

TANNENBERG, 26-28 AUG 1914

A Working Bibliography of MHI Sources

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OVERVIEW

Although the battle took place near Allenstein, it was named for the medieval battle at Tannenberg, or Gruenwald. It was the most complete and decisive German victory of the First World War, virtually ending the two-pronged Russian invasion of East Prussia by encircling and destroying the Russian Second Army under General Samsonov. Samsonov had planned to move his Army into the southwest corner of East Prussia, attacking Pritwitz's German Eighth Army from the rear while General Rennenkampf moved his First Russian Army into the northeast for a frontal assault.

Fearing a Russian encirclement from the outset, Pritwitz ordered a retreat and was replaced by General von Hindenburg, who normally receives credit for the ultimate German victory, although the action had been planned by his predecessor's subordinate, Colonel Maximilian Hoffmann. Hindenburg halted the German withdrawal and set into motion a series of combined arms maneuvers to lure the Second Army into an encirclement.

Russian logistics were problematic at best, and the German encirclement gradually cut off Samsonov's communication capability. Against the wishes of Ludendorff, the German Army chief of Staff in Berlin, Helmuth von Moltke, dispatched three corps and a cavalry division from the Western Front, allowing the Germans to muster even more might against the two Russian armies. Whether personal animosity between the Russian Army commanders or German leadership and numbers made the difference, Samsonov was surrounded. He got lost in the dense forest, where he committed suicide rather than face the humiliation of reporting the loss of about 140,000 troops and over 500 guns.

After Tannenberg, war in the East continued until the 1917 dissolution of the Russian Armies and their government, but they never again achieved the same level of offensive capability as evidenced in the invasion of East Prussia.

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