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## The Serbian Army in the Chalkidiki in 1916 Organization and Deployment

**Abstract:** The transportation of the Serbian Army to the Chalkidiki and deployment on the Salonika front was part of the unique process of reorganizing, equipping, training and engaging the Serbian Army within the Allied coalition. Combining unpublished archival documents and the literature, this article analyzes military reasons and diplomatic circumstances in which the Serbian Army was deployed to the Chalkidiki and became part of the Allied military forces on the Salonika front. The most important part of this research are details related to the activity of the Serbian Military Mission in the Chalkidiki, which was tasked with making arrangements for receiving, accommodating and supplying the Serbian Army in the peninsula.

**Keywords:** Serbian Army, Chalkidiki, organization, formation, Serbian Military Mission, Salonika (Macedonian) front

The combined invasion by Austro-Hungarian, German and Bulgarian forces in the autumn of 1915 forced the Serbian Army to withdraw south across Albania, reaching the Adriatic coast,<sup>1</sup> from where it was evacuated to the island of Corfu by Allied ships. The exhausting march across Albania had taken a heavy toll in lives.<sup>2</sup> The numerical strength of the Serbian Army in August 1914 had been 319,979 men according to the army enlistment records, or 286,686 men on the ground. Based on the report put together by the Adjutant Division in late December 1915, it had a total of 142,164 combatants and non-combatants. According to the data the Supreme Command submitted to the army minister on 23 February 1916 the Serbian Army had a total of 147,000 men, of whom 110,800 combatants and 36,200 non-combatants. According to the surviving reports of April 1916, there were 113,814 combatants and non-combatants on the

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<sup>1</sup> Andrej Mitrović, *Serbia's Great War 1914–1918* (London: Hurst and Company, 2007), 151–161.

<sup>2</sup> *Veliki rat Srbije za oslobođenje i ujedinjenje Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca*, vol. XIV: 1916. godina, Treći period: Opšte odstupanje srpske vojske, IV faza: Prebacivanje iz Albanije na ostrvo Krf (Belgrade: Istorijsko odeljenje Glavnog generalštaba, 1928).

spot, while a month later there were 116,954.<sup>3</sup> French sources recorded that on 22 February 135,000 Serbs were evacuated to Corfu and 9,010 to Bizerte. At the same time, in the vicinity of Valona, the Cavalry Division comprising 13,068 men and 10,144 horses awaited evacuation, which was carried out in early April. To be added to this number of men and animals are about 4,000 men who had withdrawn with the French from the southern parts of the Kingdom of Serbia to Greece.<sup>4</sup> According to the data of the Central Supply Section, the numerical strength of the Serbian Army at the beginning of the enemy offensive in October 1915 was about 420,000.<sup>5</sup> The same source suggests that between 290,000 and 300,000 people reached Kosovo, while about 220,000 withdrew towards the Adriatic coast through Montenegro and Albania. A total of 150,000 were evacuated by sea. Research conducted by Milivoje Alimpić suggests that the exact numerical strength of the Army is difficult to establish because of the mixing of soldiers between units and because of several evacuation and disembarkation ports (Corfu, Algeria, Tunisia).<sup>6</sup> According to a report of the Serbian Supreme Command cited by Alimpić, the numerical strength of the Army before the evacuation from Albania was 145,000 men, while on 24 February 1915 the Supreme Command informed the army minister that the Allies could count on 146,000 Serbian soldiers for the upcoming operations in the Balkans. According to General Petar Pešić, Assistant Chief of the General Staff, the total numerical strength was 151,920, of whom 110,000 combatants and 41,920 non-combatants. French records for 25 February provide the figure of 164,618 men (10,000 near Valona, 134,000 in Corfu, 10,624 in Bizerte, 4,584 in Salonika, about 2,000 in French and Greek hospitals, and about 3,000 in Epirus). The figures provided for 30 May 1916 by French and Serbian military sources pretty much tally:<sup>7</sup> the French produced the figure of about 146,800 men, while the Serbian Supreme Command recorded about 144,000 men. According to the research by the historian Dušan Bataković, in May 1916 the Serbian Army had 6,025 officers and 124,190 soldiers.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Veliki rat Srbije za oslobođenje i ujedinjenje Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca*, vol. XV: 1916. godina. *Reorganizacija srpske vojske na Krfu i prebacivanje u Solun i okolinu* (Belgrade: Istorijsko odeljenje Glavnog đeneralštaba, 1929).

