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COLONEL DOBROSAV MILENKOVIĆ'S JEZERSKO DETACHMENT IN AN OFFENSIVE LAUNCHED BY THE ARMY OF THE KINGDOM OF SERBS, CROATS AND SLOVENES IN CARINTHIA IN MAY AND JUNE 1919

ABSTRACT: On the basis of an analysis of archival sources and the literature, the author addresses the combat operations of the Jezersko Detachment, commanded by Serbian Colonel Dobrosav Milenković, which played the main role in an offensive launched by the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (the May-June Offensive) against the Austrian units in Carinthia in 1919. The Detachment was tasked with attacking from starting positions along the St. Leonhard–Bad Vellach–Trögernline and penetrating in the direction of Kühnsdorf–Völkermarkt. It had to maintain communication with the Ljubelj Detachment on its left flank and the Carinthian Detachment on its right flank. Together with other units of the Army of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, it successfully completed its battle path; Slovenian-Serbian units reached the river Gurk and occupied Zollfeld and Klagenfurt. The signing of a ceasefire resulted in the establishment of a demarcation zone, and the Paris Peace Conference ultimately decided that a plebiscite would determine which country Carinthia would fall under.

KEY WORDS: Jezersko Detachment; Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes; Carinthia; fights for the northern border; May-June Offensive.

Introduction

After the end of the First World War, numerous new states formed in the territory of the dissolved Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Due to their multi-nationality, the delimitation between them was extremely difficult, which was also true of the territory of southern Carinthia and Styria, inhabited by the Austrians and the Slovenes. On 29 October 1918, a crowd of people in Congress Square in Ljubljana and in other Slovenian cities welcomed the establishment of a new South Slavic state, the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs. Its short-lived existence was marked by complex issues of the revolutionary period, with all the characteristics which were brought about by the end of the war. The state did not receive international recognition, and after a month it joined the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. A new German Austria was also formed in Vienna on 12 November 1918, in the territory of the disintegrated dual monarchy. Both new states tried to establish authority in their respective territories, and began to create their armed forces with soldiers who had only recently fought in a common army. The dispute between the Slovenes and the Austrians in Carinthia and Styria evolved into an armed conflict, known in Slovenian historiography as the fight for the northern Slovenian border. The fiercest skirmishes were fought with the Austrian units for Bad Radkersburg (*Radgona*) in February 1919, and the battles in Carinthia, where the unresolved issue of national demarcation was left to the initiative of the Slovenian and Austrian authorities. The occupation of parts of eastern and western Carinthia in December 1918 was followed by an attack by Austrian units, which pushed the Slovenian units in the western part back to the Karavanke range. The Slovenian side tried to gain better starting positions before the decision was made at the Paris Peace Conference, and launched a poorly prepared offensive in eastern Carinthia in April 1919, which ended in the loss of almost the whole of Carinthia. As a result, a new offensive was launched by the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in late May 1919, which included Slovenian and Serbian units with Serbian commanders. This article analyzes the operation of the Jezersko Detachment in the offensive by

the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in May and June 1919. The Detachment, commanded by Serbian Colonel Dobrosav Milenković, reached positions in Tentschachu (*Štetiče*), Karawankenblick, Leibsdorfu (*Ličja vas*) and Krumpendorf am Wörth See (*Kriva Vrba*) on 6 June and arrived at Klagenfurt. This article presents the battle path of the Detachment, and provides an analysis of the offensive operation of Serbian and Slovenian units.

The April defeat and the decision of the Government of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes to launch a new offensive

After the signing of a ceasefire between the Carinthian provincial government and the Slovenian National Government on 14 January 1919, the fighting in Carinthia stopped. From January 1919, Slovenian territory was under the 4th Army Zone of General Božidar Janković, which was directly superior to the Drava Division Authority.¹ The period from February to April 1919 was relatively peaceful and without any combat. However, rumours soon began to spread that the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes would not get as much Carinthian territory at the Paris Peace Conference as it had expected. For this reason, the units of the Drava Division Authority, pressured by Slovenian politicians, broke the ceasefire and attacked along the entire demarcation line in Carinthia on 29 April 1919. The attack did not have sufficient military support and depended on the self-initiative of the commanders of the Slovenian units of the Drava Division Authority. For the offensive mounted on 29 April 1919, nine and a half infantry battalions and 40 cannons were gathered in the eastern Carinthian battlefield: two battalions of the Celje Infantry Regiment, two battalions and a half of the Slovenian Mountain Infantry Regiment, two battalions of the Ljubljana Infantry Regiment, two battalions of the Maribor Infantry Regiment, and one battalion of the Trieste Infantry Regiment.

Immediately after the attack, most units took advantage of the initial surprise and advanced; however, they did not achieve the set objectives, since the operational plan was too demanding for the quite weak

¹ On 1 February 1919, the Drava Division Authority replaced the 2nd Military District, which in its zone of responsibility covered the entire Slovenian territory in the former State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs.

