AN EXAMPLE OF STRATEGIC COMMAND AND COORDINATION PROBLEM IN THE OTTOMAN ARMY: THE BATTLE OF SHIPKA DURING THE OTTOMAN-RUSSIAN WAR OF 1877-1878

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis analyzes the battle of Shipka during the Ottoman-Russian War of 1877-1878 within the context of its effect on the strategic command and coordination problems in the Ottoman army. The developments that took place during the war, the fall of the Shipka Pass and the attempts of the Ottoman forces to recapture the Shipka Pass will be discussed alongside the interventions from Istanbul to the front line, the effects of the commander appointments on the strategic command and coordination mechanism, and the strategic aspect of the Ottoman attacks under Süleyman Pasha. Finally, this thesis argues that the decisions at the strategic level had an important role in the course of the Ottoman-Russian War of 1877-1878.

Keywords: Shipka Pass, Unity of Command, Strategy, Ottoman-Russian War of 1877-1878, Süleyman Hüsnü Pasha

ÖZ

OSMANLI ORDUSUNDA STRATEJİK KOMUTA VE KOORDİNASYON SORUNUNA BİR ÖRNEK: 1877-1878 OSMANLI-RUS HARBİNDE ŞIPKA MUHAREBELERİ

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Bu tez, 1877-1878 Osmanlı Rus Harbinde Şıpka muharebelerini ve bu muharebeler bağlamında yaşanan gelişmelerin Osmanlı ordusundaki stratejik komuta ve koordinasyon sorunlarına etkisini incelemektedir. Savaş döneminde meydana gelen gelişmeler, Şıpka Geçidi'nin Rus ordusu tarafından işgal edilmesi, Osmanlı ordusunun Şıpka Geçidi'ni geri almak için verdiği mücadele, İstanbul'dan cephe hattına yapılan müdahaleler, atama süreçlerindeki hatalı kararların Osmanlı stratejik karar mekanizmasında meydana getirdiği etkiler ve Süleyman Paşa'nın Şıpka taarruzlarının stratejik boyutu tartışılacaktır. Sonuç olarak bu tez 1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus Savaşında stratejik seviyede verilen kararların savaşın gidişatında önemli rol oynadığını savunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Şıpka Geçidi, Emir-Komuta Birliği, Strateji, 93 Harbi, Süleyman Hüsnü Paşa

In Memory of My Brother

Şehit Jandarma Uzman Çavuş BURAK TOK…

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PLAGIARISM iii
ABSTRACT iv
ÖZ v
DEDICATION vi
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS vii
TABLE OF CONTENTS ix
LIST OF MAPS xii
LIST OF TABLES xiii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS xiv
CHAPTERS
1. INTRODUCTION 1
2. THE OTTOMAN AND RUSSIAN MILITARY POWER PRIOR TO THE WAR 10
2.1. The Ottoman Military Power 10
2.1.1. The Ottoman Army Organization 10
2.1.2. The Ottoman War Plan 19
2.1.3. Mobilization and Deployment of the Ottoman Army until the Russian Attacks on the Danubian Front 22
2.2. The Russian Military Power 27
2.2.1. The Russian Army Organization 27
2.2.2. The Russian War Plan 32
2.2.3 Mobilization and Deployment of the Russian Army until the Operations on the Danubian Front 36
3. THE FIRST ROUND IN THE SHIPKA PASS: FALL OF THE OTTOMAN BALKAN DEFENSE (MAY-JULY) 40
3.1. Terrain Analysis and Strategic Importance of the Shipka Pass 40
3.2. The Russian Crossing Operations from the Danube River 45

3.3. Command and Control Problem in the Ottoman Headquarters: Operations of General Gurko's Advance Guard in the Balkans 53
3.3.1. The Battle of Tırnova 58
3.3.2. The Russian March on the Shipka Pass 61
3.4. The Fall of the Shipka Pass 71
3.4.1. The Attacks of the Northern Column 76
3.4.2. The Attacks of General Gurko's Column 79
3.5. The Russian Advance after the First Shipka Battle 83
4. THE COUNTEROFFENSIVE OF THE OTTOMAN ARMY ON THE SHIPKA PASS (JULY-OCTOBER) 88
4.1. Süleyman Pasha in the Balkans: Operations of the Ottoman Army prior to the Shipka Attacks 88
4.2. The Second Stage of the Shipka Battle 97
4.2.1. The Russian Deployment in Shipka and the Ottoman Battle Plan 99
4.2.2. The First Days in Shipka: 21-22 August Battles 105
4.2.3. The Turning Point of the Shipka Attacks: 23 August Battle 111
4.2.4. The Russian Revival: 24-25-26 August Battles 121
4.2.5. Renewed Fighting in Shipka: The Last Attack of the Ottoman Forces 125
4.2.6. The Price of the Attacks and the Ottoman Health Service in Shipka 131
5. ASSESSMENT OF THE BATTLE OF SHIPKA: STRATEGIC COMMAND AND COORDINATION PROBLEMS IN THE OTTOMAN ARMY 137
5.1. Assessment of the First Shipka Battle 137
5.2. Assessment of the Ottoman Counteroffensive for the Shipka Pass 147
5.2.1. Strategic Command and Coordination Problems in the Ottoman Army during the Shipka Attacks 150
5.2.2. Time Management Problem in the Ottoman Army 167
5.2.3. The Problem in Force Distribution and Center of Gravity during the Shipka Attacks 176
5.3. Reconsidering the Shipka Attacks within the context of the Principles of War 180
6. CONCLUSION 189

REFERENCES 197
APPENDICES
A. MAPS 213
B. ARCHIVAL DOCUMENTS 217
C. ILLUSTRATIONS AND PICTURES 223
D. TABLES 226
E. TURKISH SUMMARY / TÜRKÇE ÖZET 228
F. THESIS PERMISSION FORM / TEZ İZİN FORMU 241

LIST OF MAPS

MAP 1: Deployment of the Ottoman Army at the Beginning of the War……25

MAP 2: The Balkan Mountains and the Principal Passages for the Ottomans……41

MAP 3: The Main Transportation Routes in Bulgaria……..…..……..44

MAP 4: The Advance of General Gurko……..……..…….69

MAP 5: The Advance of the Russian Columns on the Shipka Pass……..…78

MAP 6: The Vicinity of Shipka and Russian Positions…….102

MAP 7: The Ottoman Attacks on 21 August …….…...107

MAP 8: The Ottoman and Russian Positions on 23 August Afternoon..…….115

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Deployment of the Ottoman Forces on the Danubian Front before the Declaration of the War 24

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ATASE	Genelkurmay Askerî Tarih ve Stratejik Etüt Başkanlığı Arşivi
ORH	Osmanlı-Rus Harbi
BOA	Cumhurbaşkanlığı Osmanlı Arşivi
Y. EE. D	Yıldız Esas Evrakı Defterleri
İ.DH	İrâde-Dâhiliye
Y.A.RES	Yıldız Resmi Maruzat
MB.İ	Mâbeyn-i Hümâyûn İrâdeler

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The subject of this thesis is the Shipka battles and their effects on the course of the 1877-1878 Ottoman–Russian War. The necessity for such a study arose from the fact that while the battle of Shipka had a determinant impact on the war as much as the battle of Pleven, which was deeply investigated in many studies, there is no comparative and special study about the Shipka in the Turkish historiography.

The Ottoman–Russian War of 1877-1878, namely the 93 war, which played a conspicuous role in many developments throughout the last 45 years of the Ottoman Empire, have been generally discussed within the context of its political and social consequences in the Turkish historiography. The military aspect of the war has not been investigated as much as it supposed to be despite the fact that the campaign had a remarkable place in the military history of the nineteenth century with the use of many new technologies effectively such as telegraphy, railways, torpedoes and heavy artilleries. Regarding the military aspect of the war, the main concern of the Turkish historians has been primarily limited with the battle of Pleven because of the tendency to achievements. Thereby, many events other than the battle of Pleven have been neglected. However, it is no doubt that like the battle of Pleven, the Shipka battles played a key role in the course of the other major battles and accordingly the result of the war. Although the importance of the Shipka battles was recognized by the Bulgarians, who acknowledged the clashes as epic and celebrate it every year by organizing ceremonies in Shipka Pass, the comprehension of many Turkish people about the war cannot go beyond the battle of Pleven.

Throughout the war, the Ottoman army had the advantage of having better transportation and communication opportunities due to fighting under the Ottoman territories. The number of mobilized manpower was remarkable in terms of the period. Besides, the army had been strengthened with the new Snider and Winchester rifles, Krupp artilleries and many powerful battleships until the commencement of the war. However, the determinant factors for the consequence of the war became the strategic command and coordination problems in the Ottoman army. The strategic command mechanism of the Ottomans was not efficient to sustain such an exhaustive war. The combat ability of the Ottoman army was demolished by a series of strategic mistakes such as the deployment of the forces, appointments of the commanders without following the military necessities, unity of command and external interventions in the decision-making mechanism. In this regard, one of the places in which the strategic mistakes had intensely experienced from the beginning of the war to the end was the Shipka Pass.

The Ottoman war plan was based on protecting the two main geographic barriers in the *Rumelia*, which is the Danube River and the Balkan Mountains. Nevertheless, because of the problems at the strategic level, the Ottoman forces remained immobile against the advance of the Russian forces and therefore it could not be possible to defend both defense lines. After crossing the Danube River, the Russian army rapidly advanced on the Balkan Mountains and captured the strategically important Shipka Pass without facing any resistance. The effect of the failure in defending the Balkan line became the main reason for the important developments which affected the course of the war. After the dismissal of the commander-in-chief Abdülkerim Nadir Pasha, the Ottoman decision-making system worsened than before by the new appointments without considering the necessities of the military tradition and the unity of command. Even though the new commanders Mehmed Ali Pasha and Süleyman Pasha had to coordinate with each other to successfully conduct their operations, they prioritized their responsibility areas without paying attention to others. For that reason, the Ottoman Army mainly contended with the strategic command and coordination problems after the fall of the Shipka Pass. The developments that took place within the

context of the Shipka battles damaged the maneuverability and operational capability of the ottoman army.

The Ottoman commanders wasted August and September without obtaining any significant gain against the Russians, who contended themselves on completing preparations for a general attack on the Ottoman corps. After the reinforcements arrived and the preparation stage was concluded in the Russian army, the maneuverability and operational capability of the Ottoman army completely disappeared. The Russian army surrounded Pleven with a remarkable force and the loneliness of Osman Pasha could not be changed until the fall of Pleven in December, which became a psychological defeat of the Ottoman army. Therefore, the Russian army managed to reach outskirts of Istanbul without any resistance. In fact, it was possible to constitute a fortified position like Osman Pasha did in Pleven. However, nobody attempted to encounter the Russian advance during that period in which the command and control problem in the Ottoman army peaked.

The purpose of this study is to identify the strategic command and coordination problems in the Ottoman army during the 1877-1878 Ottoman – Russian war within the scope of the Shipka battles. In this context, this study will attempt to shed light on these questions: How and why was the Shipka Pass occupied by the Russians? What was the plan of the Ottoman army to recapture the pass and how this plan was conducted by the Ottoman commanders? What were the reasons for the failure in the battle of Shipka? What is the role of the Shipka battles in the course of the Ottoman-Russian War of 1877–1878? How the military council and multi-headed decision-making organization affected the operational capacity of the Ottoman army? Even though the struggle had continued around the Shipka Pass until 9 January 1878, this thesis is mainly contented with the fall of the Balkan defense, the operations of Süleyman Pasha as the commander of the Balkan corps and their effects on the course of the war. Therefore, the developments around the Shipka Pass after Süleyman Pasha, which needs separate attention, were exempted in this thesis.

This study depends mainly on the documents in the Archive of the Directorate of Military History and Strategic Studies of the Turkish General Staff (ATASE), especially in elaborating the strategic level of the Shipka battles. The collection of the 1877-1878 Ottoman – Russian War was classified and cataloged throughout the 1990s. The main part of this collection, which contains more than 37.000 documents, were telegrams among the Ottoman commanders and Istanbul. The archive research was the most challenging phase of this study. Because of the problematic order of the archive catalog, without a certain grouping regarding the regions and responsibility areas, it had been hard to follow the footprints of a case by using the *ATASE*. To illustrate the complicated format of the catalog, while the first volume was containing the documents about the Shipka movement of Süleyman Pasha, in the second volume Süleyman Pasha was still in Montenegro. There is no information in the catalog indicating the sender and receiver.[1] Nevertheless, the close assistance of the archive officers was a great chance for this study to be completed although the archive does not offer direct access to the documents, and thus the process of obtaining documents and analyzing them covered a long period. In this context, one of the most useful documents for this study will be a small number of folders including many telegrams of Süleyman Hüsnü Pasha with Istanbul and the other commanders in the front line. Besides, in order to fill the void, the relevant documents in the Presidency Ottoman Archives (*BOA*) will be examined.

In addition to the archival documents, the other important source used primarily in this study was the memoirs of Süleyman Hüsnü Pasha, *Umdetü'l-Hakāyık,* in which he described all events he witnessed from the beginning of the war to the end detailly. The memoirs were published in six volumes by his sons and grandsons in 1928.[2] The

[1] Ömer Turan, "The Turkish Documents About the Ottoman-Russian War of 1877-78", in *The Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78*, ed. Ömer Turan, (Ankara: ODTÜ, 2007), p. 324. For detailed information about the documents in the ATASE archive regarding the Ottoman-Russian War of 1877-1878, *see* Ibid., pp. 321-339.

[2] Fethi Tevetoğlu, *Süleyman Paşa*, (Ankara: Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, 1988), p. 107. For detailed information about Süleyman Pasha's personality and each volume of *Umdetü'l-Hakāyık, see* Ahmet Tetik, "*Umdetü'l-Hakāyık: Süleyman Paşa*", Master Thesis, (Istanbul: Marmara University, 1993).

second volume of the book deals with the battle of Shipka. In this volume, Süleyman pasha offered remarkable information in detail about his operations with the Balkan corps.[3] His primary motivation, which can be easily perceived while reading, was to justify himself. The name of the memoirs, meaning the basis of truth, already reveals his intention. Nevertheless, he was able to make self-criticism regarding many failures of the army under his command. Besides, he used many documents throughout the writing period and offered profound details of the operational and strategic levels of the battle. The details given by Süleyman Pasha in his memoirs regarding a specific case corresponds exactly with many archival documents sent by him during the battles. It is possible to find many similar examples between the memoirs and the archival documents.[4]

In the Turkish historiography, it is not possible to find a detailed study dealing with the battle of Shipka except the books of the Turkish Generals Ali Fuad, Halil Sedes and Hikmet Süer. The first and pioneer one is Ali Fuad's *Musavver Osmanlı Rus Harbi* written in Ottoman Turkish and published between 1910-1912 in three volumes. All of the important events were investigated with different kinds of foreign sources by Ali Fuad in this book.[5] Besides, he published a book in 1924, *Süleyman Paşa*

Also, *see* Erol Özbilgen, *Osmanlı'nın Balkanlardan Çekilişi: Süleyman Hüsnü Paşa ve Dönemi*, (Istanbul, İz Yayıncılık, 2012).

[3] Süleyman Hüsnü Paşa, *Umdetü'l-Hakāyık*, Vol. 2, (Istanbul: Askeri Matbaa, 1928).

[4] For example, the narration of the Ottoman attacks on 17 September both in the *Umdetü'l-Hakāyık* and Süleyman Pasha's report to the Ministry of War (*Seraskerlik*) after the attacks were as follows: "Düşmana fedâkârane mukâbele ederek mezkûr Esveti Nikola taşlı tepenin zirvesindeki düşman istihkâmını altı buçuk saat kadar sâlif-üz-zikr birinci liva hücûm kolunun yed-i zabtında kaldı ise de ikinci ve üçüncü livâlardan müretteb hücûm kollarının her nasılsa ta'yîn olunan vakit ve gösterilen cihete ilerleyemediklerinden ve bu cihetle Esveti Nikola istihkâmatını zabt eden birinci livâ hücûm kolunun sağ ve sol tarafları irtibatsız ve muhâfazasız kalub ol veçhile bozulmuş ve bakiyyesi geride kalmış ve istihkâmâtına kaçmış olan düşman kendisini çıkub çevirib ve bir tarafdan da 'asâkir-i külliye-i imdâdiyyesi yetişüb Esveti Nikola zirvesindeki birinci livâ hücûm kolunun üzerine ve yanlarına kemâl-i şiddetle hücûm etmiş" Archive of the Directorate of Military History and Strategic Studies of the Turkish General Staff (=ATASE), Ottoman-Russian War (=ORH). 101/8, 17 September 1877; ATASE, ORH. 101/8AA, 17 September 1877; Süleyman Hüsnü Paşa, *Umdetü'l-Hakāyık*, p.153.

[5] Ali Fuad, *Musavver 1293-1294 Osmanlı-Rus seferi*, Vol. 1, (Istanbul: Kitabhane-yi Islam ve Askeri, 1326); Ali Fuad, *Osmanlı-Rus seferi: Şıbka ve Plevne Muharebatı*, Vol. 2, (Dersaadet: Matbaa-i Osmaniye, nd.); Ali Fuad, *Osmanlı-Rus seferi: Plene'nin Sükutu*, Vol. 3, (Dersaadet: Mahmud Beğ Matbaası, 1327).

Ordusu'nun Balkanlardaki Harekâtı, that separately deals with the developments on the Danubian front after the battle of Shipka.[6] The other writers, Sedes and Süer, mainly followed the path of Ali Fuad and used their predecessor's books as one of the primary sources for their books. After Ali Fuad, General İbrahim Halil Sedes focused on the war in his book *1877-1878 Osmanlı – Rus ve Romen Savaşı*, which was written between 1935 and the 1950s in multiple volumes. Especially the third, fifth and eighth volumes of the book correspond to the battle of Shipka.[7] Both Ali Fuad and Sedes detailed the battles by using some certain foreign studies, mainly Epanchin's *Operations of Gurko's Advance Guard in 1877* and Greene's *Reports on the Russian Army and Its Campaign in Turkey in 1877-1878*. Besides, Süleyman Hüsnü Pasha's memoirs was the other primary source for these books. Although these books were written without any reference to the sources mentioned above, it is easy to understand the origin of the information by following the similarities between the books. In 1993, General Hikmet Süer published *1877-1878 Osmanlı–Rus Harbi: Rumeli Cephesi* by following his predecessors. He mentioned the battle of Shipka in a chapter of the book by making some additions to the cumulative information received by Sedes and Ali Fuad sequentially.[8]

These books are remarkable studies and show the course of the war not only from the Ottoman point of view but also from the Russian. However, because of the military origin of the authors, they primarily focused on the tactical and operational levels without following any academic rule. The intensity of the details regarding the tactical and technical levels in these books lead the reader to miss the main points of the battles. Besides, the problems of the Balkan corps at the strategic level, which had the most important effect on the course of the war, are presented immethodically without any

[6] Ali Fuad, *Süleyman Paşa Ordusu'nun Balkanlardaki Harekâtı*, (Istanbul: Matbaa-ı Askeri, 1340).

[7] Halil Sedes, *1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus ve Romen Savaşı*, Vol. 3, (Istanbul: Askeri Matbaa, 1937), Halil Sedes, *1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus ve Romen Savaşı*, Vol. 5, (Istanbul: Askeri Matbaa, 1938), Halil Sedes, *1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus ve Romen Savaşı*, Vol. 8, (Istanbul: Askeri Matbaa, 1940).

[8] Hikmet Süer, *1877-1878 Osmanlı Rus Harbi Rumeli Cephesi*, (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 1993).

groupings and indication because of mainly focusing on the narration of the battle and technical and tactical developments. Therefore, in order to handle the course of the battle by primarily focusing on the strategic level, the tactical and operational stages of the battles will be given without drowning in many details that are not useful for the objective of this study,

To compare the conditions of both the Ottomans and the Russians, the battles are not only investigated with the Turkish sources. It could not be possible to investigate the Russian sources because of the language problem, but many foreign studies, especially those of those who lived during the war, such as the publications of war correspondents and foreign military officers accompanied the Russian army will be used to be able to fill the void from the Russian point of view. These were important sources because of representing the firsthand impressions about the battles. Moreover, they allow us to follow the war not only from the Ottoman point of view but also the Russian point of view. Among them, *The War Correspondence of the Daily News* includes the reports of famous war correspondents of the time such as Archibald Forbes and Januarius MacGahan[9] and the book of Francis Winton Greene, American military attaché at St. Petersburg, *Reports on the Russian Army and Its Campaign in Turkey in 1877-1878*[10] offer remarkable information about the battles. Greene used many Russian documents while preparing his book. Besides, important cumulative publications written by military men lived during the war period such as Russian soldier Epanchin's *Operations of Gurko's Advance Guard in 1877*[11] and British soldier Hozier's *The Russo – Turkish War*, will be used.[12] All of these studies will fill the void in this thesis

[9] Daily News, *The War Correspondence of the Daily News 1877*, (London: Macmillan, 1878).

[10] Francis Vinton Greene, *Report on the Russian Army and its Campaigns in Turkey in 1877-1878*, (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1879).

[11] Nikolai Epanchin, *Operations of General Gurko's Advance Guard in 1877*, trans. H. Havelock, (London: Kegan Paul, 1900).

[12] Henry Montague Hozier, *The Russo-Turkish War*, Vol. 4, (London, Mackenzie, 1878).

by presenting the course of the war from the Russian point of view in order to understand the movements of the Ottoman forces properly.

The thesis begins with elaboration on the preparations of the Ottoman army and Russian army before the war. It is important to analyze the army organizations, war plans, mobilization of the manpower and deployment of the troops to understand the developments that took place throughout the war. Without considering the main objective of the Russian army, it will not be possible to identify the significance of the Shipka Pass in the course of the war. Likewise, without examining the deployment of the Ottoman troops throughout not only in the war zone but also in the other parts of the Ottoman Empire, the reason for the immobility of the Ottoman commanders and their passive defense strategy will be unclear. Therefore, the second chapter of the study will be about the Ottoman and the Russian military powers, their preparations and the war plans.

In the third chapter of this study, the fall of the Shipka Pass will be discussed with the events that preceded the first Shipka battle and caused the collapse of the Ottoman defense line on the Balkan Mountains. In this context, firstly the passage of the Russian army from the Danube River and the advance of the Russians without resistance until the foothills of the Balkan Mountains will be given alongside making terrain analysis of the Balkan Mountains and the Shipka Pass.[13] Thereafter, the operations of General Gurko's advance guard will be investigated together with the Ottoman defense attempts against this force. The primary concern of this chapter will be revealing what were the underlying reasons for the failure in the defense of both the Danube River and the Balkan Mountains against the Russian attacks.

The fourth chapter is concerned with the attacks of the Balkan corps under Süleyman Hüsnü Pasha by clarifying how these operations were conducted and how they were confronted by the Russian forces. In the first part of this chapter, the operations of the

[13] There are many different usages regarding the place names. In this thesis, the city and town names will be given in line with their contemporary and widespread usages. For differences between the Ottomans' usage and the contemporary usage, *see* appendix 16.

Balkan corps before the Shipka assault that had a big impact on the consequence of the Shipka battles will be examined. The second part of the fourth chapter will contain the attacks of the Ottoman forces by detailing each attempt under four periods in respect of the developments on the battlefield. Besides, this chapter will deal with the cost of the attacks as manpower and the Ottoman health service in the Balkans.

The final chapters of this study are devoted to the evaluation of the failure of the Ottomans in the Shipka and their effects on the course of the war. This chapter will endeavor to produce an analytic study instead of sticking solely to narration. In this regard, firstly the assessment of the first Shipka skirmish will be given by pointing out the strategic mistakes in the ottoman army that caused the fall of the Balkan Defense. After that, the strategic command and coordination dilemma among the Ottoman commanders will be dwelled on together with the problems in time management, deployment of forces and determining the center of gravity during the Shipka assault under Süleyman Hüsnü Pasha. Besides, the attacks of the Balkan corps will be evaluated within the context of the principles of war in order to consider the attacks regarding the main necessities for command. Thereby, the main concern of this chapter will be identifying the mistakes at the strategic level from the beginning of the war to the end of the Shipka attacks regarding the battle of Shipka.

CHAPTER 2

THE OTTOMAN AND RUSSIAN MILITARY POWER PRIOR TO THE WAR

2.1. The Ottoman Military Power

2.1.1. The Ottoman Army Organization

The Ottoman army had been considered as one of the leading armies in Europe since it became a regional power in the fourteenth century. This situation continued until the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Yet, the Ottoman war power started to be decrease by the changes in the military understanding that came with the Industrial Revolution. The Ottomans could not manage to implement the developments in firepower and recruitment system in the Janissary Corps, which was the main organ of the Ottoman army. Therefore, the combat power of the Ottoman army had started to become insufficient over time. For that reason, the military reformation became an important matter for the Ottomans throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The military reformation which Ottoman Empire needed was mainly conducted by foreign military advisers, especially from France, Britain and later Prussia. One of the first examples of these advisers were Claude Alexandre de Bonneval who was known as Humbaracı Ahmed Pasha[14], and Baron François de Tott. With the help of these advisers, many reforms had been implemented in the Ottoman army in the second and third quarters of the eighteenth century. Even though these reforms increased the

[14] For detailed information about Humbaracı Ahmed Pasha and his service in the Ottoman Empire, *see* Uğur Demir, *Humbaracı Ahmed Paşa: Osmanlı Hizmetinde Bir Mühtedi*, (Istanbul, Yeditepe Yayınevi, 2016).

technical and organizational power of the Ottoman army, it was not possible to implement in all army corps because the reformations concentrated on certain classes and areas such as artillery.

The first extensive military reforms came with the *Nizâm-ı Cedid* reforms during the reign of Sultan Selim III. The Ottomans' need for European style based professional troops once again emerged during the Ottoman-Russian War of 1787-1792, and serious steps taken by Sultan Selim III right after the war under *Nizâm-ı Cedid*. Nevertheless, the political and military reality of the Ottoman central administration prevented the accomplishment of the *Nizâm-ı Cedid* program and even cost the life of Sultan Selim in 1807.[15] Even though the Sultan could not be successful to make long-lasting changes in the military organization, Sultan Mahmud II managed to perform remarkable changes not only in the military but also in the administrative organization of the empire. In 1826, the Janissary Corps, one of the major determinant for the failures in the military reforms, was abolished. A new organization was established under the name *Asâkir-i Mansûre-i Muhammediyye*. This event that called as *Vak'a-i Hayriyye* (auspicious event) became a milestone for the Ottoman military organization. Many reforms were started to be implemented in the Ottoman army after 1826 especially in military organization, military education and armament technology.[16]

Until the last quarter of the eighteenth century, the Ottoman military force mainly consisted of professional soldiers as in all monarchies on the European continent. However, this professional military understanding started to change with the developments that took place in France at the end of the eighteenth century. After the French Revolution in 1789, compulsory military service based on citizenship started

[15] Stanford Shaw explained detailly the Nizam-ı Cedid reforms in his article. For detailed information about the reforms of Sultan Selim III, *see* Stanford Shaw, "The Origins of Ottoman Military Reform: The Nizam-ı Cedid Army of Sultan Selim III", *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 37, No. 3, (1965), pp. 291-306. Also, *see* Virginia Aksan, *Ottoman Wars 1700-1870: An Empire Besieged*, (New York, Routledge, 2013), pp. 180-259.

[16] For detailed information about the reforms of Mahmud II and abolition of the Janissaries, *see* Aksan, *Ottoman Wars 1700-1870: An Empire Besieged*, pp. 259-343.

to be practiced in France. Because of the success of this new system in France, the French type of compulsory military service became a model for the European armies throughout the nineteenth century, but it took a while to implement compulsory military service system in the Ottoman army.[17]

The *Asâkir-i Mansûre-i Muhammediyye* organization which was established after the abolition of the Janissary Corps continued professional military service for a while. Although ordinary people were attached to the military system in 1834 by establishing reserve units under the name of *Redif* to support the regular armies,[18] the systematic compulsory military service was not possible until the *Tanzimat* period. With the Edict of *Tanzimat* in 1839, it was stated that the military service was the debt of the entire nation. In this context, the legal basis of military service was determined by the military law in 1843. According to this law, it was decided to define soldiers to be recruited by lot, i.e., *kurâ*. The duration of military service was ascertained as five years for regular soldiers in *Nizamiye* troops and seven years reserve soldiers in *Redif* troops.[19] Nevertheless, the new military recruitment system could not be implemented as planned at the beginning, since it was not possible to conduct a population census to apply the *kurâ*,[20] and the implementation of the system was able to start after 1846.[21]

[17] For detailed information about the reorganization of the Ottoman army based on compulsory military service after the abolition of the janissaries, see Gültekin Yıldız, *Neferin Adı Yok: Zorunlu Askerliğe Geçiş Sürecinde Osmanlı Devleti'nde Siyaset, Ordu ve Toplum*, (Istanbul: Kitabevi, 2009).

[18] The first exam of the new army was the 1828-1829 Russo-Turkish War and the Egyptian-Ottoman War of 1831-1833, but failed. Also, the economic burden of the professional army was a big problem for the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, in order to reduce dependence on paid soldiers, a reserve system was created among ordinary people in 1834. Mübahat Kütükoğlu, "II. Mahmud Devri Yedek Ordusu Redif-i Asâkir-i Mansûre", *Istanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Tarih Enstitüsü Dergisi*, Vol. 12, (1982), p. 127.

[19] Ali Akyıldız, "Tanzimat", *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*, Vol. 40, (2011), p. 4; Musa Çadırcı, "Yenileşme Sürecinde Osmanlı Ordusu", *Türkler*, Vol. 13, p. 1458.

[20] Naci Çakın and Nafiz Orhon, *Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri Tarihi Osmanlı Devri (1793—1908)*, Vol. 3, Section 5. (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 1978), p. 145.

[21] Even though military service was indicated as a debt of all Ottoman subjects to the homeland, it could not be applied in all parts of the Ottoman Empire. Some people were exempt from military service such as Non-Muslims, clergy, students, people of certain areas like Arabia, Tripoli and Istanbul. The

The Ottoman military system that was shaped during the *Tanzimat* period continued until the reforms of Hüseyin Avni Pasha in 1869. The system took its final form before the Ottoman-Russian War of 1877-1878 with some changes in organization and conscription. According to the 1869 regulation, the duration of military service was determined as 20 years between 20 and 40 ages. The army was divided into four as *nizamiye*, in which four-year service for infantry and five-year service for cavalry and artillery; *ihtiyat*, composed of soldiers who completed their service in the *nizamiye* for two years; *redif*, included men who completed the *nizamiye* and *ihtiyat* service and those who escaped from military service for six years; and *müstahfiz*, eight year service for those who completed their service in *redif*.[22]

Another important change that came with the 1869 regulation was in the army organization. The Ottoman army was divided into five army corps considering the geographical location in the 1843 law. In 1869, the number of the army corps increased to seven and the Ottoman army participated in the 1877-1878 War with this army organization. The Ottoman army before the was as follows; the first (*Hassa*) army in Istanbul, the second (*Tuna*) army in Shumen, the third (*Rumeli*) army in Manastır, the fourth (*Anadolu*) army in Erzurum, the fifth (*Suriye*) army in Damascus, the sixth (*Arabistan*) army in Baghdad and the seventh (*Yemen*) army in Sanaa.[23] The region armies consisted of infantry, cavalry and artillery regiments, and *talîa* battalions, which served as an advance guard. With the 1869 regulation, it was planned that there would be six infantry regiments, four cavalry regiments, one gunner and one artillery

Ottomans tried to attach Non-Muslims to the military system by the *Tanzimat*. However, this was not possible, and non-Muslims continued to live as exempt from military service by paying a certain price.

[22] Çadırcı, *Yenileşme Sürecinde Osmanlı Ordusu*, p. 1459; Çakın and Orhon, *Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri Tarihi Osmanlı Devri (1793—1908)*, p. 147; Frederick Maurice, *The Russo-Turkish War*, (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1905), pp. 14-15. In fact, it would not be wrong to say that the ottoman army consisted of three parts; *nizamiye*, *ihtiyat* and *redif* because the *Müstahfiz* became a non-functional part of the Ottoman army for a long time. In the army, there were not enough officers and weapons for these troops. For that reason, the *müstahfiz* units were used with the *redif* troops during the Ottoman-Russian War 1877-1878. Mesut Uyar and Edward Erickson, *A Military History of the Ottomans: From Osman to Atatürk*, (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2009), p. 180-181.

[23] Çakın and Orhon, *Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri Tarihi Osmanlı Devri (1793—1908)*, pp. 206-207; Süer, *1877-1878 Osmanlı Rus Harbi Rumeli Cephesi*, p. 34.

regiment in each army corps. Even though the administration unit of the Ottoman forces was the army corps, the biggest tactic-operative unit was the regiments, and even generally battalions between 1827 and 1880.[24]

After the 1843 law, the French regulations were started to be implemented in the Ottoman army. In this context, it was planned to organize infantry regiments in four battalions which comprised eight companies. Each of these battalions was supposed to include about 815 men: one Major, one Senior Captain (*Kolağası*), eight Captains, 16 Lieutenants, 48 noncommissioned officers, 64 corporals, and 640 rank and file (*nefer*).[25] However, since the Ottoman army did not have enough officers and soldiers during the Ottoman-Russian War of 1877-1878, infantry battalions, like the other battalions, could not be organized as they were supposed to be. Therefore, there were too many mixed battalions from different corps, and this led to great confusion on the battlefield.[26] According to Frederick William von Herbert, a British officer who served in the Ottoman army throughout the war, the Ottoman Empire did not have a proper army organization because there were too many deficiencies in the army. For example, while each army had to have four army corps, in 1877 there was no army that had more than three corps, even some of them just managed to gather one or two corps.[27]

The infantry generally used the tactic of attacking after a strong fire. Nevertheless, the Ottoman infantry was more capable of defensive tactics because of defective training.[28] Despite insufficient training, the Ottoman army had adequate arm power during the 1877-1878 war, also it was better than the Russian arm power. The Ottoman

[24] Gültekin Yıldız, "Kara Kuvvetleri", in *Osmanlı Askeri Tarihi: Kara, Deniz ve Hava Kuvvetleri 1792-1918*, ed. Gültekin Yıldız, (Istanbul: Timaş, 2013), p. 81.

[25] Uğur Ünal, *Sultan Abdülaziz Devri Osmanlı Kara Ordusu (1861-1876)*, (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 2016), pp. 38-39.

[26] Maurice, Frederick, *The Russo-Turkish War*, (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1905), p. 15; Ian Drury, *The Russo-Turkish War 1877*, (London: Osprey, 1994), p. 36.