<sup>4</sup> Milivoje Alimpić, *Solunski front* (Belgrade: Vojnoizdavački zavod, 1967), 59–60.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* 60.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* 68.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* 68, 69.

<sup>8</sup> Dušan T. Bataković, "Serbia in the Great War 1914–1918: War Imposed, Martyrdom, Resurrection", in *Serbia in the Great War. Anglo-Saxon Testimonies and Historical Analysis*, ed. Dušan T. Bataković (Belgrade: National Library of Serbia, 2015), 33.

### *From Corfu to the Chalkidiki*

The issue of deploying Allied forces to Salonika and establishing the Salonika front was tied to the issue of Greece's participation in the war. The possibility of an Allied attack on Greece precipitated the Greek government into assenting to the Allied landing in Salonika, which was followed, on 27 September 1915, by Prime Minister Venizelos request to the British and French governments to send troops.<sup>9</sup> A day later the French war minister ordered deployment of parts of the 156th Division to Salonika, and Lord Kitchener ordered the transfer of the 10th Division from Gallipoli to Salonika. French General Sarrail was appointed commander of the expeditionary forces in the Balkans, and he disembarked in Salonika on 12 October.

After the recuperation and reorganization in Corfu, the Serbian Army was deployed to the Chalkidiki. The deployment of the Serbian Army was a subject of intensive negotiations between the Serbian General Staff and the French Supreme Command, the role of the main intermediary being played by General Piarron de Mondésir, head of the French Mission to the Serbian Army. On 20 February the general announced the imminent deployment of Serbian troops to the Chalkidiki, assuring the Serbian General Staff that the Serbian troops on the Salonika front would not be absorbed by Allied units but rather that it would be able to operate independently. He also announced that the Serbs would be armed by the Allies in the Chalkidiki.<sup>10</sup> It was planned to form no more than six divisions of twelve battalions each with a total of 140,000 men. On 17 March 1916 the Serbian Supreme Command suggested to the war minister to reach an agreement on the disposition of the Serbian Army in the Chalkidiki and its use in the upcoming operations. Convinced that the Serbian Army should be able to operate independently, the Supreme Command insisted that it be given a specified direction of advance and a specified sector of the front. General Mondésir informed the Serbian Supreme Command that the first echelon of Serbian troops would soon be transferred to Salonika.<sup>11</sup>

On 9 April, after the disembarkation of horses and cavalry equipment in the Chalkidiki began, the Serbian Supreme Command ordered the transportation of the corresponding units from Corfu to the Chalkidiki. The first to be transported were the staff of the food supply column of each division and a section of the division food supply column. The transportation began on 12 April from the port of Govino for the units of the 1st Army, and from Moraitika for those of the 2nd and 3rd Armies. These units were tasked with preparing camps in the Chalkidiki and receiving the first transport of horses. On 13 April the Su-

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<sup>9</sup> Alimpić, *Solunski front*, 8.

<sup>10</sup> *Veliki rat Srbije za oslobođenje i ujedinjenje*, vol. XV, 14–15.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* 148–149.

preme Command ordered the transport of 1st Army units. On 15 April the commander of the Cavalry Division was ordered to have all healthy horses sent to the port of Corfu for transport to the Chalkidiki. At the Inter-Allied conference held at Chantilly on 12 March 1916 it had been decided to reorganize and transport the Serbian Army to Salonika.<sup>12</sup> The decision suited the Allies because they wanted to reinforce their forces with a reorganized Serbian force, and it suited the Serbian Army to be deployed to the Salonika front because it opened the shortest route home. The Allies insisted on deploying the regiments one by one, as soon as reorganized and ready. They believed that the opening of the Salonika front would precipitate the entry of Romania and Greece into the war.

