

Grupo de Investigación
Historia Militar



Hindenburg, Ludendorff, and the Battle of Tannenberg 1914

Tannenberg was not a battle led by the general's hill, as it was known from the 19th century. Under the name Tannenberg, one must imagine many smaller and larger skirmishes or battles in August 1914.

However, two generals became famous through the Battle of Tannenberg. The old Paul von Hindenburg and von Beneckendorff, who had just been reactivated from retirement, as well as the aspiring military genius Erich Ludendorff. With the battle, however, Hindenburg almost immediately became a myth and a living legend. With this one battle, into which both officers were thrown rather briefly, a new life in the public eye began for them in a certain way and a military partnership that was to last until the end of the First World War and would carry both to the top of the German military and the German Empire.

Exploring the Battle of Tannenberg

How do we know the course of this battle at Tannenberg in 1914? The Prussian General Staff usually wrote its own history. A specialized General Staff Department, the War History Department (Kriegsgeschichtliche Abteilung), had the task of filtering out from past wars not only what "really happened", but at best also drawing lessons for the present and the future. The loss of the First World War forced a rethink. After the Treaty of Versailles 1919 and the prohibition of the General Staff and the forced downsizing to the Reichswehr of the Weimar Republic, many former officers found work in the so-called Reichsarchiv. These Reich Archives were housed in the former war school of Potsdam. There they wrote the history of the First World War. In their minds, they had thoughts of revenge and hoped that their work with the history of war might help to win the next war for Germany again.

In 1925, the Reich Archives had already published the second volume of the history of the World War.¹ It was about the liberation of East Prussia in 1914. And a few years later, in 1928, the historian Walter Elze published his book on Tannenberg, which was to become the standard work of historiography about this battle for over 50 years.² Anyone who wanted to know something about the Battle of Tannenberg therefore reached for the volumes of the Reich Archives or the work of Walter Elze. Criticism of the depictions regularly came from Ludendorff's pen. Hindenburg spoke less frequently, but both generals tried to spread their view of history after 1918. One of Ludendorff's best-known diatribes was probably the small book "Whore War History before the Court of the World War".³ But also in Hindenburg's memoirs and Ludendorff's war memoirs, the Battle of Tannenberg was an important moment in both lives.

There were a few books from the perspective of the Russian Tsarist Empire. Many Russians had left Russia for fear of the Communists. And one of these political refugees was General of Infantry Yuri N. Danilov. In 1914 he had served as Quartermaster General in the Headquarters of the Command of the Supreme Commander of the Russian Army, and in 1925 he wrote a book about what it was like in this High Command and how he experienced from Russia those really hard battles of 1914 and their significance for the Tsar and his General Staff.⁴ Winston Churchill's book entitled "The Unknown War" is also likely to be a discovery for many.⁵ The European Eastern Front of the First World War was, in fact, largely unexplored for almost 100 years. It was only after the end of the Cold War and the enormous change in Eastern Europe that military historians thought of finding the "missing link" of World War II history and dealing with the topic of the East in the First World War.

Usually, historians looked at the Western Front, and the fighting in the Mediterranean, in the colonies, or at naval warfare. As a result, however, the Russians, while preoccupied with their own history, like Yuri Danilov, all too often adopted the

¹ Die Befreiung Ostpreußens. Hrsg. vom Reichsarchiv (= Der Weltkrieg 1914 – 1918, Die militärischen Operationen zu Lande, Band 2), Berlin: E.S. Mittler & Sohn, 1925.

² Walter Elze, Tannenberg, Breslau: Ferdinand Hirt, 1928.

³ Erich Ludendorff, 'Dirne Kriegsgeschichte' vor dem Gericht des Weltkrieges: zum Feldzuge in Süd-Polen Anfang Oktober 1914, München: Ludendorffs Verlag, 1934.