Slovenian units. Austrian units used the violation of the ceasefire to carry out a counter-attack on the Völkermarkt (*Velikovec*) bridgehead and moved the frontline to the Dravograd-Plešivec-Solčava-Bad Eisenkappel (*Železna Kapla*)-Karavanke peaks. At first, the Slovenian soldiers firmly resisted, but then backed down and retreated. The Austrian counteroffensive was successful and did not result only in the Austrian occupation of the entire Carinthian territory, but also caused moral disintegration in the Slovenian units and ended Slovenian military independence. The question of responsibility for the commencement of the Slovenian offensive is not of primary importance; the fault undoubtedly lay in the poorly planned offensive prepared by the Slovenian military leadership. Moreover, the Government and the military leadership of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes could have been more actively engaged in solving the Carinthian issue. Only after a comprehensive intelligence report by the Drava Division Authority and the 4th Army Zone did the consequences of the defeat of the Slovenian units in Carinthia become obvious to the Supreme Command.² The defeat in the April-May offensive in Carinthia resulted in more active involvement of the Government and the Army of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in solving the Carinthian issue. General Krsta Smiljanić was appointed commander of the newly-planned offensive. Preparations began, which meant that the Drava Division Authority declared mobilisation and called up men born in 1890-1894 and men born in 1895-1899. On 9 May, the Serbian Supreme Command ordered the Drava Division Authority to demand that the Carinthian provisional government withdraw the Austrian units to the *ante bellum* line – the line before the launch of the Austrian offensive. On 9-16 May, negotiations on achieving a ceasefire were conducted in Klagenfurt (*Celovec*). The military delegation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, which was sent to Klagenfurt, demanded that the Austrian side withdraw back to the positions before the beginning of the battles, but the Austrians were prepared to move their troops only south of the river

² Archives of the Republic of Slovenia (hereafter) ARS, SI AS fond 1193, t.u. 22, the Ljubelj Group, Memories of Captain Kren, 24,25; Lojze Ude, *Boji za severno slovensko mejo 1918–1919* (Ljubljana: Založba Obzorja, 1977), 198 (hereafter: Ude, *Boji za severno slovensko mejo*); Matjaž Ravbar, "Poročnik Lojze Ude – borec za slovensko severno mejo", in: *Stražarji Karavank: Lojze Ude in boji za severno mejo*, edited by Blaž Torkar and Miha Šimac (Kranj: Duštvo general Rudolf Maister Kranj, 2018), 47; Ljubomir Marić, *Iz moga komandovanja Koruškim odredom od 21. maja do 22. juna 1919. godine* (Beograd: Ratnik, 1927), 1-2 (hereafter: Marić, *Iz moga komandovanja*).

Drava at Dravograd. For this reason, negotiations were broken off on 16 May 1919 and the delegation left Klagenfurt.

On 11 May, the Supreme Command received a report on the state of the military units in the Drava Division Authority. The Ljubljana Infantry Regiment had almost ceased to exist, while the Celje and Mountain Infantry Regiments each had only 400-500 soldiers. Only the Maribor Infantry Regiment and the artillery were in good condition, which worried General Smiljanić. On 19 May 1919, the Government of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes gave the green light to the commencement of combat actions in Carinthia. In its message to the 4th Army Zone, the Government said that it had no intention of turning to the Entente with regard to the issue of solving the border dispute in Carinthia. Among other things, it clearly stated that the enemy had to be forced to withdraw across the demarcation line, and that once Völkermarkt and its rear area was occupied from the north and the east, an order for the occupation of Klagenfurt would probably also be issued. The Government demanded that the date and time of the offensive be determined as soon as possible, that a mobilisation of Slovenian units be carried out and their line of operation determined, and that strict discipline and the responsibility of superiors be exercised. They ordered Smiljanić to personally engage deeply in the preparations for the offensive, and to report on combat power, the order of the battle and the concentration of their own and the enemy units. For the purposes of the offensive, new units from other regions of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes arrived in Slovenian territory: the 8th Infantry Regiment; two battalions of the 1st Infantry Regiment; a squadron of the 2nd Cavalry Regiment; the Drina Howitzer Artillery Division; one battalion of the 5th and one of the 7th Infantry Regiments; a machine-gun squad of the 5th Infantry Regiment; and the 2nd Division of the Drina Mountain Artillery Regiment.³ The main direction of

³ Marić, *Iz moga komandovanja*, 4-5; Zvonko Seručar, *Vojne akcije u Koruškoj 1918/1919 godine* (Beograd: Vojnoistorijski institut JA, 1950), 59 (hereafter: Seručar, *Vojne akcije*); Janez Švajncar, *Slovenska vojska 1918-1919* (Ljubljana: Prešernova družba, 1990), 164-165 (hereafter: Švajncar, *Slovenska vojska*); Matjaž Bizjak, *Operativno-taktična analiza ofenzive vojske Kraljevine SHS proti Koroški (28.05.-6.6.1919)* (Poljče: Ministrstvo za obrambo RS, 2004), 14-16 (hereafter: Bizjak, *Operativno-taktična analiza*); Ude, *Boji za severno slovensko mejo*, 219; Matjaž Bizjak, *Slovenska vojska 1918-1919 in formiranje Dravske divizijske oblasti*, magistrska naloga (Ljubljana: Filozofska fakulteta Univerze v Ljubljani, 2003), 245 (hereafter: Bizjak, *Slovenska vojska 1918-1919*).