About 112,000 men and 8,300 horses were transported from Corfu to Salonika.<sup>13</sup> Since it was a highly risky operation because of the presence of enemy submarines in Greek waters, the French and British ambassadors suggested to the Greek prime minister, Stefanos Skouloudis, that the Serbian troops be disembarked in the port of Patras and then transported by rail to the town of Ekaterini in the region of Thessaly, from where they would proceed to Salonika on foot.<sup>14</sup> Prime Minister Skouloudis rejected the suggestion as detrimental to Greece's political and economic interests and as compromising her neutrality. The rejection had an adverse impact on the relations between the Athens government and the Allied governments.

The transportation operation plan was developed by the French Navy, which also provided means of transportation and convoy protection.<sup>15</sup> In order to preclude any confusion and delays in unloading materiel from ships, infantry units were to be transported in the order of divisions and armies, and the rest in the order in which the materiel intended for them arrived in the port of Mikra near Salonika. The operation took forty-eight days, as opposed to only thirty days had the idea of the landing at Patras been accepted.

The first Serbian units that had embarked in Corfu on 12 April disembarked at Mikra on 18 April.<sup>16</sup> The main phase of transportation began on 18

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<sup>12</sup> Alimpić, *Solunski front*, 76.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Efraxia S. Paschalidou, "Greece's Prolonging Neutrality Perception during WWI. Stance towards Serbia", in *The First World War, Serbia, the Balkans and Great Powers*, eds. Srđan Rudić and Miljan Milkić (Belgrade: Institute of History and Strategic Research Institute, 2015), 134.

<sup>15</sup> Alimpić, *Solunski front*, 77.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* 78; Miladin Milošević, *Srbija i Grčka 1914–1918. Iz istorije diplomatskih odnosa* (Zaječar: Istorijski arhiv "Timočka krajina", 1997), 205. Reports on the first Serbian troops in the Chalkidiki kept in Vojni arhiv Ministarstva odbrane Republike Srbije, Belgrade [Military Archives, Ministry of Defence, Republic of Serbia, hereafter: VA], Belgrade, Register 3, box 388, file 2, document 2/5.

April.<sup>17</sup> Troops from the 1st Army and the Cavalry Division embarked in the port of Govino, and those of the 2nd and 3rd Armies in the port of Mariotika. Before embarkation the soldiers underwent medical examination and were given new clothing. The embarkation of the 1st Army took from 18 April to 7 May, of the 2nd from 6 to 17 May, of the 3rd from 17 to 21 May, and of the Cavalry Brigade from 24 to 26 May.

On 23 May, by order of General Sarrail, the Volunteer Unit of Vojvoda Vuk (Vojin Popović) was deployed to the Florina area – where some smaller French units had already been dispatched – with the task of preventing arms smuggling.<sup>18</sup>

The Staff of the Serbian Supreme Command embarked the ship, *Ingoma*, for Salonika on 14 May 1916. Chief of Staff of the Supreme Command, Assistant Chief of Staff, Chief of the Operation Section and Chief of the Intelligence Section left for Salonika the following morning. They arrived in Salonika at 14:00 on 16 May. The Staff of the Serbian Supreme Command and the French military mission headed by General Piarron de Mondésir arrived in Salonika together, and the Staff was accommodated there.<sup>19</sup> General Mondésir's successful mission ended with the completion of the transportation of the Serbian Army to the Chalkidiki. He was recalled on 24 April 1916 by order of General Joseph Joffre.<sup>20</sup> The Staff of the 1st Army was headquartered in the village of Yenikey, the Morava Division was encamped near the village of Surukli/Souroti, and the Vardar Division near the village of Zahardji. The Staff of the 2nd Army arrived in the port of Mikra on 15 May and set its headquarters in the village of Loutra, the Timok Division was encamped near the village of Zoumbata and the Šumadija Division near the village of Loutra. The Staff of the 3rd Army set its headquarters in the village of Vasilika, the Danube Division and Drina Divisions were encamped near the village of Talatishte. The Cavalry Division was encamped near the village of Redesa. Regent Alexander Karadjordjević, Commander-in-Chief, stayed behind in Corfu awaiting the solution to the issue of command authority on the future front. Command over the troops that remained in Corfu was assumed by the war minister on 13 May.