⁴ Jurij Daniloff, Russland im Weltkriege 1914-1915, Jena: Frohmannsche Buchhandlung, 1925

⁵ Winston S. Churchill, The Unknown War. The Eastern Front, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931.

perspective of Western historiography of the Allies and the Germans. Criticism of Russia was levelled at a lack of operational readiness, hasty attacks, depletion of troops, inadequate reconnaissance, generally poor organization, and a wrong assessment of the situation. Danilov wrote in his book: "The consequence of our insufficient readiness for war was a hasty approach and therefore premature exhaustion of the troops."⁶

However, the fact that the Russian army must be viewed in a differentiated way can also be seen when analyzing the battles on the Eastern Front from 1914 to 1917. It was not a quick run to the victory of the Germans on the Eastern Front. After all, it took the catastrophe of a plan promoted by Ludendorff to transfer Lenin from exile in Switzerland to Russia, which was already reeling, to be able to deal the death blow to the giant empire by means of revolution and civil war. At that time, the Russian steamroller was already synonymous with seemingly endless crowds of people as cannon fodder. As late as 1916, General Brusilov drove Austria-Hungary to the brink of collapse with his meticulously prepared offensive, forcing the German Reich to re-stabilize the front in southeastern Europe as "corset bars". From this point of view, the Battle of Tannenberg in 1914 was still a great victory, but not a decisive victory. What the Russians did in the East on behalf of the Allies, France, and Great Britain, on the other hand, was perhaps decisive for their victory in 1918.⁷

Of the more recent books on the Battle of Tannenberg, Denis Showalter's book must be mentioned in the first place as the modern standard work in English.⁸ One of the more recent German standard works is the book "The Myth and Reality of German Warfare" by Gerhard P. Groß.⁹ The former officer and historian of the Center for Military History and Social Sciences of the Bundeswehr (ZMSBw) primarily analyzed the development and failure of German operational thinking in the 19th and 20th centuries. In 2021, John Zimmermann, also an officer and historian at the ZMSBw, presented a

⁶ Cit. John Zimmermann, Tannenberg 1914, *ibid.*, p. 2.

⁷ Heiner Bröckermann, Die Brussilow-Offensive. Juni bis September 1916, in: Der Erste Weltkrieg 1914-1918. Der deutsche Aufmarsch in ein kriegerisches Jahrhundert. Im Auftrag des Zentrums für Militärgeschichte und Sozialwissenschaften, ed. by Markus Pöhlmann, Harald Potempa und Thomas Vogel, München: Bucher Verlag, 2013, pp. 142-147.

⁸ Denis E. Showalter, Tannenberg. Clash of empires, Hamden: Archon Books, 1991.

⁹ Gerhard P. Groß, The Myth and Reality of German Warfare. Operational Thinking from Moltke the Elder to Heusinger, Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2016.

new study of the Battle of Tannenberg.¹⁰ He examined the myth of the battle as supposed proof of German superiority and the people involved.

Myths about Hindenburg and a battlefield of revenge

Since 1914 we have been dealing with the myth of the superior German military and the myth of Hindenburg as a person. With this victory, it seemed to prove that the German military was superior to Russia in its professional manner. And General von Hindenburg also became the gigantic and popular savior of East Prussia. From then on, Hindenburg's pictorial representations on everyday objects and especially on postcards became unmanageable in number. For example, a postcard showed the almost unshakable trust in Hindenburg's person with the inscription "Only over my corpse goes your way Colossus". The word "colossus" meant Russia. The huge Hindenburg is figuratively standing with one foot on East Prussia and one foot on Russia as the protector of Germany's Eastern Front and guarantor of future victories.¹¹

