to the overloaded pontoons. Kisch recalled a horrifying moment as he clung to one of the boats, the weight of his pack and rifle threatening to drag him below if he let go. The men in the boat realized they would not be able to row back across with any speed, and began bashing at the hands of the men clinging to the gunwales from the water. Kisch only managed to hang on and survive by maneuvering to the back of the boat and submerging his head under the water.¹⁰¹

Reaching the Austrian side of the river safely, Kisch joined a long line of soaked, wounded, and naked soldiers making their way inland to their jumping-off points from the day before. The horrors Kisch had endured during the retreat back across the river almost broke him: "The whole morning I cry for no reason and abruptly, around midday, I laugh; in short, I have become completely childlike."¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p 148.

¹⁰¹ Kisch, *Soldat*, p 130-1.

¹⁰² Ibid., p 136.

The 11th's losses totaled 355 for the two days of 8 and 9 September (see Appendix IV, Figure 2).¹⁰³ During the river crossing, a Serbian rifle round struck 11th Regiment's commander, Colonel Wokoun, through the breast; Wokoun survived but did not return to the regiment until 1915. Kisch's 15th Company, which had actually crossed the river, sustained twenty-four casualties, or roughly one tenth of a wartime company's armed strength.¹⁰⁴ Even Bejl's 7th Company, which had remained on the Austrian side to evacuate wounded, lost six men to Serbian artillery fire. Bejl's company commander, Captain Anton David, secured a transfer to the home front in the wake of the second failed invasion.

Again, the 11th earned itself a brief period of rest, refitting, and relocation. Replacements poured in from Prague. During this time, the men of the 11th feared they would be called on to cross the river a third time. Those who had survived the first two invasions did not fancy their chances in a third. Their worst fears came to pass on 16 September. The men of the 11th were for a third time ordered to cross into Serbia, this time in support of an Austrian offensive by Sixth Army that was making serious progress in the south.¹⁰⁵ "It'll be my third crossing of the river," wrote Bejl. "How will it turn out?"¹⁰⁶

Field Marshal Potiorek had ordered another attack by VIII Corps (the 11th's parent unit) at the confluence of the Sava and Drina.¹⁰⁷ The 21st *Landwehr* Division led the attack on 14 September, crossing the border onto a small spit of Serbian territory called the Parašnica. A tight bend in the Sava River created this kilometer-wide peninsula that carved deep into Austrian territory (see Appendix V, map 2). While the 21st *Landwehr* Division made rapid progress on 14 and 15 September, its attacks soon bogged down in the face of

¹⁰³ *Dějiny*, p 57B.

¹⁰⁴ Various authors, "Daily casualty reports, August to December 1914."

¹⁰⁵ Schindler, *A Hopeless Struggle*, p 68.

¹⁰⁶ Bejl, *Deník*, p 18.

¹⁰⁷ Schindler, *A Hopeless Struggle*, p 68.

stiff Serbian resistance.¹⁰⁸ 9th Division – with the 11th – crossed the Sava River on 16 and 17 September to add its weight to the attack. Almost immediately upon entering the peninsula, the 11th engaged in frontal assaults on Serbian positions that had inflicted 2,000 casualties on the Austrian 21st Division during the previous two days.¹⁰⁹ Kisch described one such attack, carried out in the early morning light of 17 September:

Once more: 'Hurra!' This time it goes a lot faster. We see that our deaths are certain and therefore one just wants to get it over with. [...] we've advanced 20 yards, already we see that in the next few moments we'll be in the enemy positions, that hand-to-hand combat is unavoidable. Most of the Serbs turn and run away. Only a few stay lying and fire [*repeterien*] like crazy. I run diagonally towards one of them. I'm a step away from him when he sees me. He wants to shoot, but I stomp on his rifle. He jumps up and swipes at my eyes, then lets forth a scream. Private Patocka from my squad had stabbed him in the haunch. With animal eyes the Serb turns toward this new attacker. But there he receives a second bayonet thrust to the abdomen from Private Demjka. He sinks down. To the left a few duels, but there's no doubt that the position is taken.¹¹⁰

While Kisch escaped the first battles on the Parašnica without a scratch, Bejl was not so lucky. That same day, his 7th Company was trudging through a dense forest when they began taking fire from their right. Bejl went to investigate with three volunteers from his platoon:

We searched for [Serbs] among the treetops, but didn't find anyone. After probably 200 meters I heard talking behind a thick shrub and asked one of my patrolmen whether he understood [the language]. He said that he thought they were ours. We brushed past the thick undergrowth and proceeded to some tall trees, where I took cover behind a tall poplar and observed before going further. Before me, probably thirty yards away, I saw a Serb sitting on the ground and shooting haphazardly into the air; our guys in the rear had been hit by these stray bullets. I saw another one about 20 m[eters] off. Just then, however, a round from the right buried itself in the tree behind which I stood, and immediately after that [came] another from the front that wounded me. At first I didn't feel any pain but could only feel blood as it ran down from my groin area.¹¹¹

Bejl dragged himself to the rear. Within an hour of receiving the wound, Bejl found himself back across the river, awaiting evacuation. His part in this third invasion of Serbia had lasted only six hours. Bejl's wound removed him from the front, while Allé's sickness kept

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p 70.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Kisch, *Soldat*, p 149.

¹¹¹ Bejl, *Deník*, p 19.

him in hospital during September and October. Only Kisch remained with the 11th to witness this third and most nearly successful invasion of Serbia.

In late September, even with support from the 9th Division, VIII Corps could not break through the well-entrenched Serbian positions at the base of the Parašnica peninsula. To protect their gains and recover strength, the Austrians on the Parašnica dug in and a long period of static trench warfare began. Kisch's description of this period evokes images normally associated with the Western front: constant shelling, rain, mud, and the danger of enemy snipers. Constant fear of death punctuated long periods of intense boredom. Kisch's normally rich descriptions of life at the front dwindled to entries of just a few sentences. He covered the period of trench warfare between 25 September and 25 October in thirty-six pages; by comparison, he took one hundred pages to cover a similar span of time between 12 August and 12 September.

Toward the end of October, Field Marshal Potiorek ordered a general resumption of offensive operations. With Sixth Army continuing to make progress in the south and intelligence reporting that the Serbian Army itself was nearing the breaking point, Potiorek aimed to finally destroy the Serbian field army in the closing months of 1914.¹¹² The first order of business for the 11th was breaking through the well-defended Serbian positions boxing them in on the Parašnica. Kisch remembered how his battalion commander, a Captain Spudil, arrived in the forward trench, ready and wearing his best uniform, complete with service cross, "as if on his way to a wedding."¹¹³

On 27 October at 7:00 am, 11th Regiment led 9th Division's trench assault. 4th Battalion's commander, the well-dressed Captain Spudil, led the charge and was killed by a shell seconds into the attack. Nevertheless, the long-dormant Austrians surprised the Serbs, and within five minutes the Serbian trenches lay in Austrian hands. The 11th succeeded in

¹¹² Schindler, *Hopeless Struggle*, pp 75-6.

¹¹³ Kisch, *Soldat*, p 198.

capturing the breadth of the Serb trenches in its sector, capturing several hundred prisoners, two machine guns, and assorted war materials.¹¹⁴ Captain Rebenstieger took over 4th Battalion, replacing the fallen Spudil.

At this point, the 11th resumed mobile, offensive field operations unlike anything it had seen since the first invasion in early August. The Serbian Army did in fact face critical manpower, officer, and supply shortages, and their resistance in late October was only token. The 11th began pushing south by southeast. The advance proceeded rapidly, pausing only to besiege the well-defended town of Lipolist between 3 and 7 November. By 11 November, the 11th had captured the towns of Miloševac and Rumska at the eastern fringe of the Cer Planina.¹¹⁵ Kisch remembered how the veterans who had fought the August battles on the Cer greeted the sight of the mountain with “opprobrium and apprehension.”¹¹⁶

In late November, the 11th turned east, toward the Kolubara River in north-central Serbia. With the Serbian Army apparently in retreat, Kisch reported a cautious uptick in morale among the men of the 11th. On 8 November he noted that “it really seems as if the campaign is shaping up nicely for Austria.”¹¹⁷ Here, however, Serbian Field Marshal Radomir Putnik intervened with a well-planned and well-executed feint. He made the momentous decision to pull his armies east of the Kolubara River, surrendering Belgrade to the Austrians. Luring the following Austrian forces east of the river, Putnik on 3 December ordered a general offensive along the entire line of contact between the Austrian and Serbian armies.¹¹⁸ His surprise attack aimed primarily at the southern Sixth Army, though

¹¹⁴ *Dějiny*, p 9B-10A.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p 11A.

¹¹⁶ Kisch, *Soldat*, p 218.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p 224.

¹¹⁸ Schindler, “Hopeless Struggle,” p 79.

Fifth Army and the 11th Regiment were forced to repel fierce attacks as well. After nearly being routed on the defensive by fierce Serbian onslaughts, the 11th Regiment and Fifth Army managed to hold firm.¹¹⁹ However, with the Serbs victorious in the south against Sixth Army, Potiorek for a third time ordered a general retreat, this time north through Belgrade to Hungary. Military order frayed, almost breaking under the pressure of the Serbian attacks and the mad dash across the Sava to Austrian territory.

The 11th's final battles on Serbian soil helped prevent the complete destruction of the Fifth Army as it plodded northward to the safety of the Austrian shore. By the night of 13 December, after a final delaying action in the southern suburbs of Belgrade, the remaining Austrian troops broke into full flight to escape capture. Disorder reigned. As Kisch approached the bridge connecting Austria and Serbia, he faced a final impediment. He described an engineer captain who stood at the bridgehead, blocking unauthorized men from passing to safety on the Austrian bank. Only after he and some comrades came up with a phony assignment to carry across precious regimental documents was Kisch able to pass.¹²⁰ By the morning light of 14 December 1914, the 11th had crossed back onto Austrian soil. After seven uninterrupted weeks on the frontlines, the regiment counted 200 riflemen ready for action.¹²¹

Between 27 October and 14 December, the regiment sustained 2,831 casualties, amounting to 63% of a regiment's personnel at full strength (see Appendix IV, Figures 3 and 4).¹²² The regimental history lists a huge number of soldiers missing (1,443), making up over half of the regiment's losses during the regiment's final stretch of frontline service in Serbia. Half of this number itself came in the course of the Serbian surprise attack on 4

¹¹⁹ Schindler, *Hopeless Struggle*, p 81.

¹²⁰ Kisch, *Soldat*, pp 283-4.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p 281.

¹²² *Dějiny*, pp 57B-58B.

December, when 703 men of the 11th “went missing” – in this case, captured by Serb attackers. Another 106, 103, and 263 soldiers from the regiment were captured on 12, 13, and 14 December as they fought desperate delaying actions against the Serbian pursuers.¹²³

The fighting at the beginning of December physically destroyed the 11th Regiment. Writing on 10 December during the harrowing retreat to Belgrade, Kisch claimed that the regiment’s total losses since the beginning of the war approached 10,000.¹²⁴ These numbers are double the official statistics recorded by the 11th’s regimental history, which records a total of 5,759 casualties of all types between 12 August and 14 December.¹²⁵ Nevertheless, it is important to note Kisch’s perception of massive, almost unbelievable casualties sustained by a unit that deployed in July 1914 with around 4,500 men.

While the opening salvos of the Austro-Russian struggle for the Carpathians boomed over the mountains in the north, to the south the 11th spent December and January resting and refitting in Hungary after five months on or near the front lines. Back in Prague, Ludwig Allé and Jindřich Bejl convalesced, nursing themselves back to health. Once they were deemed fit to return to the lines, they would join replacement battalions of new recruits and recuperated soldiers to rejoin the bloodied 11th at the front. Ludwig Allé joined the 4th Replacement Battalion, tasked with training its 4th Replacement Company. Bejl was promoted to second lieutenant and given command of 3rd Replacement Company of the 6th Replacement Battalion.

As January turned to February, Allé’s replacement battalion entrained for the Carpathians to join the 11th. The 11th, augmented by replacement battalions like Allé’s, found itself back on the frontlines that traversed the Carpathian Mountains. In the

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Kisch, *Soldat*, p 272.

¹²⁵ *Dějiny*, pp 57B-58B.

Carpathians, Austrian and Russian forces struggled for command of several mountain passes. Both harbored offensive strategic goals. The Russians hoped to force the mountain passes and gain access to the broad, flat Hungarian plain that provided much of Austria-Hungary's foodstuffs. The Austrians by contrast hoped to secure the passes as jumping-off points for the recapture of the Galician fortress city of Przemyśl, where the Russian Army had the garrison of several hundred thousand Austrian troops surrounded.¹²⁶

By early march, the 11th found itself in trench positions similar to those of the Parašnica. They and their Russian counterparts occupied heights above the Oslawa River as it coursed through the town of Wola Michowa (today in Poland). The opposing armies traded trench raids back and forth; Captain Ludwig Allé's battalion took part in one such raid on the night of 7 March. Despite his objections on tactical grounds, the battalion made the attack, losing 140 men in return for several hundred yards of ground.¹²⁷

On 9 March, Allé's battalion moved west to new defensive positions; Allé again questioned the tactical viability of their lines, which were spread thin by losses incurred in the previous trench raid. The morning of "the fatal 11th of March" began with a snow storm that engulfed Allé's positions and subjected his men to -20° Celsius temperatures. At 6:00 AM, the clangor of battle pierced the winter storm and Allé's men found themselves swarmed by Russian attackers.¹²⁸ The enemy "ran in thick, broad masses," and "overran our lines and were in Smolnik before we realized it," recalled Allé.¹²⁹ The Russians that day surprised not just Allé's 1st Battalion, but the entirety of the 11th. "For the regiment, it was the unhappiest battle of the entire war," reads the regimental history, noting thirty-two

¹²⁶ For a strategic overview and operational history of the 1914-1915 winter campaigns between Russia and Austria-Hungary, see: Graydon A. Tunstall, *Blood on the Snow: The Carpathian Winter War of 1915*, Modern War Studies (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2010).

¹²⁷ Allé, *Kriegstagebuch*, p 42.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

officers and 1,046 soldiers missing, most of whom the Russians captured.¹³⁰ Allé and a small group of officers and orderlies from 1st Battalion had escaped capture; the rest sat in Russian captivity. "Including the regimental staff personnel, the regiment's ranks comprised only eighty men," wrote Allé.¹³¹

For the second time in three months, an enemy offensive had reduced the 11th Regiment to only a handful of effectives. In the meantime, Kisch had been promoted from corporal to cadet. 18 March found Kisch delivering a dispatch to Allé's battalion headquarters when a Russian shell demolished the building housing the battalion staff. Kisch and Allé were both caught in the blast. Kisch's head wounds were serious enough to warrant removal to the rear. Having just recently been named a cadet, Kisch luckily qualified for convalescence in Prague, rather than one of the many military hospitals that dotted the swatch of country behind the frontlines. Allé escaped the blast unscathed, though he began to suffer over the next few days from pain in his ear and his arm. He fell ill shortly after the near miss and on 30 March received a doctor's certification from the regimental medical staff, warranting a trip home for "cardiac insufficiency." By the end of March, both Allé and Kisch had left the front, not to return in 1915.¹³²

Several days after Kisch was wounded by the Russian shell, Bejl's 3rd Replacement Company arrived at the front, an amalgam of recuperated soldiers and green recruits. The men arrived in the Carpathians in the last week of March 1915. Just before midnight on 22 March, Bejl and his company replaced the 22nd *Landwehr* Infantry Regiment on the line. The next morning, Bejl surveyed his sector by the light of day. Much like Allé's positions weeks

¹³⁰ *Dějiny*, p 59B.

¹³¹ Allé, *Kriegstagebuch*, p 46.

¹³² It is important to note Allé and Kisch's divergent memories of the events of the 18th. According to Allé, Kisch had been named a cadet as early as 1 March. Kisch, on the other hand, wrote in his own diary that he had only been named cadet *after* his wounding. In his telling, Kisch realized the moment he was wounded that as a corporal, he was destined to sit in one of the cramped hinterland hospitals behind the line. Hoping to convalesce along with other officers at home, he secured a commission as a cadet enabling him to return to Prague. See: Kisch, *Soldat*, pp 305-6.

before, Bejl's line consisted of trenches separated from the Russians' lines by anywhere from 600 to 1,300 yards.¹³³ For the next two weeks, Bejl and his men sat in their holes, battling the same winter conditions that had plagued Kisch and Allé. The sector remained quiet during the day, both sides allowing the other a modicum of "peace in war" to collect what sparse firewood they could.¹³⁴ Russian artillery fire intermittently crashed in on Bejl's positions, usually without effect. When not overseeing the improvement of the company's trenches, Bejl usually sat at coffee with his footman or received friends visiting from neighboring units.