The transportation of the Serbian Army was completed in perfect order and according to plan. Owing to the measures taken by the French Navy, not a single case of torpedoing had occurred. Once in the Chalkidiki, the Serbian

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<sup>17</sup> Alimpić, *Solunski front*, 78.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* 79.

<sup>20</sup> Miljan Milkić, "Serbia and Allies in 1916", in *The Year of 1916 and the Impact of the World War Dynamics. Romania's entry into the Great War*, ed. Dr. Mihael E. Ionescu (Bucharest: Institutul pentru studii politice de aparare si istorie militara, Editura militara, 2017), 45.

troops were equipped with arms and materiel shipped from France.<sup>21</sup> Training was an important step in the process. The infantry training plan developed by the Serbian Supreme Command in Corfu on 16 May 1916, envisaged a two-month timeframe for producing an efficient and disciplined armed force.<sup>22</sup> At the same time, Serbian military chaplains provided moral instruction.<sup>23</sup> On 1 March 1916, in the camp at Govino in Corfu, the French military organized a training of Serbian officers and non-commissioned officers in handling a new type of rifle. The training in handling the French St Etienne Mle 1907 machine-gun that had begun in Corfu was completed in the Chalkidiki. A few manoeuvres were also carried out. After the arrival of the Serbian troops that had been evacuated to Bizerte, the formation of the Serbian Army was finally completed in the Chalkidiki.<sup>24</sup>

### *The Serbian Mission in the Chalkidiki*

By order of the Chief of Staff of the Serbian Supreme Command of 20 February 1916, Captain 1st Class Aleksandar Stojanović and Major Velimir Tomašević were transferred from Corfu to Salonika.<sup>25</sup> Stojanović was assigned the task of selecting locations for the encampment of Serbian soldiers in collaboration with a member of the French Mission, Lieutenant-Colonel Broussoud. Maj. Tomašević, commander of the Cavalry Depot, and his men were tasked with the reception of horses from all units of the Serbian Army. On 27 February 1916, the Serbian Supreme Command set up a special mission tasked to organize the accommodation of Serbian troops and sent it to Salonika.<sup>26</sup> The Mission was composed of Colonel Petar Todorović as its head, Colonel Miloš Jovanović as his deputy, Colonel Radisav Zečević, medical doctor Colonel Dragutin Petković, and supply officer Colonel Stanoje Ristić. The Mission was to act in compliance with the Supreme Command's written instructions of 4 March and oral instructions received from the Chief of Staff of the Supreme Command and chiefs of some sections of the Supreme Command.<sup>27</sup> The Mission was to ensure the tactical, sanitary and economic functioning of the camps. The order of the Supreme Command instructed the Mission to limit itself to assigning encamp-

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<sup>21</sup> Alimpić, *Solunski front*, 75.

<sup>22</sup> *Veliki rat Srbije za oslobođenje i ujedinjenje*, vol. XV, 115–123.

<sup>23</sup> Miljan Milkić, *Verska služba u srpskoj vojsci u Prvom svetskom ratu* (Belgrade: Medija centar Odbrana, 2016), 204–207.

<sup>24</sup> Alimpić, *Solunski front*, 75.

<sup>25</sup> *Veliki rat Srbije za oslobođenje i ujedinjenje*, vol. 15, 17–18.

<sup>26</sup> Alimpić, *Solunski front*, 77.