With the outbreak of the First World War and the Eastern Front, the question soon arose of a historical revenge associated with the town of Tannenberg or Grunwald. Tannenberg is the German name of a battle in 1410. Grunwald is the Polish name. Both nations remembered this, because this mythical battle was a real decisive battle between the knights of the Teutonic Order and the Polish and Lithuanian armies. Hindenburg knew the history of the battle and asked that the battle be named after this small place on the battlefield precisely because of this revenge between Germans and Slavs. So, another myth of historical revenge is added to this battle of 1914. And this, too, fostered Hindenburg's long-term transformation into a charismatic and political leader on a par with emperors and kings. Hindenburg learned to be charismatic, and his unwavering calm came to his aid, something that those around him saw more as a reason for criticism of his certain lethargy. This gap was always filled by the hyperactive Ludendorff, so that no criticism of Hindenburg stuck. Kaiser Wilhelm II quickly realized that Hindenburg was a competitor in the favor of the population. For Wilhelm II, it was even a personal problem that his wife soon became a real Hindenburg fan.¹²

¹⁰ John Zimmermann, Tannenberg 1914. Der Erste Weltkrieg in Ostpreußen (= Zeitalter der Weltkriege, Bd. 23), Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2021.

¹¹ Regarding the myth and the popular image of Hindenburg in public, see: Jesko von Hoegen, Der Held von Tannenberg. Genese und Funktion des Hindenburg-Mythos, Köln et al.: Böhlau Verlag, 2007.

¹² Wolfram Pyta, Hindenburg, Herrschaft zwischen Hohenzollern und Hitler, München: Siedler Verlag, 2007, p. 54, p. 163.

The Battle of East Prussia did not take place on an easy battlefield. If you look at pictures of lakes, fields, and forests today, you get an impression of the former East Prussia. It is the "land of dark forests and crystal lakes", as the German East Prussian song put it. From a military point of view, it was a land full of terrain obstacles: many lakes, rivers and ditches, a lot of forest and only a few high points that offered an overview and where to place artillery. Interesting for the preparation of a national defense and difficult for the attacker. But even the defender had to plan his mobile defense very carefully in such a confusing terrain.

The size of the battlefield was gigantic for people who thought in terms of 19th century categories. Everyone knows the Battle of Waterloo in 1815. You can cross the battlefield in an hour or two. But the battlefield of Tannenberg is about 70 kilometers long and 60 kilometers wide. The traditional image of a military leader standing on a general's hill leading his troops is not what one could expect on this battlefield. This part of the myth, which is about a great leader at the center of the action, is unrealistic for that reason alone.

Hindenburg and Ludendorff – a happy team

Hindenburg and Ludendorff were considered a well-functioning team because Hindenburg wrote in his memoirs that they both had a kind of "happy marriage" in their views of military thought and action. So, you worked so well together that you didn't have to talk much and shared a deep understanding of the needs of troop leadership. Perhaps this was due to a happy coincidence that had brought these two personalities together. But at its core, it is also about what had made the Prussian General Staff famous, namely the unity of a well-thought-out, basic military understanding that all General Staff officers possessed. An intellectual elite of military sciences that masterfully understood how to translate military sciences into leadership practice.

Hindenburg and Ludendorff were both Prussian career officers and had received basically the same pre-military and military education from childhood. The difference in time, Hindenburg was twenty years older than Ludendorff, and a difference in war experience did not make much difference. Both had attended Prussian cadet schools. Paul Ludwig Hans Anton von Beneckendorff und von Hindenburg, that was his full

name, joined the Royal Prussian Army. His service in the 3rd Guards Regiment on foot was an excellent introduction for the clever and ambitious, but somewhat phlegmatic officer. The fact that he had chosen the right profession was soon to become apparent to him. In the summer after his entry into service began the Austro-Prussian War of 1866 and 1870/71 fought in the Franco-German War. In 1866 he was wounded in the head at the Battle of Hradec Králové. He kept his damaged "Pickelhaube" (spiked helmet) in his study as a reminder for the rest of his life. Even in the First World War, the war experience of the so-called Wars of Unification until 1871 was much more powerful for Hindenburg than the material battles in "Storms of Steel". In 1877 Hindenburg became a Prussian general staff officer with the typical alternation of troop service, leadership, and staff service. At the military academy he was a tactics teacher. In 1900 he became division commander and in 1903 he became commander of an army corps in Magdeburg, a city between Berlin and Hanover. He stayed there for quite a long time, and for an officer in the Empire, he had, by and large, made a top career. The long-awaited next war did not materialize, and so Hindenburg decided to retire as General of Infantry in 1911 and settled in Hanover. In 1914 he immediately tried to get a new command.¹³