[27] Frederick William von Herbert, *Plevne Müdafaasında Bir İngiliz Zabitinin Hatıraları*, trans. Nurettin Artam, (Ankara: Ulus Basımevi, 1938), p. 4.

[28] Süer, *1877-1878 Osmanlı Rus Harbi Rumeli Cephesi*, p. 37.

Empire purchased many modern weapons from American, British and Prussian arm companies. Turkish infantry was armed mainly with Martini-Peabody and Snider rifles. While seventy-five percent of the infantry were using American product Martini-Peabody rifles, which reach about 1700 meters, the remaining part of the infantry were armed with British Snider rifles which sighted to about 1200 meters.[29]

The cavalry class, like infantry, was arranged in accordance with the French regulations during the *Tanzimat* period. Each cavalry regiment was planned to consist of six cavalry squadrons that comprised 120 soldiers.[30] Each cavalry soldier was equipped with Winchester carbines and revolvers.[31] Nevertheless, the training of these troops did not go beyond basic riding training. The important combat trainings such as patrol and tracking missions were disregarded.[32] Therefore, the situation of the cavalry in the Ottoman army was worse than infantry during the war. It became one of the main weakness reasons for the army on the battlefield. There were not enough cavalry forces and trained war horses in the Ottoman army. The problem was tried to be eliminated by irregular Circassian cavalry units, but it did not make a remarkable change in the combat ability of the army.[33] The inefficiency in cavalry would pave way the Russian to be easily conduct their operation without reaction of the Ottoman forces during the war.

There is no doubt that the artillery was the best class in the Ottoman army both in terms of training and education. The main reason for this seems that artillery officers had a separate education from the other classes. While the rate of the Military Academy (*Mekteb-i Harbiye*) graduated officers (*mektepli*) was %20 in artillery throughout the

[29] Maurice, *The Russo-Turkish War*, p. 17.

[30] Ünal, *Sultan Abdülaziz Devri Osmanlı Kara* Ordusu, p. 39.

[31] Maurice, *The Russo-Turkish War*, p. 19.

[32] Süer, *1877-1878 Osmanlı Rus Harbi Rumeli Cephesi*, p. 37.

[33] Maurice, *The Russo-Turkish War*, p. 19.

war period, the rate of cavalry and infantry officers was far less than this rate.[34] The artillery regiments comprised three battalions which included four field batteries, one horse and one gatling battery. In practice, each of these batteries was supposed to consist of six guns and from 132 to 164 men under the command of a Captain. The artillery units were generally equipped with four and six-pounder breech-loader the Krupp guns which were better than the Russian guns.[35]

Throughout the reign of Sultan Abdülaziz, great attention was devoted to the reorganization of the navy which was destroyed during the Crimean War. Many ships were purchased from the European companies between 1864 and 1870. Thereby, the Ottoman navy became one of the powerful sea forces of Europe. Before the war, the navy consisted of fifty battleships; an ironclad fleet with six frigates, seven corvettes, two monitors and seven gunboats, and a wooden fleet that included four galleons, five frigates, ten gunboats, two steamers and seven corvettes. Besides, there were forty-three transportation ships in the Ottoman army.[36] The armored ships were carrying about 300 pounder muzzleloader Armstrong guns.[37] Although the Ottoman navy was superior to the Russian navy,[38] the Ottomans could not use their technical advantage well because of the insufficiency of the navy officers. The officers of the Ottoman navy throughout that period were insufficient both in terms of number, training and education.

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[34] Halil Sedes, *1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus ve Romen Savaşı*, Vol. 1, (Istanbul: Askeri Matbaa, 1935), p. 118.

[35] Drury, *The Russo-Turkish War 1877*, p. 40; Maurice, *The Russo-Turkish War*, p. 18. The Ottoman Empire purchased 1816 different kind of artilleries between 1861 and 1875 from the Prussian Krupp company. Fahri Türk, *Türkiye ile Almanya Arasındaki Silah Ticareti 1871-1914*, (Istanbul: IQ Kültür Sanat Yayıncılık, 2012), p.74. p.227 and p.231.

[36] Saim Besbelli, *Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri Tarihi Osmanlı Devri 1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus Harbi Deniz Harekâtı*, (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 1980), p. 11.

[37] Ibid., p. 16.

[38] After the Crimean war, the presence of the Russian and Ottoman navy was limited in the Black Sea, but this restriction did not affect the Ottomans because they had a chance to build a powerful navy in the Aegean Sea and the Mediterranean which had a connection to the Black Sea.

There is no doubt that inefficient military education became one of the main problems of the Ottoman army during the nineteenth century. In order to solve this problem, the Ottoman Empire founded the Military Academy in 1834. The academy became the pioneering organ of the military reforms after the abolition of the Janissary corps. Even though many changes were implemented in Ottoman military education, it was still inadequate in 1877 compared to its contemporaries. The Military Academy could not prepare enough trained officers. Therefore, just 1600 of all Ottoman officers throughout the war, about 20000 officers, were military academy graduates. Most of the other officers, rankers (*alaylı*), did not have basic military skills, and some of them were even illiterate. In addition, the staff officer's number in the army was not enough. There were just 132 staff officers in the Ottoman army.[39]

Archibald Forbes who was the witness of the war as a war correspondent on the Danubian front described the situation of the Ottoman army organization well by these words :

> Turkish commanders are seldom thoroughly grounded in the principles and practice of the military art as it now exists. They are for the most part ignorant of tactics and of strategy, and have much to learn in some of the most necessary requirements of war. Yet here again there is no lack of valor, nor of a certain native readiness for military life. What is needed is more complete instruction, together with an honest devotion to the interests of the country, apart from corrupt personal ends. One of the best sections of the army is the infantry, which cannot be surpassed for steadiness, quickness, intelligence, and sustained force. The cavalry is not so good, though the Circassians are excellent horsemen, and might do admirable service, if better organized. In the artillery corps many first-rate qualities are apparent; but the want of guns and ammunition is often seriously felt, and the arrangements for military transport are extremely defective. In other matters, the condition of the Sultan's forces is such as to magnify to a grievous extent the unavoidable evils of war. The sanitary arrangements are imperfect and behind the age. There are, it is true, eight military hospitals at Constantinople, into which more than two thousand patients can be received; and in other large towns similar establishments are in existence, and derive their supplies from the School of Medicine at the metropolis. In time of peace, the sick are well cared for; but in war the Turkish wounded and disabled suffer terribly. Ambulances, hospital-

[39] Sedes, *1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus ve Romen Savaşı*, Vol. 1, pp.117-119.

> corps, and litters are almost entirely wanting. The injured are sent on the backs of mules, or in carts, to the nearest hospital, and their anguish is incalculably magnified by the absence of alleviating appliances. Care for the wounded is a modern practice, and it has not yet reached Turkey.[40]

To sum up, the Ottoman army organization before the commencement of the war was not sufficient to deal with the Russian army regarding both manpower and the military experience. Despite long-lasting reformation efforts that were implemented in every aspect of the Ottoman army, the Ottoman military understanding would prevent the army to exploit from these reformation attempts. The main problems in this context during the war would be the inefficiency of the officers and cavalry units in the Ottoman army. The number of educated and trained officers would be the main determinant for the Ottomans because the necessities of the military administration at the strategic, tactical and operational levels were generally disregarded by the Ottoman commanders. The limited number of staff officers had always faced with problems against the dominance of the rankers in the army. Especially the failures in strategic planning would trigger many problems for the Ottomans. On the other hand, the Ottomans could not organize a proper cavalry force for a long time throughout the nineteenth century. The irregular cavalry units known as Bashibozuks constituted the main body of the Ottoman cavalry force. However, keeping these forces under control had always been a problem for the Ottoman commanders. The inefficiency of these units would be seen mainly in determining the enemy forces and providing information about them for the commanders. These problems on the front line would pave way for the Ottoman officers to make wrong decisions at the strategic level.

[40] Edmund Ollier, *Illustrated History of the Russo-Turkish War*, Vol. 1, (London: Cassell Company, 1890), p. 137.

2.1.2. The Ottoman War Plan

There is no doubt that the management of armies became more complicated after the developments in the military understanding throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Because of the increased needs of the forces, war plans that were prepared during peacetime became necessary to organize big numbers without facing problem. Therefore, the staff officer class was constituted to plan and conduct these activities. Within this context, a staff officer class (*Erkân-ı Harbiye*)[41] was constituted in the Ottoman Empire. Even though the staff officer class was formed in 1845, the requirements of this class were still not understood by the 1877-1878 war because the Ottomans army still did not have a proper war plan which was prepared during peacetime considering the political conditions.[42]

In the Ottoman Empire, the wars were generally being planned by a war council established right before the action. In 1877, the traditional way of planning was followed and a war council (*Meclis-i Askeri*)[43] was convened on 24 March 1877, just one month before the declaration of the war. The main strategy of the Ottoman army was determined as defense against the Russian forces by the *Meclis-i Askeri*.[44] All

[41] In 1845, it was decided to establish a staff officer class in the Military Academy (*Mekteb-i Harbiye*). In 1847, some of the officers who completed the last year of the academy were passed to staff officer class (*Mekteb-i Erkân-ı Harbiyye-i Şâhâne*), and graduated in 1848. *Osmanlı Döneminde Askeri Okullarda Eğitim*, (Ankara: Milli Savunma Bakanlığı, 2000), p. 283.

[42] The first Ottoman peacetime war plan was prepared before the Ottoman-Greek War in 1897. Yıldız, "Kara Kuvvetleri", p. 54.

[43] *Meclis-i Askeri* and the other military councils which were formed during the war period such as *Meclis-i Umur-u Harbiye* and *Heyet-i Müşavere-i Harbiye* caused big confusion on the command of the Ottoman army corps. According to Mahmud Celaleddin Pasha, these councils became a place where all decisions about the war were taken, although the main task of the councils was to fulfill the needs of the armies. He pointed out that the complicated decision-making process was one of the main causes of the defeat of the Ottoman army because the councils slowed down the movement of the armies on the battlefield. Mahmud Celaleddin Paşa, *Mirat-ı Hakikat*, ed. İsmet Miroğlu, (İstanbul: Bereket Yayınları, 1983), p. 310. For detailed information about the effects of the military council's decisions and interventions on the Danubian front, see Chapter 5.

[44] One of the common features of the Ottoman-Russian wars between 1770 and 1877 was that the Ottoman Empire remained in the defense and the Russians in the attack. In fact, the vision of the Ottoman grand strategy since the last quarter of the eighteenth century was to remain as a regional power and maintain its territorial integrity. The main way to sustain this strategy was seen as establishing strategic partnerships with one or more European powers, and following the way of defense

Ottoman forces which comprised 621 infantry battalions, 25 cavalry regiments, and 129 batteries were planned to be divided all over the empire. 479 infantry battalions, 15 cavalry regiments and 107 batteries of the total Ottoman force were separated for the conflict zones around Bosnia, Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, Anatolia, the Caucasus and the Danube. In this regard the forces on the Danubian front would be divided into three army corps on under command of Abdülkerim Nadir Pasha.[45] There were *Tuna Şark* corps in the eastern Danube around Varna, Ruse, Shumen and Silistra, which was known as *Kale-i Erbaa*, and *Tuna Garp* corps in the western Danube around Vidin. Also, a reserve corps comprised of 40.000 soldiers would be prepared in Edirne for the defense of the Balkan Mountains because the Balkan Mountains was determined as the second defense line of the Ottoman army after the Danube River.[46]

Within the scope of the war plan, the Ottoman navy was divided into three fleets. These were in the Black Sea, in the Mediterranean and the Danube. The mission of the Black Sea fleet that consisted of three squadrons was to blockade the Russian coastline to prevent the Russian ships from entering the Black Sea. The Danube fleet, consisting of 13 monitors and gunboats, would focus on limiting the mobility of the Russian forces, not only the naval forces but also land forces. The Mediterranean fleet was

instead of attack. Therefore, the Ottoman army generally preferred defensive tactics on the battlefield. Yıldız, "Kara Kuvvetleri", p. 48.

[45] Abdülkerim Nadir Pasha was born in 1807 in Çırpan. He attended the army at an early age. In 1835 he was sent to Vienna for education. Upon returning from Vienna in 1840, he was promoted as Colonel and assigned as the head of the Erkân-ı Harbiyye. He became Lieutenant General in 1846 and Field Marshal in 1847. He commanded the Anatolian army during the Crimean War. Until the Ottoman-Russian War of 1877-1878, he held many important positions. At the age of 70, he appointed as the commander of the Danubian front during the 1877-1878 war. Because of the rapid advance of the Russian army in the first months of the war, Abdülkerim Nadir Pasha was dismissed from the service and court-martialed. Although it was accepted that he was not the only reason for the failures of the Ottoman army, he was exiled and ended his life in Rhodes in 1883. Abdülkadir Özcan, "Abdülkerim Nadir Paşa", *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*, Vol. 1, (1988), pp. 253-254.

[46] Halil Sedes, *1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus ve Romen Savaşı*, Vol. 2, (Istanbul: Askeri Matbaa, 1936), pp. 11-15. As can be seen in the Ottoman war plan, the Ottomans mainly concentrated on the Danubian line to prevent the Russians from passing. However, because of the wide-range distribution of the Ottoman forces throughout the Danube River, the Ottomans neglected the Balkan Mountains. Although two separate army corps, *Tuna Garp* and *Tuna Şark*, were established, there was no such a special army organization for central Bulgaria line at the beginning of the war. The security of this area was just left to a reserve army which was not yet gathered, and to 20 battalions of Rauf Pasha corps. Therefore, as will be shown, the second defense line of the Ottomans collapsed just in about 4 days.

located in an important place throughout the Mediterranean for a possible attack of the Russian Baltic fleet.[47]

The Ottoman war plan took its final form with the decision taken by the military council on 20 April 1877, just four days before the commencement of the war. According to the war plan, the right-wing of the *Tuna Şark* corps that comprised the *Kale-i Erbaa* region would hold the line between Constanta and Tırnova. The middle Danube region between Svishtov and Oryahovo would be under the control of the left-wing of the *Tuna Şark* corps. The *Tuna Garp* corps, on the other hand, would prevent a connection between the Russians and the Serbians around Vidin region. Moreover, a strong reserve group would be created for central Bulgaria.[48]

Consequently, the Ottomans mainly focused on two defense lines on the Danubian front. The first one was the Danube River which was already accepted as the first defense line against the Russian Empire for a long time. The second one was the Balkan Mountains, especially the area between Tırnova and Kazanlak. It can be easily understood by the decisions of the war council on 20 April 1877 that although one month had passed since the first plan of the Ottoman decision-makers, there was still no sign about the reserve corps which was considered to be prepared for the defense of the Balkan Mountains on 24 March. While the Ottoman war planners had been trying to determine the missions of the other army corps, on the other hand, they were still mentioning about the constitution of an army corps for the Balkans as if this matter was not taken into account one month before. Therefore, the Ottoman war plan, which was not considered in time, could not be implemented properly because of the apathy of the Ottoman war planners. Whereas two strong army corps were prepared for the first line, the defense of the second line was left to be planned in line with the course of the war. This was probably because the Ottomans thought that the Russians would

[47] Evren Mercan , *II. Abdülhamid Dönemi Deniz Stratejisi*, (Istanbul: Dergah Yayınları,2018), pp. 69-70.

[48] Süer, *1877-1878 Osmanlı Rus Harbi Rumeli Cephesi*, p. 53. Even though it was decided to establish a strong reserve army for the protection of central Bulgaria, that is the Balkan Mountains, there was still no serious step on April 20. This uncertainty even continued until the end of June 1877.

be encountered the powerful defense of the *Kale-i Erbaa* if they managed to pass the Danube River. It was not considered that the Russians would follow a different route rather than wasting their time with the fortified zones. Therefore, it would be possible for Russians to pass the second defense line of the Ottomans and reach Nova Zagora in 20 days after the Danube without facing any remarkable resistance. The defense of such a wide area on the Danubian front became a difficult matter for the Ottomans because they planned to be strong everywhere and did not consider taking calculated risks in the secondary areas such as Bosnia and Montenegro to focus on the primary one, which was the Danubian front. Therefore, the numbers under the commander-in-chief would be the main reason for his passivity against the Russian advance during the first months of the war. In addition, the timing of the war planning was wrong to practice the war plan properly. Although the Russian army focused on war preparations in 1876 and determined a detailly considered war plan, the Ottomans just attempted to make such a plan right before the war. Therefore, the Ottoman could not practice all considerations in time on the front line and the deficiencies, especially in manpower, would enhance the timid attitude of Abdülkerim Nadir Pasha.

2.1.3. Mobilization and Deployment of the Ottoman Army until the Russian Attacks on the Danubian Front

The mobilization of the Ottoman army started with the Balkan rebellions in 1875. In addition to the regular *nizamiye* units, the first and the second class *redif* soldiers were mobilized for the Serbian and Montenegrin wars.[49] The Ottoman army mobilized about 448 infantry battalions, 147 cavalry companies and 114 field batteries until November 1876. From this date to the declaration of the war on 24 April 1877, the first class, the

[49] The Ottoman soldiers, whose duties in the *nizamiye* finished, were passed to the *redif* class to serve another six years. The first three years of the service was called as the first class *redif* (*sınıf-ı mukaddem*), the other three years as the second class *redif* (*sınıf-ı sâni*). In 1871, the total number of *redif* was 105.000. After six years, the Ottoman soldiers served eight years in the *müstahfiz* troops, and they were called as the third class (*sınıf-ı salis*). Abdülkadir Özcan, "Redif", *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*, Vol. 34, (2007), pp. 525-526.

müstahfız soldiers were recruited. These mobilized soldiers were distributed to important locations such as Vidin, Shumen, Edirne, Sofia, Silistra, Ruse and Varna.[50]

During the mobilization of the army, one of the main problems of the Ottoman army became recruiting cavalry force. To be able to minimize the problem in the cavalry, the Ottomans had recourse to the irregular troops known as *Bashibozuks*. These units were mainly organized with the Circassian volunteers in the Danubian front. However, the insufficiency of the cavalry force could not be solved, and it would be one of the main problems of the Ottoman army during the war. "These troops were insubordinate and unruly, occupied in marauding and pillaging instead of reconnoitering, cowardly and disobedient in battle, and of no military service whatever to the Turks."[51] The undisciplined attitude of the irregulars would cause many failures on the battlefield. One of the main necessities of strategic planning which is determining the enemy and making terrain analysis would not be conducted properly.

Serasker Redif Pasha indicated the total mobilized manpower of the Ottoman army before the commencement of the war as 490.300 men. 186.500 of the mobilized soldiers were separated for the Danubian front, which would be the Ottoman center of gravity. 90.900 soldiers were sent to the Caucasian front. However, the remaining part of the mobilized number which constituted half of the total mobilized manpower did not sent against the Russian forces at the beginning of the war. Most of them were located in the secondary positions. For example, 107.500 men were deployed around Bosnia, Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro because of the conflicts in these regions. Also, 105.000 soldiers were separated as security measures in some cities like Crete, Istanbul, Hedjaz, Tripoli and Janina.[52] According to a document prepared by *Erkân-ı Harbiye* (General Staff) in February 1877, the whole force of the army, except volunteers and *mustahfiz* troops, was around 580.000. Although the number of the

[50] Sedes, *1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus ve Romen Savaşı*, Vol. 1, pp. 95-96.

[51] Greene, *Report on the Russian Army and its Campaigns in Turkey in 1877-1878*, p. 141.

[52] Mahmud Celaleddin Paşa, *Mirat-ı Hakikat*, p. 294.

mobilized soldier was different than Redif Pasha's account, both accounts gave almost the same numbers for the Danubian front which is the subject matter of this study. According to this document the deployment of the Ottoman forces on the Danubian front before the commencement of the war as follows:

Table 1: Deployment of the Ottoman Forces on the Danubian Front before the Declaration of the War[53]

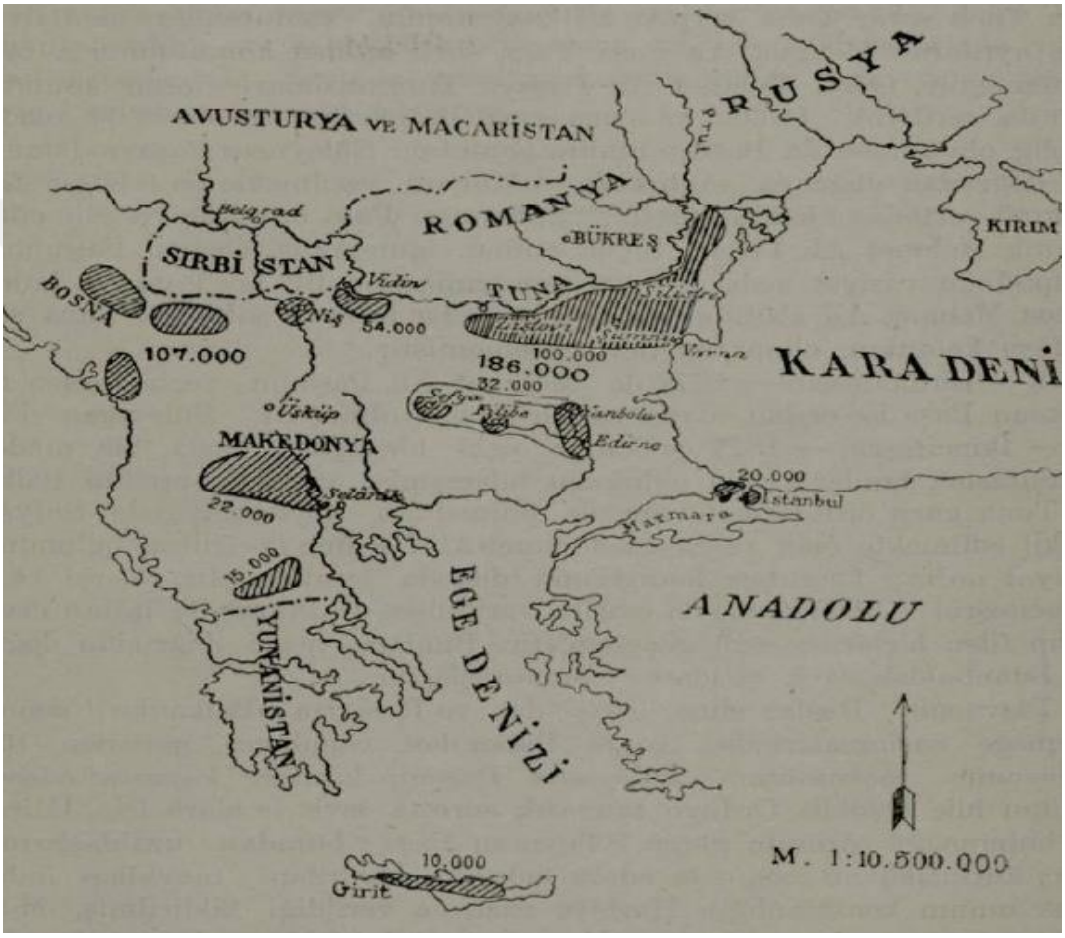
Place	**Force**
Silistra	13.598
Vidin	48.481
Varna	19.773
Sliven	9.000
Shumen	23.450
Ruse	4.966
Dobruja	13.598
Sofia	11.062
Nis	43.650
Total	**187.578**

As can be noticed, the deployment was conducted regarding the war plan of the Ottoman army. In this regard, the concentration of the Ottoman forces was around the Danube River. The deployment of the forces had continued until the commencement of the war and afterward. Right before the war, more than 50.000 men were attached to the force of the *Tuna Şark* corps and the numbers around Shumen, Silistra, Ruse, Varna and Dobruja exceeded 100.000 men. Also, the other positions, Vidin and the

[53] Sedes, *1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus ve Romen Savaşı*, Vol. 1, pp. 97-100. In fact, it is impossible to give an accurate account of the Ottoman forces in the 1877-1878 Russo Turkish War. During that period, the Ottoman army was scattered throughout all parts of the empire because of the rebellions. Moreover, it was quite common to see mixed units with *nizamiye*, *redif* and *müstahfiz* classes in order to meet the soldier needs of the army. Ali Fuad, *Musavver Osmanlı-Rus seferi 1293-1294*, Vol. 1, (Istanbul: Kitabhane-yi İslam ve Askeri, 1326), p. 68. In addition, there was no understanding of record-keeping of deaths and fugitives during that period. Mahmud Celaleddin Paşa, *Mirat-ı Hakikat*, p. 296. However, it is possible to get close to the accurate numbers of the mobilization and deployment by comparing such accounts. although these accounts were representing the approximate numbers,

Balkan Mountains region between Sofia and Yambol were reinforced with more than 10.000 men. Thereby, the total force became 186.000 except the province of Nis at the beginning of the war. The positions of the last Ottomans right before the commencement of the war as follows:

Map 1: Deployment of the Ottoman Army at the Beginning of the War[54]



Although more than 300.000 men were separated for the Rumelia, about 190.000 of them were placed against the Russian forces on the Danubian front during the first months of the war. The Ottoman forces on the Danubian front were divided into three parts in accordance with the deployment plan. The first part, *Tuna Şark* corps which constituted the center of gravity of the Ottoman army on the Danubian front was under

[54] Necati Tacan, "1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus Seferinde Türk Sevk ve İdaresinde Sevkulceyşi Hatalar: Başkomutanlık", *Askeri Mecmua*, Vol. 8, No. 107, (1937), p. 757.

command of the commander-in-chief Abdülkerim Nadir Pasha. The second group, known as *Tuna Garp* corps was under command of Osman Nuri Pasha in Vidin. The last part of the Ottoman deployment on the Danubian front was around the Balkan Mountains between Sofia and Yambol. In fact, the force which was positioned around the Balkan Mountains was not sufficient to hold such a wide defense line in the Balkans. Although it was planned to organize an army corps that comprised 40.000 men for just the defense of the Balkan line before the declaration of the war. It could not be possible to prepare an army corps for a long time. Ignoring the Balkan Mountains line during the deployment of the mobilized forces would cause many problems for the Ottoman army.

It can be concluded that the deployment of the Ottoman forces without considering the economy of force, that is to say, not using the opportunities properly by taking calculated risks would be one of the main problems of the Ottoman army during the war. Although the Ottomans organized a remarkable number of men, the best proportion for the principal regions was not organized. Since more than 100.000 men were placed in secondary positions such as Bosnia, Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro, the Ottoman Empire would face problems in manpower against the Russian army, and this situation would affect the course of the war. If the Danubian front which was the Ottoman center of gravity was reinforced from the secondary regions at the beginning of the war by considering one of the main necessities of war, which is economy of force, the number of soldiers against the Russian army could have been doubled. There is no doubt that such a change would have been a more reasonable deployment plan for the Ottoman army because the inefficiency of the manpower on the Danubian front would be the main reason for the passivity of the Ottoman army against the Russian forces. However, the Ottoman war planners could not set balance, and tried to be powerful in every part of the empire instead of taking calculated risks in the secondary positions. Indeed, the transfer of Süleyman Pasha and Mehmed Ali Pasha to the Danube line in June 1877 showed the applicability of such a decision. However, the timing of this maneuver was not appropriate and prevented the Ottomans to exploit such a change.

2.2. The Russian Military Power

2.2.1. The Russian Army Organization

The nineteenth century was a transformation age for most of the European countries as well as the Russian Empire. Many reforms were implemented in Russia throughout the century especially in social, administrative, economic and military. The reformation movements mainly intensified after the defeat in the Crimean war. Within this context, the structure of the Russian army which fought against the Ottoman Empire in 1877 shaped during this reform period. The Russians realized their military weakness against the European armies during the Crimean War. Under the management of the new war minister Nikolay Alexandrovich Milyutin, many military reforms had implemented since the beginning of the 1860s. These military reforms mainly intensified in recruitment, military technology, army organization and military education. It is no doubt that the 1877-1878 war would be a test for the new Russian army.[55]

One of the main problems of the Russian army during the Crimean war was the old-style recruitment system that was based on class. It was inefficient to meet the necessities of the modern military understanding because all burden of the military service was ascribed to only peasants and the petite bourgeoisie.[56] For that reason, most of these people were unable to consider military service as a duty for their homeland. The military service was even considered as punishment and restriction of freedom by most of them.

[55] For detailed information about the reformation process that conducted by Milyutin, see Bruce Menning, *Bayonets before Bullets: The Imperial Russian Army, 1861-1914*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), pp. 6-38.

[56] Nurgül Kutlu, "*Rus Kaynaklarına Göre 1877-1878 Osmanlı Rus Harbi*", Master Thesis, (Diyarbakır: Dicle University, 2019), p. 33.

The liberation of the serfs in 1861 became the starting point of the changes in the Russian recruitment system. However, it could not be possible to practice it until January 1874 because of the political resistance.[57] On 1 January 1874, a universal military service system that obliged compulsory service for all citizens of the empire was adopted. The law declared that "the defense of throne and homeland foes is a sacred duty of every Russian subject."[58] All male population reached the age of 20 required to take part in the lot every year. The term of military service was defined as 15 years in the land forces, six years in active service of the army and nine years as reserve.[59] In the navy, on the other hand, the ordinary term was determined as 10 years, seven years active and three years reserve service.[60] Moreover, there were some exemptions for those who completed their education at primary, secondary and higher education institutions. The period of military service of such people was defined regarding their degree of education.[61]

During the Ottoman-Russian War of 1877-1878, the Russian army was organized under army corps. Each of these corps comprised two infantry divisions, a cavalry division, and two artillery brigades. Each infantry division had two infantry brigades, each brigade consisted of two regiments, each regiment had three battalions and each battalion consisted of five companies.[62] There were 48 infantry divisions in the Russian army in the 1877-1878 war. These were numbered among themselves and took names that indicated the locality which they came from such as "The 53d Infantry

[57] Quintin Barry, *War in the East: A Military History of the Russo-Turkish War 1877-1878*, (Solihull: Helion, 2012), p. 68.

[58] Bruce Menning, *Bayonets before Bullets: The Imperial Russian Army, 1861-1914*, p. 23.

[59] Greene, *Report on the Russian Army and its Campaigns in Turkey in 1877-1878*, p. 3.

[60] Ibid., p. 6.

[61] Those who completed higher education were responsible for six months active 14.5 years reserve service. It was determined as 18 months active 13.5 years reserve for those who completed secondary education, and four years active and 11 years reserve for those who completed primary education. Ibid., pp. 8-10.

[62] Maurice, *The Russo-Turkish War*, p. 11.

Regiment of Volhynia of His Imperial Highness the Grand Duke Field Marshal Nikolai Nikolaivitch".[63] An infantry regiment that consisted of 4 battalions was supposed to have 87 officers, 4283 soldiers, 186 horses and 44 wagons on a war footing. The active force of the regiment on peace footing was planned to have 71 officers, 2082 soldiers, 52 horses and 17 wagons.[64] The armament capacity of the Russian army was also increased with modern weapons at the beginning of the 1870s under the direction of war minister Milyutin.[65] Throughout the 1877-1878 war, the guard, rifle and grenadier infantry regiments and nine infantry divisions were armed with the Berdan breech-loader rifle sighted to about 1400 meters. The remaining part of the Russian infantry that comprised twenty-seven divisions were armed with the Krnka rifle; a converted breech-loader sighted to about only 600 meters.[66]

There is no doubt that cavalry was the most effective and trained class of the Russian army throughout the war. This class, especially Cossack cavalries, were accepted as the key factor for success. Therefore, the Russians paid special attention to the education and training of the cavalry units.[67] Each army corps of the Russian army consisted of one cavalry division which comprised two brigades. One of these brigades consisted of a dragoon regiment, a lancer regiment, a Cossack regiment and a hussar regiment. Besides, it was supposed to be two horse artillery batteries in each cavalry division equipped with six four pounder guns.[68] A cavalry regiment should have consisted of 33 officers, 64 non-commissioned officers, 512 mounted men and 120

[63] Greene, *Report on the Russian Army and its Campaigns in Turkey in 1877-1878*, p. 21.

[64] Ibid., p. 22.

[65] The Austro-Prussian War in 1866 showed the superiority of breechloaders rifles over muzzleloaders. For that reason, about 200.000 muzzleloader Karle rifles of the Russian army converted to breechloaders. In 1869, the Russian Empire purchased about 800.000 0.60-caliber the Krnka rifle. After 1870, 0,42 caliber Berdan rifles were purchased and the Berdan became the primary shoulder weapon of the Russian army. Menning, *Bayonets before Bullets: The Imperial Russian Army*, pp. 30-31; Greene, *Report on the Russian Army and its Campaigns in Turkey in 1877-1878*, pp. 52-53.

[66] Maurice, *The Russo-Turkish War*, p. 12.

[67] Süer, *1877-1878 Osmanlı Rus Harbi Rumeli Cephesi*, p. 45.

[68] Maurice, *The Russo-Turkish War*, p. 11.

dismounted men, 135 non-combatants, 13 wagons, 55 draught horses and 593 troop horses. The organization of the Cossack regiments was different from the other cavalry units. These special regiments were supposed to include 21 officers, 86 non-commissioned officers, 685 men, 41 non-combatants, 75 draught horses and 802 troop horses.[69] The Russians cavalry was generally armed with lance, sword, carbine, the Smith-Wesson revolver and the Berdan rifle.[70]

The artillery class of the Russian army in 1877 was the least efficient compared to infantry and cavalry because both training and armament of the artillery were not being accepted as suitable for the requirements of the era. The Russian army corps consisted of two artillery brigades. Each of these brigades equipped with three nine pounder and three four pounder artillery batteries. Each battery consisted of eight bronze guns that had between 2300 meters to 2900 meters range.[71]

At the beginning of the war, the Russian Empire had two fleets, one in the Baltic Sea and the other in the Black Sea. The Black Sea fleet, which was the only marine force of the Russians that could be used against the Ottoman Empire, consisted of two ironclads, four corvettes, 20 steamers, four vessels, five cutters and seven torpedo boats.[72] On the other hand, the Baltic fleet, which was the strongest part of the Russian navy with 26 armored and 31 unarmored battleships, was not usable against the Ottoman forces because of geographical obstacles.[73]

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[69] Drury, *The Russo-Turkish War 1877*, pp. 20-22.

[70] Sedes, *1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus ve Romen Savaşı*, Vol. 1, p. 148.

[71] Maurice, *The Russo-Turkish War*, pp. 11-14.