<sup>27</sup> VA, 3, 388, 2, 2–5.

ment sites to divisions, parts of armies and parts of the Supreme Command. It also had to address all other issues relating to the landing and reception of troops and materiel. Its special duty was to ensure regular meals and water for the troops upon disembarkation. The type of problems the Mission had to address may be illustrated by the fact that the distribution of troops had to take into account the capacity of water sources in each area of encampment. The Mission acted as an institution of the Supreme Command. Upon arriving in Salonika on 10 March and coming into contact with French authorities, the Mission was based at Sedes, where it analysed the earlier reports of French Lt. Col. Broussoud and Serbian Maj. Stojanović, and put together a memorandum on general and particular issues concerning different fields (supply service, medical service, artillery and engineering). The Mission submitted its report on these issues to the Supreme Command on 19 March 1916.<sup>28</sup> As far as the selection and organization of encampment sites was concerned, the Mission followed the instructions of the French military. At its first meeting with the delegate of the French Eastern Army, Colonel Descoins, and its first meeting with General Sarrail, the Mission was told that the area designated for encamping Serbian troops was the valley of Vasilika.<sup>29</sup> The Mission was ordered to move to Vasilika in order to prepare the camp at Surukli, which it did as early as 13 March and, at the request of Col. Descoins, immediately set to work. According to the earlier plan by Lt. Col. Broussoud and Maj. Stojanović, the camp at Surukli was to be the first to accommodate a division. The Mission generally accepted the earlier suggestions of the two officers, but rejected encampment away from main roads. Analysing the area assigned for the encampment of Serbian troops, the Mission concluded that its low population density, limited water supply and lack of good roads required that inhabited places be chosen as encampment sites and that the Mikra–Galatista road be the main line of supply for Serbian troops. The Mission's first decision concerning the distribution of Serbian troops was as follows:

- At Sedes: Cavalry Division with the Cavalry Depot, and the central hospital
- At the villages of Surukli and Loutra: 1st Army on both sides of the Mikra–Galatista road and the headquarters at Loutra
- At the village of Galatista: the 2nd Army with all its parts
- In the area of Yenikey–Zakardja–Zumbat: the 3rd Army
- At Vasilika and in its environs, on both sides of the main road: the staff and departments of the Supreme Command.

The camps were to be set up in the order laid down in this plan of the Serbian Mission, but the plan had to be changed. According to General Sarrail's

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

order of 16 March, the sequence of entering the camps was to be as follows: Sedes, Surukli, Zakardji, Galatista, Zumbat, Loutra (where the French 17th Colonial Division was stationed at the time) and, possibly, the area between Aksakan and Agia Paraskevi.<sup>30</sup> The latter was a swampy area with few roads and an inadequate number of usable wells. A further inconvenience was that such a sequence of establishing camps would break up the armies and cause considerable communal and administrative difficulties. Therefore, the Mission promptly requested to be assigned the area north of and around Loutra unless occupied by the 17th Colonial Division, in which case the Loutra camp would be second in line. But the request was denied, and it was even made clear to the Mission that unless it withdrew the request the 17th Division would leave its camp at Loutra and cease the ongoing construction of communications. Such a prospect would have made it impossible for the Mission to fulfil its assignment. The few workers it had at its disposal would not have been able to prepare the Surukli camp, let alone to resume the construction of communications. As a result, the Mission was compelled to comply with General Sarrail's order. Since it refused to use the area between Aksakan and Agia Paraskevi, the camp at Galatista had to accommodate two divisions instead of one. That meant that the Serbian 6th Division could be accommodated there only after the departure of the 17th Colonial Division. The problem was presented to Col. Descoins. The reply came on 21 March. General Sarrail decided that the Serbian Division encamped at Surukli be deployed to the front as soon as it was armed, thus making way for the division that would arrive last. But these decisions concerning the distribution of Serbian troops were not definitive. The ensuing period saw frequent changes, at times completely contrary to the earlier plans. The lodging of the Supreme Command was a particularly delicate issue for the Serbian Mission. Based on General Sarrail's order of 16 March, the Supreme Command was to be headquartered at Vasilika. When General Mondésir arrived on 2 April, his chief of staff, Colonel Douchy, stated to the members of the Serbian Mission in a private conversation that the Serbian Supreme Command would be lodged in the eastern part of Salonika and that the Serbian military would be in charge of Mikra. Col. Descoins, on the other hand, went on claiming that the Serbian Supreme Command would be in Vasilika and that the Cavalry Division would arrive last. He insisted that the construction of barracks for the Serbian Supreme Command should be stepped up even though the elementary school in Vasilika had been designated for the purpose. On 12 April the Serbian Mission began the construction of barracks for the Supreme Command in Vasilika since it failed to obtain private buildings from the local municipal authorities. Later on the issue of the accommodation of the Serbian Supreme Command became the subject of direct talks between the Serbian Army delegate Colonel Dragomir Milojević