On 6 April 1915, Bejl's company warily watched No Man's Land after receiving orders warning the frontline sentries of an imminent Russian assault. Bejl complained of his company's precarious position, on a rocky shelf surrounded by ravines that cut off their avenues of retreat to the right, left, and rear. The expected Russian attack came on 7 April; as with Allé's battalion, masses of attackers took the defenders by surprise, despite the warnings. With nowhere to run, Bejl and his entire company fell into Russian captivity.

In the preceding pages, I have outlined the combat record of the 11th Regiment – its three failed invasions of Serbia, its disorderly retreats, its wholesale destruction by enemy troops twice within the space of several months. The men of the 11th experienced defeat and retreat, deadly assaults, and the loss of close friends during 1914 and early 1915. In such conditions, one might expect to find evidence of fraying relations between Czech and German soldiers. In fact, it was the key military relationships based on rank that frayed first.

¹³³ Bejl, *Deník*, p 33.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

CHAPTER 4: EXPERIENCING WAR IN A DIVIDED REGIMENT

Observing the 11th during mobilization, we saw how national divisions existed without necessarily creating tension among the troops. By contrast, the relationships between officers and men and between reserve officers and careerists had already showed signs of fraying. This chapter will examine national, rank-based, and professional divisions as experienced by the men of the 11th once they entered combat. When fighting began in August 1914, the experience of death, despair, and deprivation at the front created spaces in which the already fraught officer-soldier relationship took on more emotionally charged meaning. Officers' behavior in combat and attitudes toward war, their performance as combat leaders, their treatment of the Serbian population, their relatively greater freedom to remove themselves from the frontline, and their responsibility to uphold military order provided further evidence to soldiers that men and officers occupied entirely different worlds. The relationship of the regiment's Czech and German soldiers to one another, however, remained largely neutral. National divisions were still visible, but they did not result in interpersonal conflict within the regiment.

4.1: National Differences at the Front

We shall begin by examining how the diarists discussed the national divide that ran through the regiment. The diarists were certainly cognizant of the multinational character of the unit, but left little evidence of tension breaking out along national lines during the regiment's time at the front.

Language continued to function as the most visible and noticeable dividing line between the regiment's two national groups. On 12 August, during the regiment's first real

battles, Bejl recalled “cries and swears in different languages” as they combined into a mélange of tongues.¹³⁵ Months later, during the hectic December retreat to Belgrade, Kisch described the stressful experience of finding himself alone among soldiers who didn’t speak his language. In the dark, rainy, confusing night of 13 December, Kisch found himself mixed up in a column of Magyar militiamen and “felt lonelier than ever among them and their language, of which I did not understand a single word.”¹³⁶ Kisch was perfectly happy serving in a majority-Czech regiment since he spoke Czech passably. But faced with the completely alien Magyar language, Kisch felt himself completely lost and alone.

The diarists also noted instances of national-group behavior as soldiers sought comfort in song. On 9 August, for example, Bejl remembered cheering along as men from his company sang national tunes in four-part harmonies. The songs were well-received, with German-speaking Lieutenant Colonel Haluzka from Brno, the battalion’s commander, joining in the applause as well.¹³⁷ Again, on 4 September, Kisch watched as Czech soldiers broke out harmonicas and played their “melancholy, Slavic melodies and popular songs.”¹³⁸ Important national holidays also gave cause for national solidarity. Kisch observed on 27 September how the regiment’s Czechs grouped together and reminisced about past St. Wenceslaus Day celebrations in their native towns and villages.¹³⁹

The onset of fighting also brought the men of the 11th into contact with Serbian civilians and soldiers. Recall that Bejl decried the war as forcing “Czech people [...] to be slaughtered for interests that were foreign to their hearts [...]”¹⁴⁰ and to fight against their

¹³⁵ Bejl, *Deník*, p 8.

¹³⁶ Kisch, *Soldat*, p 282.

¹³⁷ Bejl, *Deník*, p 7.

¹³⁸ Kisch, *Soldat*, p 104.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p 164.

¹⁴⁰ Bejl, *Deník*, p 3.

"little brother Serbia."¹⁴¹ This reluctance could develop into serious breaches of military protocol, resulting at times in "live-and-let-live" situations when Czech and Serb soldiers held positions in close proximity. During a pause in fighting between the first and second crossings of the Drina, Bejl and his company were stationed in forward sentry lines, sitting across the river from similar Serbian positions. A tacit agreement emerged between the two sides and soldiers of both armies could walk down to the river's edge for fresh water without fear of being shot. Once, Bejl recounted, an Austrian patrol was even captured on the Serbian side of the river and sent back by their Serb captors. The lucky soldiers were issued a stern warning that if they tried it again, *then* they would be shot.¹⁴² When on 1 September Bejl's unit was pulled off of the line and replaced by Magyar and Croat troops, Bejl confided in his diary: "Farewell idyllic Drina! Soon the Serbs will realize that it's no longer us Czechs standing across from them [on the river]."¹⁴³ He clearly implied here that *Czech* soldiers in particular allowed such tacit ceasefires to emerge.

Bejl was certain of the common, Slavic origins that united Czechs and Serbs. But Czech soldiers did not hold a monopoly on such views. On 14 August, Kisch remembered his company's first contact with Serbian civilians: "They [the Serbs] observing us were shocked that our regiment consisted of Czech soldiers, of Slavic brothers."¹⁴⁴ One can only wonder what enabled Kisch to make such an observation. Was the shock visible on the inhabitants' faces? If so, was it the Czechs' language that alerted them to the presence of their "Slavic brethren?" Was Kisch reading his own interpretation of Czech-Serb national brotherhood into the situation? Whatever the reason, the episode reveals Kisch's cognizance of the suggested Slavicness shared by Czechs and Serbs.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid., p 14.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Kisch, *Soldat*, p 46.

Enemy Serbian soldiers also displayed an awareness of the pan-Slavic tendencies of some Czech soldiers and at times sought to take advantage of it. Kisch described one night in the trenches during late October when a Serbian band in the opposite trench performed a rousing rendition of the "Czech anthem 'Andulka Šafařová'" as well as an ironic performance of the patriotic Habsburg tune "O You, My Austria," in an example of deft psychological warfare.¹⁴⁵ Later, on 12 November, as Kisch witnessed a group of Magyar soldiers singing around a campfire, he noted that the Magyars were "much happier than the Czech soldiers, who, since they left Bohemia, appear to have been beset by a deep melancholy that does not disappear even in lighthearted situations."¹⁴⁶ Here, Kisch described what he saw as a uniquely Czech aversion to fighting far from their homes.

Allé also generalized about the Czechs' support of the war. Again comparing the Czechs with the Monarchy's Magyars, he wrote at the beginning of the war that "the greater participation of the [Magyar] population was striking [...] in comparison to Bohemia, and expressed itself in jubilant acclamations."¹⁴⁷ On another occasion, in March 1915, he noted that "the German – and much less the Slav – from Bohemia, does not possess the doggedness, resilience, and indomitability of perhaps the Magyar, the Croat, or the Alpine German."¹⁴⁸ It is interesting that Allé, himself a German-speaker from Bohemia, included all Bohemians – Czechs and Germans – at the bottom of the Monarchy's hierarchy of martial peoples. According to Allé, German-speaking Bohemians displayed greater martial vigor than their Czech-speaking neighbors, but nevertheless fell short of their German-speaking compatriots in the more rugged and self-reliant Alpine regions of the Monarchy.

Bejl for his part generalized in the opposite direction, about his German-speaking

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p 234-5.

¹⁴⁷ Allé, *Kriegstagebuch*, p 12.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p 46.

comrades. In contrast with his Czech people's natural reluctance to fight the Habsburgs' war, the Germans represented pro-war bootlickers. At the very beginning of the war, Bejl included a very telling line in his diary. On 7 August, news arrived telling of the Austrian invasion of Russia and its reception in Prague:

"And in Prague and other Czech cities there are apparently enthusiastic ovations for the war, and on Prague's streets, Czechs are apparently demonstrating in unison with Germans [...] I absolutely don't want to believe such fraternization of Czechs with Germans in Prague and elsewhere!"¹⁴⁹

For Bejl, such demonstrations were infuriating as they involved Czechs' selling out to the German war frenzy. On 24 September, Bejl recalled stopping at a train station on his journey to a hospital in Prague. Buying a newspaper, he commented that "it was of course German and full of victoriousness; but we know from experience how such victories look in reality."¹⁵⁰ At this point Bejl clearly identified Germanness with false victoriousness, obfuscation, and dishonesty. As Bejl came to know and relate with some of his German-speaking comrades, this opinion of his proved malleable to a degree.

In conclusion, nationality expressed itself among the troops in a number of ways, particularly through language and song. The diarists themselves often commented on soldiers of different national origins, particularly on the political attitudes of these soldiers toward the war and the Serbian enemy. Bejl wrote critically about Germans in the abstract but hardly mentioned negative interactions with Germans in his own unit. Cognizance of national differences among the regiment's men did not necessarily indicate national tension or enmity.

4.2: Of Men and Officers

National difference existed, but according to the diarists examined here, did not cause significant strain on social relations within the regiment. By contrast, the relationship

¹⁴⁹ Bejl, *Deník*, p 6.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p 21.

between officers and their men proved altogether more dynamic and, ultimately, far more capable of undermining the regiment's combat effectiveness. The ability of the regiment to fight and carry out assigned tasks depended on a delicate balance between the officers and men of the unit. Officers had to depend on the willingness of their men to follow often dangerous orders; this often depended on soldiers' belief in their officers' capability and the unity of interests between the two groups.¹⁵¹ As Kučera has pointed out, the unequal distribution of material provisions and privileges had great power to upset this balance. But as the regiment entered combat, additional spaces opened up that further upended the soldier-officer balance. Officers' abilities as decision-makers, their ideas of war and combat, their ability to remove themselves from the frontlines, and their behavior toward the Serbian enemy all forced soldiers to question the unity of interests between officers and soldiers.

Combat meant exposure to the enemy's rifles, machine-guns, and artillery. Soldiers depended on their officers to make tactical decisions that accomplished the task at hand, but more importantly, increased their chances of survival. Early on, with the disastrous defeats of August and September, soldiers quickly came to doubt their commanders' capability in this most important arena. As early as 16 August, just four days into fighting, Bejl wrote that "in combat, we were amateurs at infantry fighting, as well as artillery."¹⁵² While this seems to implicate the Army as a whole, Bejl and others would soon come to identify officers' decision-making abilities as the source of the Army's malaise and failure.

Four days later, after Serbian counterattacks forced the entire Fifth Army to pull out of Serbia in chaotic retreat, Bejl recounted a story he overheard from a "Captain V." The story illustrated for him the "incompetence and indifference of the leadership." During

¹⁵¹ For a brief introduction to the concept of the "officer-soldier balance" and a discussion of further reading, see: Lee, "Mind and Matter," p 1118, esp. note 11. Lee notes that several recent historical works (1986, 2000, 2001, 2006) have re-characterized some classic examples of soldier "indiscipline" as products of a calculus between officers' intentions and their soldiers' willingness to carry them out.

¹⁵² Bejl, *Deník*, p 10.

fighting on the Cer, the captain had gone to divisional headquarters to warn them that divisional artillery was firing on friendly positions. The divisional commander assured the captain that his report was very important and insisted on sitting him down and pouring him a glass of wine. The commander then proceeded to forget about the captain's report and had to be reminded. In this anecdote, the blasé attitude of the commander combined with the image of a lavish lifestyle to form the perfect picture of officer privilege and indifference. "How rotten everything is in this country!" Bejl complained, tying officer indifference to Habsburg corruptness.¹⁵³

Kisch included similar complaints about the tactical decision-making of his commanders. During the retreat on 20 August, Kisch noticed growing discord among the soldiery after the disastrous battles on the Cer Planina. "Without interruption, a general depression breaks free among the troops, expressed through curses and suspicions aimed at the leadership."¹⁵⁴ Kisch, going into reporter mode, recorded several of his favorite quotes. "Our generals are nothing but incompetent old donkeys" remarked one soldier. "He who has *Protektion* is entrusted with the fates of hundreds of thousands," complained another, using the German word roughly translating to "patronage."¹⁵⁵

Later, during the fighting on the Parašnica, when both sides settled into well-constructed defensive positions, Austro-Hungarian commanders relied more and more on their soldiers' resolve and willingness to charge into danger. Since more developed infiltration tactics would not emerge until 1915, Austrians relied on their skirmishing-line tactics to assault enemy positions. Kisch described one such attempted breakout on 25 September that miscarried almost immediately after it began:

If one can believe the experiences of a single soldier, the Serbs had attempted to take flight as we stormed forward, but returned to their positions almost immediately once they realized

¹⁵³ Ibid., p 12.

¹⁵⁴ Kisch, *Soldat*, p 74.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

the feebleness of our attack. That the attack was feeble is without question. Most [of our soldiers] shouted their 'Hurra!' into the soil and even the buglers blasted the signal into the breastworks of our trench. Hardly a third of our soldiers stormed forward. Thus, a few managed only a few yards before they were either shot, as they offered the Serbs their entire figures as targets, or they ran themselves back to the jumping-off point when they became isolated and saw the hopelessness of our action.¹⁵⁶

While this passage seems to fault soldiers' lack of resolve, Kisch was clear about who really lay at fault for the abortive assault. "Under no circumstances should the soldiers be blamed," he continued. The tactical situation was highly unfavorable, argued Kisch citing the difficult terrain, the great distance between the two trenches, and the Serbs' numerical and firepower superiority.¹⁵⁷ That many of the soldiers had balked at going "over the top" was a result of the odds stacked against them by questionable orders. But Kisch was also careful to identify *which* officers had been responsible for the poor planning. Kisch's immediate commanding officers could not bear the entire weight of failure. According to Kisch, "our own commanders had indeed themselves been of a different opinion regarding the possibility of attack and had – as we heard over the telephone lines – debated it for several days [prior]."¹⁵⁸ Superior officers had ignored the objections of these junior officers in the trenches and ordered the attack anyway.

Kisch's reporting on the trench assault showed how, in the realm of tactical decision-making, soldiers drew distinctions between their immediate superiors (lieutenants and captains) and more senior commanders at the brigade and divisional levels. Though their anger at poorly-planned maneuvers was usually displaced onto senior commanders, other arenas opened up that placed soldiers directly at odds with their lieutenants and captains. Junior officers served as the conduits for military orders and information passing from higher commands to the rank-and-file. When soldiers' experiences did not line up with the claims made by officers, they felt lied to, and disaffection followed.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p 161-2.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

On 19 August, returning from the first failed invasion of Serbia, Jindřich Bejl recalled being told about the number of casualties sustained: "Our 11th Infantry Regiment apparently has 200 officially dead and 700 wounded. Why do they lie like that?"¹⁵⁹ The numbers Bejl received on 19 August actually quite closely resemble those of the official statistics: seventy-five dead and 676 wounded.¹⁶⁰ But they did not coincide with Bejl's perceptions of even higher losses, leading him to suspect dishonesty on the part of his superiors.

On 8 December, as Fifth and Sixth Armies retreated to Belgrade, Kisch remembered how officers countered the rumor that a general retreat was underway. According to "authentic reports," the officers argued, the retreat was really "just a change of position on tactical grounds."¹⁶¹ Kisch editorialized in his diary, noting that "in war, however, such authentic reports are worth nothing more than the rumors. The tactical reasons are in any case identical with the reasons for general retreat."¹⁶² Again, when soldiers felt they were being lied to their resentment grew.

The responsibility of upholding frontline discipline also fell in general to lieutenants and captains. As soldiers began to balk at costly tactical maneuvers, their officers often responded with coercion based on violence or the threat of violence. This increased the feeling on the part of some soldiers that their interests and those of the officer corps lay diametrically opposed to one another.

Some soldiers began to equate the danger posed by their commanders' pistols with the danger posed by enemy machine-guns. On 16 August, during fighting on Cer Mountain, Kisch and his platoon sheltered in a small copse of trees for protection against enemy fire.