[72] Torpedo boats became the most useful marine vehicle for the Russian navy throughout the war. These small ships under the command of Osipovich Makarov broke the Ottoman dominance on the Danube, and prevented the Ottomans from using their strong marine force. For detailed information about the Russian torpedo strategy conducted in the 1877-1878 Russo-Turkish War, see Evren Mercan, "93 Harbi'nin Ortaya Çıkardığı Bir Deniz Harp Stratejisti: Stepan Osipovich Makarov", *Hacettepe Üniversitesi Türkiyat Araştırmaları Dergisi*, No. 22, (2015), pp. 133-144.

[73] Sedes, *1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus ve Romen Savaşı*, Vol. 1, pp. 152-154.

During the war, most of the Russian army officers who commanded the executive units such as battalions, regiments, brigades and divisions were graduates of the military academy,[74] which would be one of the most important advantages of the Russians throughout the war period. The main reason for such a high number of military academy graduates was that the reforms implemented by Milyutin. Before 1861, a traditional military education system was in practice in Russia. The main officer source of the army throughout that period was not military schools.[75] Nevertheless, with the reforms conducted by Milyutin after 1862, the main officer source of the Russian army became military gymnasiums, war schools and military academies. The cadres of the 1877-1878 war were prepared within this new system.[76] With the help of military reforms, the quality of the military academy was improved. Although the number of students who graduated each year was reduced, the quality of these graduates steadily increased. This was mainly because of the increase in field practices instead of theoretical courses. Also, the syllabus of the academy contributed to the practical understanding of the Russian officers such as cartography, sketching, military statistics, military history, artillery and engineering practice.[77]

Although the disadvantage of the Russian army regarding the naval force and artillery, they would overcome this problem by conducting efficient strategies. Their ability in solving problems by performing a remarkable planning performance might be the result of the reformations in the military academy. There is no doubt that the staff officers had an important place in this process. In addition, the Russian cavalry would be determinant for the course of the war. During the war, the effect of the Russian cavalry would be clearly noticed against the insufficient Ottoman cavalry. While the Russian cavalry had been conducting proper reconnaissance and surveillance missions

[74] Süer, *1877-1878 Osmanlı Rus Harbi Rumeli Cephesi*, p. 47.

[75] Menning, *Bayonets before Bullets: The Imperial Russian Army*, p. 97.

[76] For detailed information about military education in the Russian Empire, see Greene, *Report on the Russian Army and its Campaigns in Turkey in 1877-1878*, p. 118-125.

[77] Menning, *Bayonets before Bullets: The Imperial Russian Army*, p. 35.

and providing important information about the enemy to be able to consider the next steps, on the other hand, the Ottomans could not benefit from their cavalry force. The Russians performed many maneuvers without being noticed until the final stage by the help of their cavalry units. Therefore, the efficient cavalry would be one of the determinants of the outcome of the war for the Russian army.

2.2.2. The Russian War Plan

Even though the war in 1877-1878 began after a long diplomacy period, the war preparations had already started during the negotiations. According to the war plan prepared by General Nikolai Obruchev and accepted by Tsar Alexander II on 5 October 1876, it was possible to defeat the Ottomans within three or four months because the Ottoman army would be inevitably divided into many parts between the Caucasus and the Balkans. For that reason, the main aim of the Russian army was supposed to be reaching Istanbul as soon as possible. To ensure victory, four army corps were seen enough, but the assistance of Romania was indicated as important to perform such an aggressive war plan.[78] The Russians were planning to use especially Romanian railways as supply line.[79] On the other hand, the Russian war plan regarding the Caucasus front was almost the same as the Danubian front. It was planned to conduct an aggressive march toward Erzurum in three columns.[80]

In fact, the most suitable route to Istanbul was the Dobruja region where most of the Russian-Ottoman wars took place. The Russians even managed to break the powerful

[78] Yuluğ Tekin Kurat, "1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus Harbinin Sebepleri", *Belleten*, Vol. 26, No. 103, (1962), p. 584.

[79] Barbara Jelavich, *Russia and the formation of the Romanian national state 1821-1878*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 239. Even though Romania aimed to remain neutral, they were also desiring to obtain their independence by means of the Ottoman-Russian struggle. However, the Porte did not offer any change in the political position of Romania in exchange for their assistance, and Romania participated in the war together with the Russian Empire.

[80] A. J. Schem, *The War in the East: An Illustrated History of the Conflict Between Russia*, (New York: H. S. Goodspeed, 1878), p. 261.

Ottoman defense on the Dobruja region and marched towards Istanbul to end the war in 1829 under command of Diebitsch. Nevertheless, the conditions in 1877 were very different from the 1828-1829 war because of the weak position and immobility of the Russian navy in the Black Sea. While Diebitsch's army has about 50.000 men, the Russian force in 1877 was more than 200.000 men, and supplying the needs of such a big army without using the navy efficiently was considered as quite difficult matter.[81]

Moreover, Dobruja was located between the Danube and the Black Sea and keeping safe such a long and narrow line was seen as difficult to be implemented. The three strong Ottoman fortifications, Shumen, Varna and Ruse had railway connections with each other. Therefore, the plan was adopted first to send army corps to Dobruja to protect their rear and to mask the advance of the bulk of the army. In the second stage, the main forces would cross the Danube River at some point between Nikopol and Ruse, and then advance along the line of Lom or Yantra rivers to mask the strong Ottoman fortresses. Also, another force would send on the Vid or Isker rivers against the Osman Pasha forces in Vidin. In this way, the flanks of the Russian army would be protected by these rivers that were accepted as a defense wall for the Russian corps which would march to Edirne via the Balkan Mountains.[82] The Bulgarian population, intensified around the operation region was also seen as an important factor for the Russian war planners. Advancing on such a line that consisted of a friendly population would offer the assistance of the Christian population to the Russian army.[83]

The success of the Prussian army during the 1871 war inspired the Russian war planners and encouraged them to prepare a perfect plan to destroy the Ottoman army in case of a war during that period. Like the Prussian army experienced, the Russians

[81] Maurice, *The Russo-Turkish War*, p. 31.

[82] Greene, *Report on the Russian Army and its Campaigns in Turkey in 1877-1878*, p. 145.

[83] Maurice, *The Russo-Turkish War*, p. 32. The predictions of Obruchev regarding the friendly population in central Bulgaria was an accurate decision. The Russian army was supported by the Bulgarians well after passing the Danube, especially around the Balkan Mountains which is the subject of this study. The Bulgarians provided significant support not only as a military force but also logistics and intelligence.

planned to rapidly reach the heart of the enemy by deploying cavalry based mobile units that would bypass fortified zones. By the help of the rapidity, the possible intervention of Britain and France would be prevented. In this regard, the assistance of the local Christians was considered as important to carry out reconnaissance and collect information about the terrain features of the operation regions and the Ottoman installations.[84]

However, the Russians were not planning to capture the Turkish capital because of the fear of British intervention even though Istanbul was their main target. Instead, they were planning to force the Ottomans for a profitable peace agreement. Within the context of the Obruchev plan, the Russian forces would be divided into two armies on the Danubian front. The first army, involving more than 100.000 men, would rush to Istanbul as soon as passing the Danube and the Balkan Mountains. The task of the other column, comprising eight infantry and four cavalry divisions and ten to twelve Cossack regiments, would be forcing Ruse and Shumen to protect the rear of the first column and its line of supply.[85]

The Russian decision-makers had followed a strategy that included both passive and active defense against the superiority of the Ottoman navy throughout the Black Sea and the Danube River. Within the scope of this strategy, the Russian war plan was divided into three parts. The first one was to perform passive defense by using mine barrages around the important naval bases of the Russian army such as Odesa, Sevastopol and Kerch. Secondly, the Danube fleet would focus on preventing the movements of the Ottoman fleet with the help of steam lunches which were equipped with torpedoes and sea mines. The torpedo attacks on the Danube became the main strategy of the Russians against the powerful Ottoman battleships. Lastly, they planned

[84] Uyar and Erickson, *A Military History of the Ottomans: From Osman to Atatürk*, pp. 184-185.

[85] William C. Fuller, *Strategy and Power in Russia 1600-1914*, (New York: The Free Press, 1992), pp. 314-315)

to prevent the Ottoman transportation activities throughout the Black Sea with surprise attacks.[86]

Considering the Russian War plan which was determined as passing the Danube river from a point between Ruse and Nikopol, the Balkan Mountains had key importance to be successful. It would be inevitable for the Russians to capture a passage to direct their forces as rapidly as possible to Istanbul. Even though there were many passages on the central Balkan Mountains, some of them had suitable conditions to conduct military operations and transfer heavy artilleries. These were mainly the Shipka Pass between Gabrovo and Kazanlak and the Kazgan (Kotel) Pass between Omurtag and Sliven. Among these passes, the best avenue of approach for the Russian army was undoubtedly the Shipka Pass because the Kazgan Pass was near to the Ottoman center of gravity on the Danubian front, which was the Shumen and Ruse line.

Consequently, the Russians planned every aspect of their operations not only for the land forces but also for the naval forces. They successfully executed one of the main necessities of strategic planning, which is determining the objective in time. Although the Ottomans focused on the war preparations right before the war, on the other hand, the Russians had long been thinking about a possible war with the Ottomans. This matter had become one of the main subjects of the courses in the Russian military academy and the military strategists prepared the Russian war plan with the help of these courses. Especially the preparations against the Ottoman Danube fleet were remarkable in this regard. Moreover, their awareness about the geographical features of the Balkan passages was a clear evidence that they successfully investigated the region while most of the Ottoman commanders were ignorant about the Balkan passages. However, the rapid advance plan within just three or four months was not realistic because passing through such a challenging line in a short time was not reasonable although the Russians considered most of the factors before the war.

[86] Evren Mercan, *93 Harbi'nde Deniz Harekatı*, (Istanbul: Selenge, 2020), pp. 35-38.

In addition, although it was a proper plan to pass the Danube from the west of Ruse, the Russian plan of directly marching to Istanbul without defeating the main body of the Ottoman army was not applicable since leaving strong forces on the right and left wings would be a very dangerous plan for the Russians. It was quite possible to be punished by the Ottoman forces if they conducted such an aggressive plan. However, the strategic command and control problems in the Ottoman army paved way for the Russians to implement such a dangerous war plan.[87] Indeed, Osman Pasha proved the deficiency of the Russian war plan and broke the right-wing of the Russian army in Pleven, and prevented the Russian advance about five months. The Russians could not reach Istanbul as rapidly as they planned, but managed to carry out Obruchev's plan and ended the war by reaching Istanbul in February 1878. Despite the problems of the Russian war plan, it was clear that the staff officer class of the Russian army was more active than the Ottomans because they proved their superiority in one of the main necessities of their class which is planning.

2.2.3 Mobilization and Deployment of the Russian Army until the Operations on the Danubian Front

The Russian war planners estimated that the Ottoman army would deploy approximately 160.000 men on the Danubian front, and this number could exceed 200.000 men with the reinforcements. In this regard, the Russians planned to prepare about 300.000 soldiers for the Danubian front in order to perform their war plan.[88] The mobilization of the Russian army was conducted regarding the estimates of the Russian war planners. In this regard, the mobilization of the Russian army took place mainly in three phases. In November 1876, in which the Russian Empire sent a diplomatic note regarding the Ottoman-Serbian and Montenegrin War, the mobilization of the

[87] Mehmed Hulusi, *Niçin Mağlub Olduk 1877-78 Osmanlı Rus Seferi; Avrupa Cihetindeki Harekât*, (Istanbul: Sancakcıyan Matbaası, 1326), pp. 36-37.

[88] Kutlu, "*Rus Kaynaklarına Göre 1877-1878 Osmanlı Rus Harbi*", p. 55.

Russian forces was started. The second mobilization was in January 1877, and the third was at the beginning of the war in May 1877. Until the second mobilization on 24 January 1877, the Russian army mobilized about 460.000 men. 193.000 men of this mobilized force that included 107 infantry battalions, 149 cavalry squadrons and 472 artilleries were separated for the Danubian front. On the other hand, 122.000 soldiers were tasked under 79 infantry battalions, 32 Cossack infantry squadrons, 151 cavalry squadrons and 256 guns for the Caucasus front. The remaining part of the Russian army was separated for the Black Sea defense and the other services.[89] The Russian army on the Danubian front was given under command of Grand Duke Nicholas. At the beginning of the War, the Danube force was composed of four army corps: the VIII. corps under General Radetzky, the IX. corps under General Baron Krüdner, the XI. corps under General Prince Shakofsky, and the XII. corps under General Vannofsky.[90]

During the mobilization, one of the main concerns of the Russian army became the insufficient number of educated officers. This problem was solved by performing a series of implementations such as recalling the retired officers, promoting the cadet officers and graduating military academy students by giving them accelerated training. In this way, about 6.000 officers joined the army. During the war, this number had continued to increase and reached to about 11.500 at the end of the war.[91]

With the third mobilization in May 1877, three extra corps were sent to the Danubian front. These were the IV. corps under command of General Zotov, the XIII. Cops under General Korsakoff and the XIV. corps under General Zimmerman. Thus, the total force of the Russian forces for the Balkans before the operations increased to about 305.000 men and 918 cannons, comprised of 16 infantry division; 254.784 men and 768 artillery, two brigades of sharpshooters; 7.633 men, 9,5 cavalry divisions; 38.711

[89] Sedes, *1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus ve Romen Savaşı*, Vol. 1, pp. 160-161.

[90] Schem, *The War in the East*, p. 218.

[91] Kutlu, "*Rus Kaynaklarına Göre 1877-1878 Osmanlı Rus Harbi*", p. 62.

men and 114 artillery, seven separate Don Cossack regiments; 4.900 men, and six separate batteries of Don Cossacks with 36 cannons.[92] Considering the Bulgarian volunteers and the Romanian army, the total force of the Russian army at the beginning of the war exceeded 350.000.[93] After the last mobilization, the Russian forces on the Caucasian front under the command of Grand Duke Michael took the final shape as about 140.000 infantry and 372 guns at the beginning of the war.[94]

The mobilized army corps transported by trains and had been concentrated along the Russian Romanian border. The Russian deployment plan was based on firstly gathering the mobilized forces in Bessarabia between the Dniester and Prut rivers. In the second stage, the troops would be transferred to Romania. In this regard, it was decided to concentrate the forces in the Romanian territories with two groups. The first group would be directed to the Dobruja around Galati, Reni and Braila the second group which constituted the Russian center of gravity would be gathered around Bucharest.[95] The Russian forces under Grand Duke Nicholas army crossed the frontier with four columns as soon as the war was commenced on 24 April 1877. Two columns positioned around Bucharest and the others were forwarded around the Dobruja, near Galati and Braila to hold the strategic positions before the operations. Besides, two detachments were sent to the opposite shores of the Danube against Ruse and Silistra.[96] All of these movements were conducted regarding the Russian war plan that was based on masking the Dobruja and forcing the Ottoman defense on the Danube River from a point between Ruse and Nikopol. The concentration of the main forces under the Grand Duke in Bucharest, which close to the main target of the Russian army should be considered regarding the Russian war plan.

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[92] Schem, *The War in the East*, pp. 223-224.

[93] The Romanian forces were directly involved in the war after the Russian defeat in Pleven. According to Schem the strength of the Romanian army in the war was 38.000 infantry, 8.200 cavalry and 120 field artillery. Ibid., p. 223.

[94] Ibid., p. 261.

[95] Süer, *1877-1878 Osmanlı Rus Harbi Rumeli Cephesi*, p. 60.

[96] Greene, *Report on the Russian Army and its Campaigns in Turkey in 1877-1878*, pp. 149-150.

Throughout May 1877, the Russian army focused on completing the deployment of the forces. With the arrival of the last mobilized forces, the XIV., IV. and XIII. corps, which was mobilized at the beginning of the war, the deployment of the forces was completed. Before the Russian attacks on the Danube river, the deployment of the Russian army was as follows: the concentration of the army, the VIII., IX., XII. and XIII. corps in the opposite of Nikopol and Svishtov, the XI. corps before Silistra and the XIV. corps around Galati and Braila.[97]

To sum up, as can be seen by the mobilized numbers, the Russian army managed to organize a remarkable number on the front line before the declaration of the war and increased the number in time by sending reinforcements. All of the deployment movements of the Russians were conducted by following the Russian war plan which was prepared in 1876. However, all of the mobilized forces for the Danubian front were not used during the operations. A remarkable part of the mobilized number was separated for the other missions such as logistics. In addition, it was possible to mobilize more troops with the help of the remarkable Russian population. However, the Russian war planners did not intend to double the numbers in the front lines probably because of abstaining logistic and economic concerns. They considered that about 200.000 total number in action would be to easily reach their aim on the Danubian front. However, the defeat in Pleven would prove that the number of Russian forces was not enough to conduct an aggressive advance plan. They had to wait for the reinforcements which would be recruited with the new mobilizations during after the battle of Pleven. The Russian even tried to solve manpower problem by requesting support from their ally Romania.

[97] Mehmed Hulusi, *1877-78 Osmanlı Rus Seferi*, p. 40.

CHAPTER 3

THE FIRST ROUND IN THE SHIPKA PASS: FALL OF THE OTTOMAN BALKAN DEFENSE (MAY-JULY)

"Attack is the best form of defense"[98]

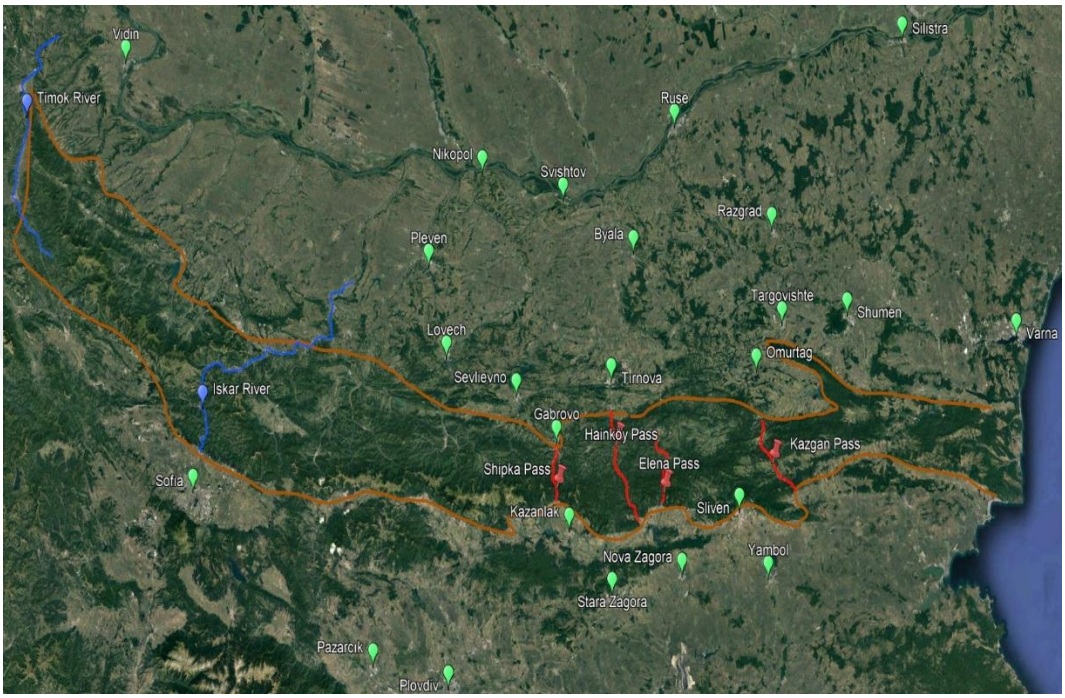
3.1. Terrain Analysis and Strategic Importance of the Shipka Pass

As a geographic barrier like the Danube River, the Balkan Mountains had key importance for the Ottoman war plan. It was ascertained as the second defense line after the Danube. The Balkan Mountains, which start from the Timok River in the Serbia-Bulgaria border and reach the Black Sea, mainly considered in three parts. These are the Western Balkan Mountains, Central Balkan Mountains and Little Balkan Mountains. The Western Balkans begin from the Timok River and extend to the Iskar River around Sofia. The altitude in this range, which was 300 meters at the beginning, increases up to 2100 meters to the second line. The Second range, the Central Balkan Mountains comprises the area between the Iskar River and Sliven. The highest part of the Balkan Mountains extends in this part between Troyan and Kalofer Mountains near the Shipka Pass. The altitude reaches 2200 and 2300 meters in this part and begins to decrease from the Kalofer. Around the Shipka and Elena (Ferdiç) passages it does not exceed 1350 meters. The third part of the Balkan range begins from Elena-Sliven line

[98] J. E. A. Whitman, *Tarih Boyu Strateji ve Taktik*, (Istanbul: Q Matris Yayınları, 2003), p. 44.

and continues about 125 km until the Black Sea. The altitude of the Little Balkan Mountains line is about 700-800 meters.[99]

Map 2: The Balkan Mountains and the Principal Passages for the Ottomans



During the war, there were many passages connecting the north of the Balkan Mountains to the south. However, due to both altitude and the broken terrain, only some of these passages were convenient to conduct an extensive military operation. The Ottoman headquarters was aware of the importance of the Balkan Mountains. The Ottoman army officers analyzed the Balkan passages before the war and prepared a report on 1 March 1877 which indicated the circumstances of the Balkan passages. The plan of the Ottomans was to determine which one of these passes would be the most suitable position to constitute a defense line. According to the report, there were four passages in which were adequate for military groundworks. These were Shipka, Kazgan (Kotel), Elena (Ferdiç) and Hainköy passages. These passes were also divided into two among themselves as primary and secondary compared to their terrain

[99] Süer, *1877-1878 Osmanlı Rus Harbi Rumeli Cephesi*, pp. 24-25.

features and transportation potentials. Therefore, while Shipka, Elena and Kazgan passages were considered as primary, the Hainköy Pass[100] was seen as secondary by the Ottomans.[101]

Upon the commencement of the war, Mehmed Hulusi Pasha was assigned to investigate the Balkan passages. The result of the investigation was not different from the previous one and he reached the same results. In his report dated 2 May 1877, Mehmed Hulusi Pasha emphasized mainly the importance of the Elena, Kazgan, Hainköy and Shipka passages for defense. In addition to these, he also mentioned the Çalıkavak passage in the Deliorman region, which connects Shumen and Karnobat. According to Mehmed Hulusi Pasha, among these passes, Kazgan and Shipka were primarily important ones compared to others. The Hainköy Pass was considered as secondary in both reports.[102] Therefore, the strongholds of the Hainköy Pass were not well handled, and the main Ottoman plan in the Balkan Mountains based on the defense of the other passes mainly the Shipka Pass.[103]

Frederick Vinton Greene, the American military attaché at St. Petersburg, accompanied the Russian army during the war, analyzed the terrain features of the Shipka Pass in his famous book properly. In this book, he described the Shipka Pass as:

> In the vicinity of Shipka the peaks of the Balkans are nearly 5,000 feet above sea-level. The valley of the Tundja, which is parallel to the chain and only a few miles from it on the south, has an altitude of about 1,300 feet; on the north the head waters of the Yantra near Gabrovo are at about the same altitude. Near Shipka the chain throws out three long and nearly parallel spurs to the north, and these spurs, although shorter, are also

[100] The Hainköy village was named Gurkovo after the war because of the importance of this pass on the operations of the Russian forces under General Iosif Gurko which will be detailly explained hereinafter.

[101] ATASE, ORH. 96/200, 1 March 1877.

[102] ATASE, ORH. 96/201AE, 2 May 1877.

[103] However, as would be seen throughout the war period, the Hainköy Pass would be the first target of the Russian army to capture the Shipka Pass. Consequently, they easily captured the Hainköy and crushed the Ottoman defense line in the Balkan Mountains by surrounding the Shipka Pass.

> distinguishable on the south; they are separated by deep wooded ravines, and are only united at the top by saddles in the main range of the mountains. The central one of these we may call the Shipka ridge, the easterly one the Berdek, the westerly the Bald Mountain ridge. It is a misnomer to speak of the Shipka Pass as a pass in the ordinary meaning of the word; for the road does not pass through a gorge or ravine between high peaks, but on the contrary it follows the whole length of the central spur and passes over its highest point. From Gabrovo the road follows a small stream for about 5 miles to the south and then takes a sudden turn to the east, and in the course of a mile of very steep ascent climbs on to the ridge; it then follows the gradual slope of the ridge for about 3 miles to Mount St. Nicholas, the highest point ; from here the road descends rapidly in steep zigzags to the village of Shipka. Near the summit of the central or Shipka spur are three sets of little hills or ridges about 200 feet high, running across the main ridge ; the highest and most southerly of these is called Mount St. Nicholas, and for convenience we will call the other two the "Central" and "Northern" hills. The highest points of the western and eastern spurs are known respectively as the Berdek and the Bald Mountain. They dominate the whole position, and are reached by narrow paths along the mountain.[104]

In the ottoman sources, there were different kinds of names regarding the terrain features. Among these, the most important one for this study was the ridge on the right side of the Shipka, named as Bald mountain by Greene. It was known as Aykırıcebel by the Ottomans. The hills on this ridge had the same meanings in both Ottoman's and Greene's usage. These are Woody Mountain and Yeşiltepe.[105]

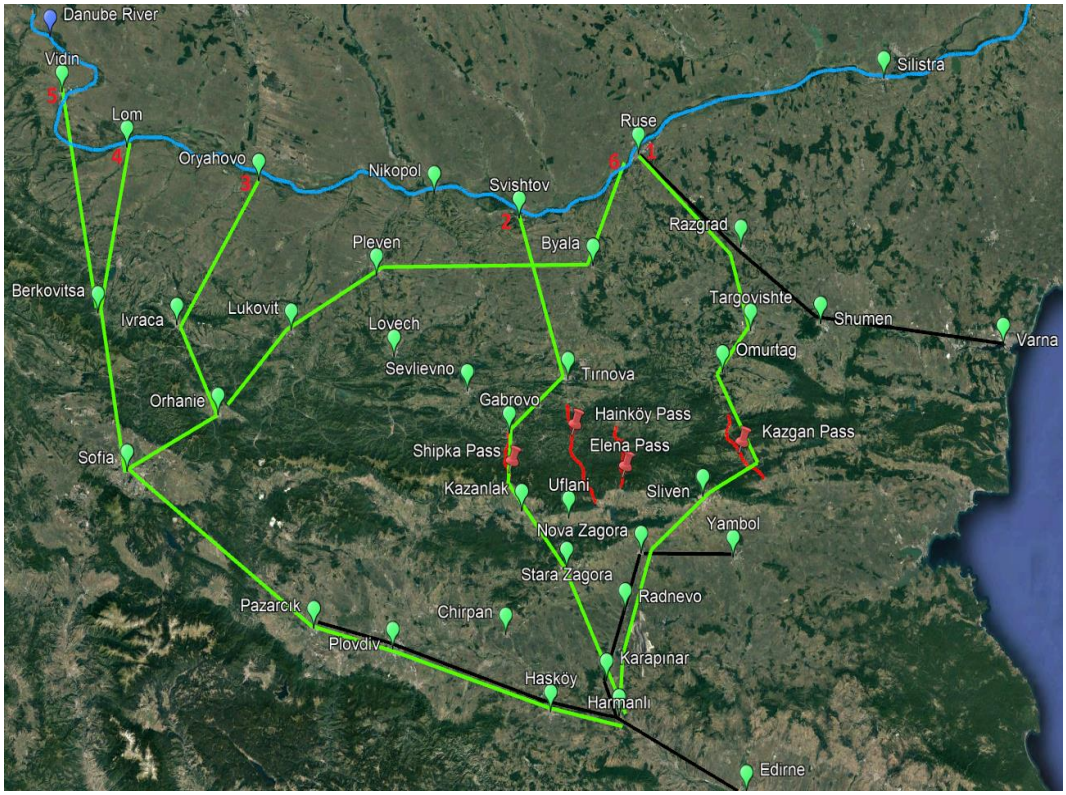
During the Ottoman-Russian War of 1877-1878, the Shipka Pass became the reason for many important skirmishes because it was enabling the primary connection between the north of the Balkan Mountains and Istanbul. The Russian army based their plan on capturing this strategically important pass. Its close connection to the Ottoman transportation lines became another reason for determining it as one of the major targets. There was a convenient road from Ruse to Tırnova and Gabrovo. Besides, it had a connection to the railway line between Edirne-Plovdiv-Nova Zagora-Yambol.

[104] Greene, *Report on the Russian Army and its Campaigns in Turkey in 1877-1878*, p. 207.

[105] The geographic place names in the Shipka Pass will be used as the Ottomans used for the integrity this the study. In this regard, the main change would be giving Bald Mountain ridge as Aykırıcebel and Woody Mountains as Yeşiltepe.

For the Russians, it would be possible to reach Gabrovo, the northern slopes of the Shipka Pass, in 24 hours, and after capturing the Shipka, the railway line in Nova Zagora would be in 14 hours distance, which means no need for another calculation for the Russians to reach Istanbul.[106]

Map 3: The Main Transportation Routes in Bulgaria[107]



The principal transportation routes in Bulgaria leading to Istanbul during the war were as follows: 1. Ruse-Razgrad-Targovishte-Omurtag-Kazgan Pass-Sliven–Nova Zagora-Harmanlı-Edirne road. 2. Svishtov-Tırnova-Gabrovo–Shipka Pass–Stara Zagora–Edirne road. 3. Oryahovo-Vratsa–Orhaniye (Botevgrad)–Sofia road. 4. Lom–

[106] ATASE, ORH. 96/201AAA, 2 May 1877. For detailed information about the main roads on the Danube front, *see* map 3.

[107] The green lines represent the main transportation road leading to Edirne and the black lines indicate the railways in Bulgaria between Ruse-Varna, Pazarcık-Harmanlı-Edirne and Yambol-Harmanlı-Edirne.

Berkovitsa–Sofia road. 5. Vidin–Pirot–Sofia road. 6. Ruse–Byala–Pleven–Lukovit-Orhaniye-Sofia road.[108]

Considering the main transportation roads, there were six practicable directions for the Russian army which was planned to cross the Danube River from a point between Ruse and Vidin. Four of them follow in the direction of Sofia–Plovdiv–Edirne. Nevertheless, following this route would be dangerous for the Russian army compared to other options, from the Central and Little Balkan Mountains. If the Russian army followed Sofia road they would be far away from the Shumen-Ruse line, which was the center of gravity of the Ottoman army. The Ottomans could threaten the supply route and the Russian line of retreat. For this reason, the most convenient direction for the Russian army was the roads through the Shipka and Kazgan passages. These roads would offer a chance to perform the Russian plan based on moving as fast as possible. In addition, the majority of the Christian population around this direction was an important advantage for the Russians and could be used for manpower, supply and intelligence. Thereby, the Russian army planned to forward the main body of the army to Istanbul through the region between Tırnova and Nova Zagora.

3.2. The Russian Crossing Operations from the Danube River

The Ottoman-Russian wars generally took place on two fronts. These were the Caucasus[109] and the Balkans. Among these fronts, especially the Balkans was considered as the concentration area by the Ottomans and the Russians. Both of them focused on the Balkans and pushed beyond their limits in terms of numbers and quantity. While the primary aim of the Russians was to cross the Danube River to perform the next stage of their plans throughout the nineteenth century, the Ottomans

[108] Greene, *Report on the Russian Army and its Campaigns in Turkey in 1877-1878*, p. 163.

[109] The Caucasian front was beyond the scope of this study. For information about the Caucasian front, *see* Allen Paul Muratoff, *Caucasian Battlefields: A History of the Wars on the Turco-Caucasian Border 1828-1921*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

on the other hand had endeavored to keep Russians away from the river. In this respect, the Danube became a psychological border for the Ottomans.[110]

The Dobruja region, the center of gravity of the Ottoman defense in the Balkans, had been the main target for the Russian Empire until the 1877-1878 war. However, the strong *Kale-i Erbaa* defense and ottoman dominance on the Danube river forced the Russians to find a different target during the Ottoman-Russian War of 1877-1878. In addition, the roads in the region were not suitable for the transportation of thousands of soldiers. In this context, the area between Nikopol and Svishtov was considered more efficient than the Dobruja. By passing this road, it would be possible to reach the best avenue of approach, which was the Tırnova-Kazanlak route. There were no strong fortifications that would threaten the Russian advance in this region. Also, the flanks of the Russian troops could be secured by the Yantra and Vid rivers.[111]

Although the Dobruja was not envisaged as the main operation zone, it still had an important role for the Russian war plan. If this region was neglected, the mouth of the Danube River remained open and the Ottoman navy would be able to use the Danube River effectively. In addition, the Ottoman army would have been forced to distribute its forces to many different regions. Therefore, the Russian army planned to cross the Danube through two or more points, to divide the Ottoman forces and weaken their defense.[112] In this context, The Russian war makers planned to send a detachment to Braila and Galati to draw the attention of the Ottomans in this area to mask the main attack. The main body would try to pass the river between Nikopol and Svishtov. Thereafter the Russians would march on the Balkan Mountains to get a connection for the next step of the campaign which was rushing to Edirne and Istanbul.

[110] İbrahim Köremezli, "Osmanlı-Rus Harpleri (1768-1878)", in *Osmanlı Askeri Tarihi: Kara, Deniz ve Hava Kuvvetleri 1792-1918*, ed. Gültekin Yıldız, (Istanbul: Timaş, 2013), p. 252.

[111] Süer, *1877-1878 Osmanlı Rus Harbi Rumeli Cephesi*, pp. 28-29.

[112] Mahmud Celaleddin Paşa, *Mirat-ı Hakikat,* p. 383.

In the first phase of the war, the Russian army crossed the Dniester River and entered Romania with four columns. The right and the center columns advanced to Bucharest. The left column marched to Sereth in order to take possession of the important railway bridge near Galati under command of Lieutenant-General Radetzky, and two detachments were located on the Danube opposite Ruse and Silistra. The fourth column marched on Galati and Braila to occupy the strategic positions on the left bank of the river.[113] During this period, the Russian army under the command of Grand Duke Nicholas comprised 104 infantry battalions, 144 cavalry squadrons, 884 infantry guns and 984 guns, including 100 horse artillery.[114]

Even though Tsar Alexander II was planning to pass the river in May 1877, it was not possible under the rainy spring conditions in the area. Due to heavy rain, the transportation and mobilization of the Russian army became a difficult matter.[115] Therefore, the Russian army had concentrated on transportation of the reinforcements and preparations for the attack. After the arrival of the XIV, IV. and XIII. corps, 72 infantry battalions, 288 infantry guns, 60 cavalry squadrons and 86 horse artillery were joined, and the total force of the Russian army on the Danubian front before passing the river became 182 infantry regiment, 672 infantry guns, 204 cavalry squadrons and 186 horse artillery.[116] By the middle of June, the eve of the Russian attack, the deployment of the Russian army was as follows: the concentration of the army, the

[113] Greene, *Report on the Russian Army and its Campaigns in Turkey in 1877-1878*, pp. 149-150.