Erich Ludendorff was much younger than Hindenburg, bourgeois and a modern, but also conservative Prussian. After his time as a cadet, Ludendorff became an infantry officer, and for a time even an officer of the marines in the naval battalion of the Imperial Navy, which gave him his first military experience overseas. Helped. Eventually, Ludendorff became a general staff officer. He became one of the specialists in the mobilization of the army and in difficult problems in the early days of a future war. Thus, he drew up plans for the conquest of the Belgian fortress of Liège. In 1912 he became regimental commander in Düsseldorf and in 1914 brigade commander in Strasbourg. In August 1914, the capture of the citadel of Liège was his greatest experience, which also made him famous. The opportunity to take over this command had fallen to him rather by chance when he attended the execution of his plans as a guest and the responsible commander died in the process. When the front in East Prussia threatened to collapse in 1914, Ludendorff was to hold the front in the east with energy and general

¹³ Wolfram Pyta, Hindenburg, *ibid.*, pp. 13-46.

staff planning. Too young for a high command, Ludendorff was to be placed in front of a general who would not disturb him but would support him.¹⁴

In the war memoirs of British Prime Minister David Lloyd George there is something that helps to describe the difference between Hindenburg and Ludendorff. After the war, David Lloyd George asked the French Marshall Foch what he thought of the two officers. Foch said: "Ludendorff was a great soldier and Hindenburg a great patriot." In a way, that described the right perspective when you look at the two people who are so different but complementary to each other.¹⁵

The Schlieffen Plan and its weakness

The basis for the initial phase of the First World War was the famous Schlieffen Plan of the then deceased Chief of Staff of the Prussian Army. The plan was based on an idea to solve the problem of Germany's geographical and political-strategic position in Europe. The Germans needed a quick victory in a war because, although they had the advantage of the "inner line" in the middle of Europe, they could attack Germany's enemies in the west and east from both sides.

Alfred Graf von Schlieffen planned to first defeat France and then, after France was quickly decisively defeated or weakened, lead the defense and counterattack into Russia. Behind this was also the idea that Russia was not as well organized as France and would therefore take a long time to mobilize. Against France, on the other hand, it was a matter of hours, perhaps several days, to mobilize the army. Out of eight German armies, seven armies attacked in the west. In the east, only one army was ready to defend itself. That was the 8th Army. By 1914, the Prussian General Staff knew that this might not work, but they only had this plan for victory against all enemies. This, after all, was the best plan for victory that the German military could have prepared. At first, it looked quite good. After four weeks, the Germans were close to Paris, but then this offensive stopped near the Marne River. This was already a total disaster for the German Empire. The plan had failed, but the war continued for several more years.¹⁶

¹⁴ Manfred Nebelin, Ludendorff, Diktator im Ersten Weltkrieg, München: Siedler-Verlag, 2010, pp. 113-126.

¹⁵ Quoted from Gerhard Schultze-Pfaelzer, Hindenburg, ein Leben für Deutschland, Berlin: Ullstein-Verlag, 1934, p. 290.

¹⁶ John Zimmermann, Tannenberg 1914, *ibid.*, S. 23-32.

In the east, the Russian army turned against the Austro-Hungarian army and against the German Reich. However, only two Russian armies marched towards East Prussia against the one German army, the 8th Army. Four armies in the south are concentrated against Austria-Hungary. What was surprising was evident in the rather rapid Russian build-up and attack. As a result, the defense had to take evasive action earlier than expected. And between East Prussia and Berlin there were no further plans for a credible defense. The emergency became apparent after the first border battles.

The rapid attack of the Russian 1st Army (Niemen Army) under the command of General of Cavalry Paul von Rennenkampff together with the Russian 2nd Army (Narew Army) under the command of General of Cavalry Alexander Samsonov came as a bit of a surprise to the Germans.