¹⁵⁹ Bejl, *Deník*, p 12.

¹⁶⁰ *Dějiny*, p 57B.

¹⁶¹ Kisch, *Soldat*, p 270.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p 270.

One nervous soldier expressed his fears aloud to the rest: "One might think we've deserted! Whether we're shot by the enemy or by the gentlemen with the gold collars doesn't matter."¹⁶³ The gold collars referenced by the soldier were worn by commissioned officers. Days later, during the retreat, Kisch showed that orders without the threat of coercion did not always suffice for the maintenance of discipline. On 19 August, he recounted how an officer tried to organize a rearguard of 200 to 300 men to hold an important road. As soon as the officer went off to see to other things, however, the line dissolved and "the men rejoined the flight."¹⁶⁴

Instances of actual coercion multiplied during the disastrous crossing of the Drina in September. As the men crossed the river in pontoons, precise Serbian artillery fire rained down sinking several of the pontoons before they unloaded their men on the opposite bank. Stunned by the hail of artillery, the scouts rowing Kisch's pontoon hesitated; they only resumed after Kisch's lieutenant waved his pistol in their faces.¹⁶⁵ Here, threats of violent reprisal sufficed to motivate the wavering soldiers.

Later that day, Kisch's company encountered an entire defensive line in full retreat. His commanding lieutenant again resorted to threats of violence:

'Forward!' the lieutenant ordered spontaneously, but we had advanced barely thirty steps into the corn when soldiers from the 102nd came toward us as if hounded by the Furies. They were racing to the shore. We stopped in our tracks, and it took the threatening shouts of superiors to propel us a few more steps forward. But then we ran into an entire line of defense in retreat, a cadet in the lead. 'Halt!' our lieutenant shouted to him, but he kept on running. 'Halt, or I'll fire!' Now he stopped. He trembled like an invalid. 'I am commanding you to advance!' 'It's not possible, Lieutenant sir; we're under such heavy fire, and we're out of ammunition.' He stammered from fear and his knees buckled. 'Turn around again, move out!' 'I'm on my way, sir, on my way.' But it was to no avail. His men had not waited for the resolution of the argument and, unnoticed in the high corn, reached cover, taking our people along with them.¹⁶⁶

While the brandishing of the lieutenant's service revolver succeeded in halting the shaken

¹⁶³ Ibid., p 57.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., p 71.

¹⁶⁵ Segel, *Bio-Anthology*, p 144.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., pp 146-7.

cadet in command of the broken line, it had no effect whatsoever on his men. As the shattered defenders slipped away from their superior, so too did the men in Kisch's company.

The onset of fighting also contributed to the widening gap between officers and soldiers by exposing the men to how officers behaved in, and thought about, combat. Soldiers described officers' chivalric sense of honorable combat that defied their own priorities of survival. Even worse to the men, some officers displayed a faux martial spirit that barely concealed naked careerism.

On 9 August, the regiment's first invasion of Serbia began with a symbolic field mass; afterward, the officers broke off for a separate ceremony in which the field curate blessed their sabers.¹⁶⁷ Following this chivalric display, on 12 August the regiment crossed the Drina. The Serbs had ceded the river and the crossing proceeded relatively uneventfully. Nevertheless, token Serbian artillery and rifle fire gave the men their "baptism of fire" [*Feuertaufe*]. Allé for his part felt a bit let down by his first real battle. "It was our and my baptism of fire. However, I didn't see a single Serbian soldier."¹⁶⁸ Here, the "empty battlefield" of entrenched and camouflaged soldiers and long-range artillery belied the officer's expectation of manly combat.¹⁶⁹

Some officers nevertheless tried to adapt their first taste of modern combat to their preconceived notions of martial glory. Kisch and Bejl both remembered seeing a staff officer fording a shallow tributary of the Drina on horseback during those first days of combat. According to Bejl, though there had not been an enemy in sight, the staff officer "drew his

¹⁶⁷ Allé, *Kriegstagebuch*, p 14.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p 16.

¹⁶⁹ The "empty battlefield" refers to a concept in military science that emerged in the late nineteenth century as armies transitioned from utilizing thick columns of infantry to more dispersed formations and increased reliance on cover, breastworks, and entrenchment. See: James J. Schneider, "The Theory of the Empty Battlefield," *Journal of the Royal United Services Institute for Defence Studies* 132 (September 1987): pp 37-44.

saber and with a German cry of 'For Kaiser and country!' charged on his horse into the water [...]" After his glorious charge, the soldiers calmly followed across the river before watching the staff officer ride back to the rear. "All he did was give a shout," grumbled Bejl, "so that he would be recognized and honored, perhaps become the subject of an historical genre painting, one that might be titled *For the Kaiser*."¹⁷⁰ Kisch named the officer – General Staff Captain Stojan von Lasotič – and joked about the man's "theatrical cry."¹⁷¹ Kisch saw overblown chivalry while Bejl saw careerist aspirations, but both raised an eye at the strange way in which officers' conceptions of combat clashed with the reality of modern warfare.

The bloody assaults and firefights on the Cer Planina further convinced Kisch and Bejl that officers' notions of combat and behavior before the enemy were at odds with soldiers' desire simply to stay alive. On 14 September, during the battle for a hill south of Lješnica, Bejl noted that his battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Haluzka – who "wanted to carry the soldiers into the attack from atop his horse" – had been killed.¹⁷² That same day, Kisch noted a similar phenomenon in his diary: "Yesterday it occurred to me how carelessly the higher officers carry themselves: most of them sit atop horses during the march as if they wanted to offer the [Serbian irregulars] a clear target. Some wear sashes and all carry sabers."¹⁷³ Austro-Hungarian Army officers did indeed lead from the front in order to offer moral inspiration to their men; the tactic combined with the extremely visible officers' accoutrements to cause high casualties among the officers during combat.¹⁷⁴

Crossing the bridge back into Serbia after the disorganized retreat of 19 and 20

¹⁷⁰ Bejl, *Deník*, p 8

¹⁷¹ Kisch, *Soldat*, p 36.

¹⁷² Bejl, *Deník*, p 9.

¹⁷³ Kisch, *Soldat*, p 45.

¹⁷⁴ On officers' dangerous risk-taking in battle, see: Schindler, *Double Eagle*, pp 130-1, 141.

August, the soldiers had to march past corps commander General von Gieslingen, who regaled them with hopeful sentiments such as "You have no reason to hang your heads, you have fought bravely against a superior, experienced enemy."¹⁷⁵ While Allé considered the words "encouraging," Bejl saw them in a different light. After calling von Gieslingen "an old grandpa general," he added that "the soldiers and I are angry at this parade march; even now [the officers] are hounding us! The campaign could not have turned out otherwise under such stupid, haughty, and inexperienced leadership."¹⁷⁶ Officers' insistence on military tradition incensed soldiers in the wake of catastrophic defeat.

Later, during the crossing of the Drina on 8 September, Kisch remembered how his lieutenant – the one who had depended on his sidearm to get his troops moving – eagerly volunteered his company for a mission to reinforce an incredibly hot sector of the front line. Nearing the line of contact between the embattled Austrians and the Serbian defenders, Kisch watched as an officer from the 91st Regiment, one of the 11th's sister units, drew up plans to defend the hard-earned ground:

We had then shifted to the right and soon were at the line of skirmish. An infantryman, as it happened, reported to the squad commander, a major from the 91st, that the position of Captain Sychrova from the 91st was seriously weakened as a result of continuous losses and had become so precarious that he absolutely had to have reinforcements if he was to hold his forward position. Before the major could answer, our company commander reported that he was prepared to provide the necessary reinforcements. It seemed obvious that the major would order us to the rescue of the threatened detachments.

Finally: 'Lieutenant, for the time being consolidate the left flank at the rampart and wait and see whether we advance.' The infantryman was still waiting for an answer. 'Tell Captain Sychrava that if he can't hold his position he should retreat to this rampart, which I will defend with all my strength...'

[My comrades and I] regarded each other in amazement. Have a look over the wave of earth there, 'this rampart' – row after row of corn. Not a square meter level, as if someone had been afraid to disturb nature. The clearing amounted literally to just half a meter.

The infantryman was about to return to his endangered comrades with the report when the major called him back and instead entrusted a very young cadet candidate to deliver the negative message. But hardly did the cadet plunge into the corn when he tumbled to the ground with a scream. He had taken a shot in the head just above the ear. He was quickly bandaged. In the meantime it was the infantryman after all who was commissioned to deliver the orders. It never entered his mind to run into open terrain; instead he used the protection of the rise.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁵ Allé, *Kriegstagebuch*, p 21.

¹⁷⁶ Bejl, *Deník*, p 12.

¹⁷⁷ Segel, *Bio-Anthology*, pp 145-6.

Kisch draws the reader's attention to several points. First, Kisch paid special attention to the breathlessness with which his company commander volunteered his company to reinforce the harried men of the 91st. He also seemed amazed at the decision of the 91st Regiment major to declare a paltry, half-meter-high rise the main line of resistance as well as his brave pronouncement that he would "defend [it] with all [his] strength." Finally, compared with the cadet, who brashly dove straight ahead into the cornfield and was immediately shot, the infantryman seems to have displayed a cannier, self-preservatory instinct to use the little cover offered by the rise.

News from the wider war also provided moments of divergence between leadership and the rank-and-file. News arrived on 3 September of Austro-Hungarian victories at Komarow and Zamosc on the Eastern Front. 2nd Battalion's commanders assembled the men for a speech by Captain Turner, "which the soldiers made fun of," wrote Bejl.¹⁷⁸ Kisch's 4th Battalion also celebrated the news of the Austrian victory, Kisch noting that the "Hurra!" that rang through the camp sounded "flat and compulsory."¹⁷⁹ Visible symbols also represented the different approaches soldiers and officers took to news from the wider war. According to Kisch, the officers received small metal crucifixes from the field curate to affix to their caps. Prince Lobkowitz, a member of the centuries-old Czech noble family, had donated them after having them blessed at the Cathedral of St. Stephen in Vienna. Here, Catholicism, the aristocracy, and patriotic pride in the Army came together in a perfect expression of the officer corps' self-understanding. By contrast, wrote Kisch, "we simple soldiers just got slivovice and goulash."¹⁸⁰

Not all officers celebrated the war's prosecution, however. Bejl reported in late

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., p 14.

¹⁷⁹ Kisch, *Soldat*, p 101.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p 102. Slivovice is a popular fruit-based liquor produced in various parts of Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe.

August that his new company commander, German-speaking First Lieutenant Karl Ascherl, found much to complain about with regards to the war. "We are in good understanding with the new company commander active-duty Lieutenant Ašerl," Bejl wrote, "and we criticize the senselessness of a few of the orders from higher up."¹⁸¹ On 17 September, as they prepared to cross onto the Parašnica, Bejl noted that "First Lieutenant A[scherl] made me promise that once he had had enough, I would shoot him in the leg through a *komisárka* [a loaf of Army bread] in order to escape [the war] in time."¹⁸² Other officers went beyond offhand comments and reportedly took their chances with self-wounding. While convalescing in Prague, Allé spent much of his time with a Captain Sagner, whose calf wound was rumored by some to have been self-inflicted. Officers were not immune from prosecution for this serious crime and Allé noted that a judicial review of the circumstances of the wounding was underway.¹⁸³

Allé himself, a loyal and lifelong servant of the Kaiser and his army, expressed growing doubts as 1914 turned into 1915. Allé, like many soldiers, had begun to doubt a speedy end to the war. However, "for the comfort of my family and the other officers' families, I feigned belief and pretended as if I concurred with the general notion of a quick end to the war."¹⁸⁴ Despite his waning belief in immanent peace, Allé still believed in Austria-Hungary's cause and took out "as large a war bond as I could (2000 Krone), since everyone was still full of confidence in a successful prosecution of the war. We would have done better to purchase valuable goods. But who can see into the future."¹⁸⁵

The doubts beginning to grow in the minds of the Monarchy's most loyal servants

¹⁸¹ Bejl, *Deník*, p 13.

¹⁸² Ibid., p 19.

¹⁸³ Allé, *Kriegstagebuch*, p 27.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., p 26.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., p 28.

provided points of common connection that played a huge role in the development of the frontline community that emerged in late 1914. Even burdened with his doubt in a speedy victory, Allé acted the consummate officer. At the end of his medical leave, a medical board reviewed Allé's able-bodiedness. According to Allé, they "wanted to leave me behind, but I noted that I had reported myself voluntarily [for service] with the 4th Replacement Battalion; there they let it rest."¹⁸⁶ Allé wanted to return, since "as an officer I belong in the field."¹⁸⁷ The board decided to certify his bill of good health.

Allé's resoluteness in getting back to the front was not characteristic of all officers. According to Bejl and Kisch, officers had an easier time reporting themselves sick or incapacitated and thereby avoiding dangerous assignments, a perception with some merit. After the disastrous second river-crossing of 8 to 9 September, Bejl remembered how his battalion commander, Captain David, had been shaken up by the shelling during the battle. Rumors swirled that David had been seeking a transfer away from the front and after the river-crossing, he got it. Hearing news that David had been ordered back to Prague, Bejl wrote that Captain David "has an uncle who's a corps commander!" showing no surprise that the well-connected officer had been able to secure a transfer out of the combat zone.¹⁸⁸

On 8 November, Kisch took aim at some officers returning to the regiment after illnesses or "miniscule injuries."¹⁸⁹ Even the regimental adjutant joined in with Kisch, jokingly asking "What will we do with all these officers?" These types of officers, noted Kisch, usually escaped shortly after, complaining of "rheumatism, toothache," or some such affliction. Indeed, by the next day, Kisch proved right: "Of the three officers who had arrived yesterday, none are still here. Just before the start of the battle they had reported

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Bejl, *Deník*, p 17.

¹⁸⁹ Kisch, *Soldat*, p 225.

themselves sick.”¹⁹⁰

Several weeks later, Kisch got an even more intimate look at this practice of officers shirking. Attached to 9th Division’s staff for much of November, Kisch lived and worked among the rear officers who organized and ran the division. He recalled meeting one man, whom he labeled “an interesting type of war criminal” who “provided sanctuary” for all those officers who wanted to avoid combat and “await the results of the battles from the spectator’s box.”¹⁹¹ The wily officers, avoiding combat by reporting sick, amazed Kisch by their conversation, which put on display their “peculiar expertise” in gaming the system.¹⁹² They knew exactly which doctors, medical stations, and hospitals were most likely to issue medical exemptions. They knew how to acquire home-front leave, or how to secure a convalescence bed in a “high aristocratic castle” where one could hunt, take automobile road trips, and be cared for by a “pretty and cheerful nurse.” One man in particular complained that his lumbago would “only get him as far as Bukovar,” naming a small, provincial town in southern Bohemia. Prague was naturally the most desirable destination for convalescing.¹⁹³ Kisch was furious and amazed. For such “posh marauders,” as he called them, the “war served [...] for the attainment of a finer life, attention, and care.”¹⁹⁴ Most of the officers Kisch met *did* suffer from the afflictions they claimed, but only brought them up at the decisive moment – just before actual danger – in what Kisch called a “deceptive practice.”¹⁹⁵

The reality of the situation seems more complicated. Despite his insistence that officers belonged in the field with their men, Captain Allé reported himself sick twice,

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., p 227.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., p 252.

¹⁹² Ibid

¹⁹³ Ibid., p 253.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

securing on two separate occasions medical certification for convalescence in Prague. Above, however, we saw how Lieutenant Ascherl asked Bejl to shoot him once he had “had enough.” Similarly, Captain Sagner had, according to rumors, taken matters into his own hands and wounded himself in order to escape the front. Clearly not every officer could simply disappear from the front whenever he wished. While more empirical work needs to be done on the Austrian medical services and the process of assessing the validity and severity of illnesses, we can confidently say that soldiers at least *perceived* an imbalance that favored officers.

Compared with officers, soldiers felt they had a harder time securing sick leave. In September, on the Parašnica, Kisch recalled how regimental doctors visited 16th Company, inspecting sick soldiers and certifying those deserving convalescence in the rear. 140 of the company’s 200 men reported sick, but only a third of them were as certified ill enough to leave the front. The thinly-stretched medical services could simply accommodate only the most severely ill men.¹⁹⁶

Once soldiers and officers made it to field dressing stations and hospitals, these spaces further divided men and officers. Serbian rifle fire wounded Jindřich Bejl on 17 September and his testimony serves as a window onto the world of Austrian military medical care. On 19 September, Bejl found himself at a military hospital, surrounded by men of all stripes. Soon after, however, medical personnel relocated Bejl to an “officers’ room” which was airier, less crowded, and more comfortable.¹⁹⁷ The next day, the officers at the hospital bought themselves some wine and socialized with the hospital’s doctors, telling their individual stories of how they had come by their wounds. “It was all very humorous,” remembered Bejl, who, as a cadet, was entitled to join the officers in their

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., pp 150-1.