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

and the Staff of the French Eastern Army and was finally settled in April. The distribution of troops and the sequence of entering the camps were also subject to change. Upon the arrival of General Mondésir the Serbian Mission was informed of the imminent arrival of Serbian troops and the need to prepare all camps simultaneously.

Pursuant to the order of 3 June 1916, the Serbian Mission submitted a full report on its work.<sup>31</sup> The report, received on 7 June, states that the Mission was met with a cold reception from the French military representatives at their first meeting and that the Staff of the Eastern Army had made no preparations for the arrival of Serbian troops. Instead of getting answers to its many questions, the Mission was told not to expect to ever get them. The answers to some general questions it did get were so vague that they were of no use. The problem was in that the Mission could not learn what of the equipment and furnishings for the camps it could expect to get from the French military and what it had to procure itself. It was only after the arrival of the Morava Division that the Mission was informed of the Supreme Command's order of 20 April which specified in more detail what of the material was allocated to which unit. There was also the problem of transportation of the material. Another of the Mission's objections was the fact that not a single automobile had ever been placed at its disposal; by contrast, every member of the French Mission ("even a second lieutenant") had one at his disposal. So they had to do their work on horse or on foot. This problem became particularly acute once the Serbian troops began to disembark at Mikra. The Mission was unable to tend to the disembarkation and the preparation of the camps at the same time. The troops arriving in the Chalkidiki were completely unprepared and needed not only lodging and meals but also all manner of instructions and explanations, which the Mission frequently was unable to give them. The information given to the Mission did not specify the allocation of materiel among units, which caused many problems and compelled them to ask questions over and over again.

One of the Mission's assignments was to designate the sites for shooting exercises. A shooting ground was assigned to every infantry division in the vicinity of its camp. Grounds for artillery practice had to be limited to two sites: in the environs of the camp at Galatista, with a 4-km shooting range, and at Big Karaburun, with a range of 11.5 km.<sup>32</sup> Each division commander was shown the encampment site and the location of water sources, the layout of his division's camp, diet plans, the operation procedure for the medical staff, the exercise ground. The units whose camps were not yet ready to receive them were temporarily accommodated in the provisional camp at Sedes.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

The first camp to be set up was the one at Surukli and preparatory work began on 14 March,<sup>33</sup> involving sixty-four railway workers and three engineers the Mission had brought from Corfu. All the necessary material and tools were requested from the French military. A few days later, on 18 March, two 3rd-line companies of the 1st Combined Regiment were brought to build a road between Vasilika and Surukli. Namely, the building of roads by the French 17th Colonial Division had begun before the Mission's arrival. The Mission also worked on establishing telephone communications. The plan was to establish communications between Vasilika and Salonika (for communication between the Serbian Supreme Command and the commander of the Eastern Army), Vasilika and Galatista (for communication with one of the armies), Vasilika and Zumbat (where an army was to be headquartered) and Vasilika and Loutra (for communication with the 3rd Army headquarters). But by 20 March the Mission was informed by the Telephone Department of the 17th Colonial Division that there were no technical conditions for establishing new telephone lines and was advised to take over the 17th Colonial Division's lines once it left the camp.