attack was towards Bad Eisenkappel. One of the two subsidiary routes led from Šoštanj towards Črna na Koroškem and on to Bleiburg (*Pliberk*), and the other followed the Drava valley. The offensive was approved by the Government of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, with a comment that the offensive had to be brief and ensure absolute success with minimal casualties. General Smiljanić delayed the launch of the offensive, since he was not convinced of its success and had insufficient information on the enemy. Five combat detachments were formed for the purposes of the offensive; based on their composition, three were offensive and two defensive. The latter were smaller in numbers and supported by less artillery. The offensive detachments were General Rudolf Maister's Lavamünd Detachment, Colonel Ljubomir Marić's Carinthian Detachment, and Colonel Dobrosav Milenković's Jezersko Detachment; and the defensive detachments were Lieutenant Colonel Sava Tripković's Ljubelj Detachment, and Captain Kajundžić's Jesenice Detachment. With the exception of the Lavamünd Detachment, Serbian officers were appointed as detachment commanders. All the appointments were in the hands of General Smiljanić, who did not know or trust the Slovenian senior officers, mostly because of their defeat in the April offensive. He appointed officers whom he knew well and trusted.⁴

Interestingly, intelligence on the enemy was extremely scarce before the offensive. There was a particular lack of information on the size and deployment of the Austrian units. The Lavamünd Detachment commander, General Maister, had the best intelligence on the enemy, owing to his well-developed intelligence network on the ground.

The Jesenice Detachment consisted of 200 soldiers and two cannons. Its subordinate units were the 3rd and 4th Companies of the 1st Infantry Regiment's 1st Battalion; the 26th Infantry Regiment's machine-gun squad; volunteers of First Lieutenant Karel Šefman's Jesenice Company; the 1st platoon of the Celje Mountain Battery; and a telephone section. Part of the Detachment operated near Rosenbach (*Podrožca*), and the other near Podkoren. The Rosenbach part was tasked with reconnaissance and tying the enemy to itself, while the Podkoren part was to hold defensive positions. The Detachment's mission was to remain completely defensive and secure occupied positions.

⁴ Blaž Torkar, "Ofenziva vojske Kraljevine SHS maja in junija 1919 na Koroškem", in: *Strážarji Karavank: Lojze Ude in boji za severno mejo*, edited by Blaž Torkar and Miha Šimac (Kranj: Duštvo general Rudolf Maister Kranj, 2018), 54-55 (hereafter: Torkar, "Ofenziva vojske Kraljevine SHS").

The Ljubelj Detachment comprised 720 soldiers, 23 machine guns and 8 pieces of artillery. Its subordinate units were the 1st Battalion of the Ljubljana Infantry Regiment; Captain Kren's volunteers; the 3rd Ljubljana Battery; the 4th Howitzer Battery; and a telephone section. The Ljubelj Detachment was tasked with advancing in the direction of Ljubelj-Ferlach (*Borovlje*), while using its main striking forces in the direction of Zgornjikot-Ferlach; there it was to conquer and cut off the Ferlach-Apače communication and occupy a bridge across the river Drava near Hollenburg (*Humberk*). Between the villages of Zell (*Sele*) and Schaida (*Šajda*), it was to find a connection between the left and right wings of the Jezersko Detachment.⁵

The Carinthian Detachment was commanded by Colonel Ljubomir Marić, and was comprised of 3200 soldiers and 26 pieces of artillery. Its subordinate units were three battalions of the Slovenian Mountain Regiment; two battalions of the Celje Infantry Regiment; one battalion and two companies of the Ljubljana Infantry Regiment; the 2nd Squadron of the 2nd Cavalry Regiment; the 2nd and 5th Batteries of the Drava Mountain Artillery Regiment; the 1st Field Maribor Battery; the 1st Field Serbian Battery; the 2nd Howitzer Ljubljana Battery; the 3rd Howitzer Celje Battery; the 5th Heavy Ljubljana Howitzer Battery; and a telephone section. The starting positions of the Carinthian Detachment were on the line Sv. Peter na Kronske gori-Sv. Rok-Plešivec-Tolstivrh-Smrekovec-Komen-Veliki Travnik-Solčava. The aim of the operation was to occupy the bridge in front of Völkermarkt in the first phase, and to occupy Völkermarkt in the second phase. In addition, the Detachment was tasked with supporting the Lavamünd Detachment in its occupation of Spodnji Dravograd.

The Lavamünd Detachment was commanded by General Rudolf Maister and was composed of 2000 soldiers and 14 pieces of artillery. Its subordinate units were three battalions of the Maribor Infantry Regiment; the 4th Celje Mountain Battery; the 2nd and the 4th Maribor Howitzer Batteries; the 5th Heavy Howitzer Battery; a cavalry squad; and a telephone section. The starting positions of the Detachment were on St. Leonhard (*Sv. Lenart*) -St. Urban (*Sv. Urban*)-Hill 1367-Hill 835-Hill 344 and in the village of Trbonje. From this line, the Detachment was to carry out an attack on the enemy and occupy Spodnji Dravograd with the help

⁵ ARS, SI AS fond 1193, t.u. 22, Sava P. Tripković, the Ljubelj Detachment.

of the right wing of the Carinthian Detachment. After the occupation of Spodnji Dravograd, the Detachment continued its attack in the direction of Lavamünd (*Labot*)–Sankt Paul im Lavanttal (*Šentpavel v Labotski dolini*), with the aim of reaching the narrow passage at Sankt Paul im Lavanttal and holding it. After the occupation of Lavamünd, it was obliged to send a weak column along the left side of the river Drava with the mission of maintaining communication with the Carinthian Detachment and occupying a bridge across the river Drava near the village of Lipica on time. When the Detachment occupied Sankt Paul im Lavanttal, reconnaissance would have to be carried out and the Detachment would have to be protected against potential surprises from the direction of Wolfsegg (*Volšperk*) and Völkermarkt. The Detachment was specifically ordered to pay attention to its right flank towards Styria; this was understandable, since only small security units and the Carinthian Regiment were deployed on that side.