¹⁹⁷ Bejl, *Deník*, p 20.

separate hospital room.¹⁹⁸

As a cadet, he was also entitled to convalesce in Prague, rather than in one of the crowded military hospitals in the rear area behind the front. Only officers and cadets enjoyed the chance to convalesce at home.¹⁹⁹ By the middle of September, Bejl and Allé both found themselves among friends and family as they recovered from their injuries and illnesses. Kisch summed up the different roads to recovery facing soldiers and officers. Wounded men faced “the possibility of sloppy care, the possibility of gangrene, of an excruciating buffering about in the back of a cattle car and of being held up in every corner of the monarchy, without receiving permission to return home [...]” Compared to the uncomfortable journey and potential of negligent care, officers “could travel directly to Prague.”²⁰⁰

Those soldiers and officers who died at the front also received separate treatment, military situation permitting. Often, but not always, the Army established separate officers’ graveyards, as it did on 23 November when Kisch’s friends Lieutenant Dr. Thorsch, First Lieutenant Bischitzky, and Ensign Ferda were laid to rest in a “small, improvised officers’ cemetery” near divisional headquarters in Lajkovac.²⁰¹ The practice of building separate officers’ graveyards seems to have been contingent on the military situation, however. During the advance of 14 August, for example, Allé took care to point out that Lieutenant Colonel Haluzka and First Lieutenant Ullrich “had been buried there near the church, next to a few [enlisted] men.”²⁰²

Finally, soldiers recognized a difference between their and their officers’ attitudes toward, and treatment of, the Serbian enemy. Bejl, Kisch, and Allé all offer interesting

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Kisch, *Soldat*, p 303.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Ibid., p 249.

²⁰² Allé, *Kriegstagebuch*, p 17.

perspectives vis-a-vis the Serbian enemy they faced. The way each diarist wrote about the Serbs with specific reference to his own status as a soldier or officer demonstrates how Serbian civilians and soldiers added to the emerging and diverging self-definitions of "soldier" and "officer."

Many officers enacted the Army's suspicion toward Serbs as potential guerillas and saboteurs. Even before entering Serbia, the Army arrested hundreds of Serbian-speaking Austrian citizens living in Austrian Bosnia under suspicion of sabotage and espionage.²⁰³ Soldiers and subalterns noticed. Describing a moment on 9 August when Austrian sentries captured a Serbian-speaking Austrian woman with materials they suspected to be poisons, Kisch wrote that "the military administration is endlessly suspicious that the entire population here is Serbophile in spirit."²⁰⁴

As the Austrian Army moved into Serbia, its units increasingly engaged in anti-Serbian violence, hanging and shooting Serbian civilians on allegations of sabotage or in retaliation for attacks on Austrian rear troops.²⁰⁵ Kisch viewed atrocities against the Serbs with revulsion. On 16 August, he reported seeing a group of five Serbian civilians led by a colonel and his adjutant. The Serbs stood accused of firing weapons at Austrian soldiers and the Army had sentenced them to summary execution. The youngest appeared to be fifteen years old, noted Kisch sympathetically.²⁰⁶

Bejl also commented with anger at what he saw as unfair treatment of the Czechs' fellow Slavs. On 14 August, Bejl wrote: "[...] our 1st Battalion apparently killed six women! That then is our culture! Little Serbia defends itself manfully against intruders and this is

²⁰³ Jonathan E. Gumz, *The Resurrection and Collapse of Empire in Habsburg Serbia, 1914-1918*, Cambridge Military Histories (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp 37-40.

²⁰⁴ Kisch, *Soldat*, p 27.

²⁰⁵ Gumz, *Resurrection and Collapse*, pp 53-58.

²⁰⁶ Kisch, *Soldat*, pp 52-3.

how the Austrian colossus, with its German bringers of culture, exacts its revenge [...]”²⁰⁷ In another episode, again relayed by Bejl, his platoon came across a Serbian schoolhouse that had been looted by Magyar troops. Bejl was shocked when he found a color picture of Prague hanging on the wall. Another tirade followed:

[The teacher] had clearly studied in Prague, like many Serbs [...] He must’ve gone to U Fleků for beers and must have enjoyed our Prague, just as we enjoyed [the Serbs’] cheerfulness and brotherly friendship. And now I felt ashamed to the bottom of my heart at this barbarism and how it has been carried out at the expense of a person who really liked us Czechs!”²⁰⁸

Here we see how Bejl understood treatment of Czech-friendly Serbian civilians in the combat zone as further evidence of the oppression of Europe’s Slavic peoples by Magyars and Germans.

Allé for his part seems to have had conflicting feelings about the Serbs. He admitted on 10 August that “one didn’t trust the Serbs, perhaps with good reason.”²⁰⁹ However, on 20 August, Allé described the impending execution of Serbian civilians as a “heart-wrenching scene.”²¹⁰ Fifty Serbian men and women lined up at the edge of ditches they had dug themselves, a war tribunal having sentenced them to death. Captain Anton David, Allé’s close friend and fellow career officer, was tasked with overseeing the deed. Perhaps the realization that men like himself would be carrying out the executions prompted Allé to reconsider the Army’s treatment of the Serbian civilians.

Other officers felt no such compunction. On 31 October, Kisch watched as a First Lieutenant Bibola used his smattering of Serbian to ask an intoxicated Serbian civilian whether he had seen Serbian Army units passing by recently. When the man claimed he knew nothing, Bibola flew off the hook and responded by cursing the man with every animal

²⁰⁷ Bejl, *Deník*, p 9.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., p 10. U Fleků was a popular beer garden for Czechs, and particularly Czech nationalists.

²⁰⁹ Allé, *Kriegstagebuch*, p 14.

²¹⁰ Ibid., p 21.

word he knew in Serbian.²¹¹ As a precaution, soldiers were then ordered to round up all the village notables and place them under guard as hostages. In another Serbian town just days later, Kisch surveyed another one of these groups of civilian hostages, likening the scene to “a genre painting of suffering.”²¹²

Such mistrust resulted in growing paranoia. On 13 November, as the Austrian Fifth Army pushed east into northern Serbia, the rapidly advancing Austrian units found roads clogged with Serbian civilians travelling in the opposite direction, returning to the towns and villages now behind the front lines. Kisch and his friends watched as Serbian civilians tried to drag heavily-laden carts through the mud, intermingling here and there with Austrian troops. “The owners [of one cart] stood by helplessly,” remembered Kisch, “and their despair pierced our hearts. But we could not help them.” Nearby officers, reported Kisch, suspected that the lumbering civilian carts had been sent along the road to deliberately clog up the already muddled thoroughfares.²¹³

The points of contention between officers and men were numerous. Generally better material provisioning for officers was accompanied by the officer corps’ unique attitudes toward combat, tradition-laden support for the war, relatively easier ability to remove themselves from danger, and overly zealous abuse of the local population. The aim here is not to assert that every officer exhibited all of these tendencies; indeed, as I have shown, exceptions to each of these trends existed. The important point is that soldiers like Bejl and Kisch began to *perceive* the officer as the antithesis to the soldier.

²¹¹ Kisch, *Soldat*, p 206.

²¹² Ibid., p 211.

²¹³ Ibid., p 239.

CHAPTER 5: FRONTLINE CONVERGENCE

The experience of war in 1914 drove wedges between soldiers and their officers. Significant differences in material well-being, outlook, and behavior caused some soldiers to doubt the unity of purpose between themselves and their officer corps. But feelings of loyalty and comradeship, resentment and exclusion proved highly malleable at the front. The physical and mental spaces that divided men and officers at the beginning of the war could fade at times. The diarists of the 11th described parallel processes of frontline cohesion that reformulated old relationships and created new ones. Developments in the military situation proved vital in enabling this process.

With regards to Czechs and Germans, the relationship between the regiment's two nationalities remained neutral during mobilization and the early weeks of the war. Rather than worsening with the onset of combat, I argue that in some cases, relationships between Czech and German soldiers improved. Bejl, whose antipathy for Austria-Hungary's German-speaking population has been well-documented, formed intense bonds with several Germans in the 11th. In Bejl's case, his increasing aversion to the war served to encourage relationships with like-minded German soldiers.

With regards to officers, soldiers' perceptions of their superiors worsened as the war began, as new grievances added further kindling to an already smoldering fire. As the war progressed, however, a more powerful division emerged that proved stronger even than that between officer and soldier. Among some soldiers there dawned the realization that not all officers behaved and thought alike. Many of their field officers suffered the same dangers and deprivations they did. The result was an increased propensity to draw distinctions between frontline combatants and rear-echelon troops. The latter, suggested frontliners,

enjoyed a more comfortable and less fraught existence behind the lines. Frontline soldiers *and* officers, they realized, shared common experiences that differed sharply from those of rear-echelon soldiers and officers.

This chapter shall examine periods of “convergence” when Czechs and Germans, officers and men came to understand one another as living a shared experience. The outward expressions of this convergence were the many personal relationships and shared moments described by the diarists.

5.1: National Convergence

As the war entered its second month for Jindřich Bejl and the men of the 11th, the young Czech reported forming strong bonds of comradeship with several of his German-speaking colleagues. Several factors contributed to this phenomenon, each of which we shall discuss. First, Bejl felt an intense loneliness at the front that prompted him to seek interpersonal connections among unlikely friends. Second, the decimation of the regiment’s leadership brought on reorganization and replacement which opened new avenues for Bejl to make those relationships. Finally, and most importantly, his disgust with the war proved to be a powerful attractor, bringing him together with other soldiers already fed up with war, be they Czechs, Germans, or officers.

The story of Bejl’s unlikely friendship with German comrades begins before the war. Bejl came from the Czech town of Police nad Metují in northeastern Bohemia. He ended up serving in a regiment drawn from the *southwestern* corner of the Crownland. As an EF, Bejl had taken advantage of one of the program’s benefits: choosing one’s future regiment. Regular conscripts served in whatever formation happened to recruit from their county.²¹⁴ Normally, as a conscript from Police nad Metují, Bejl would have ended up in the 18th Imperial and Royal Infantry Regiment headquartered in Hradec Králové/Königgrätz;

²¹⁴ Zehetbauer, *Die "Einjährigen,"* p 61.

however, as young, nationally-minded Czech EF, Bejl decided to serve with the 11th, as it had several of its battalions headquartered in Prague. Unlike most of the Monarchy's soldiers, then, Bejl went to war in 1914 with a regiment filled with men from an entirely different part of the Monarchy. The vast majority of young men from Bejl's town would have served together in the same regiment, an important factor in establishing support networks among the ranks.²¹⁵ Egon Kisch made this connection explicitly when he wrote that "I live among the ranks of the homeland's corps [*heimatliche Korps*], at every turn I encounter familiar faces, and I have a common touchpoint with new acquaintances." Kisch enjoyed the comfort of fighting alongside those familiar to him from his days in Prague; even those he did not know at least had some common point of contact.

Not so for Bejl. He went to war in 1914 alongside officers and men he hardly knew or just barely remembered from his days as an EF. On 10 August, just before the first invasion of Serbia, he wrote:

There is such unease and I am sad, very sad. I feel so alone and I don't understand myself. I've not yet grown close to my comrades from the company and their behavior towards me does not seem very sincere; we've not yet had the opportunity to grow close. As a result our conversations are not very warm and my loneliness weighs heavily upon me. Where is Karel? Where is Štěpán, where is Venoušek?²¹⁶

The war ripped Bejl from his home and his friends – Karel, Štěpán, Venoušek – and placed him among a group of men he did not know.

Bejl's only close friend in the 11th was Gustík Kösl, "the son of a doctor from Lhenice" and a Czech-speaking former EF classmate of Bejl's. Bejl wrote fondly of Kössl. During their year of EF training in Prague, Bejl and Kössl "took many evening strolls around Old Prague and our royal castle." Bejl remembered how "together we dreamed from afar that this

²¹⁵ James McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War*, Paperback (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p 86. McPherson writes that "the territorial basis of company recruitment reinforced this cohesion by bringing friends and relatives together in the same unit, thus linking primary groups at home with those in the army."

²¹⁶ Bejl, *Deník*, p 7.

symbol of our independence would yet one day return to its former glory [...]”²¹⁷ Where career officers bonded over their shared dedication to the dynasty and empire, EFs often shared intensely emotional bonds of national and class sentiment. Throughout the first months of war, Bejl would run into Kössl occasionally, always remarking with joy on the occasions. Kösl served in 3rd Battalion, however, and thus the two only rarely saw each other at the front.

Compounding his loneliness was Bejl’s intense hatred for the war, both in terms of its aims and the experiences it forced upon him. His anger with the war, the Habsburgs, his commanding officers, and Army leadership grew after the failed invasion and retreat of late August 1914. The week of costly assaults had thinned out his 7th Company. By Bejl’s estimate, on 20 August, “from our company, which originally had 240 men and 6 officers, I alone remain with 45 men!”²¹⁸ As a result of high losses, regimental command split up Bejl’s company and doled the survivors out to other companies. The battalion sent Bejl to 8th Company, where on the night of 22 August he bunked with a Cadet Heinrich Jüthner.²¹⁹

Bejl described his bunkmate thus: “Even though he’s a Prague German, he’s had it up to his neck with the war and his opinions on Czechs and Germans living together are humane and he seems like a good guy.”²²⁰ Bejl tells us a great deal about himself through this small description. He tells us that his first impression is to shrink from Jüthner on account of his being a German. But two factors mitigated his initial revulsion. First, he had “humane opinions” about the Czechs and Germans living together, an interesting point from Bejl, who not weeks before had expressed disgust at the idea of Germans and Czechs

²¹⁷ Ibid., pp 3-4.

²¹⁸ Ibid., p 12.

²¹⁹ “Einteilungsliste 1 July 1914,” p 7. The 11th Regiment’s officer personnel lists show that Cadet Jüthner (Bejl spelled his name “Jütner”) was born in 1896 in the German-speaking, northwest Bohemian town of Einsiedel (today the Czech town Mníšek v Krušných horách). The personnel list reports that Jüthner joined the Army in 1907, like Bejl, at age twenty-one.

²²⁰ Bejl, *Deník*, p 11.

celebrating military victories together in the streets of Prague. Second, according to his personnel record, Jüthner spoke Czech with “native fluency,” a fact that no doubt aided the communication between the two cadets.²²¹

Most importantly, like Bejl, Jüthner had had it with war. Their shared disgust with the way the war was going brought the two together. Bejl in general began to notice that perhaps the Germans in his regiment did not categorically support the war. Speaking with Gustík Kössl on 2 September, Bejl noted how the man “longed [to receive] a nifty, light wound” that would earn him a trip home. “But probably everyone wants that, the Germans not excluded,” continued Bejl.²²² As the war entered its second month, Bejl began to realize that many of his German comrades also disliked the war and just wanted to get home. The realization opened up space for Bejl to approach his German comrades with less suspicion.

Cadets Jüthner and Bejl, a German and a Czech, became fast friends during the period of rest and recuperation after the first failed invasion. On 23 August, Bejl reported coming down with a case of the “Bosnian sick,” the soldiers’ nickname for the runs. Jüthner helped the sick Bejl, offering him some chocolate and opioids from his private effects.²²³ A couple days later, Bejl remarked with approval on Jüthner’s having been promoted to battalion adjutant. Jüthner was “canny, calm, and very tactful; he hadn’t lost his head in all this stupidity,” wrote Bejl.²²⁴

The decimation of the 11th and the addition of replacement officers and men provided further opportunities for Bejl to form new friendships. On 27 August, Bejl’s reconstituted 7th Company received two new officer aspirants. One, Cadet Zdislav Pragr, had

²²¹ “Einteilungsliste 1 July 1914,” p 7.

²²² Bejl, *Deník*, p 14.