[114] Ibid., pp. 147.

[115] Ollier, *Illustrated History of the Russo-Turkish War*, Vol. 1, p. 171. The war correspondent of the daily news was describing the conditions as: "Throughout May 1877 But day by day it was reported that the Danube was still too high to permit crossing. Either rain was falling, and the river was swollen by the drainage of its vast basin, or the sun was melting the snow on the mountains, In the meanwhile the Russian preparations were gradually approaching completeness" Daily News, *The War Correspondence of the Daily News 1877*, p. 129.

[116] Greene, *Report on the Russian Army and its Campaigns in Turkey in 1877-1878*, p. 149.

VIII., IX., XII. and XIII. corps in opposite of Nikopol and Svishtov, the XI. corps before Silistra and the XIV. corps around Galati and Braila.[117]

On the other hand, the Ottoman forces mainly concentrated around Shumen, Ruse, Silistra during that period. There were also forces in Varna, Dobruja and Nikopol but the main body of the army was kept around *Kale-i Erbaa*. Also, there were a remarkable number soldier in Vidin to be able to prevent a probable connection between the Serbian and Russian forces. The rest of the manpower were mainly positioned in the remaining locations in the front line. Apart from the fortified zones, other locations on the first defense line of the Ottoman Empire were left to the surveillance outposts created in every 4-5 km. These outposts were protected by a platoon or a company depending on the strategic importance of the position. Seven battalions were just appointed for this mission, which was not enough to protect such a wide line. Also, there were not convenient communication opportunities between the Ottoman outposts. Therefore, it was planned to deliver message to the other outposts in case of an emergency situation by using an old fashion technique, which was burning hay on the highest hill of the positions.[118] As it can be noticed, the defense of the Danube was left to such an inefficient system albeit deploying about two hundred thousand soldiers in the front. The main reason for this efficiency was the deployment of the troops. Most of the forces were located in certain positions, and that led to the problem in the other parts of the front line.

The first phase of the Russian war plan, feint on the Dobruja, began with the construction of a bridge in Braila after 12 June. Nevertheless, due to the rise in the water right after the construction, the bridge became useless. Therefore, the operation was started on 22 June by transporting the regiments by means of boats, rafts and steam-tugs, and the Russian forces crossed the river at Galati. The price of the operation was very cheap for the Russians. Since the region had been protected with a

[117] Mehmed Hulusi, *1877-78 Osmanlı Rus Seferi*, p. 40.

[118] Sedes, *1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus ve Romen Savaşı*, Vol. 3, pp. 9-12.

small Ottoman detachment, the Russian casualties were only 5 officers and 137 rank and file.[119]

Undoubtedly, one of the most important reasons for the success of the Russians was that the Ottoman navy could not control the river by using its strong navy.[120] The Ottomans were expecting to keep Russians away from the river by the strong battleships and that was the main reason why they did not locate enough numbers in the Dobruja. However, the navy could not exploit its advantages in terms of technological capacity.[121]

The Russian army followed the same masking technique during the main attack between Nikopol and Svishtov. Before the main attack, the Russian artillery began strong bombing on the strategic positions across the Danube such as Ruse, Nikopol,

[119] Greene, *Report on the Russian Army and its Campaigns in Turkey in 1877-1878*, p. 156.

[120] At the beginning of the war, a fleet that consisted of 8 ironclads, each one capable of carrying 30 guns, were located in the lower Danube around Braila. Also, the Ottoman Danube fleet had 7 light armored gunboats and 18 wooden ships between Harsova and Vidin. Ibid., p. 152.

[121] In fact, one of the main reasons for the Ottoman navy's ineffectiveness against the Russian navy was the naval warfare strategy developed by the Russians since the 1870s. The Russian defense was based on the French *Jeune École* strategy that emphasized torpedo operations, and the Russian navy managed to neutralize the Ottoman fleet on the Danube River. The Industrial Revolution had a big impact on naval technology throughout the nineteenth century. The change in armor and weapons with the new technology offered important advantages on the battlefield to the ships equipped with the new technology. However, after the discovery of the torpedo, the powerful combat ships relatively lost their control over the seas. In this respect, the *Jeune École* strategy was based on using light tonnage ships that had the ability of high speed and maneuverability, as torpedo boats against such kinds of powerful battleships. It gained considerable popularity after it was used effectively by the Russians during the 1877-1878 war. *See*, Mercan , *II. Abdülhamid Dönemi Deniz Stratejisi*, p. 57-94; Mercan, "93 Harbi'nin Ortaya Çıkardığı Bir Deniz Harp Stratejisti: Stepan Osipovich Makarov", pp. 133-144; Mercan, *93 Harbi'nde Deniz Harekatı*, pp. 49-64. As a result of successful torpedo operations of the Russian army, the Ottoman navy tried to be protected by surrounding the sides of the ships with fishing nets and ropes attached to floating logs and small boats. It was planned to prevent the advance of the torpedo boats by this primitive defense line. The main reason for the simplicity of this defense line was that no one knew actually what to do against this new technology, but it was necessary to take precaution because by 16 July, there were only two ships remained undamaged in the Ottoman Danube fleet. Charles Hampden Hobart, *Hobart Paşa'nın Anıları*, trans. Derin Türkömer, (Istanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Yayınları, 2015), p. 157; Emin Yener, "Deniz Muharebeleri ve Müşterek Hareket (1792-1912)", in *Osmanlı Askeri Tarihi: Kara, Deniz ve Hava Kuvvetleri 1792-1918*, ed. Gültekin Yıldız, (Istanbul: Timaş, 2013), p. 332. The inability of the ottoman soldiers against the torpedoes became a joke in Istanbul throughout the war. It has become a habit of the rowdies (külhanbeyi) to joke with the navy members, saying that take a slow step there is a torpedo, "beyim yavaş bas torpil var". Sedes, *1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus ve Romen Savaşı*, Vol. 3, p. 32.

Vidin and Tutrakan after 24 June. In addition, they tried to draw the attention of the Ottomans to different locations by masking the main operation. Thus, these feint attacks were considered as the main attack by the commander-in-chief Abdülkerim Nadir Pasha and the attention of the Ottomans was directed to other regions.[122] Besides, the Ottomans continued to keep area with only 6 infantry battalions and did not send any reinforcements there.[123]

The crossing operation started on the night of June 26 with many little boats. Due to the night conditions, the ottoman watchtower close to the river could notice the Russians before they reached 35-40 meters to the opposite bank of the river. The first outpost, which consisted of reserves, did not show any resistance and immediately retreated. Therefore, the Russians continued landing without being interrupted until 04:30. The only remarkable defense was made by the Hamdi Pasha brigade that was forwarded from Svishtov. However, the Ottoman detachment could not hold the line against the Russians, who had constantly reinforced, and forced to withdraw after 7:00.[124]

The cost of the operation for the Russian army was just 821 men including 31 officers.[125] On the other hand, the Ottomans lost 340 soldiers during that operation.[126] Whereas, the cost of forcing the Danube defense was much more than 1877 during the 1828-1829 and 1853-1856 Ottoman-Russian wars. The Russian casualties were about 12.000 in the 1828-1829 campaign and around 15.000 in the Crimean War.[127] It is possible to comprehend how the Ottomans showed inefficient defense by comparing

[122] Süer, *1877-1878 Osmanlı Rus Harbi Rumeli Cephesi*, pp. 99-101.

[123] Mehmed Hulusi, *1877-78 Osmanlı Rus Seferi*, p. 44.

[124] Süer, *1877-1878 Osmanlı Rus Harbi Rumeli Cephesi*, pp. 100-101; Sedes, *1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus ve Romen Savaşı*, Vol. 3, pp. 42-47.

[125] Greene, *Report on the Russian Army and its Campaigns in Turkey in 1877-1878*, p. 160.

[126] Sedes, *1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus ve Romen Savaşı*, Vol. 3, p. 49.

[127] Süer, *1877-1878 Osmanlı Rus Harbi Rumeli Cephesi*, p. 103.

the numbers on the Danube that constituted the main defense line of the Ottoman army during the War.

The Russian army managed to capture the strategic positions on the opposite shore of the Danube River within just ten weeks from the beginning of the war. If the Ottoman decision-makers intended to perform an active defense by attacking the strategic transportation points throughout Romania such as the railway bridge on the Sereth River, they would have been more successful in stopping the Russian advance. Likewise, the towns of Galati, Reni, Braila and Ismail could be besieged to prevent the Russian advance. In this way, the Russian operations might be postponed for months and the Ottoman army would gain time against the Russians. However, the Ottoman forces was sentenced to passivity unintelligibly. Although it turned out to be evident that the Russian army would concentrate on the mid-Danube instead of Dobruja when the Russians started to gather their troops in Bucharest, the Ottoman army did not take any significant step beyond a slight increase in the numbers of the garrisons and the construction of a few batteries around the riverbank. They had no definite war plan beyond simply waiting behind the fortifications. This offered big opportunities to the Russians to finish their preparations and carry out their war plan. Even though the Russian army remained around Bucharest for a long time to get ready, there was no reconnaissance and surveillance activity to determine their strength, positions and movements and above all, the Ottomans did not even intend to assemble a mobile unit behind mid-Danube to resist the Russians when they started the operation.[128]

Even though the Ottomans missed the opportunity of preventing the Russians from landing by following an inactive strategy, the Ottoman army still had an opportunity to force them back during the last days of June. If the Ottoman troops in the concentration areas like Ruse and Nikopol, directed on Svishtov, it would be possible to keep busy the Russians, who have been striving for completing the transfer most of the troops and ordnance to the opposite shore, and by advancing on their flanks from both *Kale-i Erbaa* and Vidin regions, the Russians might have been forced to repel in

[128] Greene, *Report on the Russian Army and its Campaigns in Turkey in 1877-1878*, p. 161-162.

the first days of July. Nevertheless, the cautious steps of Abdülkerim Nadir Pasha and the Ottoman commanders paved the way for the Russians to complete the landing successfully and locate around Svishtov.[129]

The Ottoman commanders was aware that the Russians would not separate their main force to the Dobruja. The commander-in-chief Abdülkerim Nadir Pasha stated in his telegram to Sultan Abdulhamid II that they were expecting an attack from the region between Ruse and Vidin. Besides, he was complaining about the lack of fortified positions in this region and the insufficient number of soldiers.[130] For this reason, no significant action was taken by the commander-in-chief from this date until June 26, in which the enemy forces passed the Danube.

After the war, Abdülkerim Nadir Pasha was court-martialed. He accused of not preventing the Russian advance and keeping thousands of men in the fortified locations without giving any significant reaction although the Russians dared tens of thousands of casualties. Abdülkerim Nadir Pasha defended himself by pointing out that the Danubian front was not well fortified to resist on the Russian attacks. According to him, the only fortified positions on such a wide line that comprised of 200-hour marching distance were Ruse, Silistra and Vidin. Therefore, it was not possible to defend this line against the Russians, who arrived the vicinity of the Danube River with 170 scattered battalions throughout the front. The manpower of the Russian army was 3-4 times more than the previous campaigns on the Danubian front throughout the nineteenth century.[131]

The Commander-in-chief never considered that his army would be sufficient against the Russians. Under these circumstance, he felt obliged himself to focus on a couple

[129] Mehmed Hulusi, *1877-78 Osmanlı Rus Seferi*, pp. 48-49.

[130] ATASE, ORH. 1/7/616, 26 May 1877.

[131] Mustafa Öztürk, "1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus Harbi Belgeleri: Abdi Paşa'nın Muhakemesi", *Belgeler*, Vol. 23, No. 27, (2003), pp. 121-122. The complaints of the commander-in-chief is enough to understand why the army stayed inactive when he was in charge. He would never intend to attack on the advancing Russian forces throughout his mission because of his never ending hesitant and cautious attitude.

of fortified positions in order to gain time by detaining the Russian troops around these fortifications. Thus, he decided to delay the Russian advance to be able to open the way for a foreign intervention. However, the Russian army did not attempt to waste time by forcing the strong Ottoman fortifications and the strict immobility of the Ottoman forces enabled them to advance rapidly over the Balkan Mountains.

3.3. Command and Control Problem in the Ottoman Headquarters: Operations of General Gurko's Advance Guard in the Balkans

After the landing operation, the Russian army rapidly started to construct a bridge to ensure the transportation of the troops and equipment. It was completed on 2 July and firstly the advance guard under General Gurko, which was assigned to march on the Balkan passages, crossed the bridge. Afterward, the other army corps landed on the opposite shore of the Danube.[132] Thus, the number of the Russian army around Svishtov has reached up to about 130,000 soldiers.[133] According to the Russian war plan, the main concentration of the Russian army would be capturing the main roads leading the Balkan passages such as Tırnova. To be able to advance, firstly it was necessary to secure the flanks of the forces in case of a probable Ottoman attack. Therefore, the Russian army is divided into three main groups in Svishtov. On the left, the XI., XII. and XIII. Corps that consisted of 75.000 soldiers under Grand Duke Nicholas moved on *Kale-i Erbaa*. At the same time, 35.000 soldiers of the IX. Corps was marching on Nikopol and Pleven under General Krudner on the right, and the advance guard of General Gurko that involved more than 10.000 men, included remarkable cavalry force, was advancing on the Balkan passages through Tırnova.[134]

[132] Greene, *Report on the Russian Army and its Campaigns in Turkey in 1877-1878*, p. 164.

[133] Mehmed Hulusi, *1877-78 Osmanlı Rus Seferi*, p. 46.

[134] Ibid., p. 50.

The missions of these three columns were as follows. The force under Grand Duke was to assembly around the Yantra River and besiege Ruse. If the General Krudner forces managed to secure the right flank by capturing Nikopol and Pleven-Lovech line, the next target would be a joint attack with the advance guard. On the other hand, the mission of the advance guard was taking the possession of the Balkan passages and fortifying them whereas awaiting the arrival of the right and left columns to march on Istanbul.[135]

The Ottoman army did not intend any serious offensive action either during the crossing operation in Svishtov or the following days. The main reason for this was the inefficient patrolling activities of the Ottomans to determine the enemy. *Serdar-ı Ekrem* Abdülkerim Nadir Pasha who constantly complained about the insufficiency of his force was expecting an attack from Silistra and Tutrakan. Therefore, the Ottoman staff avoided to forward a remarkable force towards the Russians, who gathering around Svishtov. İnstead, the staff preferred to act with strict constancy. The only move of the headquarters against the progress of the Russian army was sending Ahmed Eyüb Pasha and Eşref Pasha around Ruse to prevent a possible attack to Ruse and threaten the Russian advance on the Balkan Mountains. With this detachment, it was also planned to perform reconnaissance and surveillance missions to determine the enemy between Svishtov and Tırnova.[136] The headquarters only relied on that detachment to defend the Balkans. There was not any other option for them to resist the Russian army corps.[137] However, this detachment was not capable of conducting such a mission, especially preventing the Russian advance on the Balkans.

Ahmed Eyüb Pasha and Eşref Pasha forces, consisting of 33 infantry battalions, five cavalry regiments and 11 artillery batteries assembled on 8 July near Trastenik between Ruse and Byala. The commanders firstly sent three cavalry vanguard on the

[135] Ali Fuad, *Süleyman Paşa Ordusu'nun Balkanlardaki Harekâtı*, p. 7.

[136] ATASE, ORH. 3/185, 7 July 1877.

[137] ATASE, ORH. 71/49AB, 9 July 1877.

avenue of approach of the enemy around Byala. Nevertheless, the Ottoman detachment had to retreat right after encountering the enemy due to their superiority in numbers. As a result of the information provided by the vanguard, the detachment was driven back by the headquarters[138] on 11 July to find a more suitable position for them and to surprise the Russians without attacking them to prevent their march.[139] In the telegram written by Redif, Namık and Abdülkerim Nadir Pasha on 13 July, right after the retreat around Byala, they explained the reasons for their cautious steps by indicating that the enemy was superior to the Ottoman detachment, and apart from this, there was no any other mobile unit than this detachment in the Ottoman army. Therefore, they did not want to risk this force.[140]

The only maneuver of the Ottomans was incapable of even showing a minimal resistance against the Russian forces. One of the main reason for this incomprehensible passivity of the Ottomans was the multi-headed command structure in the Ottoman army. While the military council in Istanbul waited for the enemy to be stopped rapidly and ordered to take measures in this context, the headquarters was hesitated to implement an aggressive movement. In fact, one of the most efficient maneuvers might have been forwarding Osman Pasha army, which comprised about 45.000 soldiers, to central Bulgaria.[141] He even offered to move on the enemy after the Russian army

[138] The *Serasker* Redif Pasha, literally the minister of war and Nazım Pasha, the minister of the Sultan's treasury of the sultan (Hazîne-i Hâssa Nezâreti) were sent to the front line after the Russians managed to pass the river. With that appointment, the decisions of the headquarters had started to be given by Redif, Nazım and Abdülkerim Nadir Pasha.

[139] Sedes, *1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus ve Romen Savaşı*, Vol. 3, pp. 69-72. Mahmud Celaleddin Paşa, *Mirat-ı Hakikat*, p. 391; Öztürk, "1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus Harbi Belgeleri: Abdi Paşa'nın Muhakemesi", p. 131.

[140] ATASE, ORH. 9/8A, 13 July 1877.

[141] According to Abdülkerim Nadir Pasha, his main plan was based on such a plan that threatened the flanks of the Russians. In this context, he asserted that he was planning to send a detachment to Omurtag to hit the left flank of the Russians and to transfer Osman Pasha on the right flank. However, for him, the orders of the military council about attacking Svishtov prevented him from conducting these maneuvers. Öztürk, "1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus Harbi Belgeleri: Abdi Paşa'nın Muhakemesi", p. 131. Nevertheless, it was not possible to find any documents to directly charge the military council on Abdülkerim Nadir Pasha's accusations. Even many telegrams were sent by him indicating the reasons for his cautious steps. Also, none of these claims was not enough to explain his immobility of more than one hundred thousand soldiers under his command. After all, although these statements were the

crossed the river. However, his offer was not accepted at that time because of an intelligence received from Austria, which was indicating that the Russians would unite with the Serbian army through the Timok River. Therefore, Abdülkerim Nadir Pasha decided to postpone such a precaution in order to be cautious.[142]

The most striking maneuver against the Russian advance was correcting a mistake, the inappropriate deployment of the Ottoman forces. The Ottomans had gathered a significant part of the mobilized force in the secondary fronts throughout the Ottoman territories such as Bosnia, Herzegovina, Montenegro, Batumi and Sokhumi. It was planned to transfer a remarkable force from these regions to the Danubian front during the first days of July. It was clear that if the enemy crossed the Balkan Mountains, the defense of the Danubian front would face very difficult conditions. For that reason, the Ottomans planned to confront the Russians on the Balkan Mountains line with that reinforcement. In this regard, the force under Süleyman Pasha[143] in Montenegro,

reflection of his self-defense psychology, they were good examples of how the decision-making mechanism in the Ottoman army was problematic.

[142] ATASE, ORH. 3/185, 7 July 1877.

[143] Süleyman Hüsnü Pasha was born in 1838 in Istanbul. He graduated from the Military Academy and attended the army with the rank of Lieutenant in 1860. Between 1860-1862 he served in the 2nd army in Bosnia. He was promoted as Captain in 1862 and Senior Captain in 1865. He took part in the suppression of the Crete insurgence between 1867-1869 as Major. Upon returning his mission in Crete, he served in the Military Academy as Lieutenant Colonel. In 1871, he was sent to Yemen as Colonel to suppress the rebellion. After his mission in Yemen, he turned to Istanbul and served as history teacher in the Military Academy. He was promoted quickly in Istanbul and assigned as the dean of the Military Academy (*Ders Nâzırı*) and deputy director in 1873 as Brigadier. In 1874 he became the director of the Military Academy. Throughout his service in İstanbul, he had close connections with the Young Ottomans. One of the most important actions of Süleyman Pasha in Istanbul was his role in the dethronement of Sultan Abdülaziz and in the new constitutional order. He was involved in the coup and appointed as Lieutenant General. After the dethronement, he participated in the Serbian War and conducted successful operations against the Serbian forces. In December 1876 he was appointed as the commander of Bosnia and Herzegovina to suppress the insurgence as Field Marshal. The Ottoman forces under his command managed to suppress the Montenegrins in many events. Upon the advance of the Russian army in the Balkans, he was sent to the Balkans and tried to recapture the Shipka Pass until the end of September. In September 1877, he was appointed as the general commander of the Ottoman corps on the Danubian Front. After the war, he was exiled to Baghdad by court-martial due to the failure of the army under his command. Süleyman Pasha ended his life in Baghdad at the age of fifty-four on 7 august 1892. Kemal Beydilli "Süleyman Hüsnü Paşa", *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*, Vol. 38, (2010), pp. 89-91; İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, "Şıpka Kumandanı Süleyman Hüsnü Paşa'nın Menfa Hayatına Dair Bazı Vesikalar", *Belleten*, Vol. 12, No. 45, (1948), pp. 207-210; Tetik, "*Umdetü'l-Hakāyık: Süleyman Paşa*", p. 1-8. Süleyman Pasha had an important place in Turkish Nationalism. He was considered as one of the leading figures in this regard by the important Turkish Nationalists such as Ziya Gökalp and Yusuf Akçura. Especially his publications paved the way for him

would be located between Shipka and Sliven, and Mehmed Ali Pasha[144], the commander of Yenipazar, would be transferred to Sofia with his troops. The reinforcements would be sent from Batumi, Sokhumi and the Fifth Army as much as possible. Besides, the proposal of Osman Pasha, which was not accepted a couple of days before, put into practice to threaten the right flank of the Russian army. He was moved to Pleven after leaving a detachment in Vidin.[145]

The advance of the Russian forces drew great attention in Istanbul and led to such measurements, but time was required to exploit these reinforcements. However, the decision of these maneuvers was taken right before the strategic city Tırnova near the Balkan Mountains was about to be captured by Genera Gurko. This would mean that there was not enough time for these troops to save the Balkan passages from the Russian attacks.

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to be known among the leading figures. For example, during his service in the Military Academy, he prepared a history book, *Târîh-i Âlem*, that presented the Turkish history from the Oghuzs and Huns instead of directly translating the foreign sources to be used in military education. In this way, he had a big effect on the awakening of the Turkish national consciousness. Tetik, "*Umdetü'l-Hakāyık: Süleyman Paşa*", pp. 8-13.

[144] Mehmed Ali Pasha was born on 18 November 1827 in Magdeburg, Prussia. His real name was Ludwig Karl Friedrich Detroit. During his early ages, he defected to the Ottoman Empire and entered under the protection of important Ottoman dignitaries. He registered to the *Mekteb-i Harbiye* in 1846 and graduated in 1853 one year early because of the Crimean war. During the war, he was promoted quickly with the help of his success and became Captain. He was promoted as Colonel in 1863 and Brigadier in 1865. Between 1867 and 1877 he attended many suppression operations in Crete, Serbia, Montenegro and Novi Pazar. In 1875 he became Lieutenant General. During the Ottoman-Serbian and Montenegrin War, he conducted successful operations as the commander of Novi Pazar. Upon the failure of Abdülkerim Nadir Pasha against the Russian advance on the Danubian front, he was appointed as Field Marshal and appointed as the general commander of the Ottoman corps on the Danubian front in July 1878. However, he could not be successful against the Russians like Abdülkerim Nadir Pasha. At the end of September, he was dismissed from the general commandership and appointed to a small post, commander of the corps in Orhaniye (Botevgrad) which was responsible to help Osman Pasha corps in Pleven. After the war, he was elected as the second delegate of the Ottoman Empire for the Congress of Berlin. Upon returning from Berlin, he was appointed to determine the new borders between Albania and Montenegro, ensure the evacuation of the lands to be left to Montenegro and suppress the reaction of the Albanians. However, he was killed by the Albanian insurgents who were angry with him for his mission in Berlin and Janina. Besides, Mehmed Ali Pasha was the grandfather of two famous figures of the Ottoman Empire during the twentieth century, Ali Fuad Cebesoy and Nazım Hikmet Ran. Beydilli, Kemal, "*Müşir Mehmed Ali Paşa*", *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*, Ek-2, (2019), pp. 218-220.

[145] ATASE, ORH. 3/185AA, 8 July 1877.

3.3.1. The Battle of Tırnova

After crossing the Danube, a detachment was formed by order of the Grand Duke under command of General Gurko on 30 June. The mission of this detachment was to forward to Tırnova and Sevlievno as much as possible, reconnoiter the surrounding country and carry out preparations to gain possession of a pass in the Balkans , in which the bulk of the army could cross. Besides, the advance guard was responsible for sending cavalry to the south of the mountains to cut strategic transportation and communication lines such as the railroads and telegraph. The detachment consisted of approximately 8.000 infantry, 4.000 cavalry and 32 guns.[146]

Among the members of the advance guard, there was a remarkable number of Bulgarian volunteers that were organized and equipped with the help of Pan-Slavist organizations like the Slavic Benevolent Committee and the Bulgarian Civil Administrative Organization.[147] As soon as the war was declared, many Bulgarians

[146] Greene, *Report on the Russian Army and its Campaigns in Turkey in 1877-1878*, p.165. The detachment was made up as follows: 4th Rifle Brigade, 6 battalions Bulgarian militia, a half battalion of Plastoon as infantry, 8th and 9th Dragoon Regiments, 9th Regiment of Hussars, a half squadron of volunteers, 21st 26th and 30th Don Cossack Regiments as cavalry, and an engineering detachment. Ibid., p. 165.

[147] The Bulgarian Civilian Administrative organization was formed in 1876 by Prince Vladimir Aleksandrovich Tcherkassky with the order of Tsar Alexander. The organization aimed to build a firm ground for the new Bulgarian state throughout the war. The organization worked like a ministry with 400 civil and 80 military officers. Even though the mission of the organization was shown as administrative affairs, one of the main aims of the organization was to organize Bulgarians against the Ottomans. They conduct "the war of race and extermination" policy to form a suitable atmosphere for the Bulgarian national state. In this context, all Muslims were disarmed in the occupied lands by the help of the Russians and after that, armed Bulgarians started to attack helpless Turkish people who did not migrate, especially together with the Cossacks. Ömer Turan, *The Turkish Minority in Bulgaria*, (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 1998), pp. 80-88. There is no doubt that both Bulgarians and Muslims committed mutual massacres, but these were not committed in a systematic plan. With the rapid advance of General Gurko, the systematic massacres on the Muslim population started. In this context, the definition of Tcherkassky is an important issue that needs special attention. He defined the war as "the war of race and extermination". The main aim was to clean the Balkans from the ottoman present. To make this possible, the special Cossack units were organized to terrorize the Muslim population. Weapons were taken from the Muslims of the captured districts and distributed to the Bulgarians. Both Bulgarians and Cossacks were used to "exterminate" the Muslims. they committed massacres in many locations such as Tırnova, Kazanlak, Stara Zagora, Karlovo. Turan, "The Turkish Documents About the Ottoman-Russian War of 1877-78", pp.336-339. for detailed information about the massacres throughout the war, *see* Ömer Turan, "Bulgaristan'da Türklere ve Müslümanlara Yapılan

joined the Russian army. These volunteers were organized under an independent brigade consisting of six battalions under command of General Nikolai Stoletov. In fact, it was planned to use these units in the rear as a kind of gendarmerie, but they were transferred to the Balkan Mountains with Gurko right after passing the Danube and had a big influence on the uprising and the massacres that would be seen throughout the war.[148]

The advance guard of Gurko passed the Danube on 2 July and reached near Tırnova just in five days without facing any obstacle. The vanguards provided an information that the Turks were waiting in Tırnova with a small force. In order to confirm the intelligence and reveal the real force of the Ottoman detachment, General Gurko decided to organize a reconnaissance attack towards the city by using the cavalry.[149] The main reason for Gurko's cautious step was the terrain features of the city, in which situated in a bend of the Yantra River and surrounded by rocky hills on all sides. The roads reaching the city were passing through narrow defiles. All of these were offering a natural defense capacity for the city. For that reason, General Gurko decided to perform the attack with a brigade without waiting. He was convinced that the ottoman detachment in Tırnova was not capable of resisting the Russian forces, and aimed to not give a chance for reinforcements by capturing the city as soon as possible.[150]

There was a detachment consisting of five battalions in Tırnova, four regulars and one reserve, under command of Colonel Ahmed Hamdi. This force was firstly located on the left bank of the Yantra, close to the way leading the city from Svishtov and Sevlievno. However, due to exaggerated information about the number of Russians, which was provided by the villagers escaping in front of the Russian detachment, the Ottoman commander abandoned his dominant position to avoid problems in case of a

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Mezalim", *Uluslararası Suçlar ve Tarih*, No. 1, (2006), pp. 89-101. and Zeynep Kerman, *Rusların Asya'da ve Rumeli'de Yaptıkları Mezalim*, (Istanbul: Türk Dünyası Araştırmaları Vakfı, 1987).

[148] Sedes, *1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus ve Romen Savaşı*, Vol. 3, p. 59.

[149] Ali Fuad, *Musavver 1293-1294 Osmanlı-Rus seferi*, Vol. 1, p. 284.

[150] Greene, *Report on the Russian Army and its Campaigns in Turkey in 1877-1878*, p. 166.

possible retreat on Omurtag.[151] In fact, the Ottoman headquarters sent six battalions reinforcement under Saffet Pasha to Tırnova from Omurtag on 30 June in order to keep the city against the Russians. Nevertheless, this reinforcement could not arrive Tırnova by marching about 100 km within seven days.[152] The Tırnova detachment was located along the ridges on the right side of the Yantra River. However, the trenches were prepared right after the position change and had certain deficiencies. To illustrate, it was easy to attack that position from the right side. Besides, they were not ready psychologically to deal with the Russian forces. Thus, the reserves abandoned their positions at the beginning of the Russian attacks. The regulars, on the other hand, retreated to Omurtag direction after attempting to resist them a while.[153]

Since the Ottoman forces could not deal with the strong Russian cavalry, the entire loss of the Russian forces was just two men. General Gurko managed to capture strategically important Tırnova by using just a brigade of cavalry and a single battery, that is to say, about 14000 cavalry and six guns.[154] It is enough to understand the psychological weakness of the Ottomans by looking at the numbers and the price of the attack for the Russian forces. The Ottomans were exaggerating the number of the enemy. Therefore, they preferred retreat instead of resistance. In fact, the Ottoman detachment, consisting of 4.000 soldiers, was able to resist more, but no one intended to try reacting. After the Tırnova affair, both Colonel Ahmed Hamdi and Saffet Pasha

[151] Sedes, *1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus ve Romen Savaşı*, Vol. 3, pp. 60-61.

[152] Süer, *1877-1878 Osmanlı Rus Harbi Rumeli Cephesi*, pp. 108-110. This delay of Saffet pasha was another example of the strategic command problem in the Ottoman army. Because the order was given to him on 30 June, but he moved to Tırnova on 6 July. As a result of this big mistake, the reinforcement could not reach the Gurko detachment. Sedes, *1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus ve Romen Savaşı*, Vol. 3, pp. 88-90.

[153] Sedes, *1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus ve Romen Savaşı*, Vol. 3, pp. 61-62. The bad news about Tırnova had a great impact in Istanbul, even it was claimed that the fall of Tırnova disturbed the sultan, and he communicated with the front without sleeping all night. Hüseyin Raci Efendi, *Zağra Müftüsünün Hatıraları*, ed. Ertuğrul Düzdağ, (Istanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 2019), p. 82.

[154] Archibald Forbes, *Czar and Sultan: The Adventures of a British Lad in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878*, (London, Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent, 1894), p. 50; Greene, *Report on the Russian Army and its Campaigns in Turkey in 1877-1878*, p. 166.

were accused of losing such a strategically important location by "dishonoring the glory and honor of the military".[155]

The attention of the Russian headquarters directed to the Balkan Mountains after capturing Tırnova. The battle plan of the Russian army was to march on Istanbul as soon as securing the right and left flanks. Nevertheless, the immobility of the Ottomans enabled the Russians to change their war plan and turn their direction to the south. While the mission of the Grand Duke corps regarding the previous plan was based on forcing Ruse, he left the XII. and XIII. corps around Ruse and departed to Tırnova on 9 July. He was planning to advance on from Tırnova after uniting the right flank that marched through Pleven and the VI. and VIII. corps that would be sent from the reserve.[156]

3.3.2. The Russian March on the Shipka Pass

Upon capturing Tırnova, General Gurko started to conduct preparations for the next target, which was the Balkan Mountains, especially the Shipka Pass. When the Russians had bivouacked in Tırnova, on the other, General Gurko was trying to collect all possible information about the Balkan passages from Bulgarians and the reconnaissance and surveillance activities. As a result of these activities, the Russians realized that there was not enough force in the Balkan passages except the Shipka Pass, which was the most convenient way to cross the Balkan Mountains.[157] The other options to the Russians were Hainköy, Elena (Ferdiç) and Kazgan (Kotel) passages. Among them, especially Elena and Kazgan passages were not suitable to perform a

[155] Presidency Ottoman Archives (=BOA), Yıldız Esas Evrakı Defterleri (=Y.EE.D.), 48/3-4, 12 Receb 1294, [28 July 1877].

[156] Sedes, *1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus ve Romen Savaşı,* Vol. 3, pp. 67-68. Grand Duke Nicholas could not go forward from Tırnova because of the successful defense of Osman Pasha in Pleven. When danger appeared in Pleven which threatened the Russian bridgehead in Svishtov, all the Russian attention about marching on the shout turned to the right flank of the army.

[157] Greene, *Report on the Russian Army and its Campaigns in Turkey in 1877-1878*, p. 166-167.

safe operation due to their close distance to Shumen and Omurtag, in which there were many Ottoman soldiers. Therefore, the Hainköy Pass was ascertained as the target by the Russians because of its weak position in terms of number and fortification. General Gurko planned to surrender the Shipka Pass by turning the rear of it throughout Hainköy Pass.

According to the Daily News reporter MacGahan the Hainköy Pass was presented to Gurko by Prince Tserteleff. He knew that Count Moltke was referring to a pass in his book between Shipka and Kazgan passages which is not practicable for an army. He ascertained that the pass had a bad reputation among the people and was rarely used by them and the transportation possibilities were not suitable. Therefore, after determining the Hainköy Pass as the objective, General Gurko sent the pioneers, 200 Cossacks with Bulgarian guides under General Rauch, to make the road passable for artilleries. The repairment had completed within three days by strict secrecy. In this regard, being among a friendly population was a big chance for the Russians.[158] During the march of the Russian forces on Hainköy talking and even smoking was forbidden to all ranks.[159] It was crucial to conduct the preparations in secret for the Russians. Since their main target was to capture the Shipka Pass, they wanted the Ottomans to be aware of the preparations as late as possible. In this way, the plan could be successfully implemented without giving a chance to Ottomans to send reinforcements. Since the Ottomans did not conduct reconnaissance and surveillance activities properly, they could not be aware of the Russian activities that continued about four days around the Hainköy Pass, and this enabled General Gurko to reach his aim, not giving a chance for reinforcement.