The main attack part of the offensive operation rested with the Jezersko Detachment, which consisted of 4200 soldiers and 23 pieces of artillery. Its subordinate units were the 8th Infantry Regiment; the 2nd Battalion of the 7th Infantry Regiment; the 1st Serbian Cavalry Squadron; the 1st Squadron of the Drava Cavalry Regiment; the 1st and the 2nd Drina Artillery Divisions; the 2nd Drina Howitzer Division; the 6th Ljubljana Howitzer Division; the Danube Field Battery; and a telephone section. The starting position of the Jezersko Detachment was the line St. Leonhard–Bela Bad Vellach (*Bela*)–Trögern (*Korte*). The Detachment was tasked with attacking the enemy in front of it from the starting line, advancing towards Kühnsdorf (*Sinča vas*)–Völkermarkt and conquering a railway and wooden bridges near the village of Stein (*Kamen*) and Ana's wooden bridge near Gallizien (*Galicija*). Additionally, the Detachment was responsible for maintaining the connection on its left flank with the Ljubelj Detachment in the direction of Schaida (*Šajda*)–Apače, and with the Carinthian Detachment in the direction of Kopreina–Petzen–Globasnitz (*Globasnica*). The division reserve included a group under the command of Major Milorad Radonjić, which was located in Ljubljana, and a group commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Svetozar Radovanović, located in Slovenj Gradec.

The Austrian authorities in Carinthia were aware that the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was planning an offensive, and for this reason, the Austrian Government allowed the mobilisation of men born in 1877-1900. However, this was not successful, since only approximately 11,000 soldiers

responded, 4500 of which had already been drafted or were active as volunteers, 2200 were exempt, and 1900 fled. As a result, the Austrian units were additionally manned with only approximately 790 soldiers.⁶

The Jezersko Detachment and its battle path

The Jezersko Detachment commenced its attack on 28 May 1919. The right-hand column advanced quickly despite the difficult terrain, since it did not encounter its adversary in the direction of Tomažič in the valley of Remschenig (*Remšenik*), except in the settlement of Kupec, where the adversary had a platoon. The advance party of the Detachment avoided this platoon, and as early as 8.00am reached Kah and continued on its route towards the peak of Gobančev vrh, where fierce fighting took place. The enemy defended their positions with one company and two machine guns, but their resistance was soon broken owing to an intervention by a 4th Mountain Battery platoon. Gobančev vrh was conquered at 10.30am, and the advance party continued past Bad Eisenkappel towards the saddle of Prevern timer saddle. At 12.00 am, the Jezersko Detachment commander demanded that the right-hand group carry out a strike on the right flank of the enemy's units defending Bad Eisenkappel. This task was assigned to the 3rd Company, whose mission was to occupy two dominant points, Hill 746 and Hill 777, which controlled communication towards Sittersdorf (*Žitara vas*), and in this way prevent the enemy from retreating from the town along the main communication line. The main body of the right-hand column supported the operation of this company, enhanced by two machine guns, with infantry, machine gun and artillery fire from Gobančev vrh. The company conquered both Hills at approximately 1.30 pm; however, the Austrian units had begun to retreat from Bad Eisenkappel after the fall of Gobančev vrh, mainly because the defence of the town had been threatened on its right flank and had found itself under intense fire, predominantly from Hill 1090 and Gobančev vrh. The Austrians withdrew along the communication line Bad Eisenkappel-Sittersdorf. The advance party of the right-hand column reached Hill 1294, Prevern timer saddle and Ojstra at approximately

⁶ Viktor Andrejka, "Razvoj vojaštva in vojaški dogodki od prevrata do danes", in: *Slovenci v desetletju 1918-1928*, edited by Josip Mal (Ljubljana: Leonova družba, 1928), 285-286 (hereafter: Andrejka, "Razvoj vojaštva"); Švajncner, *Slovenska vojska*, 176; Bizjak, *Operativno-taktična analiza*, 18-22.

3.30 pm, and so fulfilled the planned objective for the first day of the offensive. The group spent the night on Preverník saddle. The right-hand security unit of this group encountered the enemy at Podpeca. Some of the Austrian soldiers occupied Luscha (*Lužar*), while others were deployed in the vicinity of Černer. The security unit of the right-hand column went around Černer and struck into the flank of the adversary's positions at Luscha, which caused the Austrians to withdraw towards Globasnitz. Cavalry patrols reached Globasnitz on the same day.