²²³ *Ibid.*, p 12.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, p 13.

been a classmate of Bejl's from their One-year Volunteer training course in Prague.²²⁵ The other was Reserve Ensign Faltin, a "dear Jewish fellow from Prague."²²⁶ In the thinned-out ranks of the Eleventh, more and more career officers were being replaced by men like these: middle-class graduates of a reserve-officer course, many of whom had only recently left their civilians lives behind to respond to their call-up. Faltin and Pragr would join Bejl's group of closest friends, not least because of their common status as cadet officers. Several nights later, the battalion camped for the night in the small village of Perin-hán, Bejl bunking in a small cottage with his new comrades Faltin and Pragr. Over a dinner of fried eggs, they debated back and forth whether they were likely to be transferred to the Russian Front.²²⁷

Bejl also got along well with 7th Company's new commander, the active-duty first lieutenant Karl Ascherl from Bohemia.²²⁸ Ascherl was perhaps an unlikely friend for Bejl, given that he was both a career officer and a native German-speaker. Describing Ascherl as "an otherwise iron German," Bejl nevertheless identified a number of favorable qualities about the man.²²⁹ Despite Ascherl's Germanness, Bejl and his new commander got along well based on their mutual disdain for their higher-ups and similar pessimism about the course of the war. According to Bejl: "We are in good understanding with the new company

²²⁵ "Einteilungsliste 1 July 1914," p 8. According to the officers' list, Cadet Prager (as his name was spelled in the roll) had been born in 1890 and joined the Army at age twenty-one. He hailed from Kolín, a Czech town just a short train ride east of Prague. He is listed as speaking Czech with native fluency.

²²⁶ Ibid., p 6. The only soldier named Faltin to be found on the regiment's personnel list was one Ernst Faltin, listed as a reserve *lieutenant*, born 1889 in Sobotka, a Czech town in the Hradec Králové region. It is likely that Bejl either misidentified Faltin's rank or was referring in his text to Faltin's past service as a reserve ensign.

²²⁷ Bejl, *Deník*, p 14.

²²⁸ "Einteilungsliste 1 July 1914," p 3. Ascherl was born 1882 in Seewiesen (today's Javorná in the Plzeň region of the Czech Republic) who had entered the Army in 1902 and reached the rank of first lieutenant in 1910. He is reported as speaking Czech that was "suitable for the needs of service."

²²⁹ Bejl, *Deník*, p 14.

commander active-duty Lieutenant Ašerl and we criticize the senselessness of a few of the orders from higher up.”²³⁰

It will be useful here to compare Lieutenant Ascherl with another one of Bejl’s commanding officers, Captain Anton David. Bejl’s interactions with the two men reveal what he found most important in an officer. After the losses incurred during the August invasion, David rose from command of 2nd Battalion’s 7th Company to command of 2nd Battalion itself. The number of men under his command grew from 250 to 1,000.²³¹ David spoke better Czech than FAscherl. He spoke Czech with a “native fluency” according to his entry in the regiment’s rolls. In comparison, Ascherl’s entry only lists his Czech as being “suitable for the needs of service.”²³² But Bejl’s responses to the two men did not ultimately hinge on their ability to speak his language. Rather, he judged the two based on their ability to command.

On 24 August, Bejl had his first run-in with David, who dressed him down personally for failing to make a timely report. Bejl took the officer’s insistence on timely reports as compensation: “Sure, he can buzz on about that, but otherwise he’s got the jitters.”²³³ For Bejl, the officer’s uneasiness with command of the larger unit expressed itself through unnecessary strictness on administrative matters. In another episode, Bejl and David played cards with other battalion officers. Bejl angrily left the game after being accused of cheating, and David, “in revenge” [*ze msty*], sent the young cadet and his platoon to patrol the banks of the Drina under the beating sun and without lunch.²³⁴

In a telling episode on the night of 29 August, Bejl directly compared the two men’s leadership styles. Captain David ordered a general alarm along the lines, suspecting that

²³⁰ Ibid., p 13. Note Bejl’s Czechification of the German surname Ascherl.

²³¹ These figures represent the ideal complement of troops at full strength.

²³² “Einteilungsliste 1 July 1914,” p 3.

²³³ Bejl, *Deník*, p 13.

²³⁴ Ibid.

the Serbs were attempting a surprise attack. Ascherl did not bother reacting since, "being in the first line, we would have to have known something was up."²³⁵ Bejl admired the lieutenant for his blasé but experienced attitude, comparing him favorably with Captain David: "It's only David that frets about in such a way."²³⁶

Ascherl was eventually wounded in the line of duty, during the September operations on the Parašnica. Around the same time, David secured a transfer back to Prague; "He has an uncle who's a corps commander!" Bejl had written.²³⁷ David eventually returned to the front and was killed by the shell that wounded Kisch and very nearly Allé. Upon learning of his former battalion commander's death, Bejl reacted sardonically: "Captain David was killed by a grenade here in Maniov, where he sat at lunch with a few officers. I think back on the man and how he had 'played at war' in Serbia, bossing around soldiers, and how he himself had been cowardly."²³⁸ In comparison, Bejl reacted to news of Ascherl's wounding with sadness.

Bejl, who began the war unhappy, lonely, and bitter, found himself on the night of 2 September 1914 sitting under a "beautiful moon," and discussing "the future," with his friends Ensign Faltin, Cadet Pragr, Cadet Jüthner, and First Lieutenant Ascherl. The conversation inevitably turned toward the war and the group – unafraid among friends – "criticized the leaders of the battalion and higher, that they are not able to handle the most valuable thing: people."²³⁹ Bejl, for whom Germans were the greatest threat to his Czech nation, now sat happily around a table complaining about incompetent leadership with his four friends, two German, one Czech, and one Jewish.

The 11th underwent its second great trauma of the war on 8 and 9 September, when

²³⁵ Bejl, *Deník*, p 14.

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Ibid., p 17.

²³⁸ Ibid., p 32.

²³⁹ Ibid.

the abortive river-crossing cost the regiment over 300 casualties in under twenty-four hours. By now, at least, Bejl had a group of close comrades in whom he could confide. Their discussions usually turned to the war eventually and, especially, what they hoped would be its speedy end. On 12 September they learned of the fall of Lemberg, an important Austrian city in east Galicia. They commented ironically that their "glorious army" had "taken a beating." "We are ceasing to believe in a quick end to the war," wrote Bejl sadly.²⁴⁰

During this time, Bejl's friendship with Jüthner, in particular, solidified. Despite his German heritage and language, Jüthner seems to have become Bejl's truest and closest friend in the battalion. On 15 September, as Bejl recalled, he and Jüthner spent the night talking about their lives and futures. "I really have faith in him and we've become true comrades," wrote Bejl. "He is very observant and good hearted, and we told each other about our childhoods and our life stories."²⁴¹

In mid-September, as the regiment embarked on its third invasion of Serbia, Bejl fell wounded, struck by Serbian rifle fire. Bejl dragged himself to the rear, to battalion headquarters, where his friend Cadet Jüthner found him. "We were both very sad," wrote Bejl.²⁴² After accompanying Bejl farther to the rear, to a field dressing station, Jüthner bade his friend farewell; they promised to reconnect in Prague.²⁴³ The comrades made good on their promise. In November, the two men both found themselves on leave in Prague. His old comrade had been promoted to lieutenant in November.²⁴⁴ "[...] joyfully we grasped hands,"

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Ibid., p 19.

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Ibid., p 20.

²⁴⁴ "Rang- und Einteilungsliste der Stabs- u. Oberoffiziere, dann Fähnriche und Kadetten des Soldatenstandes mit 1. Dezember 1914," (Unpublished manuscript, Located in: Folio 11. Infanterieregiment, Karton 3 [Infanterieregiment 9.-12.], Rang- und Einteilungsliste [1914-1918], Personalunterlagen, Kriegsarchiv, Staatsarchiv, Vienna) p 6. Henceforth, I shall refer to this document as "Einteilungsliste 1 December 1914."

wrote Bejl remembering the reunion. Several days later, as Bejl recovered from a second surgery, his German friend Jüthner sat by his side.²⁴⁵

5.2: The Frontline Experience

Soldiers' resentment toward their officers indeed increased as the war began in 1914. A whole host of issues figured into this resentment: threats of violent coercion, abuse of privilege, imbalanced standards of living, an insular corporate ideology, and different treatment by medical services. The most emotion-laden issue, however, was officers' tactical decision-making, as this bore the most direct impact on whether soldiers lived or died. Here, soldiers recognized the difference between junior and senior officers. Orders for futile and costly attacks often came down from senior officers, far more removed from the front and less cognizant of the conditions there. This opened the space required for the convergence of soldiers and their junior officers.

In chapter four, section two, we discussed how officers' combat decision-making antagonized the men, as it often led to horrendous casualties. In the examples cited, however, it is important to note that in each case, more junior officers emerged as protagonists vis-à-vis senior commands. Recall the story of "Captain V.," who trudged to divisional command to prevent further friendly fire, but was met with a blasé divisional commander who offered him wine instead of halting the barrage.²⁴⁶ Similarly, in his conversations with Ascherl, Bejl noted that the lieutenant berated the higher commanders for their leadership.²⁴⁷ Kisch also recounted how "our own superior commanders themselves had been of a different opinion regarding the possibility of an attack." Despite the objections of these more junior commanders, which the soldiers overheard by listening in on the

²⁴⁵ Bejl, *Deník*, p 22.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., p 12.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., p 13.

position's telephone connections, the attack went on as planned, resulting in high casualties.²⁴⁸ Kisch even referenced specific commands by name, addressing "Herr Commander of the Balkan Forces" Field Marshal Oscar Potiorek in his diary on 13 September. Upon learning of the Fifth Army's third planned invasion, he catalogued the tactical difficulties involved in the plan before adding: "If only we had enough forces for an offensive! But to jaunt [across the river] in order to pinch the stronger fellows in the bum and then run away again – I find that childish, Herr Balkan Forces Commander!"²⁴⁹

Captain Allé offers corroborating evidence from the officer side of things. He often took pains to caution his superiors when he felt uncomfortable with their orders. In March 1915, Allé's superiors called on his battalion to make an assault on the well-defended Hill 705 in Russian hands. Allé counseled his superiors against an attack in his sector, as machine-gun fire from the neighboring Russian-held Hill 884 would pose too great a threat to attacking forces.²⁵⁰ Brigade Command considered this justification satisfactory and held off. Five days later, however, Allé's brigade commander called for his 1st Battalion to make the assault anyway, on the night of 7 March. The attack began at 6:00 pm with Allé's men charging forward under artillery cover. They reached the enemy positions but the attack flagged as men encountered barbed-wire barriers ten to forty yards before the Russian trenches. His men lacking wire cutters, Allé was ordered to return his battalion to previous positions just before 2:00 AM.²⁵¹ 140 of Allé's men fell in the assault.

Besides the crucial distinction between junior and senior commanders, soldiers also realized that their junior officers often shared the worst aspects of the frontline experience. Soldiers knew from experience that officers often became the first targets for enemy small-

²⁴⁸ Kisch, *Soldat*, p 161-2.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., p 142.

²⁵⁰ Allé, *Kriegstagebuch*, p 41.

²⁵¹ Ibid., p 42.

arms fire. On 17 August, Cadet Jindřich Bejl's company commander, Captain Wenzel, fell during a fight on the Cer. With Wenzel shot down in the middle of a field, Bejl charged out from his cover behind a low stone wall, seized his fallen commander under fire, and returned him to safety. Though Bejl did not consider Wenzel an especially able or friendly officer, he considered him "an otherwise good person" and risked his life to save him. For Bejl's actions, Captain Wenzel recommended him for the Grand Gold Medal of Bravery, one of Austria's highest military awards for combat service.²⁵²

During extended periods of operation on enemy territory, officers found fewer opportunities to take advantage of the highly visible privileges that drew so much disdain from the troops. During the August invasion of Serbia, Captain Ludwig Allé fainted from the heat and thirst that caused similar episodes among countless Austrian privates and NCOs.²⁵³ The lines that divided men from their officers in field hospitals and war graves also tended to blur during periods of intense combat. Again during the late August invasion, Kisch observed a field dressing station where the regimental commander, Colonel Wokoun, lay sandwiched between two infantrymen: "the colonel lay crowded in among privates, although someone had given him a blanket."²⁵⁴ Here, deference to command clashed with the forced equality of the front. Combat also precluded the normal practices that reified military hierarchy when it came to the dead. While the Army preferred to bury its dead officers and aspirants in separate graveyards, the hasty combat situation did not always allow such care. During the Fifth Army's advance on 14 August, for example, Allé had bothered to point out that Lieutenant Colonel Haluzka and First Lieutenant Ullrich "had been buried there near the church, next to a few [enlisted] men."²⁵⁵ Thus, even when soldiers complained about the

²⁵² Bejl, *Deník*, p 13.

²⁵³ Allé, *Kriegstagebuch*, p 17.

²⁵⁴ Kisch, *Soldat*, p 67.

²⁵⁵ Allé, *Kriegstagebuch*, p 17.

inherent unfairness of the officer-soldier relationship, they often made mention of small instances in which this unfairness melted away.

But the most crucial factor in the convergence of officers' and soldiers' interests came with the presence of rear and support troops, who offered a stark antithesis to the frontline soldier. Bejl was especially sensitive to the difference between, for example, transportation troops and his own infantry soldiers. On 18 August, he wrote that "we were worn out and dejected and we gazed with envy at the troops from the transport service, who had biscuits, chocolate, cigarettes and who were rested and fresh."²⁵⁶ Later, as his company prepared to cross into the Parašnica in mid-September, Bejl recounted another such encounter with a captain in the engineering detachment: "A captain from the engineers was bragging about how the engineers have it so well compared to the infantry. I could not listen to this and so I gladly left for the courtyard [and headed] to my platoon, where we conversed with soldiers."²⁵⁷

Green replacements provided another pole against which veterans defined the experience of the frontline soldier. On 27 August, Kisch observed the arrival of replacements, who stared in horror as the veteran troops drank freely from the river, just beside rotting and bloated corpses of the drowned. One reserve lieutenant, Kisch reported, had brought a suitcase with such luxury items as nightshirts and mustache wax.²⁵⁸ With the arrival of the green soldiers, the veterans' attitude changed. "Suddenly we began to dust off stories of the battles and our experiences, and our heroic deeds [...]"²⁵⁹ Around the same time, Bejl exhibited a similar veteran's bemusement. One Lieutenant Hocke arrived from Prague to join 7th Company. The way the reserve lieutenant "[looked] around at everything

²⁵⁶ Bejl, *Deník*, p 11.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., p 19.

²⁵⁸ Kisch, *Soldat*, p 75.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

as if it had fallen from the sky” amused Bejl. “Hello!” he wrote rhetorically in his diary, “war is war and this isn’t Prague!”²⁶⁰ Jindřich Bejl clearly saw himself as more privy to the reality of war than the new, unblooded reserve officer.

Unit and service-branch distinctions also provided space wherein men and officers joined together in the face of an ‘other,’ often in a jocular manner. The Austrian Army actually consisted of three separate armies, the Common Army as well as the Austrian and Hungarian National Guards. Though by 1914 the National Guards functioned exactly like the line units of the Common Army, their supposed incompetence provided the butt of many soldiers’ jokes at the front. While advancing to the front lines on the Parašnica on 15 September, Kisch and his friends passed National Guard soldiers hiding in groups behind bushes and trees, as they “didn’t want to go forward.” According to Kisch, both the men and officers found this funny, aiming their jokes not just at the cowering Guardsmen before them, but at the National Guard in general.²⁶¹

These brief episodes reveal the nascent frontline culture developing among the men who served at the very tip of Austrian attacks. The feeling of goodwill and camaraderie reached its apogee, however, during October and November, as the material conditions of the Austro-Hungarian soldiers plummeted even below previous nadirs. During this period, frontline officers and soldiers lived in much more equitable conditions, constrained by supply shortages, and were forced into closer proximity in cramped trenches. Kisch reveled in the forced equality of trench life:

The psychological influences were – when I wasn’t being greeted by the wounding or death of a comrade – in general not the worst. Rather, the primitiveness of life often directly amused me, and when I saw how an officer begged a piece of bread or cigarette paper from an infantrymen, to whom he would have hardly considered offering his salutations, I took joy in this enforcement of equality.²⁶²

²⁶⁰ Bejl, *Deník*, p 14.

²⁶¹ Kisch, *Soldat*, p 146.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, p 251.

Kisch clearly took pleasure in the subversion of prewar social norms that took place at the front.