The preparation of the camp ran slowly because of delays in the delivery of material and tools by the French. Time went by, often without any reply to the Mission's requests or the delivery of the necessary material. The Mission was therefore compelled to try to procure the material on its own, and it was requested of the Supreme Command to dispatch engineer units to the Chalkidiki as soon as possible. Deliveries by the French began to arrive fifteen days after the request from the Mission. The delivery of building material was still awaited and it was only on 3 April that blacksmith tools and the tools for installing water pumps arrived. General Piarron de Mondésir visited the camp at Surukli on 1 April and promised the necessary labour but it did not arrive by the time the first Morava Division troops began to be lodged in the camp. Preparations of the camp at Surukli were nearing completion when, on 7 April, preparations began at Yenikay and Zakardja. Preparations of the Surukli camp ran in parallel with those of the camp at Sedes. At the express request of Col. Descoins, the Serbian Mission did not take part in the preparations of this camp, intended for the 1st 3rd-line Combined Regiment, which began on 20 April, the date when engineer units arrived. Preparations of the camp at Zakardja were followed by those of Zumbat and then Galatista. Preparations of the camp at Loutra, which was now placed at the disposal of the Serbian Mission, ran concurrently. Although 17th Colonial Division had been encamped there, the Serbian Mission assessed that it needed additional furnishing.<sup>34</sup>

The supply of drinking water for Serbian troops involved chemical analysis of the existing sources, their covering to prevent contamination and instal-

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

lation of pumps. Bacteriological analyses began on 27 March. The Loutra and Galatista camps were equipped with various installations, drinking fountains and water tanks.<sup>35</sup>

By the time of the arrival of Serbian troops, preparations of the camp and in particular the maintenance of roads were covered by the French 17th Colonial Division. After their departure from the Chalkidiki, the organization of the work was resumed by the Serbian Mission in collaboration with the British Mission.<sup>36</sup>

Among the issues addressed by the Serbian Mission was the one of food.<sup>37</sup> The issue had not been considered by the command of the Eastern Army, and the chief supply officer of the French Army was surprised by the Serbian Mission's questions and requests. It was necessary to develop a diet chart and a plan for the upkeep of Serbian troops. The French chief supply officer stated, however, that the provisions for the Serbian soldiers would be the same as those for the French. The allowance of hay and straw for bedding and the consumption of coffee were cancelled, and the rations of cooked vegetables and firewood cut down. At a meeting held on 21 March, the main principles of supplying the Serbian Army were presented: the Serbian Army would be supplied in the same way as the French; a central base would be set up at Mikra which would supply food to the Serbian camps; the Serbian divisions were allowed to keep only a day's supply of food in storage. One of the conclusions of the meeting was that the French supply service would do all the work, while the Serbian supply officer should only organize the reception and distribution of food deliveries. The Serbian Mission objected on the grounds that transportation difficulties in case of bad weather might leave the troops without food and suggested the establishment in each area of a division depot holding two-day food supplies. The Mission also requested the urgent dispatch of Serbian bakery units to the Chalkidiki. The provision of food for Serbian troops became the Mission's most important task and many others fell in the background as a result. The Mission's effort to have food and clothing depots set up for each division ended in success.

A few days after the arrival of the Serbian Mission, the command of the Eastern Army requested of the Serbian Supreme Command to send horses to the Chalkidiki, first those from the Cavalry Division and then from the other divisions. The horses began to arrive on 30 March, but there were no conditions for their accommodation and care. All that was needed for horse care and maintenance, including blacksmiths and their materials, was yet to come from Corfu, and so the Serbian Mission tried to procure the necessary material in the Chalkidiki.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

On 5 May 1916 the Serbian Mission requested of its Supreme Command to provide interpreters to facilitate its communication with representatives of the Allied armies.<sup>38</sup> Twenty-eight members of the Serbian Army speaking one or several foreign languages – French, English, German, Greek, Russian, Spanish, Turkish, Italian, Romanian, Czech, Hungarian and Dutch – applied for the duty. On 31 May the Mission asked for another ten interpreters for French to be engaged in the French military hospitals in the Chalkidiki.