The advance party of the central group came into contact with the enemy as early as 4.05 am. After a brief battle the adversary withdrew, and when the Slovenian units reached a bridge east of the settlement of Schlagholz, Austrian units opened heavy machine gun fire north-east of the settlement of Gobanc. From the foot of this elevation, a mountain artillery group fired on Serbian units, and heavy cannons fired on them from Bad Eisenkappel. The Austrians wanted to position three heavy cannons at the foot of this elevation, but were prevented from doing so by the mountain cannon fire. Later, this fire position was also attacked by a howitzer battery, which made the Austrians retreat. As a result of determined Austrian defence, the battalion of the forward party reached the line Ribič-Korjon at 11.25 am, while the right wing of the group conquered the elevation above Korjon.⁷

Because the advance came to a standstill, the Detachment commander ordered the advance party battalion to occupy Bad Eisenkappel, which it did at 1.00 pm, and to continue its penetration with the aim of conquering the exit from the valley of the river Bela. The 3rd Company acted as flank security along the right-hand side of the communication line. Another skirmish ensued at the exit from the valley between Rechberg (*Rebrca*) and Miklauzhof (*Miklavč*), but the Austrian soldiers retreated after a short fight. By 4.40 pm, Serbian units had occupied the peak of Žitrajškovrh and fired at the retreating Austrian units. Shortly after this, the 2nd Battalion of the 8th Regiment was charged with conquering two dominant points above Sittersdorf and occupying Schlossberg (*Ženek*). All the points had been occupied by the next morning with no resistance. The 2nd Battalion of the 7th Infantry Regiment was temporarily held back with the aim of protecting the passage through the gorge from small scattered enemy groups which were still retreating towards

⁷ Bizjak, *Operativno-taktična analiza*, 49-50.

Völkermarkt. The defence of Bad Eisenkappel was carried out by the 1st Battalion of Carinthian mountain gunners under the command of Major Dragutin Perko, a Slovenian married to a Viennese woman who had remained on the Austrian side after the war.

The left-hand group of the Jezersko Detachment conquered the settlement of Šejina without a fight at 3.45 am, while at the same time a company of the 8th Regiment's 3rd Battalion crossed the Obir stream and advanced towards the saddle of Počula. Two companies, two mountain cannons and four machine guns were deployed in the waiting area near Hribernik; their objective was to help, if necessary, in occupying Bad Eisenkappel. A company of the 7th Regiment's 2nd Battalion attacked the adversary on the mountain of Strožek and captured it. Due to some problems of the central group in their advancement towards Bad Eisenkappel, the company was tasked with moving along the ridge eastwards and operating in the rear area of the adversary's defence near Bad Eisenkappel. During this time, the security unit of the left-hand group engaged in a battle with the adversary near the settlement of Trkelj. Both companies near Hribernik were tasked with moving to Strožek and, together with the company operating there, reinforcing the attack on Bad Eisenkappel from the western side. Before all the three companies had managed to reach their new locations, the Austrians had begun to retreat from the city, so they were redirected to their initial location and tasked with advancing towards Bukovnik, where they arrived at 7.00 pm. The Jezersko Detachment was ordered to advance in two directions on 29 May. The first objective was Völkermarkt, which they had to reach via Eberndorf (*Dobrla vas*) and Kühnsdorf. The other direction was the north-eastern route, and the objective was to occupy Ana's bridge near Gallizien, a bridge near Duel and a railway bridge near Stein. The Jezersko Detachment commander formed two attack columns; the first under the command of Major Božidar Anđelković, and the second under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Jovan Naumović. The first column was tasked with advancing towards Völkermarkt and maintaining contact with the Carinthian Detachment, and the second column was to occupy all three bridges. The commander kept two battalions and eight cannons in reserve.

The right-hand column began to advance at 5.00 am. As an advance party, the 4th Company of the 2nd Battalion was assigned the task of advancing in the direction of Preverniki saddle-the valley of the stream of Suha-Polena-the village of Stara vas-the elevation east of Pfannsdorf (*Ba-*

nja vas)–Homitz (*Homec*)–Pirk on Drava river. The right-hand group received the order of the Detachment commander as late as 8.15 am; for this reason, the prior decision was immediately altered and the advance party was directed towards Völkermarkt via Gösselsdorf (*Goselna vas*)–Eberndorf–Kühnsdorf. It was determined that the battalion medical station would operate in Stara vas, approximately 8-10 km behind the main body; however, after the crossing of the river Drava, the station remained in Kühnsdorf. An officer reconnaissance patrol was sent ahead of the advance party to carry out reconnaissance operations. At the same time, the commander of the Cavalry Squadron was ordered to penetrate into Kühnsdorf via the shortest route, and continue towards a bridge across the river Drava near Völkermarkt. The advance party arrived at this bridge at approximately 1.30 pm, and the Cavalry Squadron followed an hour later. The bridge across the Drava was partially damaged. Once the units of this attack column had reached the Drava, they occupied positions next to it along the line between St. Lorenzen (*Sv. Lovrenc*) and the area west of Pribelsdorf (*Pribla vas*).⁸