Kisch's observation of the new frontline equality was strongly influenced by the presence of non-combat and support troops. After the 26 October breakout from their trench positions on the Parašnica, Kisch turned his acerbic pen on the support troops following behind the main line of contact. Kisch watched in anger as rear-echelon support troops picked over the battlefield, collecting souvenirs:

At noon came the cooks from the supply train [...], who had barely heard the rifle fire and who had first learned of the assault and victory through the arrival of wounded men and prisoners. Now accountants, cooks, mobile kitchen operators *et tutti quanti* thronged over the field of debris, collecting Serbian rifles, knives, pieces of shrapnel, bits of shell, spent cartridges and other relics from "their assault." They have the ability to send [the souvenirs] home via field post or load it onto the baggage carts, and will decorate their apartments like war museums with the captured trophies and regale their astonished peers with stories of their heroic deeds. The real fighters brought home no mementos other than gout or a bullet in the body.²⁶³

Kisch bristled with resentment at the men who, in his estimation, had not taken part in the attack, not been exposed to danger, and therefore had not earned the right to claim prizes from the field of battle. In fact, he implied, such trophy-gathering was not something the "real fighters" bothered with.

Kisch gave another example of the divergent behaviors of frontline troops and their rear-echelon counterparts. On 5 November, he and his comrades entered the Serbian town of Lipolist, recently wrested from Serbian rearguard units. He surveyed the scene as Austro-Hungarian troops looted the town's homes: "Only the men from the transport branch – who have no other memories of the war than the souvenirs they bring with them – collect all sorts of trinkets they could get at home for a few kreuzer."²⁶⁴

Kisch also had the opportunity to observe the lives of rear-echelon officers, finding them distasteful. During much of late November, Egon Kisch served as a runner at 9th Division headquarters. Here, support troops, communications officers, servants,

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., p 222.

administrators, and religious staff accompanied the divisional commander. Kisch, having served as a frontline soldier for the previous three months, found the entire situation disgusting. "Life at Division appears to me to be entirely criminal," he noted on 21 November.²⁶⁵ The rear-echelon officers "can hardly be described," he added.²⁶⁶

For one, the rear officers enjoyed a standard of living completely divorced from anything experienced by frontline soldiers and officers. "[...] in the officers' mess it's like at an inn" he reported.²⁶⁷ Variegated meals were served there alongside generous amounts of wine, liquor and tobacco. He contrasted these officers with his unit's "old staff officers," many of whom had been pensioned off long ago but who had "more or less voluntarily deployed to the frontlines" when the war broke out. These hard-bitten officers often went days without eating, he pointed out.²⁶⁸

In another moment of disbelief, Kisch observed the morning routine of a transportation officer who put on a fresh, clean uniform with the help of a footman after bathing and shaving with warm water. Again, contrasting this sort of life with that of his regiment's field officers, Kisch noted that "our old colonel [...] had not been able to wash for weeks."²⁶⁹ Even among this pampered group, however, Kisch was careful to except the divisional commander who, he wrote, barely found time to eat or sleep due to his feverish work ethic.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁵ Ibid., p 248.

²⁶⁶ Ibid. See also: Oszkár Jászi, *The Dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1929), p 148. Jászi, who served as a Hungarian politician during the war, noted a similar phenomenon. "This crude antagonism between the ragged and untrimmed soldiers of the trenches and the well-dressed and polished orderly officers of the higher quarters (the people of the trenches called them with disgust *Etapenschweine* or "swines of the hinterland") was indeed one of those mass-psychological forces which weakened in a great measure the solidarity of the fronts."

²⁶⁷ Kisch, *Soldat*, p 248.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., p 249.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

Even Bejl, while convalescing in Prague, commented on the sorts of officers who lived behind the frontlines. In Prague's Josefov district, Bejl came upon several holding areas full of Russian prisoners. His sympathy for them compounded with his hatred of home-front officers. He bristled as their overseer, a "shirking colonel," forced them to form up and march for him. Bejl took this as "evidence of his Austrian, senile wretchedness."²⁷¹ Had the colonel been at the front, sneered Bejl, "how he would have cowered [...]"²⁷²

For Egon Kisch and Jindřich Bejl, their experiences as combat troops during 1914 created a mental hierarchy of worthiness in which frontline troops ranked above their rear counterparts, who had escaped the worst aspects of the war.²⁷³ Whatever tensions may have existed between infantry officers and soldiers beforehand, they both shared in the dangerous and disheartening world of the frontlines.

Simultaneously, the dividing lines between the 11th's reserve and active officers seem to have faded by the end of 1914. The active-reserve had been quite noticeable during mobilization. Bejl, as a cadet reserve officer, had not appreciated what he interpreted as haughtiness on the part of his active-duty counterparts. During the early days of war, Bejl continued to make note of the distinction between reservists and careerists. Five days into the war, Bejl "learned along the way that Lieutenant Tylle, the last active officer from our company, was torn up by a grenade."²⁷⁴ Though Bejl does not editorialize about the loss of his active-duty cadre, he at the very least felt it was worthy of note that his company by then consisted only of reserve officers.

²⁷¹ Bejl, *Deník*, p 22.

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ Interestingly, Bejl never included able-bodied civilian men in his taxonomy despite his frequent contact with them during his convalescence in Prague. Kisch also remained largely apathetic to men not in service, taking umbrage at one point, however when a girlfriend went to the opera with a civilian man in Prague. He wrote bitterly: "Well that is why we suffer hunger, bullets, pain and discipline, so as to give those back at home the leeway for erotic adventures." See: Kisch, *Schreib*, p 262.

²⁷⁴ Bejl, *Deník*, p 11.

Captain Allé also dealt with reserve and career officers differently in his writing. During the first week of combat in August 1914, Allé watched as his close friends were killed or wounded in combat. He closed each day's entry with a catalog of the fallen. On 14 August, Allé noted that Lieutenant Colonel Haluzka and First Lieutenant Ullrich had been wounded and died the next day. Lieutenant Colonel Hoffmann, First Lieutenant Luchovsky, Captain Neseny had also been wounded, along with "a reserve officer."²⁷⁵

Days later, on 17 August, Allé included another such catalog recounting the day's losses: "L[ieutenant] Tyle is dead, M[ajor] Lašek, C[aptain] Ružitschka, C[aptain] Peter, C[aptain] Wenzel, First L[ieutenant] Vlasak, and several reserve officers are wounded, as are a considerable number of men."²⁷⁶ Besides the high number of casualties, it is interesting how Allé categorized the fallen. He listed active-duty officers by name. He had known them well and had lived, worked, and socialized with them during the previous years. They were, in effect, his closest comrades in the regiment. In contrast, the regiment's reserve officers had only just rejoined the 11th after years of civilian life. It is possible that Allé did not consider the loss of the reserve officers as worthy of note as the loss of careerists. Rather more likely, however, he simply did not know the reservists well enough to list them by name and rank.

After the first weeks of combat, mentions of the reserve-career officer divide fall into abeyance in the diaries. This is likely due to the fact that both Bejl and Allé left the front for the remainder of 1914 and were not present to report on the social dynamics of the officer corps. They were, after all, the two diarists most concerned with this relationship.

When the two men returned to combat in 1915, both Bejl and Allé recorded a social convergence of sorts between professional and reserve officers at the front. Ludwig

²⁷⁵ Allé, *Kriegstagebuch*, p 17.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p 18.

Allé was unequivocal in this regard. After arriving to the regiment's frontline headquarters, Allé described his reunion with the regiment's officers:

The quarters had been prepared. I stayed together with Captain Sagner in a village community center. Officers' dining was undertaken by battalion and each battalion had its own officers' mess. [...] There were plenty of comrades there who had not been seen since the beginning of the war. Humor and singing enlivened the spirits. The reserve officers do not rank below the actives in terms of comradeship and zeal for service. All are tied together like the members of a family.²⁷⁷

According to Allé's description, the officers of each battalion had come together as one and the reunion with old comrades lifted everyone's spirits. The officers' mess, which for Bejl had been an uncomfortable space imbued with the haughtiness and insularity of the active officers, now appeared open and welcoming of all.

Allé ended up serving for the entirety of the war, and his experiences after April 1915 (the end of this thesis' timeframe) probably influenced this rosy picture of active-reserve comradeship. Allé would go on to work at numerous reserve-officer training centers behind the lines and it is possible that positive experiences of training reserve officers retroactively influenced his memory of this happy reunion in early 1915.

Compared with Allé's positive memories of active and reserve officer socialization, Bejl's descriptions offer a more neutral picture. As the war continued, Bejl rarely mentioned the sort of resentment he had borne toward the active officers in early and mid-August, 1914. As early as late August, Bejl described warm relations with his company commander, the active-duty First Lieutenant Ascherl; their shared disdain for the war provided the sinews of their relationship. In September, he had written of the atmosphere in the officers' ward at the military hospital he stayed at for several days. Drinking wine and regaling the doctors with their war stories, Bejl described the mood among the wounded officers as "all very humorous."²⁷⁸ He continued to label officers as actives or reservists in his 1915 diary entries, but paid closer attention to their tactical skills and attitudes to the war before

²⁷⁷ Allé, *Kriegstagebuch*, p 31.

²⁷⁸ Bejl, *Deník*, p 20.

making judgments. At the same time, he preferred to socialize with other reservists and cadets during his second stint at the front in 1915. His old friend from Serbia, Zdislav Pragr, had also been promoted from cadet to reserve lieutenant during the winter of 1914-1915 and Bejl spent many of his last days in Habsburg uniform with him.

In conclusion, as the war dragged on into late 1914, social divisions within the regiment responded to changes at the front. National difference did not develop into enmity. In the case of Jindřich Bejl, with his nationalist Czech outlook, quite the opposite occurred. Based on a shared unhappiness with the worsening wartime situation, Bejl formed friendships with likeminded German comrades. Officers and men came together, too, as they shared in the experience of frontline combat. Seemingly, reserve and active-duty officers established a rapport that transcended the two groups' enmities. As emphasized at the beginning of this chapter, however, relationships within the regiment were in a constant state of flux. In the following chapter, we will examine the continued development of these frontline convergences.

CHAPTER 6: FRONTLINE RELATIONSHIPS AND THEIR FATES

The convergence of the 11th's men and officers around reconfigured identities and loyalties developed in several different trajectories after 1914. Kisch's idealized frontline equality broke down after the 11th retreated from Serbia in December 1914. As officers reasserted their traditional privileges and returned to their characteristic abuses, Kisch scolded himself for believing in the possibility of the soldier-officer rapprochement. Ever after, his attitudes toward the officer corps radicalized noticeably. Jindřich Bejl had formed unexpected friendships with Germans in the regiment. Bejl retained these friendships even after he left the front to convalesce in Prague. While Bejl's personal friendships emerged *despite* his Germanophobia, they did not succeed in changing his anti-German outlook in the abstract.

6.1: Bejl's National Perspective

As newly minted reserve Lieutenant Jindřich Bejl²⁷⁹ returned to the front in mid-March 1915, his writing displays a decidedly Czech national fervor that burned even brighter than it had in August 1914. His previous war experiences in the summer of 1914 weighed heavily on his mind as he returned to frontline service in the Carpathians. His time in Prague spent among his equally Czech-nationalist family members seems to have radicalized his views to an extent, as did service with his new, almost entirely Czech replacement battalion. His close friendships with Cadets Jüthner and Faltin and Lieutenant Ascherl apparently inoculated Bejl against applying his national perspective to his interpersonal relationships with German-speaking comrades, though they did not dampen his Germanophobic political stances.

²⁷⁹ While resting and recovering in Prague, Jindřich Bejl was promoted to second lieutenant. See below.

Bejl had spent the winter of 1914-1915 at the home front, moving between Prague and his home region of northeastern Bohemia. By 1 February 1915, regimental doctors in Prague certified his readiness to return to service. He received marching orders to train with the newly-organized 6th Replacement Battalion as it prepared to leave for the front. On 1 March, Bejl was promoted to second lieutenant and on 5 March received command of 6th Replacement Battalion's 3rd Replacement Company. On 15 March, he and his company of green recruits and convalesced veterans entrained for the Carpathians to fight the Russians.

Bejl's time in Prague had erased whatever goodwill he may have borne toward the Germans as a result of his favorable experiences with Jüthner and company. While in Prague, Bejl stayed with his sister, Emilka, and her husband, Václav, both of whom held political opinions close to Bejl's. Emilka reportedly "wishe[d] that the war would end already and the Russians would win it and we would be freed."²⁸⁰ Her husband had similar ideas about the war. At one point, he read Bejl a proclamation by Russian general Paul von Rennenkampf:

Czechs! With laurels on our temples your brother Russians stand in defense of your homeland. We are coming for you not as your enemies, but as your liberators! At this very moment on the meadows of Galicia your brother Russians have broken your shackles and laid down their lives. For this the Slavs have become the heroes of the day! Czechs! The hour of Slavic glory has tolled! The moment has come for the fulfillment of your dreams!²⁸¹

Bejl responded favorably to the exhortation:

The confidence of our people in Russian victory was great and people looked forward to welcoming the Russians as they might have looked forward to roasted goose. Their firm conviction also made an impression on me, particularly when I saw how all the talk of Czech-German rapprochement was just talk and humbug.²⁸²

Bejl's own interactions with German soldiers had not been humbug, but they apparently did nothing to change his long-held political views on national issues.

On 26 January, travelling to Prague to join his new battalion of replacements, Bejl

²⁸⁰ Bejl, *Deník*, p 21.

²⁸¹ Ibid.

²⁸² Ibid.

sat with a cadet from Broumova. Recalling his travelling partner, Bejl wrote: "We enjoyed the ride well enough and for him, too, the war no longer has a nice smell about it. These Germans are beginning to have enough of it and their hurrah-mood of last year is no more. Both of us wished for a quick end of all the misery."²⁸³ Again, while Bejl personally experienced the war weariness of comrades like Jüthner and Ascherl, he still found it noteworthy that soldiers from German-speaking backgrounds disapproved of the war like he did.

Bejl led a comfortable middle-class social life while training with his new unit in Prague. When not engaged socially, Bejl reported, "I sit down with Emilka and my brother-in-law Václav and we talk politics [*politisujeme*]."²⁸⁴ Bejl's time in Prague "politicizing" with his sister and her husband seems to have compounded his disaffection with the war just as he was being conferred greater responsibilities by the Army. Bejl ascended to full lieutenant on 1 March, enjoying the boost in pay but expressing apathy otherwise: "I was promoted to lieutenant and received enough money, and now my tassel and saber are nice. It was stupidity!"²⁸⁵

He did enjoy the fact that "our entire replacement battalion is mostly Czech – except for two German NCOs – and everyone has had enough of war."²⁸⁶ The man in charge of leading the new recruits in exercises was a Major Lešek, "a good-humored soldier and a Czech," who "explained to us his experiences from Serbia and who swore with joy at the incompetence of the leadership."²⁸⁷ His company commander, Kejř, "is a good Czech reserve lieutenant, although he is a former professor and therefore it is hard to talk to

²⁸³ Ibid., p 22.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ Ibid., p 24.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., p 23.

him.”²⁸⁸ On 5 March, the commander of the replacement battalion, Major Balzar, named Bejl commander of 3rd Company, replacing Kejř. Bejl’s former EF classmate and friend from the Serbian Campaign, Cadet Pragr, had also been wounded, promoted to lieutenant, and subsequently released from medical leave back into active service. During combat exercises outside of Prague, Bejl and Pragr were finally able to take advantage of the privileges associated with officership. They rented a room from a local woman rather than staying in the company billets.

While Kisch and Allé battled cold weather and the Russians in the Carpathians, Bejl and his men patiently waited their turn in Prague. With departure for the front set for 15 March, Bejl went out one last time with his sister and her husband. “My brother-in-law Václav constantly reminded me to be on the lookout at the front for a way to get home quickly or to the other side,” Bejl wrote. His brother-in-law clearly was implying that he should desert to the Russian lines or come by some “accident” that would get him home. Bejl did not disagree with the principle, only the likelihood of execution: “It is easy to say, but hard to do!”²⁸⁹

Time came for Bejl’s replacement battalion to join the 11th in the field. According to Bejl’s description, the entire process of marching to the train station, boarding the wagons, and riding east for the Carpathians exhibited the national fervor of the battalion’s Czech soldiers. Near the Straka Akademie in Prague’s Small Town quarter, the soldiers broke into a rendition of the Sokol²⁹⁰ song, “Čtvrtého července” [“Fourth of July”], which their commanding officer quickly forbade. Bejl was furious. “This surprised us, just like the ban against wearing ribbons in [Czech] national color. It is allowed for the Magyars, Germans

²⁸⁸ Ibid. Note here that even among the reserve officer corps, cultural differences created gulfs between vocational high-school graduates like Bejl and more academically-minded men like Kejř.