To draw the attention of the Ottomans to the other passages, Gurko sent three Cossack squadrons and two guns to Elena and Bebrovo. Also, a detachment was sent to Gabrovo to attack the Shipka Pass when Gurko reached the South of the pass. The

[158] Daily News, *The War Correspondence of the Daily News 1877*, p. 264; Forbes, *Czar and Sultan: The Adventures of a British Lad in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878*, p. 51.

[159] Epanchin, *Operations of General Gurko's Advance Guard in 1877*, p. 44.

Russian feints misled the Ottomans that the Russians were planning to attack the Shipka and Elena passages. However, in reality, Gurko was moving on the Hainköy which was considered impracticable by the Ottomans.[160] During that period, the deployment of the Balkan Defense line scattered on the 80 km wide area was as follows: three infantry battalions and six cavalry divisions in Sliven, one infantry battalions in both Hainköy and Elena passages, two infantry battalions and one cavalry squadron in Nova Zagora, two infantry battalions in Kazanlak, and 10 infantry battalions in the Shipka Pass, all comprised of about 13250 soldiers.[161] Besides, there were seven infantry battalions in the Kazgan Pass, which was regarded as one of the most important places with the Shipka Pass. The Ottomans was unable to ascertain the target of the enemy, had to scatter its limited number of soldiers by placing them behind mainly in these two strategic passes.[162] Most of the Ottoman forces on the Balkan line had been arrived right after the Russian army crossed the river, and there were still many battalions on the way, but no information from the Balkan corps that was planned to be established with 40.000 soldiers at the beginning of the war. Under these circumstances, it was not possible to hold such a wide defense line without intelligence, enough number and united command.

General Gurko started marching on the Hainköy on 12 July, the force being in all eight and a half battalions, 17 squadrons, 16 horse artillery and 14 mountain guns.[163] At 10 o'clock on 14 July, the Russian detachment was ready to attack in front of the Ottomans in the Hainköy Pass. The weak Ottoman unit in the Hainköy, which consisted of 300 infantry positioned at the mouth of the defile, did not show significant resistance and retreated after a slight skirmish. In this way, the Russians managed to debouch in the valley of Tundja without any difficulty. The price of the attack was just six men for the Russians and no doubt that if the outlet of this narrow defile was

[160] Epanchin, *Operations of General Gurko's Advance Guard in 1877*, p. 44, 299, 300.

[161] Ali Fuad, *Musavver 1293-1294 Osmanlı-Rus seferi*, Vol. 1, pp. 292-293.

[162] Sedes, *1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus ve Romen Savaşı*, Vol. 3, pp. 107-108.

[163] Epanchin, *Operations of General Gurko's Advance Guard in 1877*, p. 56.

defended as it should be, even by such a little force, it would have cost them very considerable casualties.[164]

Since the main target of General Iosif Gurko was the Shipka Pass, he decided to turn the rear of the Ottomans in Hainköy, sent a column to cut their line of retreat to Shipka. In this way, the Hainköy garrison would have to retreat in the direction of Elena instead of the Shipka. General Gurko managed to conduct his plan during the attack. The Ottomans were obliged to withdraw through the Elena direction. [165] After capturing the pass, Gurko remained at Hainköy waiting for assembling his troops, the force under Gurko now reached about 11.000 men on 15 July. The force consisted of about 5000 Bulgarians, 2000 sharpshooters, 1000 dragoons, 500 hussars, 2500 Cossacks and three batteries of field and a mountain battery to be carried.[166]

The time was the most crucial thing for Gurko during that period because he did not want to allow the Ottomans to be reinforced. Therefore, as soon as his force became ready, he sent three vanguard columns to Kazanlak, Sliven and Nova Zagora. The main duty of these columns was to damage the transportation and communication means. In this context, especially Nova Zagora in which one of the main transportation bases of the Ottoman army had strategic importance for preventing transportation, observing the enemy and making feints. Also, it would draw the attention of the Ottomans to that town to conduct the main operation of his main force.[167] One of these columns managed to cut the Stara Zagora-Kazanlak telegraph line, which was the only communication of the Shipka Pass, on 15 July.[168] The column that was sent to Nova Zagora had a big impact on the course of the battle of Shipka. They damaged the

[164] Greene, *Report on the Russian Army and its Campaigns in Turkey in 1877-1878*, p. 168.

[165] Ali Fuad, *Musavver 1293-1294 Osmanlı-Rus seferi*, Vol. 1, p. 296.

[166] Daily News, *The War Correspondence of the Daily News 1877*, p. 269.

[167] Epanchin, *Operations of General Gurko's Advance Guard in 1877*, pp. 70-71.

[168] ATASE, ORH. 51/127, 16 July 1877.

railway line and telegraph, and seized an Ottoman transportation train carrying 80 wagons of ammunition.[169]

The Russian attack towards Hainköy was a big surprise for Rauf Pasha,[170] the commander of the Balkan corps. He was appointed as the commander right after the Russian advance and reached the war zone just 3 days before the Russian attacks on the Hainköy Pass. Therefore, he did not have enough time to keep everything under control and organize the troops against the Russians.[171]

The only move of Rauf Pasha was to send three columns to prevent Gurko's advance and ensure the security of the Balkans. Especially, security of Nova Zagora, which would be the assembly area of the reinforcements, was important for the Ottoman army. The first and second columns departed from Sliven to encounter the Russian pioneers around the Elena and Nova Zagora. The third column organized under Mehmed Hulusi Pasha, the commander of the Shipka garrison, was sent to Kazanlak direction. In this way, it was planned to surround the Russians.[172] However, that force was not eligible to carry out such a turning movement. The first and second columns failed to prevent the Russian advance, and only Mehmed Hulusi Pasha column remained before the General Gurko.

In fact, by sending a column on Nova Zagora, General Iosif Gurko managed to direct the Ottomans to think that the main Russian attack would be on Nova Zagora. The diversion would enable Gurko to carry out his operation on Shipka without

[169] Epanchin, *Operations of General Gurko's Advance Guard in 1877*, p. 73. The success of the Russian column played a major role in the ammunition deficiency of the Shipka Pass during the next days.

[170] Mehmed Rauf Pasha was the son of Abdi Pasha, one of the Field Marshals (*Müşîr*) Sultan Abdülmecid period. His education was not in military school. After getting private education with the help of his father, he attended the army in 1860. He was appointed as military attaché to the Ottoman embassy in Paris. Between 1872-1875 he worked as the governor of Crete. In 1875 he served as the commander of Herzegovina, and after that, he was appointed as the Minister of Navy in 1876. Sedes, *1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus ve Romen Savaşı*, Vol. 5, p. 74.

[171] BOA, Y.EE.D, 800/7, 27 Haziran 1293, [9 July 1877].

[172] ATASE, ORH. 51/126, 15 July 1877.

interruption.[173] The Russian headquarters was planning to not advance beyond the Balkan Mountains before the XI. corps arrived Tırnova. Thus, the mission of Gurko was limited as capturing a passage in the Balkans, and conducting reconnaissance and surveillance activities because they were afraid of a possible attack from Shumen and Omurtag on Tırnova. Nevertheless, there was no reaction from the Ottomans and the Russian advance without resistance encouraged them to further their operations. The results of the reconnaissance and surveillance missions were showing that the atmosphere in the south of the Balkans was suitable for Russian to advance more.[174]

The advance guard of General Gurko began marching from Hainköy on 16 July in two columns. The right column which consisted of about six infantry battalions, two cavalry squadrons and 10 guns, advanced following the main road close to the mountain through the village of Uflani near Maglizh. The left column marched throughout the left bank of the Tundja River with an intensified cavalry force, about 14 cavalry squadrons and six guns. Two squadron Cossacks were tasked to keep up the communication among these two columns.[175]

The only force against the advance of the Russians was Mehmed Hulusi Pasha column sent by Rauf Pasha on 14 July. Mehmed Hulusi Pasha moved from the Shipka Pass with three infantry battalions on the morning of 15 July.[176] These battalions reached Uflani on 16 July, positioned on the ridges near the village and started to wait for the Russians. However, the number of the Russian detachment was superior to the Ottoman battalions. Also, the position of the Ottomans was not convenient to encounter them. Therefore, after four-hour severe fighting, the Ottoman detachment was surrounded and forced to retreat under the heavy Russian fire.[177] According to

[173] Epanchin, *Operations of General Gurko's Advance Guard in 1877*, p. 74.

[174] Ali Fuad, *Musavver 1293-1294 Osmanlı-Rus seferi*, Vol. 1, pp. 299-300.

[175] Epanchin, *Operations of General Gurko's Advance Guard in 1877*, pp. 75-76.

[176] ATASE, ORH. 51/126, 15 July 1877.

[177] For detailed information about the battle of Uflani, *see* Epanchin, *Operations of General Gurko's Advance Guard in 1877*, pp. 76-80.

Hulusi Pasha, in his report about the battle, he indicated that the hot weather and the superiority of the Russians caused failure for them.[178] Nevertheless, one of the main reasons for the defeat, that was not indicated by Mehmed Hulusi Pasha, was the superiority of the Russians regarding the cavalry and artillery force. Due to the Ottoman detachment consisting of only infantry battalions without heavy guns, the Russians used the advantage of their powerful cavalry and artillery against the Ottoman detachment.[179]

One of the most important impact of the Uflani battle was on the morale of the Ottoman forces. The Ottomans showed remarkable resistance at Uflani albeit their limited force. Nevertheless, the bloody combat broke the resistance power of the Ottoman forces around the Shipka Pass.[180] The Russian superiority in Uflani together with the successful operations of General Gurko misled the Ottomans that the Russian force was irresistible. Gurko knew that his force would be estimated tenfold by rumor with his rapid advance and success.[181]As Gurko said, the Ottoman could not reach certain information about the Gurko's force. The rapid advance of them and their success against the columns that were sent among the Shipka forces had a big impact on the psychology of the Ottoman soldiers.

After the Uflani battle, the Russian detachment advanced on Kazanlak in three columns. Kazanlak was considered as the last obstacle for them before Shipka Pass. Their plan was to conduct the same strategy against the Ottomans, which was using their superiority in numbers and surrounding the enemy. The right column would march on the town by following the mountains and attack Kazanlak from the northeast with 1.5 battalions. The left column consisted of all cavalry forces with six guns, being

[178] ATASE, ORH. 51/128, 20 July 1877.

[179] ATASE, ORH. 6/123, 16 July 1877. The cost of fighting under such circumstances was heavy for the Ottomans. While the loss of the surrounded ottoman forces was 400, the Russians loss was only 60 men. Forbes, *Czar and Sultan: The Adventures of a British Lad in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878*, p. 54; Greene, *Report on the Russian Army and its Campaigns in Turkey in 1877-1878*, p. 169.

[180] Daily News, *The War Correspondence of the Daily News 1877*, p. 257.

[181] Maurice, *The Russo-Turkish War*, p. 84.

ordered to advance along the left bank of the Tundja and turn the Ottoman right flank. The center column, accompanied by General Gurko himself, was to follow the foothill of the mountain and attack the town from the east with three infantry battalions, two Bulgarian contingents and 10 guns. The Ottoman defense, consisting three infantry battalions and three guns, was located on seven km east of the town on the main road near the foothill of the mountain, against the marching direction of the Russian center column.[182]

At 7 o'clock in the morning on 17 July, these two unequal forces were encountered near Kazanlak. Yet, as experienced in Uflani, the Ottomans were surrounded with the help of the other columns and had to retire under heavy fire. They tried to organize another defense line in the town, but the result was not different from the others. The remaining Ottoman battalions retreated to the Shipka Pass through the mountain roads.[183] Besides the disadvantage of the Ottomans in numbers, another important reason of the retreat was the lack of ammunition.[184] These circumstances determined the reason for the cost of the battle. According to the Russian sources, the actual loss of the Ottomans was not known but they captured about 400 prisoners and three guns. On the other hand, their loss was just 14 men, three dead and 11 wounded.[185]

Although Gurko was planning to reach the Shipka rapidly as much as possible, the Russian forces were exhausted due to the long march and skirmishes. Thus, Gurko left his infantry in Kazanlak and continued marching on Shipka with his cavalry. The Shipka village was captured by the Russian cavalry at 2 p.m. Most of the Ottoman forces had already concentrated in the pass, but they could not transfer their provision

[182] Epanchin, *Operations of General Gurko's Advance Guard in 1877*, pp. 86-87; Greene, *Report on the Russian Army and its Campaigns in Turkey in 1877-1878*, pp. 169-170; Ali Fuad, *Musavver 1293-1294 Osmanlı-Rus seferi*, Vol. 1, pp. 304-305.

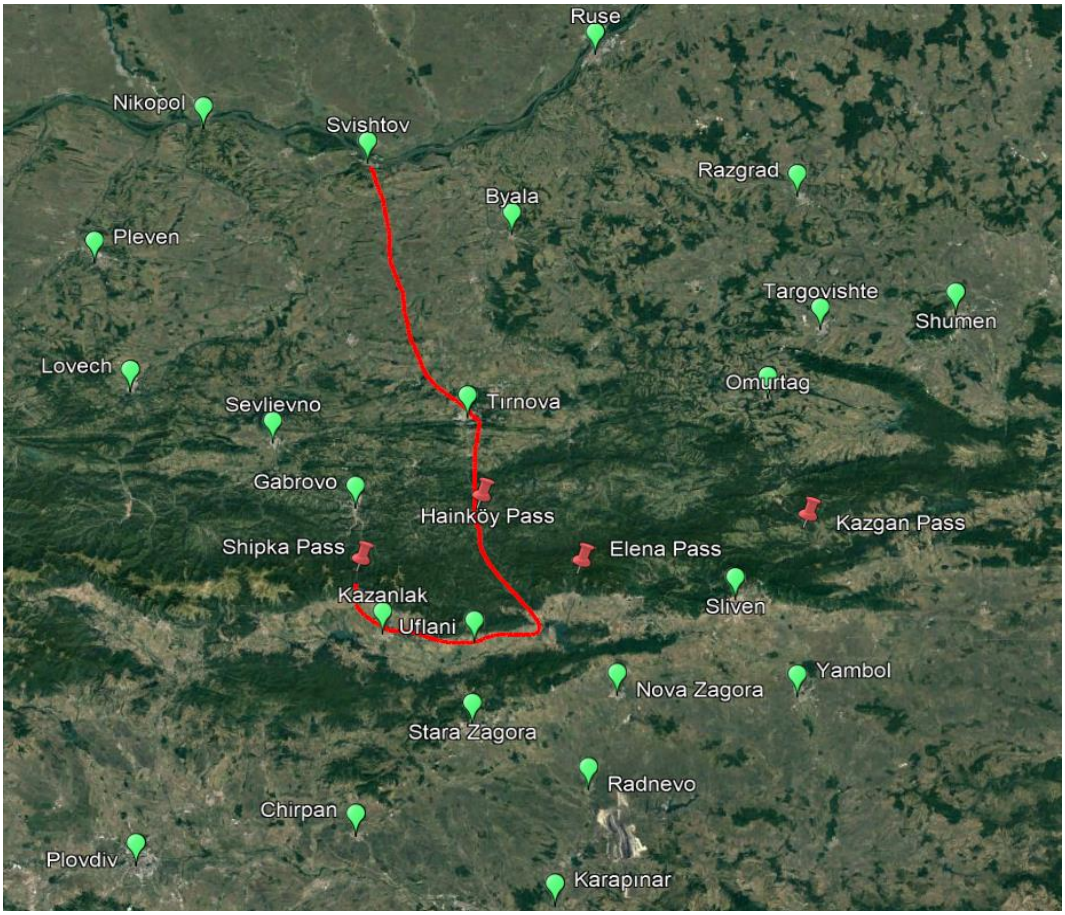
[183] Sedes, *1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus ve Romen Savaşı*, Vol. 3, pp. 116-118; Epanchin, *Operations of General Gurko's Advance Guard in 1877*, pp. 86-93; Greene, *Report on the Russian Army and its Campaigns in Turkey in 1877-1878*, p. 170.

[184] ATASE, ORH. 45/79, 18 July 1877.

[185] Epanchin, *Operations of General Gurko's Advance Guard in 1877*, p. 92.

and ammunition from the village.[186] In fact, before marching from Tırnova, the Russian plan was to attack the pass on both south and north on 17 July. From the Gabrovo side, the Russian troops had already attacked the Shipka, but the Gurko's force could not manage to reach the mouth of the pass before the evening of 17 July. Thus, the Russian forces became ready to attack on 18 July.

Map 4: The Advance of General Gurko



General Gurko started marching on 12 July and managed to reach before the Shipka Pass within just six days. The most important advantage of the Russian army in this successful march was performing the operations without reaction and their attention to conduct operations secretly. Coloned Epanchin confirmed the importance of

[186] To capture provision and ammunition of the Ottomans in Shipka village would offer very suitable conditions for the Russians during the attack on the Shipka Pass. Even that would be one of their rapid successes to capture such a pass that was favorable for defense.

conducting a secret operation and operational problems in the Ottomans. He described the operations:

> Our entry into the plain of the Tundja was secured very cheaply. The Turks had four battalions round Khainkoi, and, no doubt, if they had had time to prepare for defence, we should have had greater losses. And if we remember that at Nova Zagora, not far off, there were several more battalions which could have come to the rescue if they had been warned in time, it is certain that the whole success of our operations might have been endangered. It was only owing to the measures taken to conceal our movements, and the total unexpectedness of our appearance that we got off so cheaply, and were enabled with such slight sacrifices to complete the difficult operation of emerging from the Pass into the plain of the Tundja.[187]

The inefficiency of the Ottomans in reconnaissance and surveillance was also the other, maybe the most important, determinant factor for the Russian success. Due to the fact that the Hainköy Pass was regarded as impassable and the Russian feints around the Elena and Kazgan passages, the Ottomans concentrated on the other passes, and the reconnaissance and surveillance missions were not conducted carefully around the Hainköy Pass.[188]

During those days, the communication of the Ottoman corps was also a big problem due to the lack of telegraph in the Balkan passages except the Shipka Pass. Even though it was reported by the Ottoman investigation commission before the declaration of the war on 1 march that the lack of telegraph would lead to a communication problem, nobody attempted to take a step to prevent a probable communication problem with the Balkan passages.[189]

[187] Epanchin, *Operations of General Gurko's Advance Guard in 1877*, p. 67.

[188] ATASE, ORH. 10/164AA, 16 July 1877.

[189] ATASE, ORH. 96/200AAC, 1 March 1877.

3.4. The Fall of the Shipka Pass

The main target of the Russian army was determined to reach Istanbul rapidly as much as possible. To make this possible, the role of General Gurko's advance guard was crucial, which was to prepare the most suitable atmosphere for the passage of the main body. In this context, the Shipka Pass was the most convenient point to be able to transfer the main body of the Russian army during the marching on Istanbul. It would be possible to transfer a big force with heavy guns. Besides, the pass was located in the middle of the Balkan Mountains, which offers the shortest route for the Russian corps concentrated mainly between Pleven and Ruse.

The Ottomans were aware of the importance of the Balkan passages. The Balkan Mountains was regarded as the second defense line of the empire after the Danube River. Therefore, the Ottomans had tried to strengthen the Balkan passages, especially the Shipka Pass in accordance with the order of Abdülhamid II. To conduct that fortification mission, Halet Pasha was charged as the responsible one for the construction activities in the Balkan passages.[190]

The Ottomans had examined the Balkan passages before the war and prepared a report about them on 1 March 1877. According to this report, there were four passages throughout the Balkan Mountains suitable for a military operation. Among these passages, the Shipka Pass between Gabrovo-Kazanlak and the Kazgan Pass between Bebrovo-Sliven were shown as the primary important ones.[191] The priority of Halet Pasha regarding the Balkan passages coincided with that report. His construction activities were mainly focused around the Shipka and the Kazgan passages.

Although the fortification activities should have started before the war, it could be possible after the declaration of the war. However, there was not enough manpower under Halep Pasha to sustain he activities during that period. Since an army corps was

[190] BOA, İrâde-Dâhiliye (=İ.DH.), 745/60907, 23 Rebiü'l-âhır 1294, [7 May 1877].

[191] ATASE, ORH. 96/200, 1 March 1877.

not organized yet in the south of the Balkan Mountains and the Ottoman forces were concentrated around the *Kale-i Erbaa* and the Danube River, Halet Pasha was faced the problem of time and manpower. In order to solve this problem, it was planned to use all males of the local community except kids and elders in accordance with the order of the Sultan.[192] Based on this request, 12.000 men had been recruited within one week from the Plovdiv and Sliven provinces. Under these conditions, Halet Pasha was expecting to finish the fortification works in 40 days by the help of the local community.[193]

The construction activities were followed by the Sultan himself closely. Albeit one month had passed since the declaration of the war, there was no visible progress in the construction. On 24 May, he sent a telegram to Abdülkerim Nadir Pasha. His orders in this telegram were paying more attention to preparations and organizing a force for the protection of these passages until the main force's arrival.[194] The answer of the commander-in-chief contained his classic complaints about his force's insufficiency in number. According to him, the construction would be finished soon but it would not be possible to send force to locate on the positions by separating a force from his responsibility area. He indicated that the new force should be formed by Istanbul from the other regions such as Sokhumi and Batumi.[195] Therefore, it could not be possible to organize a proper force before the passage of the Russians from the Danube.

The construction activities had finished after two months on 1 July. Since the Russians managed to cross the first Ottoman defense line, the attention of the Ottomans was turned to the Balkan Mountains. After finishing the fortifications, two mountain

[192] BOA, İ.DH, 746/60984, 22 Rebiü'l-âhır 1294, [6 May 1877].

[193] BOA, İ.DH, 746/60994, 10 Cemâziyü'l-evvel 1294, [23 May 1877].

[194] ATASE, ORH. 1/7/617, 24 May 1877.

[195] ATASE, ORH. 1/7/616, 26 May 1877.Although there were more than 100.000 soldiers under his command, he had complained about the inefficiency of this force throughout his tenure. For that reason, he avoided sending reinforcements from those under his command to the Balkan Mountains though the Russian advance.

batteries and four-five battalions were requested for the Shipka Pass.[196] Upon this request, it was reported that three thousand soldiers were prepared to send together cannons on 3 July.[197] On the same days, Mehmed Hulusi Pasha, who also attended the construction activities, and Rasim Pasha were promoted and appointed for the defense of the Balkan passages.[198] The responsibility of the passages on the west of the Shipka Pass was given to Rasim Pasha, on the east between the Shipka and the Kazgan was given to Mehmed Hulusi Pasha.[199]

After the assignment, Mehmed Hulusi Pasha departed from Istanbul on 4 July with the force and equipment that was demanded for the defense of the Shipka Pass.[200] With this first reinforcement, 250 artillery soldiers and two artillery batteries, one mountain battery and one four pounder steel Krupp battery, were sent to the Shipka, and the number of the Shipka garrison was increased to eight infantry battalions.[201]

The forces sent with Mehmed Hulusi Pasha was the last reinforcements for the Shipka Pass. In fact, the Ottomans planned to send more reinforcement to keep this important position. However, there was no time to implement such a plan. For example, approximately 1600 cavalry were recruited from the Selanik, Aydın and Hüdâvendigâr provinces on 12 July for the Shipka Pass.[202] Also, a group that comprised five infantry battalions and military equipment was prepared in Istanbul on 13 July in accordance with the requests of Mehmed Hulusi Pasha and Rasim Pasha.[203] Nevertheless, as

[196] ATASE, ORH. 68/100AAA, 1 July 1877.

[197] ATASE, ORH. 1/7/858, 3 July 1877.

[198] BOA, İ.DH, 750/61234, 21 Cemâziyü'l-âhır 1294, [3 July 1877]; BOA, İ.DH, 750/61278, 22 Cemâziyü'l-âhır 1294, [4 July 1877].

[199] ATASE, ORH. 10/8, 13 July 1877.

[200] ATASE, ORH. 1/7/1287, 4 July 1877; ATASE, ORH. 1/7/1288, 5 July 1877.

[201] ATASE, ORH. 68/104, 5 July 1877.

[202] ATASE, ORH. 71/50, 12 July 1877.

[203] ATASE, ORH. 8/77AB, 13 July 1877.

Rasim Pasha mentioned in his telegram on the eve of the Russian attacks, none of these reinforcements reached the pass.[204] The final arrangement of the Shipka garrison on 14 July, in which General Gurko passed the Hainköy, was reported as six battalions in the pass and four battalions as reserve in Shipka village.[205]

The strategic command problem in the Ottoman army can be seen clearly in this case. The Ottoman army neither conducted a successful deployment before the war nor fixed this mistake in using time. It was clear that the time management of the Ottomans led to big problems especially around the Balkan Mountains because the number in such a wide defense line was not enough to resist the Russian attacks.[206] As a matter of fact, the Ottoman headquarters was aware that the force in the Balkan line would not be enough against the Russians, therefore they firstly aimed to stop them by threatening their rear with a mobile detachment under Ahmed Eyüb Pasha.[207] Secondly, the headquarters sent a column from Omurtag under Saffet Pasha after the Hainköy battle. However, the wrong timing of this precaution prevents the Ottomans exploiting this force during the Balkan defense. Saffet Pasha managed to reach Sliven on 17 July in which the attack of the Russian forces on the Shipka Pass already started.[208] Although Rauf Pasha requested reinforcements on 10 July by indicating especially Saffet Pasha detachment from Omurtag, the multi headed command structure in the Ottoman army prevented to take such a step rapidly. Mahmud Celaleddin Pasha showed the *Serdar-ı Ekrem* Abdülkerim Nadir Pasha as the responsible one who led to a delay in the

[204] ATASE, ORH. 45/72, 15 July 1877.

[205] ATASE, ORH. 51/125, 14 July 1877.

[206] Albeit delays and problems in deployment, the fortification process in the Shipka Pass was finished before the Russian attack and 10 battalions were located for the pass. This force actually could prevent the Russians a while if the Russians attacked on the north. This is because of the defense of the pass organized for the attacks from the north, not from the south. In his report after the occupation of the pass, General Gurko confirmed that their turning movement played a crucial role in their success, otherwise, the occupation of the pass would have caused many casualties. Ali Fuad, *Musavver 1293-1294 Osmanlı-Rus seferi*, Vol. 1, p. 316.

[207] ATASE, ORH. 71/49AB, 9 July 1877.

[208] ATASE, ORH. 10/164, 16 July 1877; ATASE, ORH. 10/164AA, 16 July 1877.

decision-making process because he hesitated to remain force under his command.[209] Consequently, Saffet Pasha could not support the Balkan defense like he failed to protect Tırnova. After his arrival on Sliven, the force of Rauf Pasha reached up to nine infantry battalions, two artillery batteries and 1500 cavalries, and it would not be possible to move this force before 18 July.[210] Under these circumstances the only chance for the defense of the Balkan line the battalions located in the Shipka Pass.

There is no doubt that one of the major reasons for the weak formation of the Balkan defense was the Ottoman headquarters. During these days, the headquarters, consisting of Abdülkerim Nadir Pasha, Redif Pasha and Namık Pasha delayed helping Rauf Pasha in spite of his assistance requests. Their main motivation was that making a serious change in the force formation would lead big troubles on the other positions. Therefore, they had always hesitated to make changes in the deployment of the forces, and this situation caused delay in the decision-making process of the Ottoman army. These pashas were even complaining that they were unable to understand whether moving soldiers from one position to another within their responsibility zone was appropriate or not. After a while, they started to indicate their age and illnesses that prevented them from checking and comprehending the conditions of the troops.[211]

These complaints were enough to understand the reason for the immobility and slowness of the Ottoman army during the war. One of the biggest reasons for Gurko's rapid advance was that he never worried about the safety of his rear because of the immobility of the Ottomans corps. If the reinforcements would have been gathered in the Balkans before the Russian attacks, General Gurko could not advance easily and even he might have to postpone his marching after the Hainköy in order to conduct his operations with the reinforcements. Rauf Pasha indicated that problem and complained about the immobility of the headquarters against the Russians in his telegrams. For

[209] ATASE, ORH. 1/7/908, 10 July 1877; ATASE, ORH. 1/7/909, 10 July 1877.

[210] ATASE, ORH. 8/108, 18 July 1877.

[211] ATASE, ORH. 9/8A, 13 July 1877.

example, he sent a telegram to the Yıldız Palace on 13 July. According to him, if 30 battalions were sent from Shumen, it would have been possible to prevent the Russians and even attack them in the north of the Balkan Mountains.[212]

3.4.1. The Attacks of the Northern Column

After the occupation of Tırnova, the Russian forces were divided into two on 12 July. One of them, composed of 36th infantry regiment, the rest of the 30th Don Cossack and 10 guns, was sent to Gabrovo to attack the Shipka Pass from the north on 17 July. The other detachment, under General Gurko moved to Hainköy Pass for making a turning movement. The main plan of General Gurko was to reach the southern slopes of the Shipka Pass on 17 July and start a simultaneous attack from the south and north.[213]

The vanguard of the Gabrovo column, consisting four cavalry companies, had been already sent before these two detachment departed from Tırnova. The pioneers reached Gabrovo on 11 July and started preparations, repairing roads and bridges, by using all eligible men around Gabrovo.[214] After the arrival of the main body of the Gabrovo column under Major-General Derojinski on 13 July, he focused on patrols to determine how to attack. On 15 July, a reconnaissance team was sent to Mount Berdek. They managed to seize the entry of Berdek mountain, but they were stopped by an Ottoman battalion and retreated to get reinforcements. On the morning of July 16, two companies were sent as reinforcement, however, the plan of threatening the pass on 16 July was postponed to the next morning with the main body. Although withdrawn of

[212] ATASE, ORH. 10/8, 13 July 1877.

[213] Greene, *Report on the Russian Army and its Campaigns in Turkey in 1877-1878*, p. 168; Daily News, *The War Correspondence of the Daily News 1877*, p. 257.

[214] ATASE, ORH. 8/77, 12 July 1877.

the Russian column from the Berdek, they managed to provide important information about the Ottoman position in the Pass.[215]

Even though General Gurko was planning to reach the Shipka Pass on 17 July, he delayed because of Uflani and Kazanlak battles and the long marching. For that reason, the Gabrovo force started the attack on 17 July without cooperation with Gurko's detachment. General Mirsky took the command of the Gabrovo force to conduct the main attack on 17 July. He divided his forces into three columns. The right column which comprised four companies and four guns was to advance Zeleno-Drevo line and attack the Bald Mountain ridge (Aykırıcebel) in order to shell the Turkish position at the St. Nicholas. The center column that included four companies and no artillery would follow the main road to draw the attention of the Ottoman force in the Shipka Pass. The left column with two companies was to follow the forest road to keep the left of the center column and attack on the Shipka. In addition, On the far left, there were three companies and 300 Cossacks with two guns which were sent to attack Berdek Mountain the day before.[216]

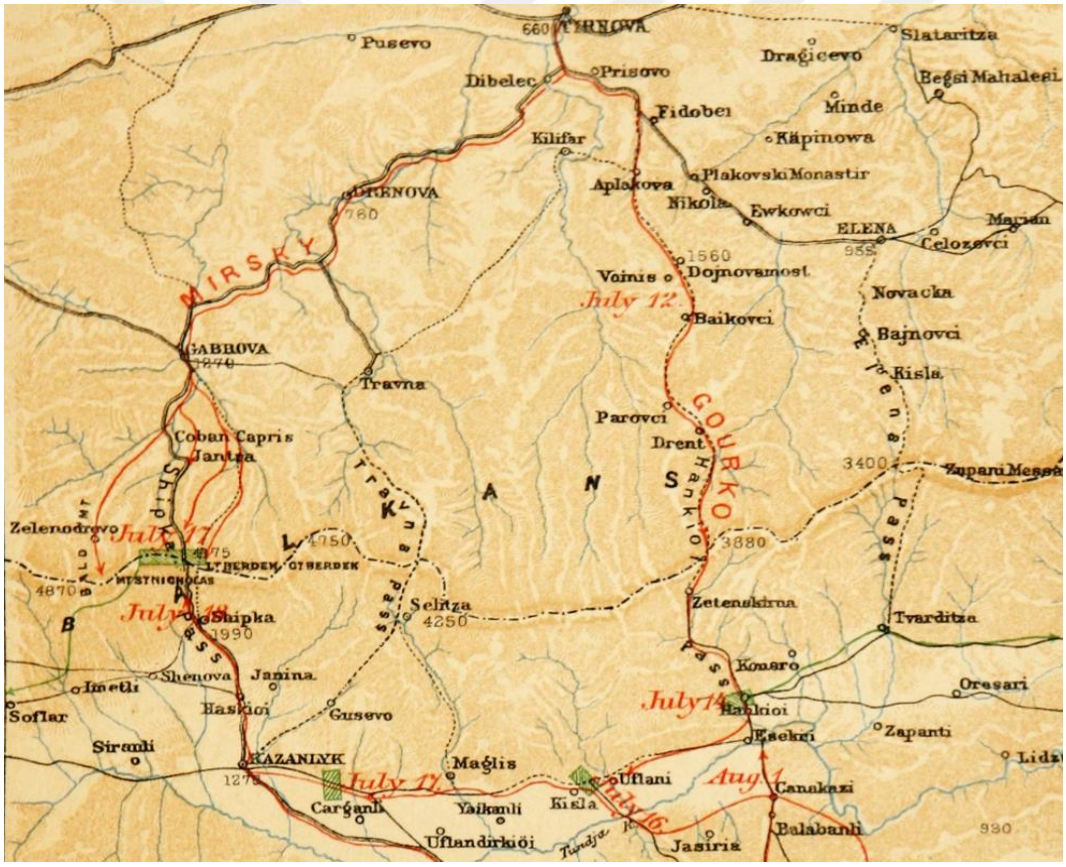
The left column missed its way and reached skirmishers of the Ottoman position on the northern hills of Shipka Mountain at 14:00. The struggle for advance continued for two hours, However, because of the fire superiority of the Ottomans, the column was heavily outnumbered, and even most of the company officers were wounded. They began to retreat by leaving five out of their six officers and 115 out of 320 men dead at 16:00. The center column followed the road and ascended the first outpost of the Ottomans at 14:00. The firing continued till the sunset, but the Russians could not advance due to a strong defense that was based on the heights. The right column reached the after a long march. They had to retreat after a few artillery shouts because their guns were out of range. The only successful movement for the Russians on 17 July was the attack of the column on the extreme left. This column attacked on the

[215] Epanchin, *Operations of General Gurko's Advance Guard in 1877*, pp. 96-98.