With the Battle of Gumbinnen on 19/20 August 1914, part of East Prussia was already occupied by the Russian 1st Army. After that, the further attack against the German 8th Army was to be directed towards the town of Königsberg, north of the Masurian Lake District in East Prussia. The attack of the Russian 2nd Army south of the Masurian Lake District against East Prussia worsened the situation of the 8th Army. But it was also clear that there was no immediate threat of encirclement of the 8th Army. There was still time to reposition themselves further west and observe the further attacks of the Russians. The lack of reinforcements on the German side was problematic. In this situation, on August 22, 1914, the commander-in-chief of the German 8th Army, Colonel General Maximilian von Prittwitz and Gaffron, was relieved of his command. The new commander-in-chief of the 8th Army was General of Infantry Paul von Hindenburg. He was assisted as Chief of Staff by the young Major General Erich Ludendorff.¹⁷

Two Russian armies against one German army, could that go well? At first glance, this should not look like a victory for the Germans. But in such a large area as that of the later Battle of Tannenberg, the situation had to be evaluated section by section, even according to the so-called superiority in space and time. It is about this respective superiority and the question of when and where an enemy troop unit could pose a threat to one's own troops. You can then prepare for this with a temporary

¹⁷ John Zimmermann, Tannenberg 1914, *ibid.*, S. 64-65, S. 92-96.

concentration of your own troops. Perhaps this would even lead to superiority on the ground. This flexibility had been the subject of many maneuvers and exercises before the First World War. However, the Vistula River and the area near Gdansk was a critical area. Behind that, a cohesive defense was probably no longer possible in the short term.

The plan that made the Battle of Tannenberg possible had already been drawn up by officers of the staff of Colonel General von Prittwitz and Gaffron. However, it was not clear that it was going to be a plan to win. In retrospect, the then lieutenant colonel and later general Max Hoffmann described the status of the planning as follows: "The battle was not laid out on the so-called Cannae principle, (...), because at the beginning of the battle it could not be that it would be possible to draw the eastern wing of the German troops to an encirclement. This possibility only arose in the course of time because of Rennenkampff's absolute inactivity. Thus, the battle became a Cannae at last." ¹⁸

First, the Germans were concerned with maintaining the greatest possible freedom of trade for as long as possible in view of the overpowering two Russian armies. And there was a castling of forces, like in a game of chess. The I Army Corps of the 8th Army is the most interesting large formation. The I Army Corps, under the command of General of the Infantry Hermann von François, broke away from the enemy in the north and moved by rail towards the Vistula. The fronts were thus changed from the 1st Army of Rennenkampff, which was attacking slowly in the north, to the west and close to the 2nd Army of Samsonov, which was attacking from the south.

Rennenkampff had no real idea of how successful he was with his 1st Russian Army. He had too much respect for the German enemy and on the other hand it was difficult to coordinate the further attack together with the 2nd Army. When in doubt, he wanted to continue attacking on his own, but had to be careful. In addition, Rennenkampff and Samsonov had a personal conflict that stemmed from the time during the Russo-Japanese War. In addition, there were poor military radio communications between the

¹⁸ Die Aufzeichnungen des Generalmajors Max Hoffmann, herausgegeben von Karl-Friedrich Nowak. Band 2. Berlin: Verlag für Kulturpolitik, 1929, p. 312.

two armies, which could also be intercepted by the German side. Residents also used their phones to report Russian troops, but this was not decisive for the war at the time.¹⁹

The Commanding Generals of the German Army Corps were accustomed to a great deal of autonomy and even had the so-called immediate right to present to the Kaiser. They evaluated the enemy situation in their areas using their own resources, including cavalry and air forces, and based on information from the headquarters of the 8th Army. When in doubt, however, generals such as Hermann von François preferred to trust their own intuition and experience. In doing so, they were aided by the German principle of order tactics, which had traditionally been the basis of action at every management level. Another help was the nature of the battlefield. With just a few forces, narrows between bodies of water and forests could be blocked and sections of terrain could be controlled. However, everything was so confusing that the leadership had to move forward to be able to use their forces properly. Hermann von François also provided a good example of this.²⁰