Lieutenant Colonel Naumović divided his attack column into two groups: the 2nd Battalion of the 7th Regiment was directed towards Stein and Duel (*Dolje*), and the 3rd Battalion of the 8th Regiment towards Gallizien. Both groups soon reached their respective locations and attempted to cross bridges, but Austrian artillery units had managed to destroy them beforehand. On the night of 29-30 May, Austrian artillery units fired at the bridge near Völkermarkt and partially destroyed it. The Carinthian Detachment was designated as the unit to cross this bridge, but not until the following night. To support the Carinthian Detachment in crossing the bridge, the Drava Division Authority resubordinated all of Major Anđelković's group to this Detachment. The condition of other bridges across the river Drava was checked as well; the wooden bridge near Gallizien was demolished. At first it was unclear whether the railway bridge near Stein had been mined, so a patrol was sent there to find that it had been; however, the patrol managed to cut the wire. The bridge was well defended, so there was also firing by Austrian artillery units.⁹

On 31 May 1919, the Drava Division Authority ordered a thorough reconnaissance of the river Drava in the area of responsibility of the Jezersko Detachment, which was to bring forward a proposal of potential

⁸ Marić, *Iz moga komandovanja*, 48-49; Bizjak, *Operativno-taktična analiza*, 50-52.

⁹ Marić, *Iz moga komandovanja*, 49-50; Bizjak, *Operativno-taktična analiza*, 50-54.

favourable locations for crossing the river. The Jezersko Detachment carried out the reconnaissance and assessed that the best potential site for getting across the river was located two kilometres above the wooden bridge near Duel. According to these assessments, the Jezersko Detachment could be supported by the Carinthian Detachment at this location, the units could quickly unfold for combat operations after having crossed the river, and the eastern bank enabled a favourable concentration of artillery units and, consequently, advantageous fire support. The location near Sagerberg (*Zagorje*), below Ana's bridge near Gallizien, was determined as the other potential crossing. After an unsuccessful violent crossing of the river Drava near Völkermarkt, Major Anđelković's group became subordinate to the Jezersko Detachment once more.¹⁰

After two Slovenian soldiers escaped from captivity and crossed the river Drava, the Jezersko Detachment was relatively well-informed about the power and condition of the Austrian units on the other side of the river. On 1 June, the Celje Legion also became subordinate to the Jezersko Detachment; it was sent to Apače, where it replaced the 1st Serbian Cavalry Squadron. On that day, all the artillery units outside Völkermarkt were made subordinate to the howitzer division commander. The majority of the artillery units was deployed to new fire positions in accordance with the planned activities and were assigned new areas of operation. The Serbian mountain battery was divided into two platoons; one set up its fire position on the left wing in the vicinity of a bridge across the Bela stream/Hill 405, and the other south of the village of Kohldorf (*Vogle*). The 8th Celje Mountain Battery was positioned next to a road north of the settlement of Sebah, with an area of operation to the right and left of the road leading to Völkermarkt. The 6th Ljubljana Howitzer Battery was positioned south of the railway station near Kühnsdorf; the 1st Serbian Field Battery had its fire position 500m north of the village of Buchbrunn (*Bukovje*); the 5th Ljubljana Heavy Howitzer Battery was positioned in the settlement of Podhom; and a platoon of the 2nd Drina Howitzer Battery was positioned west of the Holm elevation/Hill 608. On the same day, the Jezersko Detachment commander received a command by the Drava Division Authority to continue combat operations. After this decision, the Jezersko Detachment was assigned a passive role until the fall of Völkermarkt. It had to carry out demonstrative preparations for crossing the river Drava, and in this way tie enemy

¹⁰ Bizjak, *Operativno-taktična analiza*, 50-54.

units to itself. The Jezersko Detachment was supported by the Carinthian Detachment. When the latter occupied Völkermarkt, the Jezersko Detachment would forcibly cross the river Drava. On 1 and 2 June, the Jezersko Detachment took over the entire defence line along the river Drava from the Carinthian Detachment. During all that time, fierce artillery fights took place in the positions of the Jezersko Detachment.

On 3 June 1919, at 2.00 am, all the batteries outside Völkermarkt opened concentric fire on predetermined targets, and at 8.00am, the observation post reported that a white flag had been hung from a church in Völkermarkt. Patrols were immediately sent into the town to check the situation, and at 10.30am they came into contact with the Carinthian Detachment. The Jezersko Detachment commander requested the commander of the Drava Division Authority to permit the transition of the main body of his detachment across the river Drava towards Völkermarkt under the protection of the Carinthian Detachment. He was not granted permission to do so, so preparations began to cross the river at the previously determined locations. Since the swollen river Drava prevented artillery, machine guns and rear elements from crossing, the Carinthian Detachment was requested to support the left and central columns of the Jezersko Detachment in the crossing and subsequent advancing of both columns.¹¹

The crossing of the river Drava was planned for the night of 3-4 June, but the water near Völkermarkt rose by 1.5m within a few hours, and the crossing became impossible. At the planned location for crossing, water flooded the pontoon bridge and there was fear that it would give way during the crossing, so the Detachment commander decided to cancel the operation. Despite reluctance, this decision was supported by the commander of the Drava Division Authority. On 4 June 1919 at 1.00 pm, the Carinthian Detachment confirmed that its right flank against Trixen (*Trušnje*) was sufficiently secured and that it could therefore fully support the Jezersko Detachment in crossing the Drava. Between 11.00 am and 1.00 pm, the artillery commenced its preparations to carry out the transition across the river, and at approximately 12.00 am, enemy units began to withdraw towards Tainach (*Tinje*). At 8.15pm, some of the Jezersko Detachment units crossed the river Drava, mostly across the railway bridge near Stein, and then quickly advanced to the river Gurk (*Krka*) where they spent the night.