²⁸⁹ Ibid., p 25.

²⁹⁰ The Sokol was a patriotic Czech-national gymnastics organization with member branches all over the Czech-speaking lands.

and Romanians, but not for us Czechs. As a result, it is only natural that Czechs go into the field with distaste, which by no means they attempt to hide.”²⁹¹ The Army, Bejl felt, specifically singled out Czechs for anti-national measures, while tolerating the national displays of Germans and others. Here, again, we see the importance of song with regard to national displays. In her work on Habsburg language policy, Tamara Scheer notes that when officers *permitted* the singing of such national songs, soldiers often responded with gratitude and responded more enthusiastically to orders.²⁹²

After boarding the trains, the battalion made for Brno. On 16 March, Bejl reported a run-in between the battalion major and a drunken regimental doctor. The man “greeted the major, who reproached [the doctor] for saluting him with a ‘Na zdar!’ Germans bawl their ‘Heils!’ while our greetings are forbidden to us!”²⁹³ Again, Bejl felt the Czechs to be especially embattled by the Army and its officers. The train continued on to Bratislava, where the Bejl and his comrades watched a trainload of soldiers from the Czech 28th Regiment wearing Czech national colors on their caps. This practice was “forbidden for us,” grumbled Bejl. “We are likewise a Czech regiment, but the 11th Regiment always keeps its trap shut” he editorialized, identifying the 11th as both a *Czech* regiment and one that traditionally forbade its soldiers the types of national displays tolerated in other units.²⁹⁴

As he wrote these blistering reproaches in his diary, Bejl also took advantage of the privileges associated with being an officer. His status as a lieutenant entitled Bejl to a personal footman – a farmer from southern Bohemia named Klase – whom Bejl sent to get cigarettes, salami, chocolate, and cognac before the battalion departed.²⁹⁵ On the train, Bejl

²⁹¹ Bejl, *Deník*, p 26.

²⁹² Scheer, “Habsburg Languages at War,” p 74.

²⁹³ Bejl, *Deník*, p 26. “Na zdar” is a Czech salutation, “Heil” a German one.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p 27.

²⁹⁵ Bejl, *Deník*, p 25.

sat in a wagon reserved for officers and, upon reaching Budapest, was served tea with the other officers, separately from the men.²⁹⁶ With the privileges, however, came military responsibilities that Bejl neither enjoyed nor carried out. Major Balzar at one point called a meeting of the officers prior to disembarkment, giving them orders about “all sorts of fiddlesticks” like the proper behavior of soldiers in the troop trains.²⁹⁷ Leaving Budapest on 17 March, Balzar then ordered his junior officers to sit among the men in the troop wagons to “lecture on behavior before the enemy.”²⁹⁸ Bejl scoffed at the order: “However, it seems stupid to me to annoy them en route to the [front].” Instead, he accompanied his soldiers’ songs on his new harmonica.²⁹⁹

When not overseeing the improvement of the company’s trenches, Bejl sat at coffee with his footman or received friends visiting from neighboring units. Pragr, Bejl’s friend from Serbia, commanded the nearby 6th Company and often stopped by for conversation. On one such occasion, Pragr excitedly regaled Bejl with the story of a Cadet Lochner. The man had been “a German enthusiastic for the war,” but “here [at the front] his opinion has changed and he is now an enemy of the war.”³⁰⁰ After meeting many such soldiers, Bejl and his friend Pragr still felt it noteworthy that German soldiers might also change their views on the war.

At times, Bejl considered his brother-in-law Václav’s exhortation to make a run for the Russian lines. He pondered what exactly made him stay on his side of the line:

There may be, of course, the hope that the war will be over soon, or is it fear of consequences, or is it shame that prevents one from running across to the other side? It seems to me that it is shame. But for me it is already inconsequential! It would be best if it was all already over. [...] I am amazed at our patrols and field sentries, Czechs who so properly carry out their service when they have such a great opportunity to reach the other

²⁹⁶ Ibid., p 27.

²⁹⁷ Ibid., p 26.

²⁹⁸ Ibid., p 27.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., p 34.

side. But after all, they must know and feel what awaits them there and they have their families at home.³⁰¹

While soldiers might carry on about their apathy to serving in the Kaiser's army, there still remained a great deal of uncertainty about what captivity in Russian hands might entail and how it would affect their families at home.

On 6 April 1915, in Austria-Hungary's ninth month of war, a surprise Russian attack caught Bejl and his company off guard and exposed. Cut off from any avenues of retreat, almost the entirety of Bejl's company fell into Russian captivity. Remembering the moment he encountered his own captor, Bejl wrote:

I held my rifle in my hand and it flashed into my head that I wanted to throw it away. Instinctively, I tossed it down and the Russian approached me. If he had been a German, he clearly would not have hesitated and would have shot me down. – The mentalities of two nations.³⁰²

Bejl for the moment rejoiced at being taken captive: "So we are captured! [...] The end of Mr. Emperor's war; no more 'to the last man!' Thank God that we're away from it."³⁰³

Bejl's war for the Kaiser had come to an end.

During these final weeks of service in the Austro-Hungarian Army, Bejl had become increasingly boisterous. Everything he wrote filtered through a keen national lens. The conversations with Jüthner and Ascherl in Serbia seemed to fade from his memory and each German who expressed distaste for the war gave cause for surprise. Finally captured and "away from it," Bejl breathed a sigh of relief. By 1916, he would be back on the line, fighting his former comrades in the name of an independent Czech state.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

³⁰² Ibid., p 38.

³⁰³ Ibid.

6.2: Kisch's Idealized Front

During late 1914 and early 1915, Bejl's national perspective came increasingly to dominate his framing of the war. In the meantime, Corporal Kisch watched in horror as his idealized frontline community dissolved. After the intoxicating experience of "forced equality" at the front, the 11th Regiment was pushed out of Serbia and the phenomenon broke down. For the next several months, regiment sat in Austrian territory, awaiting further orders.

Removed from the combat zone, Kisch described how officers reasserted their privileges and once again abused their command. As the 11th sat in Hungary, refitting for further service in the Carpathians, Kisch's disgust with the officer corps grew dramatically. Having seen the fraternity of equals at the front, he rued its disappearance.

Kisch's rhetoric regarding the officers began to shift in early December as the counterattacking Serbian Army once again forced the Austro-Hungarians into full retreat. He began to notice the first indications of a return to a social normalcy characterized by rigid barriers between officers and men. On 4 December, he grew angry as he and his comrades waited hours to eat after the officers had been served. "For four days we hadn't been provided any bread and rations weren't made up for us in the field kitchens until six o'clock in the afternoon," wrote Kisch, while "for the officers, lunch had already been given out immediately at midday."³⁰⁴

A day later, Kisch chafed even more at officers' effrontery after being expelled from the warm, dry barn he and some comrades had been using for shelter. Several dragoons had arrived with orders that the barn was to be used as stables for officers' horses.³⁰⁵ Kisch stood his ground, demanding to see written proof of the order; when a dragoon sergeant showed up and confirmed the order, Kisch gave up, dejected. At least for the time being, the threat of punitive measures still held weight with the soldiers, and Kisch ultimately

³⁰⁴ Kisch, *Soldat*, p 263.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p 266.

backed down in the face of written orders. In another instance, again on the 4th, Kisch and some comrades accidentally set fire to the hut they sheltered in while cooking. The men feared that in the darkness, enemy artillery would zero in on the flaming building, but “above all” feared “reprimands by the gentlemen of our divisional staff [...]”.³⁰⁶

Kisch’s nascent hatred for the officer corps turned a corner once the 11th reached Hungary in mid-December. The regiment had been shattered, crossing back into friendly territory with only a couple hundred combat-ready soldiers and officers. As 1915 began, the 11th slowly grew in size, with replacement companies arriving weekly. The regiment ran field training exercises almost every day in an effort to maintain the men’s physical readiness and to incorporate the new arrivals into the unit. Kisch complained about the regiment’s constant exercises in late December and January, commenting that “the observance of regulations given out [behind the front] is more difficult than standing before the enemy: inspections, watch duty, curfew, saluting, exercises.”³⁰⁷

In September, Kisch had not harbored the same ill-will toward the officers as many of his comrades. He had only been jealous of some of their small privileges: “At night, the officers sit at their tables and talk by candlelight. The light is the only thing I begrudge them. With light I could write and read so much.”³⁰⁸ The Kisch writing months later in January and February 1915 was not the same man.

He had survived three failed invasions of Serbia, the complete decimation of his regiment, and the loss of almost all of his close friends. He began to see officers’ abuses of power everywhere, and usually took them as personal affronts. At a rail station in Ujvidek on 20 December, where cold soldiers huddled in the hall for warmth, a general entered, ordering all the men out so that officers could have the area to themselves. The general

³⁰⁶ Ibid., p 264-5.

³⁰⁷ Kisch, *Schreib*, p 248.

³⁰⁸ Kisch, *Soldat*, p 105.

used the pretext that the soldiers had not offered him the proper salute stipulated by regulations. Kisch felt "disgusted by this lie" and "left slowly and ostentatiously" while "loudly laughing."³⁰⁹ Kisch's disgust stemmed from a feeling of betrayal: "It is shameful of the officers to parade around as gentlemen while earlier they had been happy when one shared bread or a light with them."³¹⁰ Kisch, who had reveled in the forced equality of front life, had a hard time abiding the reemergence of the social and hierarchical status quo.

As the men shuffled out of the hall angrily, Kisch found himself confronted by a "yes-man, who laid the blame on us [soldiers]" and who, being an ammunition sergeant, tried to pull rank on Corporal Kisch. Blows were exchanged and a mass brawl broke out among the men. "As a few officers ran out from the station hall, the battle came to an end and we disappeared into the night," narrated Kisch.³¹¹ The men who had taken the sergeant's side were, according to Kisch, "rear-echelon swine" and thus "people who had hardly heard a rifle shot and who considered cavalier treatment by officers as a matter of course, or who accepted it so as not to be sent to the trenches."³¹² For Kisch, officer-soldier relations were inextricably linked with the divide between front and rear soldiers. The equality of officers and men had come to represent a special quality of frontline service. By contrast, rear-echelon troops were more used to kowtowing to officers' every whim.

The sense of betrayal Kisch felt toward the officers continued to fester: "The officers are again arrogant and strict. But should I really be surprised at that? Back in civilization, a great many things turned out to be impossible that had been worthwhile in the trenches."³¹³ Kisch rued the disappearance of the feeling of equality and shared misery that developed

³⁰⁹ Kisch, *Schrieb*, p 246. Please note that from here on, Kisch quotations come almost entirely from the later, expanded edition of Kisch's diary, *Schreib das auf, Kisch!*

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹¹ *Ibid.*

³¹² *Ibid.*, p 247.

³¹³ *Ibid.*, p 251.

among men of all ranks in the trenches. Sadness replaced anger when an officer who, at the front had often made him coffee, provided him dry shelter, and helped him find a bit of food, publicly humiliated Kisch in front of his comrades. At a local pub near their billet, the officer – “he who had shared bread with me, who had been my brother” – demanded Kisch buy him drink after drink, bragging to the other guests that he “had found someone to take advantage of, a sucker on whose tab he could get drunk.” Kisch reflected that “it made me sick that he valued his friendly favors so little.”³¹⁴ As Kisch came to understand, the officer’s kind gestures had been little more than an investment, to be cashed in at a later date. Kisch scolded himself again for being surprised at the man’s change in demeanor: “[the officers] have their ideas from peacetime: relationships for advancement, patronage, etc.”³¹⁵

He also grumbled at the officers who now flooded the regiment, back from sick leave or requesting transfers back to field duty. “While in the field we often had hardly an officer in the company, now they are here aplenty,” complained Kisch. Many had reported themselves healthy, he suspected, so as to fulfill the minimum of “field service” in their career files while the regiment was billeted in safe positions on friendly soil.³¹⁶

With the 11th back on Austrian soil for the first time in almost half a year, many soldiers’ and officers’ wives made arduous journeys by train to southern Hungary to see their husbands. Kisch observed with growing disgust as some officers demanded sexual favors from these women, offering in return better treatment of their husbands. Tasked with typing up a commendation application for a “First Lieutenant J.,” whose wife had travelled to the regiment’s billet in Ófutak, he expressed sadness at how the lieutenant’s superior traded commendations for sexual favors:

I know First Lieutenant J.’s wife. She is the daughter of a factory owner from Prague, blond and hardly twenty years old, and just for a scrap of paper for her husband she lets herself be

³¹⁴ Ibid., p 252.

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ Ibid.

taken advantage of by the lieutenant colonel, by this old firecracker who arrived in the field three weeks ago and who talks for hours at a time about his hemorrhoids.³¹⁷

"Apparently this is quite common," wrote Kisch.³¹⁸ He cataloged examples of similar instances in which superiors preyed on family members' desperation by offering to certify leaves of illness or lift disciplinary sanctions on soldiers. These arrangements unfolded under the observant eyes and loose lips of servants, footmen, and orderlies, and the practice was common knowledge among the soldiery.³¹⁹

With the regiment pulled off the front line and most of his friends dead or wounded, Kisch began his second year of war disheartened and angry. He filled his January and February diary entries with anecdotes of the haughtiness and arrogance of the officer corps. At the beginning of the war, Kisch had generally held off complaining about the officers. He begrudged them their candles, but felt no anger toward them. After sharing the muddy and bloody trenches with them, his demeanor had radically changed by 1915. The betrayal of the frontline community counted among his most heartfelt traumas of the war.

³¹⁷ Ibid., p 259.

³¹⁸ Ibid.

³¹⁹ Ibid., p 266.

CONCLUSION

The 11th entered the war in 1914 as a body of men organized within parallel and competing groups of loyalty, identity, and belonging. This thesis has charted the emergence and evolution of two broad categories of belonging: national and military-hierarchical. The experience of the 11th shows that the national divide between Czechs and Germans existed, but did not necessarily translate into negative relationships between Czech and German soldiers. In contrast, military-hierarchical relationships had a much higher potential to become emotionalized and develop into outright enmity.

If one is willing to read Czech-German peacetime political rivalry into the experiences of Austria-Hungary's soldiers, one might expect significant conflict within a regiment comprising soldiers of both nationalities. But in the 11th, this did not occur. That is not to say that soldiers' national loyalties melted away and that soldiers became "nationally indifferent." Both German and Czech soldiers were cognizant that the regiment was a binational, bilingual entity. Language, expression through song, and shared cultural experiences still served as visible expressions of the regiment's heterogeneous soldiery. Jindřich Bejl, a committed Czech, expressed visceral hatred for Germans in the abstract, but not once described a negative interaction with a German comrade that stemmed solely or even largely from national differences. Instead, he experienced extremely positive relationships with some of the regiment's German-speaking personnel. A shared distaste for the war proved to be a locus around which Bejl and his diverse group of friends coalesced. The experience of the war created a convergence of interests among soldiers who in peacetime may have found very little in common.

Military-hierarchical differences had a different life at the front. Because these differences directly influenced chances of survival and physical well-being at the front, they proved much more sensitive to combat reverses. Higher rank implied greater access to material privileges, observed jealously by soldiers. But this was not the only arena in which soldiers noted a divergence of interests between themselves and their officers. A distinct corporate ethos and manner of behavior marked officers as fundamentally different from the common soldier. But most importantly, rank came with responsibility. Officers' decision-making directly impacted soldiers' chances of living or dying in combat. When battles went poorly, the smoldering jealousies and resentments felt by soldiers toward their officers boiled over into outright hatred. Soldiers seemed willing to abide officer privilege until negative experiences in battle showed those privileges to be unwarranted. Such disaffection became most visible immediately following disastrous battles and the ensuing retreats.

But the combat situation at the front was not static. Resentment rose and fell alongside battlefield developments. One might expect tensions to rise during periods of sustained combat and dissipate when the regiment left the frontlines. But again, this was not the case. Combat and frontline life forced a certain equality between soldiers and their officers. Soldiers and officers alike died in droves during 1914. Similarly, when at the front, officers had less opportunity to take advantage of the privileges associated with their station. Egon Kisch reveled in this levelling effect of the front.

