

General Paul von Hindenburg, Message to the Soldiers of the 8th Army after the Battle of Tannenberg (August 31, 1914)

Abstract

In late August 1914, Germany's 8th army under the command of 66-year-old General Paul von Hindenburg won a major military victory against the Russian army at the battle of Tannenberg in East Prussia. Lasting for four days, the battle was Germany's first major victory on the eastern front: the German army took 13,000 casualties (killed and wounded), while the Russian army took 30,000 killed or wounded, and, more devastating, 92,000 Russian prisoners taken. Wartime propaganda and subsequent mythologizing would lay the foundation for a militarist cult of personality developing around Hindenburg. The battle actually took place closer to the town of Allenstein (present-day Olsztyn, Poland), but Hindenburg decided to name it after the nearby small town of Tannenberg (present-day Stembark, Poland) for its historical significance: 500 years earlier at Tannenberg, Polish and Lithuanian troops had defeated the army of the Teutonic Order, and this "second battle of Tannenberg" in 1914 was to symbolically erase memory of the earlier German defeat. While Hindenburg was henceforth revered as the "hero of Tannenberg," the architect of this military success was his chief of staff, Erich Ludendorff, an ambitious and focused yet unpleasant character who did not fit the mold of a national hero.

Hindenburg issued this message of thanks to his soldiers on August 31, 1914, the day after the battle, and it was printed in numerous German newspapers. This recording of the message, in which he thanks his soldiers and rewards them with a few days leave, was made several years after the battle, in October 1917, however. It was made by linguist Wilhelm Doegen, who built a collection of voice recordings of leading politicians and other well-known personalities for the Prussian State Library.

Source

Soldiers of the 8th Army! The many days of fierce fighting on the wide fields between Allenstein and Neidenburg are over. You have won a crushing victory over five army corps and three cavalry divisions. More than 90,000 prisoners, countless guns and machine guns, several flags, and much other war booty are in our hands. The few remnants of the Russian Narew Army that escaped encirclement are fleeing south across the border. The Russian Wilna Army has begun its retreat from Königsberg.

Next to God Almighty, this brilliant success is due to your willingness to make sacrifices, your unsurpassed marching performance, and your outstanding bravery. I hope to be able to give you a few days of well-deserved rest. But then, with renewed strength, we will press forward with God for the Emperor, the King, and the Fatherland until the last Russian has left our dear, sorely tried home province and we have carried our victorious flags into enemy territory. Long live His Majesty the Emperor and King, hurrah!

Source: Paul von Hindenburg, Aus dem Dankerlass an die Truppen der 8. Armee nach der Schlacht von Tannenberg, August 31, 1914. Recording date: October 17, 1917. Stiftung Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv

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