[216] Greene, *Report on the Russian Army and its Campaigns in Turkey in 1877-1878*, p. 171; Epanchin, *Operations of General Gurko's Advance Guard in 1877*, pp. 99-100. *see* map 5.

entrenchments of the Berdek and obliged the Ottomans to retire. However, because of the other column's failure, they fall back to Gabrovo during the night. The Russian casualties throughout the day was 205 men.[217] Consequently, the Russian attack on 17 July resulted with failure rapidly. This attack might have been successful if it was organized with the participation of both forces simultaneously, but there was no connection between the northern and southern columns. When the Gabrovo column retreated on the evening of 17 July, the main body of General Gurko detachment was newly arrived the outskirts of the Shipka.

Map 5: The Advance of the Russian Columns on the Shipka Pass[218]



[217] Greene, *Report on the Russian Army and its Campaigns in Turkey in 1877-1878*, p. 172; Epanchin, *Operations of General Gurko's Advance Guard in 1877*, pp. 102-105.

[218] Francis Vinton Greene, *Atlas: Report on the Russian Army and its Campaigns in Turkey in 1877-1878*, (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1879), Plate 9.

3.4.2. The Attacks of General Gurko's Column

On 17 July, the cavalry sotnias of General Gurko detachment that was sent to Shipka village after the occupation of Kazanlak, captured an Ottoman pack train, comprising 90 wagons, near the village. Although General Gurko could not attack the pass simultaneously with the Gabrovo column at the predetermined time, the success of his cavalry in preventing ammunition and provision to reach the pass paved the way for them to be successful in the Shipka Pass without facing a remarkable resistance. The pack train was the last chance of the Shipka garrison because they did not have enough provision and ammunition to sustain fighting.[219]

The captured pack train was organized in Plovdiv and departed on 13 July without separating a guard for the protection of the load except for one gendarmerie. The advance of the convoy was too slow to reach the pass in time. It had managed to reach Shipka village in four days. This delay offered a big chance to the Russians, and they took possession of more than 80 of the wagons. The Ottomans could carry only 7-8 of the wagons with the help of the soldiers sent from the pass to encounter the pack train.[220] It was obvious that the next target of the Russian army would be the Balkan Mountains. However, it had been more than 20 days since the Russians passed from the Danube and three days from the Hainköy, the Ottomans did not supply the needs of the Shipka Pass in time.

General Gurko was aware that it was not possible to defend the pass under the present circumstances. Thus, on the morning of 18 July, he sent a letter to Mehmed Hulusi Pasha suggesting surrender but received no answer. Thereupon, He started the attack by forwarding the 13th and 15th rifle battalions and two companies Cossacks. The rifle battalions, guided by two Bulgarians who knew the area well, departed at 8 o'clock in the morning and reached the Berdek heights. From that position to St Nicholas Mountain there was about two km distance. After the column reached the hill, Colonel

[219] ATASE, ORH. 99/138AJ, nd.

[220] BOA, Yıldız Resmi Maruzat (=Y.A.RES), 3/13/4-5, 7 Cemâziyü'l-evvel 1296, [29 April 1879].

Khinautovich, the commander of the column, sent patrols to the Ottoman positions. The Ottomans had four camps on the Shipka Pass, and held attachments that had a connection to these camps. The Colonel intended to attack one of these heights which were at a distance of about 500 meters. It was planned to attack with the 13th rifle battalion from the front and the 15th battalion from the flank. The aim of the Colonel was to move on to capture the eastern heights that had a connection with Mount St. Nicholas.[221] As soon as the Russian column appeared, the Ottomans started artillery fire on enemy soldiers who were descending to the heights. However, the advance of the Russians continued until reaching the foothills of St. Nicholas Mountain. During the clash of the Russian and the Ottoman forces, a white flag was displayed from the Ottoman positions. A group of Turkish officers including German military attaché Major Lignitz came down for parley. They declared that their commander was to surrender under certain conditions. However, during the negotiations, the Ottomans opened a heavy fire on Russian forces who left from their entrenchments.[222] Although this incident was regarded as treachery to gain time, the real reason for the attack might be the changes in the Russian positions. The movements of the Russian soldiers were likely misunderstood by the Ottomans forces and they opened fire.[223]

After the Turkish fire, the Russian troops gathered, and the attack was resumed. The battalions managed to advance about 300 meters to Mount St. Nicholas, but there were no reserves or artillery to deal with the Ottomans. Therefore, the Ottoman forces managed to hold the right flank of the rifle battalions, and this forced the Russians to retreat.[224] In fact, this was not proposed as a real attack by General Gurko, instead, it was planned to create a diversion in favor of the real attack which would be conducted simultaneously. There was no artillery with the Russian force which marched to St

[221] Epanchin, *Operations of General Gurko's Advance Guard in 1877*, pp. 106-110.

[222] Ibid., pp. 110-111.

[223] Ollier, *Illustrated History of the Russo-Turkish War*, Vol. 1, p. 334.

[224] Epanchin, *Operations of General Gurko's Advance Guard in 1877*, pp. 111-112.

Nicholas Mountain. General Gurko had only 5 battalions before the Shipka Pass, and he only used half of them during the attacks that took place on 18th July.[225]

On the evening of July 18, Gurko sent a report to the Russian headquarters and asked for reinforcement. He was planning to capture the Shipka Pass on 19 July at any price because of a probable Turkish attack through the railway line in Nova Zagora.[226] He was also sent a letter to Mehmed Hulusi Pasha on the same evening. In this letter Gurko was suggesting surrender again, otherwise, he said that all of his soldiers would be killed. Mehmed Hulusi Pasha considered this letter as an opportunity for retreat. He sent an officer to General Gurko in the morning of 19 July to gain time to carry out his plan.[227]

The Ottomans soldiers had been fighting since 16 July with the Gurko's force. They lost many men and had limited ammunition and provision. In fact, the Ottomans built warehouses in the pass and in the village which were large enough to meet the necessities of the Ottoman detachment for two months each. Although it had been one month since the construction of these warehouses finished, nobody attempted to send provision and ammunition. Besides, the last chance of the Shipka garrison, the pack train, was captured by the Russians around Shipka village, which meant only three-or four-days provision left.[228]

For Mehmed Hulusi Pasha, it would not be possible to continue fighting with his psychologically exhausted soldiers under these circumstances. In his letter, Mehmed Hulusi Pasha declared his full acceptance of the surrender proposal. It was planned that surrender was to take place at noon of that day. General Gurko waited in Shipka village till the predetermined time. However, there was no sign from the Ottoman forces. A group was sent to the pass to ascertain what was going on, and they found

[225] Epanchin, *Operations of General Gurko's Advance Guard in 1877*, p. 106.

[226] Ibid., p. 115.

[227] ATASE, ORH. 6/146, 22 July 1877; ATASE, ORH. 6/146A, 22 July 1877.

[228] BOA, Y.A.RES, 3/13/4, 7 Cemâziyü'l-evvel 1296, [29 April 1879].

the Turkish positions entirely abandoned. At the same time, General Skobelev reached the pass from Gabrovo with his troops to perform the attack plan on 19 July. It appeared that the pass was abandoned early in the morning, and they detained the Russians by pretending to surrender. To follow the retreating force, Gurko sent a cavalry column to Kalofer. This column managed to capture a few hundred prisoners, but the rest of the Ottoman forces succeeded in withdrawing towards Çırpan and Plovdiv.[229]

According to the report from Mehmed Hulusi Pasha, the Ottoman loss in the first Shipka battle was about 300 dead.[230] On the other hand, the Russian loss was about 233 dead in the Gurko detachment,[231] 77 dead and 122 wounded in the Gabrovo column.[232] During the operations around the Balkan passages, the Russian army took 800 captives and seized 13 guns.[233] One of the main missions of the Gurko's advance guard was accomplished by capturing the Shipka Pass on 19 July. Just within eight days from leaving Tırnova and 16 days from Svishtov, he managed to gain the possession of important Balkan passages, dispersed about 10.000 men, seized 11 guns and a large quantity of ammunition, clothing and provisions.[234]

Consequently, the Balkan defense had fallen due to strategic command problems in the Ottoman army that started at the planning stage of the war and continued afterward. The headquarters made many strategic mistakes. Even though it was planned before the war to constitute a separate army corps for the Balkans, this would not be possible

[229] Epanchin, *Operations of General Gurko's Advance Guard in 1877*, p. 117-121.

[230] ATASE, ORH. 6/146A, 22 July 1877.

[231] Epanchin, *Operations of General Gurko's Advance Guard in 1877*, p. 105, 112.

[232] Greene, *Report on the Russian Army and its Campaigns in Turkey in 1877-1878*, p. 172; Epanchin, *Operations of General Gurko's Advance Guard in 1877*, pp. 102-104.

[233] Epanchin, *Operations of General Gurko's Advance Guard in 1877*, pp. 128-128.

[234] Greene, *Report on the Russian Army and its Campaigns in Turkey in 1877-1878*, p. 174. The Shipka garrison had to leave their guns behind while retreating. These guns would be used efficiently by the Russians against the Balkan corps during the second Shipka battle.

until the arrival of Süleyman Hüsnü Pasha. For that reason, Abdülkerim Nadir Pasha had commanded the army like that the Balkan Mountains was not under his responsibility. He had always hesitated to separate a force from his corps to protect the Balkans. Under these circumstances, conducting important tasks such as supplying the needs of the Balkan corps could not be implemented in time. The biggest advantage of General Gurko during his operations was the strategic organization and command problems in the Ottoman army. He managed to benefit from these problems and deactivate the Shipka defense, which was based on the attacks from the north, by totally defusing the defense formation with a turning movement. Capturing the strategic Balkan passages was an important gain for the Russian army. The effect of the fall of the Shipka Pass especially would be seen in the second stage of the battles in which Mehmed Ali Pasha and Süleyman Pasha appeared on the Danubian front.

3.5. The Russian Advance after the First Shipka Battle

The plan of General Gurko after capturing the Shipka Pass was to continue advancing on the south of the Balkan Mountains. However, his force had not rested since the beginning of the operations from Tırnova on 12 July. For that reason, the advance guard bivouacked in Kazanlak after 12 July to rest and to be reinforced. Meanwhile, General Gurko focused on his operation plan to be conducted in the next few days. Albeit his enthusiasm to advance, as mentioned before, Grand Duke Nicholas had different opinion on moving further from the Balkan Mountains. The success of Osman Pasha on Pleven,[235] that was considered as a big threat in the Russian right flank, led him to move cautiously. Nevertheless, Gurko was always keen to move further as much as possible and use the advantage of time against the Ottomans forces

[235] The war plan of the Russian Empire was based on reaching Istanbul as much as possible. However, "the second plevna had an indisputably damping effect on the Russian offensive spirit. The Grand Duke immediately went over to the strategic defensive, while the tsar declared a new mobilization of divisions, including five army, two cavalry, three guards, and two grenadiers, for a total reinforcement of 110.000 men. Nevertheless, the arrival of these reserves would require time." Menning, *Bayonets before Bullets: The Imperial Russian* Army, p. 64.

because he was aware of the impending Ottoman reinforcements which would stand against him soon. According to him, it would be a sin not to exploit the success. The Ottomans had been defeated in the south of the Balkan Mountains, and they were not in a position to protect themselves at that moment.[236] He set out his opinions in this context clearly:

> If we stay where we are, we shall accomplish nothing, nay, we shall risk losing everything. The Turks will recover from their panic, collect their scattered forces, receive reinforcements by train, realize how we are, and reassuming the offensive with greatly increased number, drive us from the valley of the Tundja. On the other hand, if we at once continue the offensive, we stand a chance of dealing the enemy further blows, and in any case shall be able to drive them further from the passes and so gain time.[237]

In this regard, General Gurko prepared an attack plan, which was based on detaining the advance of Süleyman Pasha. Thereby, he aimed to "rout the Turkish detachments in the valley of the Maritza, increase the prevailing panic, clear the valley of the Maritza of the Turks and keep them as far as impossible from the passages".[238] Nevertheless, the answer of Grand Duke was skeptical regarding such an advance. Thus, the headquarters allowed him just moving cautiously, in other words, did not give him full freedom in his next operations. The order of the headquarter was that:

> Until it becomes clear what result the advance of the enemy from Plevna will liaxe, the Grand Duke thinks it necessary that your Excellency should not move your infantry beyond Kazanlak and in case thing's turn out badly, should hold yourself in readiness to occupy the pass with your infantry…In consequence of the failure at Plevna not only was the passage of the Balkans by the army deferred indefinitely, but there was the possibility that things might get still worse at Plevna, in which case it would be imperative for the infantry of the force to hold the pass itself. It was also known that Suleiman Pasha was on the march. For these reasons, and also because of his being categorically forbidden to move his infantry beyond

[236] Epanchin, *Operations of General Gurko's Advance Guard in 1877*, pp. 130-137.

[237] Ibid., pp. 138-139.

[238] Ibid., pp. 139-140.

> Kazanlak, he was forced to give up the idea of advancing to meet Suleiman.[239]

The main reason for allowing just cavalry in the south instead of infantry was likely to be able to retreat easily in case of a probable threat and to conduct reconnaissance and surveillance activities properly. After bivouacking in Tırnova for 3 days, the advance guard resumed the offensive by following the orders of the Grand Duke. Firstly, General Gurko sent two cavalry vanguards, one to the Karapınar (Gılıbovo) station, a branch of the Yambol railway, and the other to the Kayadcık station of the Plovdiv railroad. The mission of these detachments was to gather information as much as possible and destroy the railroad and telegraph. On 23 July, these two columns proceeded and executed the orders. Besides destroying the transportation and communication lines, these two also gathered important information about the Ottomans, that the Ottoman troops were on their way from Edirne and concentrating around the Karapınar station. Secondly, on 25 July, General Gurko sent a detachment on Stara Zagora. After capturing the city, the detachment continued reconnaissance toward Nova Zagora. It was learned that there were Ottoman troops in Nova Zagora.[240]

As mentioned before, Rauf Pasha, the commander of the Balkan corps, had remained immobile in Sliven and waited for reinforcement, that was sent from Omurtag, during the first Shipka Battle. Despite the reinforcements reached on 17 July and were ready to advance on the Russian forces, the Shipka Pass was already about to fall on 18 July. For that reason, the force under Rauf Pasha was appointed to Nova Zagora by the *Meclis-i Askerî* (military council). The mission given to Rauf Pasha was similar to the mission of General Gurko. He was commissioned for moving without taking a risk, determining the enemy forces as much as possible and ensuring the security of Nova Zagora until Süleyman Pasha arrived.[241] However, Rauf Pasha could not obtain any significant information about the Russian forces. While General Gurko's cavalry had

[239] Epanchin, *Operations of General Gurko's Advance Guard in 1877*, pp. 148-149.

[240] Greene, *Report on the Russian Army and its Campaigns in Turkey in 1877-1878*, p. 177-178.

[241] ATASE, ORH. 10/38, 17 July 1877.

been operating at many positions in the south, Rauf Pasha did not intend to use his cavalry force that consisted of about 20000 mounted soldiers.

Upon the information obtained by the vanguards, General Gurko noticed that the Ottomans were in overwhelming numbers, but he was unwilling to abandon the south of the Balkans. Gurko was assuming that Pleven would soon fall and after that, he would receive the reinforcements. It was necessary to play for time by operating to delay Süleyman Pasha's preparations as much as possible. Therefore, to take advantage of the unprepared conditions of the Ottoman forces, he planned to hit the right flank of the Balkan corps in Nova Zagora by using infantry as well.[242] In consequence of these considerations, Gurko asked permission of commander-in-chief Nicholas on 28 July and Grand Duke authorized him full liberty to act as he thought fit.[243]

Gurko ordered to proceed on Yeni-Zağra in three columns on 29 July. The right column was composed of the Bulgarian legion, three regiments cavalry and two artillery batteries moved from Stara Zagora. The central column consisting of the rifle brigade, a regiment of Cossacks and four artillery batteries started from Kazanlak accompanied by Gurko himself. The left column marched from Hainköy with five infantry battalions, some Cossacks and two artillery batteries.[244] Both the center and the left columns were able to reach Nova Zagora on 30 July, but the right column had been confronted with the Ottoman forces which were marching on Stara Zagora. Thus, without waiting the left and the center columns attacked the city simultaneously.[245]

While General Gurko was performing his maneuver to Nova Zagora, the Balkan corps under Süleyman Pasha had been conducting a similar operation on Stara Zagora with

[242] Epanchin, *Operations of General Gurko's Advance Guard in 1877*, pp. 172-174.

[243] Ibid., pp. 178-179.

[244] Daily News, *The War Correspondence of the Daily News 1877*, p. 274.

[245] Maurice, *The Russo-Turkish War*, p. 135.

three columns.[246]One of these columns departed from Nova Zagora towards Stara Zagora under Rauf Pasha. Thereby, the Russian left column encountered the Rauf Pasha detachment on the way between these two cities.[247] Before departing, Rauf Pasha left three infantry battalions, approximately 500 cavalries and two artillery batteries in Nova Zagora. These troops were mainly composed of reserves, as well as did not have adequate equipment and ammunition. The defense of the city was concentrated around the railway station. However, they were not able to resist the superior Russian columns, flanking the city from two directions. After skirmishing for a while, because of being surrounded and being under superior enemy fire, the Turkish detachment had to pull back.[248]

[246] The operations of the Ottomans on the Gurko's forces on the South of the Balkan Mountains will be detailed in Chapter 4.

[247] Greene, *Report on the Russian Army and its Campaigns in Turkey in 1877-1878*, p. 179.

[248] Sedes, *1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus ve Romen Savaşı*, Vol. 5, pp. 64-68; Süer, *1877-1878 Osmanlı Rus Harbi Rumeli Cephesi*, p. 187.

CHAPTER 4

THE COUNTEROFFENSIVE OF THE OTTOMAN ARMY ON THE SHIPKA PASS (JULY-OCTOBER)

"Every art has its rules and maxims.
One must study them: theory facilitates practice.
The lifetime of one man is not enough to enable
him to acquire perfect knowledge and experience.
Theory helps to supplement it,
it provides a youth with premature experience and
makes him skillful through the mistakes of others."[249]
Frederick II

4.1. Süleyman Pasha in the Balkans: Operations of the Ottoman Army prior to the Shipka Attacks

The rapid advance of the Russian army throughout the Danubian Front without obstacles led to a panic atmosphere in Istanbul. Edirne had been regarded as the gate of Istanbul was jeopardized. The immobility of the Ottoman army against the Russians increased the tension of the Ottoman decision-makers. Sultan Abdülhamid II was showing his concern by accusing the headquarters, namely *Serdar-ı Ekrem* Abdülkerim Nadir Pasha and *Serasker* Redif Pasha, because the main reason for the Russian advance was considered as the immobility of the Ottoman forces. The Sultan stated that the Turkish Empire would fall to the level of the Khanate of Bukhara if Edirne was occupied.[250] For that reason, to change the immobility of the army, it was

[249] United States Air Force, *Air Force Basic Doctrine: Document 1*, 17 November 2003, p. 19.

[250] Ahmed Mithat Efendi, *Zübdetü'l-Hakāyık*, ed. Ömer Faruk Can, (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 2015), pp. 204-205. Buharaya dipnot ver ansiklopediden

planned to make arrangements in the command echelon. Both Abdülkerim Nadir Pasha and Redif Pasha were dismissed and Mehmed Ali Pasha and Süleyman Pasha were assigned to the Danubian front. The contemplation was to deal with the Russians with the help of Osman Pasha, Mehmed Ali Pasha and Süleyman Pasha. In this regard, the responsibility of driving back General Gurko from the south of the Balkan Mountains was given to Süleyman Hüsnü Pasha, who was the commander of the Ottoman forces in Montenegro and Herzegovina, and summoned to Edirne with his force, at the beginning of July 1877.

It was planned to transfer 44 battalions, more than 16.000 soldiers,[251] from Montenegro by sea. Right after his appointment on 3 July, Süleyman Pasha organized his force for transportation and assembled it in Antivari on 11 July. Although the troops were ready to be transferred to Dedeağaç on that day, their departure could be possible after 13 July due to the delay of the ships. The first part of the troops was sent on 13 July, arrived on 19, and the second on 15 July, arrived on 21 July.[252]

When Süleyman Pasha was assigned on 3 July, the General Gurko had been marching on Tırnova. However, the atmosphere, in which he arrived in the Balkans, was totally different. Therefore, as indicated by the telegram of *Serasker* Mahmud Celaleddin Pasha on 21 July, his mission, as the commander of the Balkan corps, was to firstly prevent the advance of the Russian forces, secondly retrieve the Balkan passages in order to not allow the Russians to assembly in the Balkans and threaten Osman Pasha and Ahmed Eyüb Pasha corps. According to Mahmud Celaleddin Pasha, this mission was the most important duty to ensure the security of the empire.[253]

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[251] Süleyman Hüsnü Paşa, *Umdetü'l-Hakāyık*, Vol. 2, p. 25.

[252] Sedes, *1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus ve Romen Savaşı*, Vol. 5, p. 30.

[253] "Düşmanın Balkanalara ziyâde kuvvet cem‘ itmesine ve Osman ve Ahmed Eyüb Paşa fırkaları üzerine kuvve'-i külliye ile sarkmasına meydan virmemek içün Balkanın bu cihetinde ve üstünde bulunan düşmanın serî‘an def‘ ve tenkîli be-havlillâhi te‘âlâ devlet ve milletin selâmetini te'mîn ve istihsâl idecek muvakkiyât-ı celîlenin en birincisi olub bu da hakcelle ve alî-i hazretlerinin nusret ve inâyet-i ilâhiyyesine ve rûhâniyet-i seniyye-i hazret-i peygamberînin imdâd ve i‘ânesine tevessülen uhde-i aliyyelerine tevdî kılındı." ATASE, ORH. 6/137, 21 July 1877.

After the battalions reached Dedeağaç, they were firstly forwarded to Edirne and then to Karapınar (Gılıbovo)[254] by trains.[255] Karapınar was regarded as the assembly location of the Balkan corps due to its close range to Stara Zagora and Nova Zagora. Most of the troops had been transferred to Karapınar within three days. On 25 July, Süleyman Pasha reached Karapınar.[256]

As mentioned before, during these days, the only noteworthy force in the south against the Russian force was under the command of Rauf Pasha. After the passage of General Gurko through the Balkan Mountains, this force was dispatched to Nova Zagora by *Meclis-i Askerî*. Their mission was assigned as determining the enemy forces and ensuring the security of Nova Zagora until Süleyman Pasha arrived.[257] Besides, there were about eight battalions of Mehmed Hulusi Pasha in Çırpan.[258] To unite all forces and to prepare a plan for the further movements, Rauf Pasha and Süleyman Pasha met in Radnevo station between Karapınar and Nova Zagora on 27 July. In this meeting, it was decided to take back Stara Zagora and Kazanlak firstly, since most of the Russian forces concentrated in these cities. In the second stage of the plan, the Balkan corps

[254] The Karapınar station was a branch of the Yambol railway. It was possible to reach Yambol by following the Edirne-Harmanlı-Karapınar-Yenizağra destination.

[255] Sedes, *1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus ve Romen Savaşı*, Vol. 5, pp. 42-44. A Daily News correspondent accompanied the Ottoman army in edirne was describing the atmosphere and his impression about Süleyman Pasha as "July 24th.—The hero of the hour in European Turkey at this crisis of the country's danger is, without doubt, the victor of Montenegro, Suleiman Pacha…I am glad to find, in an interview with Suleiman Pacha himself, this will not be the case...He was in the midst of soldiers encamped on the northern outskirts of the city near the old palace of the Sultans of Adrianople, which was until very recently the pride and boast of the place. Now it is in rapid progress of demolition, the materials as I write being carted away to aid in the fortifications around, which are fast being raised. Some fifty battalions are already collected here, the grass on the river's bank forming their bed, and the clear summer's sky above their only covering. The General is hardly forty years old, a man of middle height, and for a wonder not inclined to corpulency, as appears to be the almost invariable effect of high command in Turkey. To look at his fair complexion, sandy beard and whiskers, and his grey eyes, one would almost imagine oneself in the presence of a migratory Scotchman bent upon amassing wealth in a foreign land, and that pure English with an unmistakable accent would proceed from out of his mouth; but no such phenomenon, unluckily for me, occurred, and instead the conversation was carried on in French." Daily News, *The War Correspondence of the Daily News 1877*, pp. 275-276.

[256] Sedes, *1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus ve Romen Savaşı*, Vol. 5, pp. 49-50.

[257] ATASE, ORH. 10/38, 17 July 1877.

[258] This was the force withdrawn from the Shipka Pass to Plovdiv on 19 July.

would advance on the Balkan passages after taking back Stara Zagora and Kazanlak. If the plan could be conducted successfully, the next step would be attacking Tırnova simultaneously with Mehmed Ali Pasha and Osman Pasha forces. According to Süleyman Pasha, to carry out this plan, the support of Mehmed Ali Pasha and Osman Pasha by threatening the rear of the Russians around the Balkan Mountains.[259]

In this regard, on 29 July the Balkan corps moved on Stara Zagora in three columns. Rauf Pasha on the right from Nova Zagora with 12 infantry battalions and more than 3000 Circassian irregular cavalry, Mehmed Hulusi Pasha on the left from Çırpan with seven infantry battalions and on the center Süleyman Pasha himself from Karapınar with 42 infantry battalions and about 500 cavalries. It was planned to unite all these columns on 30 July near Stara Zagora before starting the offensive.[260]

Following the meeting in Radnevo, Rauf Pasha left three battalions for the protection in Nova Zagora and started to advance on Stara Zagora accompanying about 10.000 soldiers. Even though this was a remarkable number, most of them were reserves and they did not have enough equipment and ammunition. Rauf Pasha had already been complaining about the ability of his force.[261] Under these conditions, this column should have arrived at Arabacıköy (Kolarovo) near Stara Zagora which was ascertained as the meeting point with Süleyman pasha forces.[262]

While the Ottomans were marching on Stara Zagora, the Russians, on the other hand, marching in the opposite direction to capture Nova Zagora. Both operations had

[259] ATASE, ORH. 94/2ADA, 28 July 1877; ATASE, ORH. 94/2AF, 28 July 1877.

[260] Süleyman Hüsnü Paşa, *Umdetü'l-Hakāyık*, Vol. 2, p. 6.

[261] According to Rauf Pasha the troops under his command consisted of mainly reserve soldiers and were not eligible to carry out successful operations. Therefore, he remained inactive against the Russian movements in the south of the Balkan Mountains and the reconnaissance and surveillance activities, which was essential to determine the strength of the Russian forces for the movement of the Balkan corps, were not conducted properly. Even, he asked for permission to retreat to Edirne from Yenizagra to assemble with the Balkan corps. Yet, abandoning such an important transportation point was not allowed by the military council, and ordered him to stay in Yenizagra until Süleyman Pasha arrived. Sedes, *1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus ve Romen Savaşı*, Vol. 5, pp. 44-47.

[262] Ibid., p. 53.

coincided with each other. The march of Rauf Pasha was stopped by the Russian column under prince Nikolai Leuchtenberg departed from Stara Zagora on 29 July. Because of this reason, he could not arrive at the meeting point and missed the chance to unite with Süleyman Pasha. Some of the Leuchtenberg column was turned back to Stara Zagora due to the information about Süleyman Pasha column's advance at the end of the day. Yet, the remaining force managed to keep Rauf Pasha around Curanlı (Kalitinovo), 11 km away from the meeting point with Süleyman Pasha, because he did not know the number of the enemy and had not intended to move without caution.[263] Thus, Süleyman Pasha had to attack Stara Zagora without Rauf Pasha detachment, and he would be under threat from General Gurko who had been performing an operation in the rear of Rauf Pasha. Meanwhile, Gurko was attacking Nova Zagora. After the occupation of the city, he received information that his right column had faced Rauf Pasha near Stara Zagora, and Süleyman Pasha was advancing on Stara Zagora. Therefore, he decided to move against the Ottoman forces that drove back to Curanlı.[264]

On the morning of 31 July, General Gurko moved on Curanlı by following the main road between Stara Zagora and Nova Zagora. But the road was under the fire of the Ottomans positioned at Curanlı. In order to make a feint, Leuchtenberg sent a force to demonstrate against the left flank of the Ottomans and subsequently sent a force on the right.[265] The Ottomans managed to resist the first attack with the help of their position but being under fire from the left flank broke the resistance ability of the Ottomans. In addition, they had been fighting for three days with the Russians and used most of their limited ammunition. Thus, after a while, they had to dilute artillery fire, which enabled Russians to intensify fire and surround the Ottomans. At 2 o'clock afternoon, the demoralized Ottomans were at the end of their patience and withdrew in the direction of Nova Zagora. General Gurko could exploit the retreat of the Rauf

[263] Sedes, *1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus ve Romen Savaşı*, Vol. 5, pp. 62-66.

[264] Epanchin, *Operations of General Gurko's Advance Guard in 1877*, pp. 231-232.

[265] Greene, *Report on the Russian Army and its Campaigns in Turkey in 1877-1878*, p. 181.

Pasha force and destroy them. However, his fear of Süleyman Pasha, who was attacking Stara Zagora and would be big trouble for the Gurko detachment, prevented him from the pursuit. The price of the Curanlı battle for the Russians was 430 rank and file, whereas the Ottomans suffered about 2200 casualties.[266]

During the Curanlı Battle, Süleyman Pasha was attacking Stara Zagora. He started the attack at 8 in the morning through the two roads reaching the city from the south and west. The only Russian force in Stara Zagora was six battalions of the Bulgarian legion.[267] The Ottomans forwarded the city in three columns. Firstly, Veysel Pasha and Recep Pasha brigades attacked simultaneously on the right and left. The Bulgarian Legion had attempted to hold the line against the superior number of the Ottomans. They had the advantage of being positioned under well-covered entrenchments surrounded by gardens and the rugged terrain, nevertheless, no reinforcements reached to change the course of the battle. Thus, right after the Ottomans moved the remaining brigades on the action, the Bulgarian Legion had to retreat towards Kazanlak.[268]

As soon as defeating the Rauf pasha force in Curanlı, the advance guard moved on Stara Zagora. The Hussars sent for patrols reported that Stara Zagora was captured by superior Ottoman forces, which meant that a big danger for his forces. Besides, he did not have enough ammunition to challenge the Ottomans. For that reason, he decided to abandon the south of the Balkan Mountains through the Hainköy Pass.[269]

Although Süleyman Pasha achieved one of his main missions by driving the Russian forces, the military gains of this success were not significant because they defeated just a small portion of the Russian force in Stara Zagora and was not able to follow the rest of the Russians under General Gurko. Even they did not take a notable step to chase the Bulgarian Legion driven back from Stara Zagora. Süleyman Pasha should

[266] Süer, *1877-1878 Osmanlı Rus Harbi Rumeli Cephesi*, pp. 192-5.

[267] Greene, *Report on the Russian Army and its Campaigns in Turkey in 1877-1878*, p. 181.

[268] Süer, *1877-1878 Osmanlı Rus Harbi Rumeli Cephesi*, pp. 199-201.

[269] Epanchin, *Operations of General Gurko's Advance Guard in 1877*, pp. 272-276.

have based his plan on destroying the Russian forces by hindering their retreat. His position in Stara Zagora was fairly suitable for pursuit. However, they remained inactive for days in Stara Zagora.[270]

Most probably, the reason for Süleyman Pasha's inactivity was the lack of a qualified cavalry force. Certainly, one of the biggest problems in the Ottoman army during the Ottoman-Russian War of 1877-1878 was that the army had no qualified cavalry both in numbers and capability. The Balkan corps was mainly composed of infantry, whereas the remarkable part of the General Gurko force was strong cavalry units such as Hussars and Cossacks. Under these conditions, it was not possible to accuse Süleyman Pasha of not considering pursuit. If he had a capable cavalry force during that period, he would have probably destroyed most of the Russian forces who did not have enough ammunition to deal with Süleyman Pasha. These missed chances would be big trouble for Süleyman Pasha while attacking the Shipka Pass because most of these forces, especially Bulgarians, were appointed for the protection of the Shipka Pass.

During the Curanlı battle, Rauf Pasha had waited for the help from Süleyman Pasha for a long time. He knew that he was around the battle zone, but there was no sign from Süleyman Pasha even though he sent a couple of Circassian soldiers to Süleyman Pasha for seeking assistance. The Circassian cavalries could not reach Süleyman Pasha in time. They managed to find him in Stara Zagora on 31 July, that is to say, in which there was no hope in Curanlı for the Rauf Pasha forces. Although the gunshots were heard by a brigade of Süleyman Pasha on the morning of 31 July, they did not care about these sounds and continued marching on Stara Zagora considering that the main Russian force was there.[271] This coordination problem would cause an increase in the divergence among Rauf Pasha and Süleyman Pasha. Besides, it led to a change in the main operation plan of the Ottoman forces which was moving on Kazanlak and the Shipka Pass after Stara Zagora, which had a big impact on the course of the war. From

[270] Epanchin, *Operations of General Gurko's Advance Guard in 1877*, p. 271.

[271] Sedes, *1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus ve Romen Savaşı*, Vol. 5, pp. 84-85.

this point on, every incident around the Balkan Mountains would be affected by the consequences of the coordination problem of the Ottoman commanders. After the Curanlı, Rauf Pasha accused Süleyman Pasha that he did not help deliberately despite he was aware of what was happening.[272] Whereas, Süleyman Pasha blamed Rauf Pasha for missing the meeting and accepting the fight albeit inadequate conditions of his force. According to him, Rauf Pasha should have avoided delaying his advance considering his problem of ammunition and reserve-based force.[273]

Süleyman Pasha was planning to advance directly on the Shipka Pass after capturing Stara Zagora, but the developments that took place at the end of July led to change the marching route of the Balkan corps to a totally different direction. In addition to the defeat of Rauf Pasha forces in Curanlı, and Nova Zagora, there was another reason for Süleyman Pasha to change his plan. While waiting in Stara Zagora, he received intelligence that a Russian detachment comprised of twenty thousand soldiers was seen around Nova Zagora. Therefore, pasha determined to march on Nova Zagora to secure the rear on 3 August. However, when the Balkan corps proceeded to the city, it became clear that the intelligence was not true. Because of the delay, Süleyman Pasha decided to supply provision and ammunition in Nova Zagora, and had waited there to complete the process.[274] Until 11 August, the Balkan corps had bivouacked in Nova Zagora. By increasing the provision enough for 15 days, the army would be ready for the next operation on the Shipka Pass. Besides to ensure the continuity of supplying the Balkan corps in front of the Shipka Pass, Süleyman Pasha organized a transportation line, that comprised five thousand wagons, between Plovdiv and the Shipka Pass on 7 August.[275]

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[272] ATASE, ORH. 10/100, 1 August 1877.