¹¹ Marić, *Iz moga komandovanja*, 90; Bizjak, *Operativno-taktična analiza*, 54-56.

After the right-hand and central columns had crossed the river Drava, the Jezersko Detachment began the crossing of its left wing at 3.00 pm. Artillery fire drove the Austrians, who unsuccessfully defended themselves with a machine gun for a while, out of their positions. On the next day, the Detachment commander went around the left wing. At 2.00 pm, the commander of the Drava Division Authority visited the Jezersko Detachment headquarters in Grafenstein and issued an order to the Chief of Staff for the Jezersko Detachment to cross the river Gurk. The commander of the Drava Division Authority ordered penetration to the line Maria Sall–St. Jakob (*Sv. Jakob*)–Ebenthal (*Žrelec*)–Sattnitz (*Sotnica*). The Detachment was to remain at this line until further orders and maintain communication with the Ljubelj Detachment in the channel of the river Glanfurt (*Jezernica*) outside Klagenfurt. The Jezersko Detachment had no contact with the adversary during its crossing of the river Gurk. On 6 June it reached positions at Tentschachu, Karawankenblick, Leibsdorfu and Krumpendorf am Wörth See and arrived in Klagenfurt.¹²

Analysis of the offensive

Compared to the Slovenian offensive in April 1919, which ended in failure for Slovenian military units, the preparation for the offensive by the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was carried out very well. The Army of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, and especially the 4th Army Zone, strove to launch the offensive as soon as possible. The situation must be viewed in the context of the Paris Peace Conference, where the borders in Carinthia were also discussed; feedback from Paris was not favourable for the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, since a decision was adopted on 30 May to carry out a plebiscite in Carinthia.

It is interesting that even General Smiljanić was not convinced of the final success of the offensive, which was probably due to the defeat of Slovenian units near Völkermarkt (the April 1919 offensive), where Slovenian units were defeated, captured and rendered operationally useless. General Smiljanić was well aware of this. In close cooperation with the Provincial Government of Slovenia, he acted towards improving order and discipline. This could only be achieved through coercive measures, and for this reason, the Provincial Government declared a rapid

¹² Bizjak, *Operativno-taktična analiza*, 56-59; Ude, *Boji za severno slovensko mejo*, 224.

court martial for the area of the districts of Celje, Maribor, Slovenj Gradec and Radovljica. The Drava Division Authority did not make the same mistake as in the offensive of Slovenian units at Völkermarkt in April 1919, which were fewer in number compared to the adversary; General Smiljanić ensured that his units had absolute superiority in technology and numbers over the enemy; 22 battalions, 4 squadrons and 25 batteries were prepared for the offensive, which amounted to approximately 10,170 soldiers, 271 machine guns and 94 cannons. The Austrians were aware that the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was planning to launch an offensive, so they declared mobilisation, which was not very successful. Just before the offensive, Austrian units totalled approximately 3000 members of voluntary formations and 6500 soldiers of regular units, as well as 90 cannons.¹³

With the exception of the Lavamünd Detachment, Serbian officers were appointed as detachment commanders. All the appointments were in the hands of General Smiljanić, who did not know or trust the Slovenian senior officers, mostly because of their defeat in the April offensive. He appointed officers whom he knew well and also trusted. There were minor disagreements between Slovenian and Serbian soldiers, but there was no open opposition during the offensive. The command itself was positive at all levels in the Army units of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, and the arrival of Serbian officers brought along some innovations from the operational and tactical perspectives. The concept of temporarily deploying units and carrying out offensive concentration in a very wide area, and placing the centre of gravity of the attack in the most geographically challenging direction, where the element of surprise could come into play, were some of the bases of Serbian military tactics, which was more or less established by the then Chief of the General Staff of the Army of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, Duke Živojin Mišić. The premises were unity of command, clearly set objectives, organization, and the principle of "marching separately, but striking together". The Drava Division Authority made a detailed plan for the offensive, which quite specifically defined the concentration of units, the reserve and the method of operation. The centre of gravity of the offensive was placed on the right-hand wing of the battle formation, while the left-hand wing, with the Jesenice and Ljubelj Detachments, played a pre-

¹³ Seručar, *Vojne akcije*, 64; Bizjak, *Operativno-taktična analiza*, 59-61.

dominantly defensive role during the first phase, and then gradually transitioned into offensive actions with the Ljubljana detachment during the second phase, when the situation on the right part of the front had become clear. During the preparation phase, the Drava Division Authority had very poor intelligence on the Austrian side. General Maister's Lavamünd Detachment had the best intelligence, since he had a well-developed intelligence network with good insight into the situation on the ground. It was different for the Jezersko and Carinthian Detachments. The Jezersko Detachment was comprised of mostly Serbian units, which were new to this area and were unfamiliar with the actual situation and language, so contact with the civilian population was more difficult. The Austrian units in Carinthia placed great emphasis on intelligence deception; in particular, they were continually talking about backup which would come from Vienna and Syria. However, the reality was different; the Styrian provincial government decided to remain neutral, and the Central Viennese Government only provided diplomatic support to Carinthia, and did not have control of military units in individual provinces.

