MODERN SOLDIER IN A BUSBY:
AUGUST VON Mackensen, 1914–1916

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Winston Churchill once described the war on the eastern front in World War I as “the unknown war.” Certainly in terms of commanders, this has remained true, at least for the English speaking audience. Despite the best efforts of Holger Herwig, Norman Stone, Hew Strachan and others, coverage of the war has remained largely Anglo-centric and oriented towards the western front. Consequently this has skewed the amount of attention paid to both commanders and developments during the war.

Nowhere has this western bias been felt more than in the coverage given to the major commanders and battles. Bookshelves fairly groan with works on Douglas Haig, Helmuth von Moltke and Erich Ludendorff, or on operations such as the Somme or the British 1917 campaign in Flanders. Lately the French Army and some of its major personalities have been the subjects of scholarly monographs.

Major commanders and staff officers who made their names on the eastern front on both sides of the conflict remain relatively unknown.


Recent scholarship on the imperial Russian Army has greatly improved our understanding of that institution. Nonetheless, recent scholarly studies of the major Russian figures the war, such as Grand Duke Nicholas, Alexei Brusilov, Vladimir Sukhomlinov and Mikhail Alexeev, to name but a few, are still lacking. Likewise on the Austro-Hungarian side, only Franz Conrad von Hötzendorf has been the subject of a recent study in English.

In terms of operations on the eastern front, Dennis Showalter broke new ground with his work on Tannenberg. Still, coverage of the major operations between Tannenberg and the Russian Revolution has been scant until recently. Graydon Tunstall has outlined in vivid detail the horrors of the Carpathian front during the winter of 1914–15, and major studies of the Gorlice-Tarnow offensive and the ensuing conquest of Poland and the Brusilov offensive have also appeared. The German operation against the Baltic Islands in October 1917 has garnered both article and book length studies. Finally, the subject of occupation policy, both in the west and east, has attracted attention that has brought forth several interesting works.

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