[273] ATASE, ORH. 17/94AB, 4 September 1877. As a matter of fact, Süleyman Pasha slowed down the advance of his march through Eskizagra because of the delay of Rauf Pasha and sent patrols, who knew the vicinity well, on the direction of Rauf Pasha forces to find him and ensure the connection. After that, he intended to forward a brigade to help Rauf Pasha, but it could not be possible to implement this plan since nobody knew exactly where Rauf Pasha was. Sedes, *1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus ve Romen Savaşı*, Vol. 5, p. 92.

[274] Süleyman Hüsnü Paşa, *Umdetü'l-Hakāyık*, Vol. 2, pp. 9-11.

[275] ATASE, ORH. 94/11BGA, 7 August 1877. The way followed in the procurement of these wagons was quite interesting and a good example of the attitude of the Ottomans to the Bulgarians even under

Consequently, there is no doubt that if the Balkan corps was prepared well for the operations, the Shipka Pass would have been captured without an extra effort.[276] Despite the Russian force under General Gurko withdrawn from the south of the Balkan Mountains, his operations offered significant gains for the Russian army. In this regard, no doubt that he achieved his purpose because the main aim of his advance from Kazanlak after capturing the Shipka was to delay the advance of Süleyman Pasha and accordingly save time for the reinforcements being sent to the front. With the help of powerful Russian cavalry, General Gurko had conducted reconnaissance and surveillance activities efficiently and determined the enemy forces properly. If he failed to delay the Ottoman advance, most probably, the Shipka Pass would be threatened by simultaneous attacks of Süleyman and Mehmed Ali Pasha, and the Ottoman army could have conduct successful operations in the north of the Balkan Mountains without any coordination problem. However, the developments that took place after capture of Stara Zagora damaged the coordination among the Ottoman commanders and triggered many failures. Therefore, the operations of general Gurko in the South of the Balkan Mountains had a big impact on the course of the war. Another important point that is supposed to be emphasized about the operation of General Gurko is that he determined Süleyman Pasha force in Stara Zagora, rapidly realized the danger and conducted retreat successfully. The success of retreat deserves special attention.

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the war conditions. A commission was founded in order to carry out the procurement activities. The necessary components provided from the obedient Bulgarian villages by paying the cost and from the rebel villages without payment. ATASE, ORH. 94/11BH, 9 August 1877.

[276] After the war Süleyman Pasha was put on trial because of the failures under his command. One of the accusations of the court-martial (Divân-ı Harb) was that he spent about 20 days in vain after capturing Eskizagra. Süleyman Paşa asserted they should have enough provision for at least 15 days before advancing on the Balkan passages, and the transportation wagons and ammunition were insufficient. According to him, since it would not be possible to move without ammunition and provision, they had to wait for supply in Yenizagra. Cihat Duran, "*Süleyman Paşa'nın Divan-ı Harp'te Yargılanmasına Dair Defterin Transkripsiyonu ve Değerlendirilmesi (1878-1879)"*, Master Thesis, (Istanbul: Marmara University, 2010), p. 13. For detailed information about the strategic problems in the Balkan corps throughout the Balkan campaign regarding the time management, *see* Chapter 5.

4.2. The Second Stage of the Shipka Battle

The new plan of Süleyman Pasha after the developments mentioned above was to continue the operations by following Elena, Hainköy and the Shipka route. The Balkan corps had to be bivouacked in Nova Zagora between 3 and 10 August to supply the ammunition and provision needs. On 10 August, the supply was completed, and the army forwarded to the Elena on 11 August.[277] However, the delay of the Ottomans about 15 days enabled the Russians to easily reinforce and supply the Balkan passages. During those days, the disposition of the Russian forces throughout the Balkan passages was as follows: One infantry regiment, five Cossack sotnias and five battalion Bulgarian militia under Stoletov in the Shipka Pass, one regiment infantry and one cavalry regiment around the Elena Pass and one infantry regiment, two cavalry sotnias in the Hainköy Pass Hainköy was held by one regiment infantry and two sotnias of Cossacks.[278]

On the other hand, the Balkan corps had been strengthened in terms of ammunition, equipment and number. With the reinforcements sent from Istanbul, the number of the army increased to 56 battalions. A little part of the army, about 3.000, was cavalry. Besides, it consisted of six field batteries and three mountain batteries. Before marching on the Balkan passages, three battalions of this force were assigned for the protection of Nova Zagora. On 11 August, the Balkan corps reached the Elena Pass. The Russian army was mainly concentrated on the defense of the Shipka Pass, some of the other forces were located on the northern mouth of the Elena and Hainköy passages. Thus, the Ottomans easily managed to capture the Elena Pass as soon as they arrived on 11 August. To secure the rear of the Balkan corps while attacking the Shipka Pass, they constructed redoubts in the Elena Pass. Right after constructions finished

[277] Süleyman Hüsnü Paşa, *Umdetü'l-Hakāyık*, Vol. 2, pp. 10-12.

[278] Hozier, *The Russo-Turkish War*, Vol. 4, p. 632; Greene, *Report on the Russian Army and its Campaigns in Turkey in 1877-1878*, p. 208.

on 14 August, three battalions were located on these redoubts and moved on the Hainköy Pass.[279]

On 14 August, Süleyman pasha reached the Hainköy Pass and the Ottoman army experienced the same process there as what happened in the Elena Pass. They did not see any resistance in Hainköy. After capturing the pass, the Ottomans bivouacked there 3 days to construct redoubts. On 17 August, four battalions were positioned four in the pass and the Balkan corps moved on to their next target which was the Shipka Pass.[280]

However, at this point, there is an important issue that needs special attention, which was the dispute on the Shipka operation among Mehmed Ali Pasha and Süleyman Pasha. The main target of the Balkan corps was defined as taking back the Shipka Pass. To make this plan possible, the coordination of the Ottoman corps was important because without threatening the rear of the Shipka Pass, attacking such a rugged terrain would cause big sufferings for the Ottoman army. Therefore, it was planned to attack the Russians simultaneously, Mehmed Ali Pasha on Tırnova and Süleyman Pasha on Shipka. In this context, Mehmed Ali Pasha deployed 14 infantry battalions and one cavalry regiment cavalry in Omurtag before the advance of Süleyman Pasha forces on Stara Zagora. However, the delay of Süleyman Pasha between Stara Zagora and Nova Zagora affected the coordination of the Ottoman corps. The Russian army had started to concentrate around the opposite of Mehmed Ali Pasha corps, around Ruse and Razgrad. This change led Mehmed Ali Pasha to move cautiously, and he had started to focus on his own responsibility area.[281]

When the Balkan corps started marching from Nova Zagora on 11 August, Mehmed Ali Pasha offered a new operation plan which was based on changing the priority of Süleyman Pasha. Mehmed Ali Pasha was considering that the Balkan corps must abandon forcing the Shipka Pass, and pass beyond the Balkan Mountains to unite with

[279] ATASE, ORH. 99/138BS, nd.

[280] Süleyman Hüsnü Paşa, *Umdetü'l-Hakāyık*, Vol. 2, pp. 12-13.

[281] ATASE, ORH. 20/92, 28 July 1877; ATASE, ORH. 94/2AF, 28 July 1877.

his force in Omurtag. After that, for him, it would be possible to carry out more useful operations towards the Russian forces in Tırnova.[282] However, Süleyman Pasha insisted on the necessity of capturing the Shipka Pass, and the final decision of the Ottoman decision-makers was to follow the first plan.[283]

4.2.1. The Russian Deployment in Shipka and the Ottoman Battle Plan

During the Shipka attacks, the responsibility of the Balkan Mountains area, located in Tırnova, was under the command of the VIII. corps, General Radetzky. The VIII. corps had about 50.000 soldiers, a remarkable part of this number had accompanied General Gurko during the operations in the south and driven back to Tırnova and the Balkan passages. With the advance of Süleyman Pasha between Stara Zagora and Nova Zagora line, it became clear that the next target of the Ottoman army would be the Balkan passages. Accordingly, the headquarters charged General Radetzky with the defense of the passes. The order given to General Radetzky was clear, to protect the Balkan passages and Tırnova under any circumstances. Therefore, he positioned some troops to the passes, mainly to the Shipka Pass. three infantry battalions, six battalions of Bulgarian militia, composed of about 7.000 combatants, were given the Gabrovo detachment under General Derozinski. About 4.500 of this force was located In the

[282] ATASE, ORH. 19/30, 11 August 1877.

[283] Even though the military council allowed Süleyman Pasha to attack on the Shipka Pass, nobody managed to ensure the coordination among Süleyman Pasha forces and Mehmed Ali Pasha forces which had key importance for the Shipka attacks. Many telegrams were sent to Mehmed Ali Pasha that asking for a feint attack on Tırnova to prevent reinforcement to the Shipka Pass, he did not take a step to help Süleyman Pasha. The dispute between these pashas was one of the most striking examples of the strategic command and coordination problems in the Ottoman army. Both of them blindly tried to perform their own plans and wasted the most crucial times for the success of the Ottoman army by always seeking assistance from Istanbul. Mehmed Ali Pasha had waited for Süleyman Pasha to give up his attacks on the Shipka Pass and unite with his forces for days. Similarly, Süleyman Pasha's desire was to ensure Mehmed Ali's assistance in his operations. Thus, the defeat became inevitable for the Ottoman army under these circumstances. For detailed information about the dispute between Süleyman Pasha and Mehmed Ali Pasha over the Shipka assault and its effect on the course of the war, *see* Chapter 5.

Shipka Pass under General Stoletov.[284] The remaining force was distributed in the important positions, and a reserve group, consisting of about 14.000 soldiers, was kept ready in Tırnova.[285]

After the advance of Süleyman Pasha on the Balkans, it was hard to perceive the main target of the Ottoman army for the Russians. They were first seen around Elena and Hainköy but a Turkish detachment was also discovered around Bebrovo and Elena. In order to mislead the Russians, Süleyman Pasha decided to make a demonstration against the Russian left-wing as if they were planning to pass over the Balkans throughout near Sliven. Therefore, he sent a detachment on Bebrova when his main body in the Hainköy on 16 August. With the help of this attack, General Radetzky considered that the Ottomans would attack the Russian left flank through Omurtag, and marched on this region to confront the Ottomans. Therefore, General Radetzky could not reach the Shipka Pass in time to help the defense.[286] When the main body of the Balkan corps was seen before the Shipka, it became clear that the target of Süleyman Pasha was the Shipka Pass. Therefore, General Radetzky first forwarded reinforcements from Gabrovo and Sevlievno, and then departed from Tırnova to the Shipka Pass.[287] After the first reinforcements were reached from Gabrovo and Sevlievno, the force of the Shipka garrison increased to eight infantry battalions, four cavalry squadrons and 27 guns, composed of about 6.000 combatants, right before the Ottoman attacks.[288]

On the other hand, the Balkan corps had to reserve 10 out of 56 battalions for the protection of Nova Zagora, Elena and Hainköy. When Süleyman Pasha reached the

[284] Most of this force participated in the operations of General Gurko's advance guard throughout the south of the Balkan Mountains. Although Süleyman Pasha managed to defeat them in Eskizagra, could not prevent them from driving back to the Shipka Pass because of the insufficiency of the cavalry force.

[285] Sedes, *1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus ve Romen Savaşı*, Vol. 8, pp. 7-10.

[286] Hozier, *The Russo-Turkish War*, Vol. 4, p. 633.

[287] Greene, *Report on the Russian Army and its Campaigns in Turkey in 1877-1878*, p. 208-209.

[288] Sedes, *1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus ve Romen Savaşı*, Vol. 8, p. 25.

foothills of the Shipka Mountain, the Balkan corps consisted of about 26.500 combatants, organized under 46 infantry battalions, two regiments cavalry and 1.500 irregulars (*Bashibozuks*). A remarkable part of the Balkan corps was well equipped, and most of them were experienced during the battles in Montenegro and Herzegovina with Süleyman Pasha. However, the other part of the army, nearly half of the total force, was not in a good position in terms of both equipment and experience. Even Süleyman Pasha was considering them as a useless crowd.[289] Nevertheless, under any circumstances, the Balkan corps had a significant force against the Russians. Both in equipment and number, the army was eligible to conduct successful operations on the Shipka Pass. On the other hand, despite the Russians did not have enough force at that moment, they could be easily reinforced from Tırnova, and being positioned throughout the rugged terrain of the Shipka Pass was their most significant advantage against the superior Ottoman force.

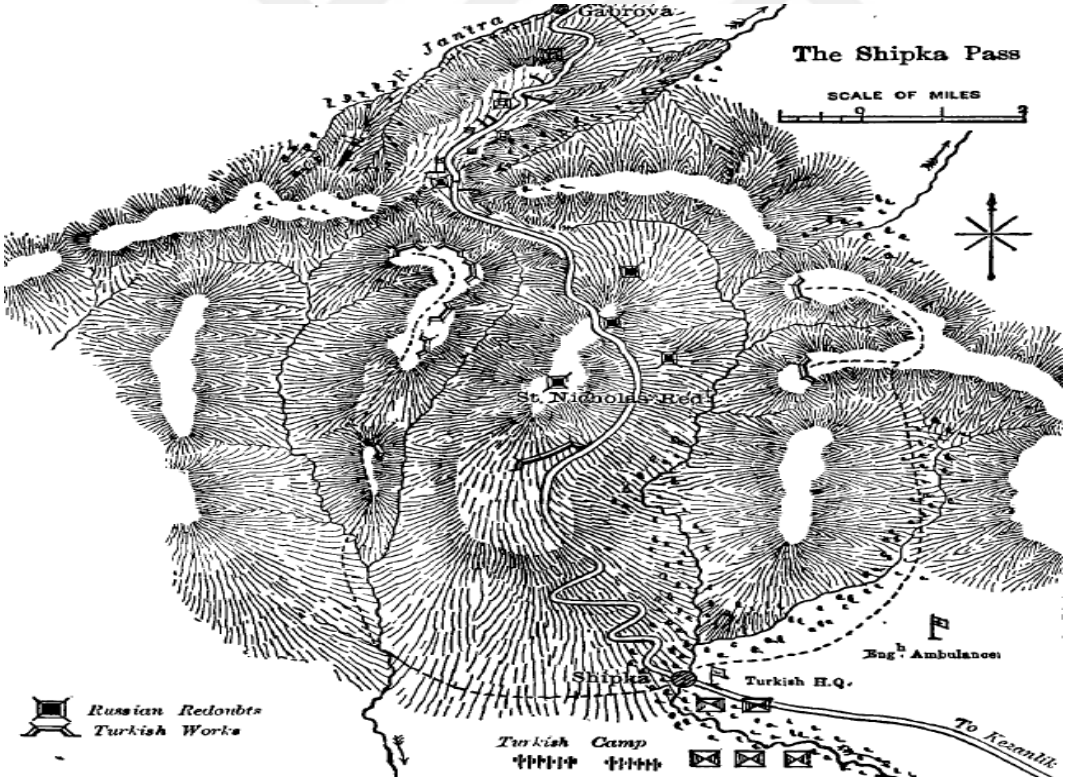
After the Ottomans reached Kazanlak, Süleyman Pasha had started preparations for the attack on the Shipka. Firstly, it should be determined how to attack the enemy. To ascertain the attack plan, a military council, consisting of the command echelon of the Balkan corps, convened on the evening of 19 august under Süleyman Pasha. Among the attendants of the meeting, there were also Mehmed Hulusi and Rasim Pasha who commanded the Ottoman detachment in the Shipka Pass during the first battle against General Gurko. According to them, the most suitable point to attack the pass was the Berdek mountains, a ridge on the eastern side of the Shipka ridge. They showed Gurko's attacks from the Berdek during the first battle as evidence of the significance of this ridge.[290] Thereupon, Süleyman Pasha sent a reconnaissance column in the morning of 20 August to resolve the final plan. The information obtained by reconnaissance was in the same direction as the recommendations of Hulusi and Rasim Pasha. The head of the column, Colonel Ömer Bey reported that the main attack should be made from the Berdek. Therefore, the military council convened again on 20

[289] Sedes, *1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus ve Romen Savaşı*, Vol. 8, pp. 12-13.

[290] Süleyman Hüsnü Paşa, *Umdetü'l-Hakāyık*, Vol. 2, p. 34.

August and finalized the attack plan. In this context, it was planned to attack the pass in three directions. Firstly, 16 battalions under Recep and Veysel Pasha would advance on the Berdek in two different directions before the daybreak and attack the central position after gathering in the hill. This position was the determined as the center of gravity for the Balkan corps. Secondly, to support the attack of the concentration forces, the first and the second brigades under Şakir and Salih Pasha would follow the road leading to the pass and make a feint on St. Nicholas Mountain, which was the first Russian defense line. The strict order that was given to this column was that not advance beyond the first Russian position in front of the St. Nicholas redoubts in order to keep the Russian's attention on this side. Thereby, the Berdek column could conduct a more effective attack on the Russian positions.[291]

Map 6: The Vicinity of Shipka and Russian Positions[292]



[291] Süleyman Hüsnü Paşa, *Umdetü'l-Hakāyık*, Vol. 2, p. 35.

[292] Ollier, *Illustrated History of the Russo-Turkish War*, Vol. 1, p.376.

As mentioned above, there are three parallel ridges in the Shipka region. All of these are separated by deep wooded ravines. The central ridge is called as the Shipka ridge, the easterly one the Berdek, the westerly one the Aykırıcebel (Bald Mountain ridge).[293] Thus, for the Russians, it was necessary to organize the defense plan by not only considering the central ridge but also the right and the left sides. By constructing artillery emplacements, it would be possible to keep the central ridge under fire. However, the Russians were positioned only on the hills above the central ridge. Although the commander of Shipka, General Stoletov, requested reinforcements to position them on the other sides, the Russians could not send enough support to the Shipka garrison in time. This paved the way for the Ottomans to dominate the Berdek and Aykırıcebel easily.[294]

The Russian defense on the pass was mainly divided into three groups. The first group was on the south of the pass around Mount St. Nicholas. The Russians positioned three artillery batteries on this redoubt. The first battery, consisting of four guns, was in the northwest of St. Nicholas Mountain. It was possible to bomb both on the south and the Aykırıcebel directions from this battery. The second battery, called as "little battery", was positioned on the center of St. Nicholas Mountain with two guns, which enabled the Russians to shell the Berdek and the south directions. On the eastern side of the hill, the third battery, "steel battery", was placed with six steel guns against the Berdek.[295] St. Nicholas Mountain was considered as the key of the Shipka Pass. Due to its importance, many special artillery combatants were positioned around St.

[293] Greene, *Report on the Russian Army and its Campaigns in Turkey in 1877-1878*, p. 207. For detailed information about the terrain features of the Shipka Pass, *see* Chapter 3.

[294] Kutlu, "*Rus Kaynaklarına Göre 1877-1878 Osmanlı Rus Harbi*", p. 127-128.

[295] Sedes, *1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus ve Romen Savaşı*, Vol. 8, pp. 27-28. The name of Steel Battery came from the Russian reports because it was armed with the steel Krupp guns taken from the ottomans in the first battle. Hozier, *The Russo-Turkish War*, Vol. 4, p. 635. For the positions of both Ottomans and the Russians in the Shipka, *see* map 8.

Nicholas Mountain, especially on "the eagle nest" which was the highest point at the southern part of the St. Nicholas.[296]

The second defense group in the Shipka Pass was constituted on the center of the ridge around the central battery consisted of four guns and dominated both the Berdek and Aykırıcebel. Besides, the Russians dug trenches on the Southern slopes of the Woody Mountain (Yeşiltepe) that had a connection to the central position of the Shipka Pass. The third group was positioned around the round battery on the north of the pass. Around all of these emplacements were encircled with many trenches, fences and fougasses and mortars.[297]

Under these circumstances, it is no doubt that the Shipka Pass was well organized and sheltered stronghold especially against the attacks from the south and east. The entrenchments in Mount St. Nicholas dominated many positions around the pass. For that reason, three of the artillery batteries were positioned there to keep flanks under control. Besides the fortified defense and the rugged terrain of the pass were the main advantages of the defenders. However, the Russians did not hold the Berdek and the Aykırıcebel ridges well and that would enable the Ottomans to make influential flank attacks from these parallel ridges. Even though it was difficult to transport heavy artillery through the broken roads, the most effective attack could have been conducted from these parallel ridges. Because the other option, St. Nicholas Mountain, would mean attacking the strongest point of the Russians. If General Radetzky was able to reach the pass in time with the reinforcements, the Russians would have covered all sides of the pass, and the defense against the constant Ottoman attacks would have been easier for them.

[296] Kutlu, "*Rus Kaynaklarına Göre 1877-1878 Osmanlı Rus Harbi*", p. 128.

[297] Sedes, *1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus ve Romen Savaşı*, Vol. 8, pp. 28-30.

4.2.2. The First Days in Shipka: 21-22 August Battles

After the appearance of the main body of the Balkan corps in front of the Shipka Pass, the Russian detachment was on alert and immediately assumed defensive formation. On the evening of 20 August, the commanders in the Shipka Pass convened to determine how to deploy the forces. In this context, the Russian troops were disposed of in the following manner. In the first defense group, Mount St. Nicholas, five infantry companies were positioned on the eagle nest, three Bulgarian battalions on the east of the mountain around the steel battery, seven infantry companies on the northern side of the mountain around the big battery. Together with two Bulgarian battalions and three infantry companies as the reserve unit, the total force of the St. Nicholas position was 16 companies, two infantry battalions and four Bulgarian battalions. In the second and third defense positions around the central and round batteries, there were three Bulgarian battalions and three infantry battalions. Apart from keeping safe the connection between Aykırıcebel and the central position, three companies were positioned around the Little Woody Mountain (Küçük Yeşiltepe).[298]

The Ottoman plan was to attack the pass in two directions with three brigades, each of which comprised eight battalions. As planned in the military council, the second and the thirds brigades under Recep and Veysel pasha advanced the Berdek ridge on the night of 20 August. The Russians firstly noticed the advance of the Berdek column at 7 o'clock in the morning. The Ottoman brigades started the construction of a battery on the Berdek hills against the Russian steel battery. Immediately after they were noticed by the Russians, a constant firing had started from the Russian positions on the Berdek, but could not stop the construction activities of the Ottomans.[299]

However, because of the rugged terrain, it could not be possible to finish the construction of the battery in the afternoon at 1 o'clock. Without the protection of

[298] Sedes, *1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus ve Romen Savaşı*, Vol. 8, pp. 31-32; Süer, *1877-1878 Osmanlı Rus Harbi Rumeli Cephesi*, p. 263.

[299] Hozier, *The Russo-Turkish War*, Vol. 4, pp. 636-637.

artillery fire, the Berdek column could not advance on the Russian positions until afternoon. Besides, the delay of the Ottomans offered enough time for the arrival of the reinforcement. After the reinforcements reached, the total force of the Shipka garrison increased to 8.500 combatants.[300]

On the morning of 21 August, another development that affected the course of the attack took place before the St. Nicholas position. The column followed the main road leading the St. Nicholas position in the early morning. The main mission of the first column was defined as making a feint attack on St Nicholas to keep the Russians busy. Yet, this column carried out a completely different attack most probably because of the little resistance of the defender at the first phase of the advance. After capturing the first post on the road, the attack turned out to be the main attack. Albeit heavy firing from the entrenchments, the Ottoman battalions managed to reach the first bulwark line in front of St. Nicholas Mountain.[301]

Nevertheless, beyond doubt that attacking such a strong position without the help of the other columns was not convenient for the military regulations. St Nicholas Mountain was covered by rocky cliffs. Also, due to its strategic importance for the defense of the pass, most of the Russian troops and equipment were located in this position. Consequently, the Ottoman column had been attacking to the most suitable point for defense without cooperation among the columns. Moreover, the weak shootings of the Berdek column without artillery enabled General Stoletov to forward reserves on Mount St. Nicholas because the attack of the Berdek was regarded as the feint attack for assisting the main attack from St. Nicholas Mountain.[302] For that reason, although the Berdek column had started attacking in the afternoon, it could not

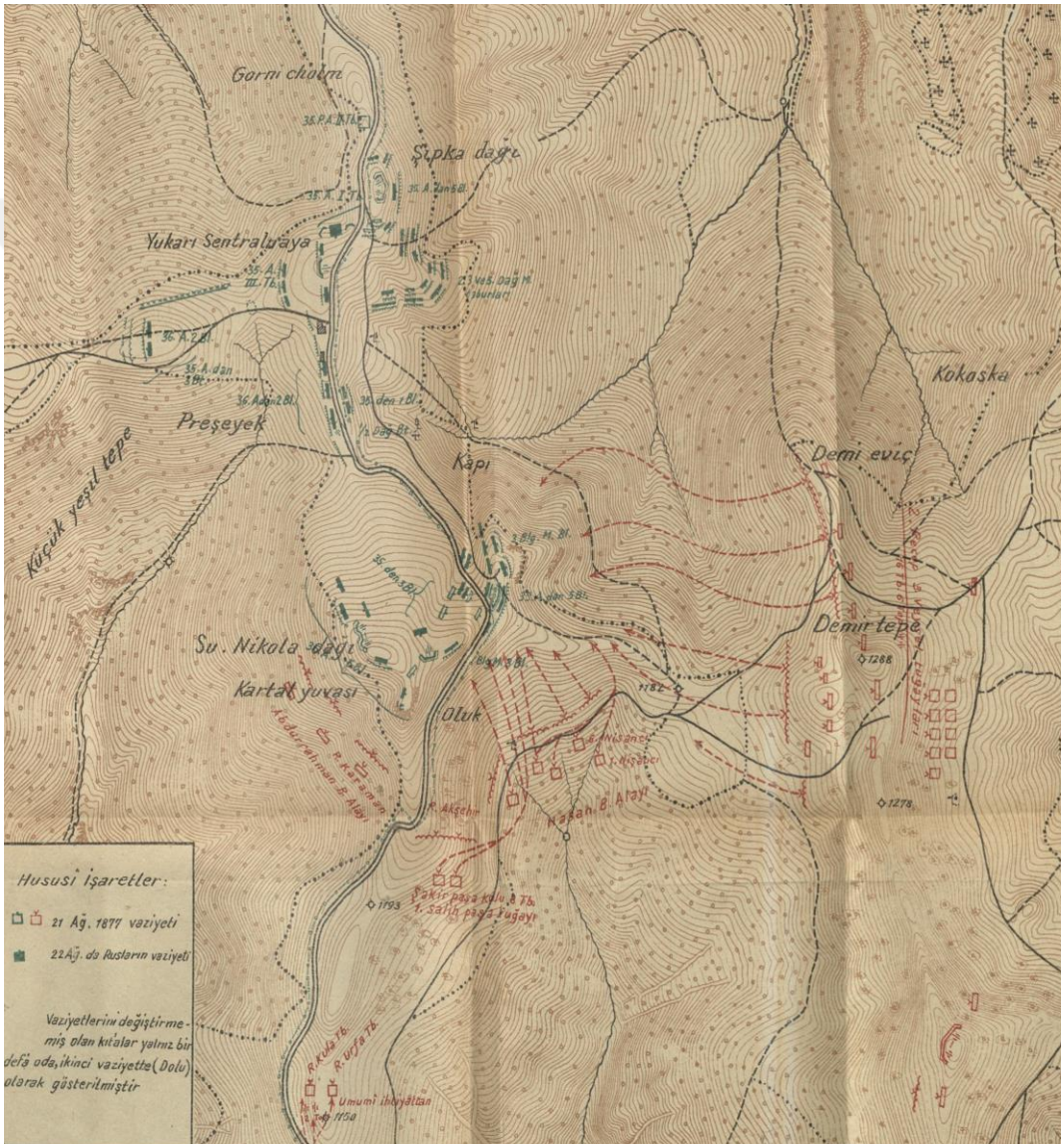
[300] Sedes, *1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus ve Romen Savaşı,* Vol. 8, pp. 44.

[301] Süleyman Hüsnü Paşa, *Umdetü'l-Hakāyık*, Vol. 2, pp 36-37. Even though Süleyman Pasha complained in his memoirs that the attacks of the St. Nicholas column were conducted out of his order by the column commanders without considering the instructions, he did not mention such a problem in his telegram sent to Istanbul in the evening of the same day. Besides, he was indicating the bravery of the troops under heavy fire by resembling that would be written in history with a gold pen. ATASE, ORH. 94/11BZ, 21 August 1877; ATASE, ORH. 94/11CAA, 21 August 1877.

[302] Kutlu, "*Rus Kaynaklarına Göre 1877-1878 Osmanlı Rus Harbi*", p. 130.

be possible to advance against the strong defense of St. Nicholas Mountain. The Ottoman troops, managed to reach the Russian trenches, suffered many casualties including their commanders and were eventually obliged to retire because of the heavy firing from the layered bulwarks.[303]

Map 7: The Ottoman Attacks on 21 August[304]



[303] Süleyman Hüsnü Paşa, *Umdetü'l-Hakāyık*, Vol. 2, pp. 38-39.

[304] Sedes, *1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus ve Romen Savaşı*, Vol. 8.

The attack on Mount St. Nicholas enabled the Berdek column to complete their preparations for the attack. While most of the Russian forces were focused on the attacks of the first regiment, the second and third regiments had been working for digging trenches and positioning the heights of the Berdek heights. As soon as the construction finished, Recep Pasha dispatched seven battalions towards the left flank of St. Nicholas Mountain, but could not approach more than 400 paces under heavy enemy fire. Thus, the Ottoman attacks on 21 August resulted with failure on both sides.[305]

Despite the failure, the Ottoman columns managed to locate on the important positions on both sides. From these positions, it was possible to shoot on the rear, which was the only transportation road of the pass, and the water sources of the defenders. Besides, the Russians had to use almost half of their ammunition to confront the Ottoman attack. Therefore, they did not have enough ammunition to use for the next few days.[306]

Many reasons affected the course of the battle on 21 August. The corporation problem among the Ottomans prevented them from conducting simultaneous attacks, and that led the first brigade to move out of plan. It was too hard to deal with the rugged terrain of the pass, the strengthened emplacements turned the Shipka impassable for Süleyman Pasha. Moreover, one of the most influential reasons for the failure was the inappropriate force deployment of the Ottoman command. There is no doubt that the number used in this attack was not enough to capture such a strong position. Although the Ottomans reached the pass with more than 46 battalions, only 24 of them were used during the first day. Even, all of the 24 battalions were not used in the attack of the column commanders. For example, on the Berdek heights, Recep Pasha used only seven out of 16 battalions in the action probably because he did not believe to be successful. According to the commander of the Berdek column, Recep and Veysel

[305] Sedes, *1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus ve Romen Savaşı*, Vol. 8. pp. 42-43.

[306] Kutlu, "*Rus Kaynaklarına Göre 1877-1878 Osmanlı Rus Harbi*", pp. 131-132.

Pasha, the main reason for the failure was not only the strong position of the Russians and improper attacks but also the lack of heavy artillery.[307]

Due to the hard terrain conditions, the Ottomans planned to conduct attacks with the easily transportable light mountain artillery in order not to be affected by the harsh conditions. However, these guns had no effect on the powerful Russian artillery batteries. Therefore, Süleyman Pasha indicated the fire superiority of the Russians against the Ottoman artillery in his letter that was sent to Istanbul after the first day. According to him, the Russian army had multiple caliber cannons against the inefficient mountain guns of the Ottomans.[308]

For that reason, on the evening of 21 August, Süleyman Pasha firstly attempted to solve the firepower problem of his army by sending six heavy field guns to Mount Berdek. Also, he sent four battalions reinforcements with these guns. These battalions prepared the broken road suitable for transportation and pulled the guns to the emplacement. However, in consequence of the hard conditions, the reinforcement managed to reach the Berdek on the evening of the second day, and the guns could be ready for the attack on the morning of 23 after the construction of the redoubts.[309] The failure on the first day led Süleyman Pasha to carry out the operation more carefully. Since the field guns were not ready until 22 August, he considered that attacking the pass again under the same conditions would cause big troubles. Therefore, the Balkan corps mainly focused on the preparations like digging new trenches and locating the newly captured positions during the second day. Süleyman Pasha was planning to start a more extensive attack when the guns and the new position became ready.[310]

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[307] Süleyman Hüsnü Paşa, *Umdetü'l-Hakāyık*, Vol. 2, pp. 46.

[308] ATASE, ORH. 94/11CAA, 21 August 1877.

[309] The broken terrain and harsh conditions in the Berdek were also indicated by an Ottoman journalist Basiretçi Ali who visited the Shipka Pass right after the attacks throughout August. He was able to reach the Berdek heights after a long and difficult march and was surprised after seeing the heavy guns located on the top of the hills. Ali Efendi, *1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus Harbinde Yıldız'ın Hataları*, p. 43.

[310] Süleyman Hüsnü Paşa, *Umdetü'l-Hakāyık*, Vol. 2, pp. 50-51. Thus, the Russians, who had been looking forward to the reinforcement from Tırnova, gained one more day. Considering the effect of the

Süleyman Pasha was planning to attack the pass on 23 August with the same formation practiced during the first day. However, an advice brought by the reconnaissance team, sent to Aykırıcebel within the scope of the preparations on 22 August, showed that this side of the Shipka could be used effectively. Also, Veysel Pasha found a way to attack the left flank of the northern position of the Shipka in his reconnaissance on the northern side of the Berdek.[311]

After the second day, the main ottoman plan was based on surrounding the flanks of the Shipka Pass and assaulting all sides simultaneously. According to Süleyman Pasha, if the Gabrovo–Shipka road, which was the only transportation way of the Shipka garrison, was captured, the Russians would have to surrender due to hunger and lack of ammunition. For that reason, a detachment would be deployed on the northern side of the Berdek for turning the left flank of the Russian northern position. In addition, a brigade would be forwarded on the Aykırıcebel to keep the Gabrovo road under control, and to capture the water supply of the defenders. If these two columns became successful, and the signs of retreat would be seen among the Russians, the first brigade positioned before St. Nicholas Mountain would attack there.[312] In this context, five battalions reinforcements were sent to the Berdek and 10 battalions were dispatched to the northern side of the Berdek under Veysel pasha. The command of the Berdek mountain was given to Şakir Pasha who was the commander of the first brigade during

timing in the success of the Russian army, waiting in front of the pass without doing anything on 22 August was a big mistake for the Ottomans. The importance of this day would be understood during the next days of the battle because it would offer the Russians what they needed, and the reinforcements would reach the pass when the Russian defense was about fall. If the Balkan corps prepared well for the attack and conducted a more extensive attack, the course of the battle might be different. For detailed information about time management of the Ottoman army throughout the Shipka attack under Süleyman Pasha, *see* Chapter 5.