An example of Ludendorff's ideas of superior leadership can be found today in quotations from books about the battle of contemporaries, as the former general and Ludendorff critic Ernst Buchfinck wrote:

"The contrast [...] was the leadership of Ludendorff, who allowed the subordinate to move freely where he was on the right path, but who always watched to see whether it was so, and who was never afraid to intervene in a commanding manner and, if necessary, to dispose of the divisions over the head of the over the heads of the commanding generals and, if necessary, to dispose of the divisions herself."²¹

After the war, attempts were made to cover up the shortcomings of East Prussia's defenses and to highlight the superiority of the German military. This was made clear even by paintings and photos that showed the usual general's hill in the open air with Hindenburg's staff, but now at least supplemented with modern technical means, such as telephones and airplanes. In retrospect, General Ludendorff was credited with a formative role that he had not exercised in relation to the army corps. Accordingly, Ludendorff would have promoted the freedom of action of his subordinates everywhere

¹⁹ John Zimmermann, Tannenberg 1914, *ibid.*, p. 39, pp. 160-165.

²⁰ John Zimmermann, Tannenberg 1914, *ibid.*, pp. 22-32, pp. 71-79.

²¹ Quoted in Zimmermann, Tannenberg 1914, *ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

and restricted it only where the military situation and Ludendorff's higher insight would have required it. Ludendorff tried to do this, but it did not succeed overall, and the battle was still won.²²

The endgame of the Battle of Tannenberg

After the castling of General von François' I Army Corps, the battle against Samsonov's 2nd Russian Army developed into an endgame. Virtually one move at a time, the Russian units were beaten out of the battle. A breakthrough was made near the village of Usdau, which would ultimately lead to the encirclement of Samsonov's army. After the breakthrough at Usdau, Ludendorff wanted the I Army Corps to continue attacking in the direction of the village of Lahna. Ludendorff considered the breakthrough of Usdau to be decisive. Unlike Ludendorff, however, General von François decided not to follow Ludendorff's order and attack Lahna but attacked Willenburg in the direction of Neidenburg. Only in this way did the general believe he could achieve a decisive victory. This was, in fact, disobedience, which was subsequently justified by the later success. He even disobeyed several times, because General von François ignored the order to continue attacking Ludendorff immediately after the breakthrough at Usdau. Instead, he had his soldiers take a day of rest to feed, recuperate, and prepare for the further attack. In retrospect, this turned out to be an excellent idea from several points of view. Samsonov's troops marched further north despite the flank threat from the west. In this way, they themselves contributed to the later total success of the German encirclement. In this situation, the ring closed around the Russians and the Russian commander-in-chief disbanded his headquarters, lost his bearings while fleeing and shot himself nearby. The total victory of the Germans was thus also reflected in the suicide of the enemy.

The Summary of the Greatest Victory

No less a figure than the soldier, politician and military writer Winston Churchill drew a differentiated summary of the Battle of Tannenberg and saw not Hindenburg and Ludendorff, but the later General Hoffmann and General von François as the actual fathers of the glorious victory:

“The credit of the victory belongs in large measure to General Hoffmann, but its glory must forever be associated with General von François, who though commanding only

²² Wolfram Pyta, Hindenburg, *ibid.*, pp. 121-125; Nebelin, Ludendorff, *ibid.*, pp. 131-134.

a single corps acted with that rare alternation of prudence and audacity which is the characteristic of true soldierly genius, and who upon his justly founded convictions defied Ludendorff and gained for him a dazzling victory against his orders."²³

Even after the war, Hermann von François enjoyed a great admiration for his resolute leadership from the front. He was perhaps the German Patton of that year 1914. And he wrote widely read reviews of his wartime time and was awarded an honorary doctorate by the University of Tübingen for his work. The fact that total victory was also a consequence of one or the other disobedience could not have been written as a soldier. His later conclusion, however, was shaped by the special circumstances of the "friction of orders" during the Battle of Tannenberg, which contributed to the victory: "The Historian will [...] recognize that the most successful Battle of the World War, like no other, was a Battle of Command Friction."²⁴