The main role in the offensive was given to the Jezersko Detachment, most likely because it consisted of the units of the regular Serbian Army. On 29 May 1919, the Austrians requested a ceasefire from the Drava Division Authority, and the conditions under which the Army of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes would be willing to agree to it. General Smiljanić proposed the line which was in force before the beginning of the December-January battles. A day later, a delegate from the Carinthian military commander, Major Jozef Heyer, was sent to the commander of the 4th Army Zone. General Janković authorized General Smiljanić for the talks and emphasised that the offensive would not be stopped until a ceasefire had been signed.¹⁴ On the whole, Slovenian military actions after the First World War had little military success. The exception were the actions in Styria, which more or less resulted in future demarcation between the states, which for the most part followed the national border. During the initial period, in November and the first half of December 1918, Slovenian units, composed of volunteers, achieved much more with their boldness and initiative than expected based on their military power. On 14 December 1918, Slovenian units occupied a great deal of territory without any major fights. A day later the second

¹⁴ ARS, SI AS fond 1193, t. u. 48, Annex B, 4th Army Zone Command, O.Br.2270, 31 May 1919; Bizjak, *Operativno-taktična analiza*, 59-61.

phase of the process began, with the surrendering of two Serbian units near Grafenstein, which was characterized by a merely defensive role of Slovenian armed units and a gradual loss of the occupied territory.¹⁵

The army units of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes involved in the May-June offensive reached the river Gurk on 4 June 1919, occupied Zollfeld (*Gospodsvetsko polje*), and conquered Klagenfurt on 6 June. After having reached the river Gurk, the units of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes had no more combat contact with the adversary. The signing of a ceasefire resulted in the establishment of a demarcation zone, and the Paris Peace Conference ultimately decided that a plebiscite would determine which country Carinthia would fall under. The weapons fell silent, but had claimed numerous casualties on both sides. In Carinthia 154 men died for the Army of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, while the number of the dead on the Austrian side was between 201 and 227. According to other available data, 52 members of the Army of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes were killed, and approximately 200 were wounded.¹⁶

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¹⁵ Bizjak, *Slovenska vojska 1918–1919*, 134.

¹⁶ ARS, SI AS 1193, t. u. 48, Supreme Command for Duke Mišić, Belgrade, Drava Division from 30 May 1919; Andrejka, "Razvoj vojaštva", 287; Švajncner, *Slovenska vojska*, 177.

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COLONEL DOBROSAV MILENKOVIĆ'S JEZERSKO DETACHMENT IN AN OFFENSIVE LAUNCHED BY THE ARMY OF THE KINGDOM OF SERBS, CROATS AND SLOVENES IN CARINTHIA IN MAY AND JUNE 1919

(Summary)

The end of the First World War also meant the dissolution of Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, on the territory of which numerous new states began to form. Due to their multi-nationality, the delimitation between them was extremely difficult, which was also true of the territory of southern Carinthia and Styria, inhabited by the Austrians and the Slovenes. The dispute between the Slovenes and the Austrians in Carinthia and Styria evolved into armed conflict, known in Slovenian historiography as the fights for the northern Slovenian border. The fighting with the units of German Austria for Bad Radkersburg in February 1919, and especially the battles in Carinthia, where the unresolved issue of national demarcation was left to the initiative of Slovenian and Austrian authorities, were the fiercest. The occupation of parts of eastern and western Carinthia in December 1918 was followed by an attack by Austrian units, which pushed Slovenian units in the western part back to the Karavanke range. The Slovenian side tried to gain better starting positions before the decision was made by the Paris Peace Conference, and launched a poorly prepared offensive in eastern Carinthia in April 1919, which ended in the loss of almost the whole of Carinthia. As a result, a new offensive was launched by the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in late May 1919 (the May-June offensive), which was supported by a few Serbian units. General Krsta Smiljanić was appointed commander of the newly-planned offensive. The main direction of attack was towards Bad Eisenkappel. One of the two subsidiary routes led from Šoštanj towards Črna na Koroškem and on to Bleiburg, and the other along the Drava valley. Five combat detachments were formed for the purposes of the offensive; based on their composition, three were offensive and

two defensive. These were the Lavamünd Detachment, the Carinthian Detachment, the Ljubelj Detachment, the Jesenice Detachment and the Jezersko Detachment. With the exception of the Lavamünd Detachment, Serbian officers were appointed detachment commanders. The Jezersko Detachment, which was mostly comprised of Serbian units and commanded by Serbian Colonel Dobrosav Milenković, played the main role in the May-June offensive. The Detachment was tasked with attacking the enemy from its starting positions along the line St. Leonhard–Bad Vellach–Trögern, and advancing in the direction of Kühnsdorf–Völkermarkt. It was also responsible for maintaining the connection on its left flank with the Ljubelj Detachment and with the Carinthian Detachment on its right flank. Together with other units of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, the Jezersko Detachment successfully finished its battle path; Slovenian-Serbian units reached the river Gurk and occupied Zollfeld and Klagenfurt. After having reached the river Gurk, the units of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes had no more combat contact with the adversary. The signing of a cease fire resulted in the establishment of a demarcation zone, and the Paris Peace Conference ultimately decided that a plebiscite would determine which country Carinthia would fall under.

KEY WORDS: Jezersko Detachment; Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes; Carinthia; fights for the northern border; May-June Offensive