The convergence of officers and soldiers at the frontline resulted from two crucial factors. First, soldiers realized early on that disastrous tactical decisions often originated with senior commanders. Indeed, many of the worst examples of botched attacks had been ordered *in spite of* the protestations of local company, battalion, and regimental commanders. Second, the differences between soldiers and their officers seemed to pale when compared with the differences between front soldiers and soldiers who served in rear and support services. Kisch expressed anger and amazement when he saw how servicemen

lived behind the front. Together, these factors enabled the creation of a “frontline experience” that welded men and their junior officers together.

Finally, emphasizing the mutability of the regiment’s personnel dynamics, I have shown that national and military-hierarchical convergence was not permanent. Both depended on the tempering effect of combat. Removed from the front, the distinction between front and rear troops faded and officers reasserted their traditional privileges. Bejl was doubly removed from the front in late 1914, while he convalesced in Prague. Here, his Czech nationalistic fervor reasserted itself. Bejl’s Germanophobia had not affected his interaction with German comrades in the concrete, but neither had Bejl’s ideas about Germans changed in the abstract. In his mind, they remained, as ever, enemies of the Czech nation.

Fighting at the front in the end radicalized Kisch and Bejl. The brief interludes of frontline cohesion would fade as the war’s duration turned from months into years. The officers’ betrayal of Kisch’s idealized frontline community resulted in increasingly bitter attitudes toward the officer corps. As pointed out by a Kisch biographer, “war became the crucible of Kisch’s social and political coming-of-age.”³²⁰ In late 1918, after Austria-Hungary concluded a ceasefire with the Allies, Kisch served as one of the leaders of the abortive 12 November Red Guard coup in Vienna.³²¹ On Bejl’s end, his persistent Czech nationalism prompted him to join the Russian-sponsored Czechoslovak Legion and return to combat in 1916, this time fighting *against* the Austro-Hungarian Army.

This thesis at its base has sought to understand what was important to Austro-Hungarian soldiers at the front. What determined soldiers’ behavior toward their comrades? I have argued that national differences (between Czechs and Germans) proved less decisive than the differences created by the Army’s rank structure (in terms of officers versus

³²⁰ Segel, *Bio-Anthology*, p 20.

³²¹ *Ibid.*, pp 20-27.

soldiers) and division of labor (between frontline and rear-echelon troops). These findings suggest two vectors for further research.

First, this study has focused on one regiment anchored in its specific military context. Comparisons ought to be drawn between other heterogeneous regiments in other military contexts. What differences might be observed if we focus our attentions on regiments at the Italian and Russian fronts, where the overall political and strategic context differed from that of the Serbian theater? How might a mixed Hungarian-Romanian regiment, for example, experience the war differently than this Czech-German one? Do regiments fighting in 1918 suggest alternate findings from regiments fighting in 1914? By making these comparisons, we stand to gain a more comprehensive picture of the breadth of Austro-Hungarian soldiers' experiences during the First World War.

Second, this study has shown the emergence and *existence* of military and national dividing lines, but further research is required in order to show the *impact* of these divisions on military efficacy. How did soldiers' resentment toward their officers impact battle? How did friendships across national lines, like that of Bejl and Jüthner, operate in combat? In essence, how did unit cohesion affect battlefield performance in the Austro-Hungarian context? Given the extremely heterogeneous character of its army, the Austro-Hungarian case can offer a great deal to this classic question of military science. By asking this question, we can more fully incorporate the Austro-Hungarian experience into European and global military history.

APPENDIX I: AUSTRO-HUNGARIAN ARMY FIELD OFFICER RANKS

Austro-Hungarian Title	United States Military Equivalent	Typical Command Assignment
Oberst	Colonel	Regiment
Oberstleutnant	Lieutenant Colonel	Deputy Regimental Command
Major	Major	Battalion
Hauptmann	Captain	Company
Oberleutnant	First Lieutenant	Deputy Company Command or Platoon
Leutnant	Second Lieutenant	Platoon
Fähnrich (Ensign)	-----	Platoon
Cadet	-----	Platoon

Information for the above table comes from a more detailed table in: Deák, *Beyond Nationalism*, pp 15-16.

APPENDIX II: AUSTRO-HUNGARIAN FIELD UNIT ORGANIZATION

Austro-Hungarian name	English Term	Typical Size	Number of constituent units
Armee	Army	100-200,000	2-3 corps
Korps	Corps	30-40,000	2-4 divisions
Division	Division	15-20,000	4-5 regiments
Brigade	Brigade	6-8,000	2 regiments
Regiment	Regiment	3-4,500	4 battalions
Bataillon	Battalion	1,000	4 companies
Kompagnie	Company	250	4 platoons
Zug	Platoon	30-50	4 squads
Schwarm	Squad	10-12	-----

Information for the above table comes from a more detailed table in: Deák, *Beyond Nationalism*, pp 15-16.

APPENDIX III: 11TH REGIMENT PARENT AND CHILD UNITS

Unit		Commander (1 August 1914)	
Austro-Hungarian Army (<i>k.u.k. Streitkräfte</i>)		Chief of the General Staff Conrad von Hötzendorf	
Balkan Force (Balkanstreitkräfte)		Field Marshal Oscar Potiorek	
5 th Army		General Liborius von Frank	
VIII Corps		General Arthur Giesl von Gieslingen	
9 th Division		Lieutenant Field Marshal Viktor von Scheuchenstuel	
18 th Infantry Brigade		Major General Josef Mayerhofer	
11th Infantry Regiment		Colonel Karl Wokoun	
2 nd Battalion	4 th Battalion	Lt. Col. Georg Hoffman	Lt. Col. Edmund Hauser
7 th Company	15 th Company	Cpt. Emil Wenzel	Cpt. Ludwig Neseni
3 rd Platoon	4 th Platoon	Res. Cadet Jindřich Bejl	<i>Unknown</i>
-----	4 th Squad	-----	Res. Corporal Egon Kisch

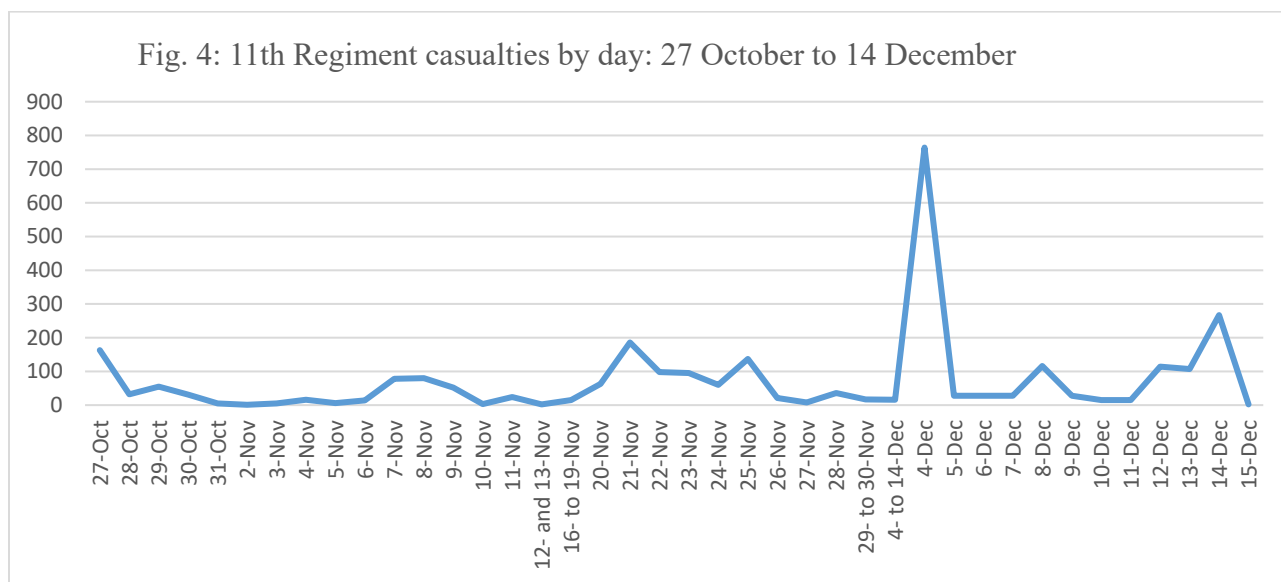
APPENDIX IV: 11TH REGIMENT CASUALTIES

Fig. 1: 11 th Regiment casualties from 12-20 August, 1914				
	Dead	Wounded	Missing	Total
Officers	10	35	2	47
Men	65	646	225	936
Total	75	676	227	978

Fig. 2: 11 th Regiment casualties from 8-10 September, 1914				
	Dead	Wounded	Missing	Total
Officers	1	7	1	9
Men	28	224	94	346
Total	29	231	95	355

Fig. 3: 11 th Regiment casualties from 27 October to 14 December, 1914				
	Dead	Wounded	Missing	Total
Officers	12	20	14	46
Men	238	1116	1429	2783
Total	250	1136	1443	2829*

* 2 men were also listed as "captured" in the official statistics, resulting in a total of 2831.



Casualty numbers come from: *Dějiny bývalého c. a k. pěšího pluku čís. 11. za dobu světové války 1914-1918* (Unpublished manuscript, prepared by Zdeněk Novák, Located in: Karton č. 3 [chronika a deníky], Sběrka c. a k. pěšího pluku č. 11 [Infanterieregiment Nr. 11], Rakouské fondy do roku 1918, 1. oddělení VHA [fondy a sbírky do roku 1945], Vojenský historický archiv, Vojenský ústřední archiv, Prague).

APPENDIX V: SUMMARY OF THE 11TH REGIMENT'S COMBAT RECORD

1914

- **Mobilization** – 27 July to 11 August: Call to arms, issuing of uniforms and weapons, departure for the front
- **First Invasion** – 27 July to 11 August: fighting on Cer Mountain, retreat of 5th Army
 - 20 August: Captain Allé takes command of 4th Battalion, his first infantry command
- **Rest and Refitting** – 21 August to 7 September: return to Austrian soil, refitting and taking on of replacements, preparations for river-crossing
 - 3 September: Captain Ludwig Allé diagnosed with dysentery and sent to the rear
- **River-Crossing** – 8 September to 9 September: disastrous attack by 9th Division on Serbian-held river bank; chaotic retreat
- **Rest and Refitting II** – 10 September to 16 September: return to Austrian side of the river, taking on of replacements, preparation for the attack on the Parašnica
- **Fighting for the Parašnica** – 17 September to 26 September: infantry battles over control of the peninsula, VIII Corps halted even after the weight of 9th Division added to attack
 - 17 September: Bejl wounded by Serbian rifle fire during attack on Parašnica
- **Trench Warfare** – 27 September to 26 October: static positions on the Parašnica
- **Advance** – 27 October to 3 December: 5th Army with 11th Regiment moves briskly through northwestern Serbia, brushing aside token Serbian resistance
 - 27 October: 11th Regiment breaks out from trench positions on Parašnica
 - 4 November: Allé certified as able-bodied by medical staff, ordered to report for duty with a replacement battalion
- **Retreat to Belgrade** – 4 December to 14 December: 6th Army shattered in the south, forcing 5th Army in the north to retreat, 11th Regiment fights bloody rearguard actions, hundreds of 11th Regiment men taken prisoner

1915

- **Off the Front** – 15 December 1914 to 5 February: 11th Regiment rests and refits in Hungary, takes on and trains new recruits
 - 26 January: Allé returns to the 11th at the head of a replacement battalion
 - 1 February: Bejl certified as able-bodied by medical staff, ordered to report for duty with replacement battalion
- **In the Carpathians** – 6 February to 7 April: 11th posted near towns of Smolník and Wola Michowa facing Russian trench positions
 - 1 March: Bejl promoted to reserve lieutenant
 - 11 March: 11th Regiment positions overrun by Russian troops, greater part of the regiment captured, including all of Allé's 1st Battalion; Allé escapes capture
 - 15 March: Bejl and his replacement battalion depart for the Carpathians
 - 18 March: Russian shell strikes Allé's regimental headquarters; Allé escapes wounding, Kisch suffers head wound, removed to home front
 - 22 March: Bejl and his replacement battalion reach the front lines
 - 7 April: Bejl and his company overrun by Russian attack, entire company captured, including Bejl

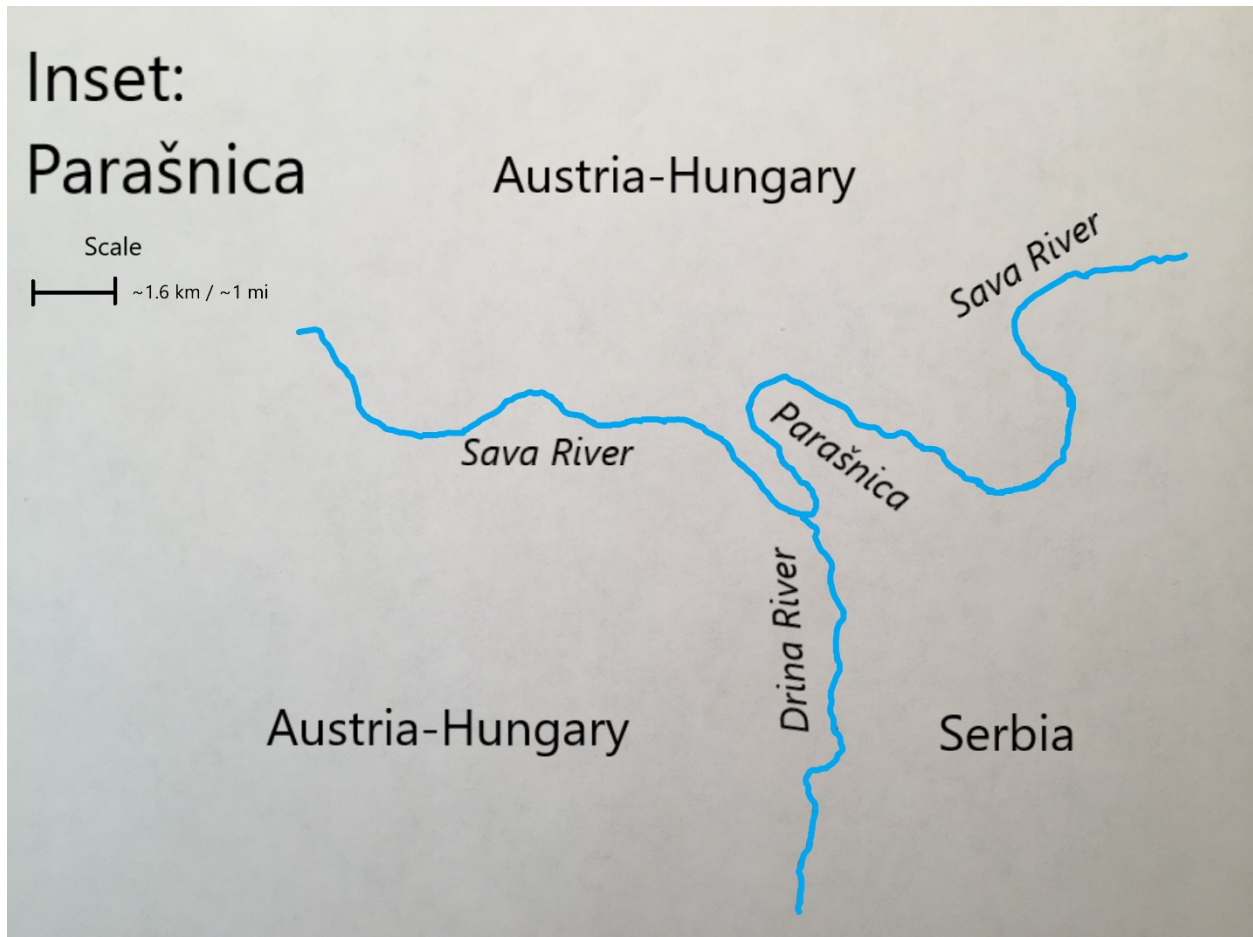
APPENDIX VI: MAPS

Map 1: The Balkan Front



Source: produced by author.

Map 2: The Parašnica



Source: produced by author.

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**Note: The location information following the above manuscript titles ascend in order from most specific to broadest archival subcollection, ending with the name of the archive and the city in which it may be found. Carton and collection identifiers are found in parentheses.*

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