In the end, Ludendorff also admitted that it was "a purely improvised battle" and that everything was planned and conducted day after day. He recalled with pride. Even during the war, in historical and personal comparisons with the war of 1870/71 and his capture of Liège in 1914, he wrote of this battle "such as cannot be imagined more beautiful. It was bigger and bolder than Sedan, and next to Liège it is my proudest memory."²⁵

Despite temporary chaotic conditions, in the end the German troop leaders were professional enough to turn this difficult, hopeless struggle into a German victory. However, the Russians had not yet been completely driven out of East Prussia. It was not until February 1915 that the Russian 1st Army was defeated in the Battle of the Masurian Lakes. The numbers of casualties from the Battle of Tannenberg are not so clear. On the one hand, 12,000 to 30,000 dead, missing and wounded on the German side. On the other hand, the Russian 2nd Army suffered a total of 120,000 casualties, including 5,522 killed, 12,326 wounded and 75,435 missing and captured.²⁶

²³ Winston S. Churchill, *The Unknown War, The Eastern Front*, London: Thornton Butterworth, 1937, p. 206.

²⁴ Cit. John Zimmermann, *Tannenberg 1914*, *ibid.*, p. 4.

²⁵ Cit. John Zimmermann, *Tannenberg 1914*, *ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

²⁶ John Zimmermann, *Tannenberg 1914*, *ibid.*, p. 225.

Hindenburg, of course, deserved the glory of the general by virtue of his office, and he suggested to the emperor the name of the battle. Hindenburg showed himself not only as the victor of a single battle, but also as the avenger of the historic German defeat of the Middle Ages, the Battle of Grunwald in 1410. The well-known historian Barbara Tuchman had already described this Hindenburg myth with the Battle of Tannenberg in her book "The Guns of August":

"To the public the savior of East Prussia was the nominal commander, Hindenburg. The elderly general dragged from retirement in his old blue uniform was transformed into a titan by the victory. The triumph in East Prussia, lauded and heralded even beyond its true proportions, fastened the Hindenburg myth upon Germany."²⁷

In the end, Hindenburg and Ludendorff were left with a kind of eternal glory from the Battle of Tannenberg. Both made it to the top of the German military during the First World War and, as soldiers, also achieved an unprecedented political influence on Germany. An industrial center in Upper Silesia was named after Hindenburg as early as 1915. He became an honorary citizen of 23 cities, including 15 cities in East Prussia. The East Prussian University of Königsberg awarded him honorary doctorates from all four of its faculties. While luckless Ludendorff resigned after his failed spring offensives of 1918 and seemed to flee from the German revolution to Sweden, Hindenburg showed his sense of duty, or perhaps his better political sense. He remained at the head of the military until 1919. His myth as a loyal soldier who remained at his post even in difficult times was to continue to pay off politically. He retained his networks and charisma as a level-headed leader. During the Weimar Republic, he was twice elected President of the German Reich directly by the German people. Hindenburg was even able to witness the inauguration of the Tannenberg memorial as an oversized fortress and a kind of death castle in East Prussia. However, just as Ludendorff attempted a coup d'état against democracy with Adolf Hitler in the Beerhall Putsch in 1923, Hindenburg appointed Adolf Hitler Reich Chancellor in 1933 and ultimately supported the elimination of the republic with emergency decrees and breaches of the law. Hindenburg died in 1934 and was buried in the Tannenberg Memorial. Today, his grave in Marburg's St. Elisabeth's Church is more or less a tolerated solution. Today, the political soldiers Hindenburg and Ludendorff are regarded above all as forerunners

²⁷ Barbara W. Tuchman, *The Guns of August*, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1962, pp. 307-308.

of Hitler and the National Socialist dictatorship, which precludes an official honorable commemoration.

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