During its term the Mission had a budget of 200,000 drachmas.<sup>39</sup> It was used to pay the rent for the buildings where the Serbian Supreme Command was accommodated, for salaries and various allowances, food provisions and various materials for furnishing the camps. Despite all difficulties, the Serbian Mission managed to have the camps prepared for the accommodation of Serbian troops. Having fulfilled its assignment, the Mission ceased to operate on 4 June 1916 by order of the Chief of Staff of the Supreme Command.<sup>40</sup>

### *The disposition of the Serbian troops on the Salonika front*

The Serbian Army stayed in the Chalkidiki for about two months, where its reorganization was completed, and it was armed and equipped. At its meeting of 24 June 1916 the Serbian government accepted General Sarrail's request for the deployment of the Serbian Army to the front, with the proviso that it should operate as a single force.<sup>41</sup> The area where Serbian troops were deployed was bounded by the rivers Kodjidere and Vardar in the east, the two Prespa Lakes in the west, in the south by the road from Salonika to Yannitsa and Edessa, then the railway to Ostrov (Arnisa) and thence the line Katranitsa–Aitos–Turnovo villages on the Florina–Kastoria road. Their deployment in the assigned area was carried out under the protection of parts of the French Army. The Serbian troops were in fact to block the possible penetration of the enemy towards Edessa, which would make it easy for them to reach Salonika. The 1st Army was deployed between the Kodjidere and Vardar rivers and the river Moglenitsa, the 2nd Army between the Moglenitsa and the line Kaimakchalan–Drushka (east of Ostrov), and the 3rd Army between the line Kaimakchalan–Drushka–Katranitsa and the two Prespa Lakes. During the transfer from Salonika to the front, General Sarrail assigned some Serbian divisions to secure a bridge on the Salonika–Edessa–Bitola railway and road. At first the task was assigned to the Šumadija Division, and from early July it was replaced successively by the

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<sup>38</sup> VA, 3, 263, 10, 8/31.

<sup>39</sup> VA, 3, 388, 2, 2–5.

<sup>40</sup> VA, 3, 388, 2, 2–4.

<sup>41</sup> Alimpić, *Solunski front*, 94, 95.

Timok, Morava and Vardar Divisions. Military experts are of the view that this was an unnecessary assignment because the Salonika–Edessa–Bitola line had already been protected by the disposition of French forces along the Vardar.<sup>42</sup>

After long negotiations, which ended in late July 1916, the issue of command over the Serbian Army was settled. While in the Chalkidiki, it had still been under Crown Prince Alexander Karadjordjević as commander-in-chief, and then General Sarrail took over. The 1st Army, headquartered in the village of Goumenissa, completed the deployment of its Morava Division by 31 July and of the Vardar Division by 7 August. The 2nd Army was headquartered in the village of Dragomantsi (Apsalos); its Šumadija Division completed deployment by 24 July and the Timok Division by 28 July. The Drina Division of the 3rd Army completed deployment in the area of Ostrov (Arnisa), where the 3rd Army was headquartered, by 24 July, and the Danube Division by 5 August.<sup>43</sup> The Cavalry Division, temporarily reassigned as an infantry unit by order of the Supreme Command of 24 July, left the camp at Sedes on 18 July, and was deployed to two positions. The 2nd Cavalry Brigade Staff and the 2nd Cavalry Regiment were transferred to Edessa, where the latter was assigned to secure the Salonika–Amyntaio (Sorovič) railway. The rest of the Cavalry Division, including its Staff, was sent to Gorno Vrbeni to protect the left flank of the Danube Division. The British 17th and 156th Divisions were also deployed in the course of July. In that way, the Salonika front was fully formed.

The deployment of Serbian troops on the Salonika front was carried out smoothly and without disturbance on the part of the enemy. The inclusion of the Serbian Army into the Allied force boosted the morale of Serbian troops. The Serbian government and Supreme Command succeeded in their effort to preserve the Army's national character and to get it employed as a unified force along a defined operational direction, along Greece's northern border. The Army was now near its occupied homeland and the fact aroused hopes of its imminent liberation.

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid. 95.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. 96–97.

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