



A path to victory

Macedonia September - November 1918

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The first version of this short study was published in 2003, in English, in serial form, on the computer network of the European force of Operation CONCORDIA and NATO Headquarters Skopje (NHQS), under the title "A Path to Victory - The Allied Eastern Campaign in Macedonia, September-November 1918". The present version is only the French version, corrected and slightly reworked. The maps and sketches in particular, which constitute the essential part of this work, have been corrected and expanded.

Between 15 September and 3 November 1918, in spite of their bad reputation, the Allied Armies of the East, under the high command of General Franchet d'Esperey, broke the front of the Central Powers in Macedonia and decided the end of the Great War after an epic pursuit carried out without disablement for 6 weeks over more than 500 kilometres.

"THE GARDENERS OF SALONICUM"

On October 3, 1915, following the disastrous attempt against the Straits (Dardanelles and Gallipoli) a Franco-British force of 20,000 men landed in Thessaloniki to support the attacked Serbia. This small force, under the command of General Sarrail, could do nothing for the Serbs. Overwhelmed by German, Austrian and Bulgarian forces, the Serbian armies and their king preferred to leave their country rather than surrender. After a terrible winter retreat through the mountains of Albania, the survivors were transported to Corfu where they were rearmed and reorganized by the French, and in the summer of 1916 they were brought back in line north of Thessaloniki. A month later, surprised by a violent Bulgarian attack, they withdrew for 5 days before counter-attacking vigorously, crossing the Serbian border, seizing Monastir (Bitola) and the summit of the famous Kaimakchalan. During the "terrible year" of 1917 and the beginning of 1918, Sarrail and his successor Guillaumat tried to nibble some ground by limited attacks without much success. It already seems fortunate that the "Gardeners of Salonika", lacking relief and reinforcements, poorly supplied and suffering from malaria, their rear permanently threatened by a hesitant Greece, were able to hold their ground. In the meantime, Greece joined the Entente,

Romania was crushed and invaded and Russia was pushed out of the conflict by the Bolshevik Revolution, allowing the Central Powers to strengthen their positions.

No one then imagined that the war could end within a year or two, let alone that a strategic result could be achieved in this "side show". In June 1918, Clemenceau got rid of General Franchet d'Esperey, the scapegoat for the spring failures, by sending him to Salonika. The newcomer was instructed to carry out limited attacks with tactical objectives for the sole purpose of supporting the Western Front. But the new commander-in-chief of the Allied Army Command East would soon prove to be of a different calibre.

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