



100th Anniversary of World War I:

## Brusilov Offensive

4 June 1916—20 September 1916

### This MONTH in military history

- 1778 Battle of Crooked Billet
- 1780 Battle of Waxhaws
- 1813 Americans capture Fort George, Canada
- 1863 Battle of Chancellorsville
- 1898 U.S. Navy destroys Spanish Pacific fleet
- 1918 Third German offensive on western Front
- 1942 Battle of Midway
- 1944 D-Day
- 1969 Battle of Hamburger Hill
- 1995 NATO air strikes on Bosnian Serb HQ



### As A Matter of Fact

On multiple occasions, the government placed the acreage that now houses Rock Island Arsenal up for auction. Each time it was placed up for public auction, the sale was pulled the day of or the day before.

### May Trivia!

1. The USS Lexington was sunk during which WW2 naval battle?
2. In what year was a U-2 Spy plane shot down over Russia?
3. In what year did Clara Barton found the American Red Cross?

For answers, go to the announcement section on the ASC History SharePoint site .

World War I saw many new technological advances on the battlefield. Widespread use of the submarine made open waters unsafe for civilians and navies, steel coffin tanks littered fields where crops used to grow, and eyes in the sky could see your every move. War was fought in the trenches, and once the lines were dug in, there was little movement and few gains.

To break this stalemate, Russia's high command (*Stavka*) was tasked with relieving stress on the Entente powers in France by increasing stress on Germany's eastern front. The hope was to draw Central forces away from Verdun to allow for reinforcements and fortification. Two generals established plans for the Russian army: the first was GEN Alexei Evert, who proposed a defensive plan; the second was GEN Aleksei Brusilov, who proposed a full out offensive strike against the Austrian-Hungarian army.

The *Stavka* opted to go with Brusilov's plan, which included four separate armies comprised of smaller and more specialized units that would focus on weak points within the enemy lines. He faced a narrowly smaller Austrian force that was reinforced later by German forces. Brusilov, however, would not have any reinforcements, putting all of his reserves on the front lines with the main attacking force. With the massive entrenchments dug out and making their

way towards the Austrian front, Brusilov and his armies were prepared to launch the largest Russian show of force in the entirety of World War I. His goal was effectively to launch a surprise attack across the entirety of his southwestern front towards the town of Lutsk, and to knock the Austrian-Hungarian Army out of the war entirely while siphoning off German forces from the French front.

The offensive launched on 4 June 1916 with an artillery barrage against the Austrians, breaking through the lines swiftly, the Russians continued onward. This was attributed to Brusilov's accurate assessment of weak points in the Austrian line. Keeping momentum, the Russians continued onward to recapture Lutsk by 8 June. The tremendous speed at which the Russians were making headway had staggered the Austrians, but Evert — still unsure of the success of the operation — did not advance. This caused flaws to open in the Russian advance, and allowed the Germans a chance to fill in the Austrian lines.

By 20 September 1916, Brusilov's forces had pushed to the doorstep of the Carpathians. Noting the success of Brusilov's front, the *Stavka* continued to feed more men into Brusilov's ranks and siphoning them off from Evert. This came long after Evert's attacks had stalled earlier in the year and progress had slowed on his front. The sector of combat that was commanded by

Brusilov was largely successful, but on all other fronts it faltered significantly.

The offensive took its toll of roughly two million casualties over the course of four months. The losses on the side of the Russians amounted upwards of half a million. It is contended today that this offensive contributed to the collapse of the Russian Army due to the short amount of time that the losses were built. The majority of Central casualties were suffered by the Austro-Hungarian forces, which was the goal of the Russian Army. They also succeeded in forcing the Germans to cease the attack on Verdun on the western front. By these points, the Brusilov Offensive was successful. Germany, however, remained a viable enemy, and the fighting that was still to come between the last half of 1916 thru 1918 would still prove to be fierce.

Historian John Keegan described the offensive in his 2000 book *The First World War* as: "the greatest victory seen on any front since the trench lines had been dug." Indeed, Keegan's description seems to accurately peg the brilliance of Brusilov's plan, as the methods of combat used would set the stage for German tactics in their *blitzkrieg* battles during World War II. The same tactics that were devised by Brusilov would be used to stop the Axis Powers less than thirty years later as World War II came to a close.