[311] Sedes, *1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus ve Romen Savaşı*, Vol. 8, pp. 55-58. The change in the plan of the Balkan corps reveals the inadequacy of the reconnaissance activities carried out before the attacks and the ignorance of the Ottoman commanders regarding the features of the Shipka Pass. Because of determining the wrong target and deploying the troops against the most powerful parts of the defenders, the Ottomans could not perform efficient attacks by using the troops well, suffered many casualties and wasted the most important advantage of them which was the time. For detailed information about the problem in reconnaissance activities, deployment of the troops and determining the center of gravity throughout the battle of Shipka, *see* Chapter 5.

[312] Süleyman Hüsnü Paşa, *Umdetü'l-Hakāyık*, Vol. 2, pp. 54-55.

the first day attack. Also, to attack the Wood Mountain, six battalions and 12 guns were sent to Aykırıcebel under Rasim Pasha.[313] A correspondent of the Daily News was describing the flank movements of the Ottomans for the next attack as the claws of a crab.[314] This indication was enough to understand the course of the battle for the next few days.

4.2.3. The Turning Point of the Shipka Attacks: 23 August Battle

The deployment of the Balkan corps on 23 August under the plan prepared the previous day was as follows: 21 battalions and 10 guns were on the Berdek heights under Şakir Pasha. 16 battalions of the Berdek force were around the parallel of the St. Nicholas and center positions of the Shipka ridge, and five battalions were on the northern side of the Berdek against the Russian northern position. On the Aykırıcebel, there were six battalions and eight guns around the Woody Mountain (Yeşiltepe) under Rasim Pasha. Before St. Nicholas Mountain, there were 10 battalions and four guns under Salih Pasha. Besides, a reserve group consisting of 13 battalions and 12 guns was kept ready in the Shipka village.[315] On the other hand, against the Ottoman force, the Russians had about 9.000 combatants, three Cossack cavalry squadrons and 29 guns.[316] Even though the Russian defense was strengthened by the arrival of the reinforcements during the first day, the Shipka garrison still needed more reinforcements to deal with the superior Ottoman forces who were about to conduct simultaneous flank attacks.

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[313] Sedes, *1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus ve Romen Savaşı*, Vol. 8, pp. 61.

[314] Daily News, *The War Correspondence of the Daily News 1877*, p. 413; Hozier, *The Russo-Turkish War*, Vol. 4, p. 649.

[315] Sedes, *1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus ve Romen Savaşı*, Vol. 8, pp. 67-69.

[316] Süer, *1877-1878 Osmanlı Rus Harbi Rumeli Cephesi*, p. 275.

As can be seen from the deployment of the Ottoman forces, the concentration center of the Balkan corps was still on the Berdek heights like during the first day. Therefore, with the new field guns positioned on the Berdek, the attack began in the early morning of 23 August. The Berdek force was divided into three detachments. Firstly, the center column consisted of six battalions forwarded to the Russian entrenchments at 6 o'clock. After that, the left column with 10 battalions under Recep Pasha was advanced at 8 o'clock. During the first attack of the center column, the Ottomans approached 250-300 paces to the Russian entrenchments around the central position that was guarded with three Bulgarian battalions. The determinant advance of the Ottomans under heavy artillery fire caused signs of diffusion among the Bulgarian contingent, thus General Stoletov dispatched two battalions from the St. Nicholas Positions to confront the Ottoman advance. Even though the column repeatedly attempted to attack, it could not be possible to reach a favorable result. With the arrival of the reinforcements, the fight became very bloody and the Ottoman battalions suffered many casualties due to the heavy bombardment of the Russian batteries. Meanwhile, the Recep Pasha column on the left had been attacking the St. Nicholas positions. However, their uncovered route caused many casualties under the fire superiority of the Russians, and the troops could not perform a determined attack against the dominant position of the St. Nicholas entrenchments.[317]

The Ottomans planned to attack firstly with the left column of the Berdek detachment to threaten the rear of the defenders and then begin simultaneous attacks with the other columns. If these three columns managed to advance, the Ottoman battalions in front of St. Nicholas Mountain would be advanced on the Russians who had already been weakened by the other columns. Nevertheless, the left column of the Berdek detachment could not be positioned against the Russian northern entrenchments around the round battery in time. After the guns arrived, the left column under Veysel Pasha was able to start the attack at 9 o'clock, but the consequence was not different from the other attacks. They had to repulse against heavy enemy fire that opened from

[317] Sedes, *1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus ve Romen Savaşı*, Vol. 8, pp. 75-76.

the sheltered Russian positions.[318] In addition, the first brigade operated out of the battle plan again. The order given to this brigade was to advance on Mount St. Nicholas if the Berdek detachment became successful. However, two battalions did not follow the order and climbed from the rocky slopes. Although they managed to capture some of the Russian trenches in the first line, it was not possible to keep this layered position under control without a remarkable advance from the other flanks. Therefore, as seen during the first they had to abandon the trenches after keeping them under control for a couple of hours.[319]

There is no doubt that one of the main reasons for the vain attacks of the Ottoman columns was the coordination problem among the troops and making a plan without considering the terrain conditions. Due to broken terrain, the columns were not able to follow the attack plan. In connection with this delay, the attack of the other columns was conducted out of the plan. The coordination problem enabled the defenders to forward reinforcements from one position to another position that were not attacked or weakly attacked by the Ottomans, and that increased the resistance capacity of the Russians. Hozier gives a striking example in this regard with these words:

> At two in the afternoon an officer sent by Lieutenant-colonel Schwabe came to announce that, in view of the large number of wounded, and the constantly increasing forces of the Turks, it would be impossible for the detachment on Mount Berdek to maintain its position any longer without fresh and large reinforcements. But only a few men were left in reserve with the standards, and orders were sent to the detachment to hold the position at any cost, and in case of extreme necessity, to fall back, taking care to avoid the foucrasses laid behind the Berdek, and occupy some trenches in the rear ; at the same time Lieutenant Romanof of the 7th battalion of engineers was instructed to keep the galvanic battery read in order to blow up the Turks if it became necessary to abandon the position. This was one of the most critical moments of the day. The terrible musketry fire was still crackling against the Round battery ; some Circassians were assaulting the Turkish lunette ; and the battery on Berdek was on the point of being abandoned. There were no more reserves ; every man had been sent into action, and was still engaged. Fortunately,

[318] Süleyman Hüsnü Paşa, *Umdetü'l-Hakāyık*, Vol. 2, pp. 59-60.

[319] Ibid., pp. 68-69.

> however, the attack on the south front had considerably slackened, and Count Tolstoi was able to send a company to Colonel Lipinsky.[320]

Nevertheless, the resources of the Russians were not as much as the Balkan corps had. They had no opportunity to retrieve the losses not only in terms of manpower but also ammunition. The Russians were obliged to use most of their reserves and ammunition. This meant that the Ottomans would have more favorable opportunities during the attacks that were planned to take place in the afternoon.

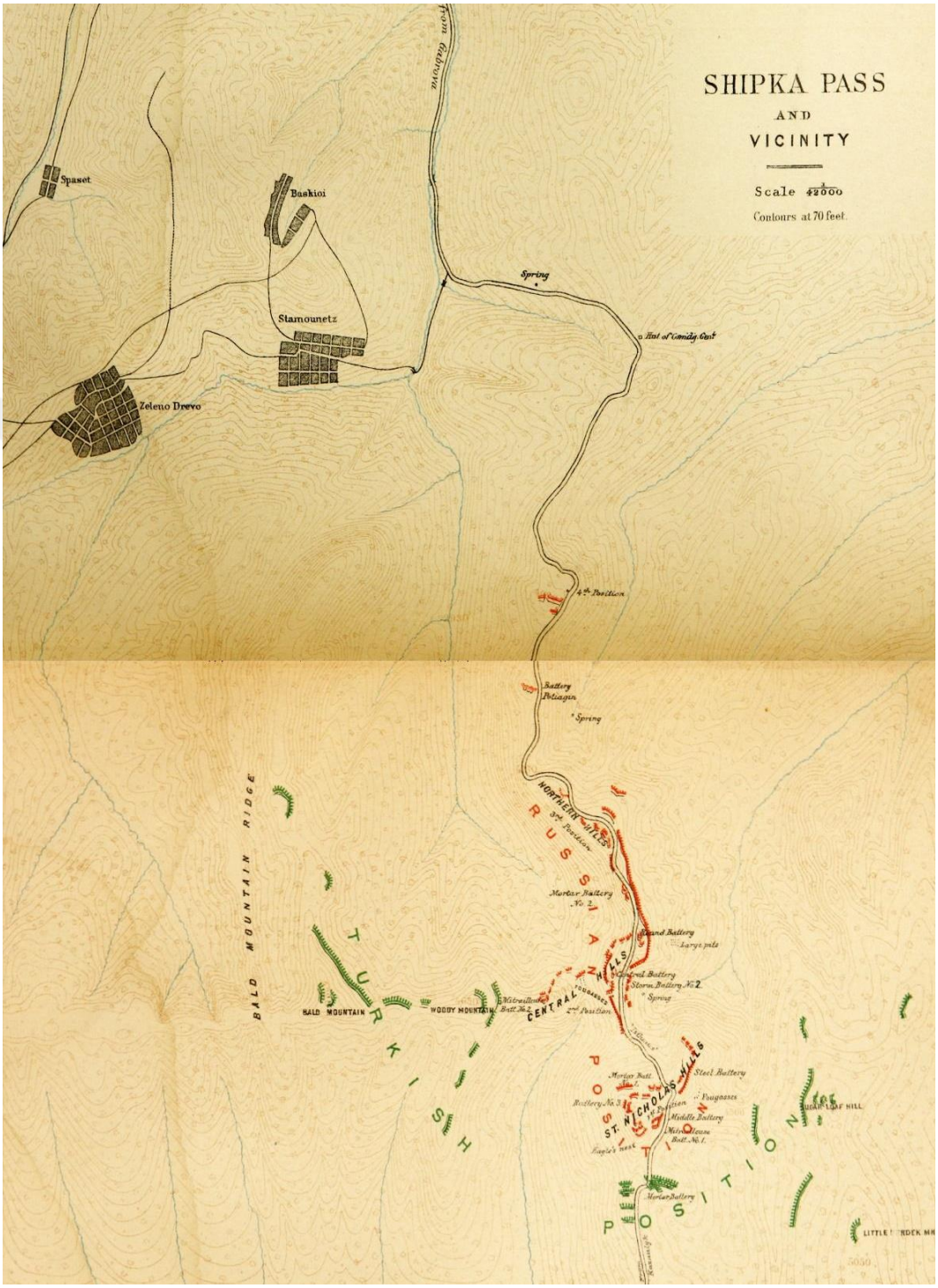
The most significant skirmish took place around the Aykırıcebel region in the afternoon because Süleyman Pasha realized the importance of the Aykırıcebel on the defense of the Shipka Pass during the attacks conducted on the morning of 23 August. The Ottoman detachment, which was sent to the Aykırıcebel on 22 August, advanced on the Woody Mountain (Yeşiltepe) and managed to capture the position in the morning. On this Mountain, it was possible to reach the Russian entrenchments throughout a height near the Russian positions named Little Woody Mountain (Küçük Yeşiltepe). Therefore, the Russian commanders attempted to defend the Little Woody Mountain by using all of their reserves and opportunities. About 1.400 Russian combatants were appointed for the protection of this height against 1.600 Ottomans.[321]

The Aykırıcebel ridge was the most suitable place to surrender the rear of the Shipka Pass by using the connection between the Woody Mountain and the Shipka ridge. Also, it was possible to advance under the protection of the woods in this region. However, the Ottomans could not understand the importance of the place because of deficient reconnaissance and surveillance activities. The Ottoman advance on the Aykırıcebel and the failure on the other flanks directed the attention of the Ottomans on the Aykırıcebel. Therefore, the battle intensified around this ridge henceforth. Both sides focused there and sent reinforcements to be superior to the other.

[320] Hozier, *The Russo-Turkish War*, Vol. 4, pp 640-641.

[321] Süer, *1877-1878 Osmanlı Rus Harbi Rumeli Cephesi*, pp. 279-280.

Map 8: The Ottoman and Russian Positions on 23 August Afternoon[322]



[322] Greene, *Atlas: Report on the Russian Army and its Campaigns in Turkey in 1877-1878*, Plate 13.

After the first reinforcements arrived, the force under Rasim pasha was increased to 11 battalions from six battalions. Also, most of the cavalry force in reserve was directed to the Aykırıcebel. The Russians, on the other hand, increased the number to 19 companies. In this way, the total force of the Ottomans became about 5.000 whereas the Russians 3.500.[323]

The Ottoman column renewed the attacks on the Little Woody Mountain with the reinforcements. The increase in the numbers altered the fighting in the Aykırıcebel into a life or death struggle. The Russians suffered many casualties during the skirmish in the afternoon. The Russian officers were almost all dead or wounded, and they droughted off the last reserve. Due to heavy clashes for three days, they spent most of their ammunition and had to economize their ammunition. Under these difficult conditions, the Russian detachment was looking forward to the arrival of the reinforcements, but no one had any idea about when the reinforcements would arrive. Therefore, they could not resist the renewed Ottoman attacks and began to fall back right before five in the afternoon from the Woody Mountain.[324]

The retreat of the Russians from the Woody Mountain was one of the turning points of the battle of Shipka because the Ottomans were right next to the Russian redoubts and it would be possible to capture the pass with a collective mass attack with the other columns. The road was under the crossfire of the Ottomans. The garrison was suffering from the lack of food and water. Meanwhile, on the Berdek ridge, the Ottomans had been performing renewed attacks, Veysel Pasha on the northern hills of the Shipka ridge, Recep and Şakir Pasha towards St. Nicholas Mountain and the center position. The delay of the reinforcements damaged the resistance power of the defenders. They were at the end of their patience in the afternoon of 23 August. The war correspondent of the Daily News Archibald Forbes, an eyewitness of the Shipka battles, described the tough conditions for the Russians as clearly.

[323] Sedes, *1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus ve Romen Savaşı*, Vol. 8, p. 80.

[324] Hozier, *The Russo-Turkish War*, Vol. 4, p. 641.

> As a result of three days hard fighting the Shipka garrison had suffered intensely from hunger and thirst. There were no cooking and the only food consisted of one day biscuit ration. The water springs were under the fire of the ottoman forces and there were no any other water source nearer that than about five kilometers. Every medic sent to field hospital with wounded was returning back with water in their canteens.[325]

Another eyewitness correspondent of the battle, Francis Stanley, described the hard conditions of the defenders like Forbes.

> During the whole of this Homeric three days' struggle in which, by the way, I had nothing to eat but a little bread, and nothing to drink but water the transcript of my note-book would be nothing but a monotonous account of attack and repulse, repulse and attack, with the ghastly accompaniment of dead and wounded, and of thousands of corpses lying scattered over the scene of the struggle, infecting the air, and swollen beyond recognition under the effects of the tropical heat.[326]

Since most of the Russian officers in the first line were dead or wounded, keeping the troops under control had started to be difficult under these conditions. The signs of retreat had started to be seen in the vicinity of the Shipka. This was the most critical moment for the defenders because the Ottomans were about to climb the slope from the Woody Mountain (Yeşiltepe) towards the central ridge of the Shipka. If they managed to reach the high road, the rear of the Shipka garrison, surrender would be inevitable. Around 4.30 o'clock the pioneers of the reinforcements arrived and managed to repel the Turkish troops near the Russian position.[327]

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[325] Forbes, *Czar and Sultan: The Adventures of a British Lad in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878*, p. 131. The Bulgarians around the Shipka Pass were the biggest supporters of the Russians fighting under difficult conditions. Local people organized an assistance team and had carried the water barrels constantly to the pass from the north of the pass. Since the main water source of the Russian army was under the Ottoman fire, the assistance of the Bulgarians had a vital importance for the continuity of the defense. They had delivered about six thousand barrels of water every day to the pass. Aytaç Yörükçü, "*1877-1878 Rus-Osmanlı Savaşı'nda Propaganda: Avrupalı Gazetecilerin Faaliyetleri ve Rus Savaş Muhabiri Vasili İ.N. Dançenko'nun Savaş Notları"*, Master Thesis, (Ankara: Hacettepe University, 2018), p. 78.

[326] Francis Stanley, *St. Petersburg to Plevna: Interviews with Leading Russian Statesmen and Generals*, (London: Richard Bentley, 1878), pp. 38- 39.

[327] Greene, *Report on the Russian Army and its Campaigns in Turkey in 1877-1878*, p. 211. *See* appendix 4.

As mentioned, to mislead the Russians brigade in Tırnova, Süleyman Pasha organized a demonstration against the Russian left-wing as if they were planning to pass the Balkan Mountains throughout Elena (Ferdiç) and Kazgan (Kotel) passages. He sent a detachment on Bebrova when his main body before the Hainköy. In this way, General Radetzky considered the movements around Bebrovo and Elena as the main attack towards his left and marched on this region to confront the Ottomans. Therefore, the reinforcements could not reach the Shipka Pass in time to help the defense.[328] The reinforcements returned to Tırnova on 21 August and forwarded to the Shipka on the morning of 22 albeit fatigue.[329] After a long march, they had arrived at the entrance of the Pass. At this moment, the general was informed that "we can hold out no longer, the Turks are on the point of cutting the road." Therefore, he sent the pioneers to the front line by mounted horses to reach faster as much as possible.[330]

With the reinforcements, the number of defenders increased to about 20.000, against about 25.000 men in the battleground.[331] The moral effect produced by their arrival was immense. The arrival of the reinforcements had demolished the Ottoman's enthusiasm and ability to attack. With the reinforcements, the Russians firstly repulsed the attacks of already exhausted Ottoman columns, and then, obliged Veysel Pasha column and the Aykırıcebel column, charged with turning the rear of the Shipka, to abandon their positions near to the Shipka ridge. The Woody Mountain (Yeşiltepe) was regarded as one of the main targets for General Radetzky to be safe in the Shipka Pass, thus he had organized renewed attacks to keep the position under control. In this way, mutual firing continued until the late hours and both sides maintained their positions.

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[328] Hozier, *The Russo-Turkish War*, Vol. 4, p. 633.

[329] Forbes, *Czar and Sultan: The Adventures of a British Lad in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878*, p. 103.

[330] Daily News, *The War Correspondence of the Daily News 1877*, p. 414.

[331] Alexander Statiev, "The Thorns of the Wild Rose: Russian Ordeals at the Shipka Pass During the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878", *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 3, (2019), p. 374.

In his telegram to Istanbul in the evening of 23 August, Süleyman Pasha was indicating the strong Russian defense line in Shipka. He said that the fighting had continued for 14 hours without stopping, but it could not be possible to capture the main Russian positions due to their strengthened and layered defense. As the gain of the day, Süleyman Pasha was drawing attention to the close position of the Ottomans to the Russians. The water supply of the Shipka and their main transportation road were under the shooting range of the Ottoman army. Thus, he was expecting to capture the Shipka with the next attack to be conducted on 24 August.[332] However, Süleyman Pasha was not aware of the Russian reinforcements and their opportunity of transportation during the nights. It was still possible to supply the water, ammunition and reinforcement needed for the Shipka garrison without facing any trouble.[333]

One of the main reasons for the failure of the Ottoman army on 23 August was because of the same reasons with the first and second days, which was the inappropriate selection of the concentration center. Until the afternoon of 23 August, the Ottoman army still had been forcing the Berdek and St. Nicholas redoubts which were the most powerful positions of the Russians. The importance of the Aykırıcebel could be understood only in the afternoon, and Süleyman Pasha attempted to strengthen the Ottoman detachment in the Aykırıcebel. Yet, the conditions of this detachment were not suitable to use it as the concentration force. Since the best troops in terms of number, practice and equipment were appointed in the Berdek, most of the remaining force, mainly reserves and inexperienced soldiers, were sent to the Aykırıcebel. This was enough to explain the slow advance of the Aykırıcebel detachment when he arrived in the Woody Mountain. Some of the troops were avoiding the conflict zone, even hiding in the forest to protect themselves.

If the Balkan corps performed efficient reconnaissance and surveillance activities towards the Shipka Pass, and accordingly a proper plan that based on the Aykırıcebel was put in practice, the Shipka defense would have fallen before the reinforcements

[332] ATASE, ORH. 13/106, 23 August 1877; ATASE, ORH. 13/106AA, 23 August 1877.

[333] ATASE, ORH. 94/2AJA, 31 August 1877.

arrived. In this memoir, Süleyman Pasha admitted his own mistakes in the organization and administration of the attacks. He said that I could not discover the importance of the Aykırıcebel, if I started attacks in the Aykırıcebel with 16 battalions instead of six battalions, the success would come before the reinforcements. He was not considering that the reinforcements would arrive soon, which directed him to move in a leisurely manner.[334]

The reason for why Süleyman Pasha did not attack the Russian positions by using all of his force was because of his mistake in estimating the arrival time of the reinforcements. He thought that he had enough time against the enemy. Therefore, instead of suffering many casualties with a sweeping attack, he was planning to turn the flanks of the Shipka and obliged them to retreat in consequence of the lack of ammunition and fatigue. Although the Ottoman commanders Recep, Şakir and Veysel Pasha asked for a general attack on 23 August, Süleyman Pasha refused this demand because of his delusion regarding the timing.[335]

Consequently, the Ottoman army could not use the opportunity of the suitable atmosphere for them during the first days because of the problems in reconnaissance and surveillance, determining the center of mass, force deployment, coordination among the columns and time management of the Ottoman command. Many of these were related to each other, especially the problem of reconnaissance activities that had a big impact on the emergence of the other. Since the Balkan corps had no efficient information source, the plan of the attack was based on totally a wrong formation, and this led to inappropriate force deployment and time management.

[334] Süleyman Hüsnü Paşa, *Umdetü'l-Hakāyık*, Vol. 2, p. 112.

[335] Ibid., p. 55.

4.2.4. The Russian Revival: 24-25-26 August Battles

The inactivity of Mehmed Ali Pasa and Osman Pasha enabled General Radetzky to easily reinforce the Shipka defense. Even though Süleyman pasha repeatedly requested for a demonstration in the rear of the VIII. corps, and this was one of the main requirements of the success of the Balkan corps, they did not take a step to make the Shipka attacks easier.[336] With the help of the gradual reinforcement, the character of the battle of Shipka had started to change after 23 August. With the reinforcements, the Russian force was able to conduct an active defense strategy against the Ottomans. Therefore, unlike the first three days, the Russians started to attack the Ottoman positions after 24 August in order to perform a more effective defense. Both forces had attempted to have possession of the Aykırıcebel.

On 24 August, the disposition of the Ottoman troops was almost the same as the previous day evening, 21 battalions in three columns around the Berdek, eight battalions in front of St. Nicholas Mountain, 12 battalions around the Aykırıcebel and five battalions as the reserve in the Shipka village. The only change was the increase in the Aykırıcebel force with the reinforcements from the reserve. Against this force, the Russian disposition was as follows: 34 companies against the Berdek concentrated around the round and steel batteries, 14 companies around the eagle nest, 25 companies against the Aykırıcebel, and three battalions in the rear as the reserve.[337]

The skirmish was renewed on the morning of 24 August. While the Ottomans were struggling to capture the Russian positions in the front and flanks, the Russians, on the other hand, endeavored to drive them from the heights of the Aykırıcebel.[338] The Ottoman forces against the Berdek and St. Nicholas attacked the Russian position simultaneously in the morning, but the result of the attack was not different from the

[336] For detailed information about the command and cooperation problems in the Ottoman army, *see* Chapter 5.

[337] Sedes, *1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus ve Romen Savaşı*, Vol. 8, pp. 101-104.

[338] Hozier, *The Russo-Turkish War*, Vol. 4, p. 644.

previous days. Against the strengthened Russian defense, they could not drive the Russians mainly positioned around the central and steel batteries. Thus, General Radetzky had the opportunity to dispatch many troops from these positions to the Aykırıcebel and increase the intensity of their attack on the Woody Mountain (Yeşiltepe).[339]

Like the other Ottoman columns, the Aykırıcebel column attacked the Russian positions on the Little Woody Mountain (Küçük Yeşiltepe), which was abandoned the previous day because of the Russian assaults. However, two Russian battalions had managed to hold the strengthened positions until the reinforcements arrived. The renewed attacks of the Ottomans did not change the possessor of the heights.[340] This was the last assault of the Ottomans on the Little Woody Mountain. With the arrival of the reinforcements, the Russians had focused on driving the Ottomans from the Woody Mountain heights until 25 August.

The Russians attacks were confronted with a stubborn resistance in the Aykırıcebel by the Ottomans. Nevertheless, the continual clashes and casualties weakened the resistance ability of the Ottoman forces who were already at the end of their patience. Since most of the officers were dead or wounded, it could not be possible to keep troops under control. Some of them were avoiding direct combat and fleeing from the battlefield. Although the total force of the Aykırıcebel column was 12 battalions, a remarkable part of these was not available. For that reason, Süleyman Pasha attempted to send reinforcements from the Berdek, in which the hope was completely lost, to the Aykırıcebel, but it was not possible to transfer these battalions near the Russian positions before the sunset.[341] Under these circumstances, the Russian attacks could be suppressed with the help of a few reinforcements, which was the last reserve force. They were positioned on the Woody Mountain before the last attempt of the Russians

[339] Sedes, *1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus ve Romen Savaşı*, Vol. 8, pp. 104-106. See appendix 3 for the maneuvers in Shipka between 21-26 August.

[340] Süer, *1877-1878 Osmanlı Rus Harbi Rumeli Cephesi*, p. 289.

[341] Süleyman Hüsnü Paşa, *Umdetü'l-Hakāyık*, Vol. 2, pp. 76-78.

at 17:00 and managed to resist the renewed attacks, the day ended without any chance in positions of both forces.[342]

The Russian attacks on the Aykırıcebel were similar to the Ottoman attacks performed the previous days and caused many casualties for both sides. Without a doubt that attacking the enemy protected by covered entrenchments and rough terrain was likely to fail and lead to serious casualties at the end of the day. The price of this attack for the Russian army was about two battalions, however, General Radetzky learned no lesson and continued to send small detachments on strongly fortified Ottoman redoubts without adequate reserve.[343] The attack was not planned by considering the Ottoman shelling. The Russians did not make any attempt to stop the firing, and gradually renewed vain attempts against the strong Ottoman positions. Moreover, the conditions of the soldiers were not as good as conducting such a tough assault. Most of them had not eaten enough for days and they even did not have sufficient water. Thus, the result of the attacks for the Russians was only new casualties, some of their higher commanders.[344]

Even though the vain attempts and many casualties, General Radetzky was considering implementing the same plan on 25 August, which was driving the Ottomans from the Aykırıcebel. On the other hand, the main concentration of Süleyman pasha was to keep possession of all positions that they had captured to use in the forthcoming days. Therefore, on 24 August evening, he managed to carry out his transfer plan from the Berdek to Aykırıcebel, which he could not implement during the day, sent Şakir and Veysel Pasha to the Aykırıcebel.[345] On the morning of 25 August, Şakir pasha reached and with the arrival of the reinforcements, the Ottoman forces in the Aykırıcebel increased to 16 infantry battalions and seven cavalry squadrons on the morning of 25

[342] Sedes, *1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus ve Romen Savaşı*, Vol. 8, p. 118.

[343] Stanley, *St. Petersburg to Plevna: Interviews with Leading Russian Statesmen and Generals*, p. 34.

[344] Kutlu, "*Rus Kaynaklarına Göre 1877-1878 Osmanlı Rus Harbi*", p. 134.

[345] Süleyman Hüsnü Paşa, *Umdetü'l-Hakāyık*, Vol. 2, pp 86-87.

August. Against this force, the Russians were standing with 22 companies around the Little Woody Mountain.[346] General Radetzky forwarded the columns that were prepared in the night on the Ottoman positions around Woody Mountain. He was planning to get a result by turning the Ottomans. At the first hours of the attacks, they managed to capture some of the Ottoman entrenchments in the first line, however, they had to abandon these positions under heavy ottoman fire.[347] After the first attack was repelled by the Ottomans, the Russians renewed the attack with reinforcements. At this moment when the skirmish intensified, some of the Ottoman forces had started to abandon their positions, and enabled the Russians to advance and capture the Woody Mountain. The Ottomans retired to the big Woody Mountain (Büyük Yeşiltepe).[348]

This was the most critical moment for the Ottomans around the Aykırıcebel because the plan of the Russians would be ensured and completed in case of a successful advance on the big Woody Mountain, which was the last position on the Woody Mountains. The Ottomans were determined to keep the position as far as possible to gain time for the arrival of Veysel pasha's reinforcement. Against the constantly reinforced Russian attacks, the conditions of the Ottomans were not seen as capable of keeping their positions under control. The new commander of the Aykırıcebel forces, Şakir Pasha, was describing his feelings about the fierce struggle with the word that I have not seen any fight as severe as today.[349]

Şakir Pasha was looking forward to the arrival of Veysel Pasha to keep everything under control. Although both Şakir Pasha and Veysel Pasha were sent from the Berdek to the Aykırıcebel on 24 August by Süleyman Pasha, the departure of Veysel Pasha was delayed by Recep Pasha who did not want to reduce his force. Therefore, he could reach the army headquarters afternoon of 25 August with three battalions, reinforced

[346] Sedes, *1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus ve Romen Savaşı*, Vol. 8, pp. 122-125.

[347] Süleyman Hüsnü Paşa, *Umdetü'l-Hakāyık*, Vol. 2, p. 87.

[348] Ibid., p. 89.

[349] Ibid., pp. 92-93.

with 4 battalions and immediately transferred to the Aykırıcebel.[350] After the arrival of Veysel Pasha, the Aykırıcebel column revived and repelled the Russians to the Woody Mountain, and captured some positions on that mountain. For the Ottomans, it was inevitable to drive the Russians from the Woody Mountain to be safe on the Aykırıcebel. Therefore, the struggle continued until 26 August morning without stopping even during the night and the Russians had to return the Little Woody Mountain, which was their first position on the morning of 24 August.[351]

Consequently, the first phase of the Ottoman counteroffensive on the Shipka Pass ended. The challenging atmosphere calmed down, both sides remained in their positions with just using artillery fire until the second phase of the attacks which would be conducted on 17 September. The attack carried out under difficult conditions caused many casualties for both sides because each of them organized attacks on well-covered entrenchments over the rugged terrain. The Ottomans suffered 6.744 casualties, 1.602 dead and 5.142 wounded.[352] Thus, the forces under Süleyman Pasha reached in front of the Shipka Pass decreased around 20.000 men from 26.526.[353] On the Russian side, their casualties were 3.942 men, 3.411 were Russian and 531 Bulgarian.[354]

4.2.5. Renewed Fighting in Shipka: The Last Attack of the Ottoman Forces

After the first phase of the Ottoman assaults in August, the Ottoman army heavily suffered from the casualties. The price of attacking such a covered position for the Ottomans was caused losing a quarter of the Balkan corps. However, Süleyman Pasha

[350] Süleyman Hüsnü Paşa, *Umdetü'l-Hakāyık,* Vol. 2, p. 88.

[351] Ibid., pp. 94-95.

[352] ATASE, ORH. 25/83AG, 2 September 1877.

[353] ATASE, ORH. 25/83AF, 1 September 1877.

[354] Statiev, "The Thorns of the Wild Rose: Russian Ordeals at the Shipka Pass During the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878", p. 376.

was still planning to capture this geographically impracticable pass. To start a new operation, he was looking forward to reinforcements. According to him, the number of many battalions had decreased to 200 men and 20 battalions under his command were not useless because they had avoided the danger throughout the skirmish.[355] Therefore, until the reinforcements arrived, Süleyman pasha changed the deployment of the forces around the Shipka Pass. In this context, he left 17 battalions on the Aykırıcebel, 13 battalions on the Berdek and three battalions before St. Nicholas Mountain. The remaining force, composed of 16 battalions, gathered in the army headquarters.[356] Throughout the calm days, the Ottoman army mainly engaged in reorganization of the forces and fortifying their entrenchments. The same fortifying preparations conducted by the Russians. They did not attempt a serious attack, instead contented themselves with desultory shelling of the enemy redoubts. An eyewitness of these calm days describes the atmosphere in the Shipka Pass in his official dispatch.

> From the 26 August to the 13 September the enemy have limited themselves to directing artillery and infantry fire upon our positions and the Gabrovo road; and this, though feeble up to the 9th, has since been redoubled. Our artillery has replied to that of the enemy; but we have not answered the infantry fire, since the Turks were completely sheltered by a wood, and were at a great distance. It has only been possible to replenish ammunition and provisions by night. During the night also we execute 1 engineering works to repair the damage done to the trenches and batteries by the enemy's fire during the day (...) Each day we have made 210 gabions and repaired roads, formed trenches thanks to efforts of the engineers (…) The district, the position at Shipka has been rendered stronger from day to day, and our troops have been, as much as possible, placed in shelter from the fire of the enemy. On an average our losses have been, from 27 August to 13 September, from five to ten men a day. During this period, the Turks have attempted nothing serious, and we have only had two skirmishes with the enemy.[357]

With the reinforcements, the number of the Balkan corps in the vicinity of Shipka remarkably increased. The number decreased to less than 20.000 during the August

[355] ATASE, ORH. 94/11CEA, 26 August 1877; ATASE, ORH. 94/11CFA, 26 August 1877.

[356] Süleyman Hüsnü Paşa, *Umdetü'l-Hakāyık*, Vol. 2, p. 99.

[357] Hozier, *The Russo-Turkish War*, Vol. 4, p. 650.

attacks, nevertheless before the second attack in September, the number increased to 31.786 men, 822 officers and 30.964 rank and file.[358] Throughout the second week of September, Süleyman Pasha received many artillery batteries and mortars. These were established near the St. Nicholas entrenchments on 13 September.[359] This was because Mount St. Nicholas was almost out of the effective range of the field artillery. To effectively attack this important position of the Russian army, Süleyman Pasha determined to use the help of these mortars. After 12 August, a heavy bombardment was started by the Ottomans. The Ottoman mortars had a serious impact on the defenders with wonderful accuracy. because of these mortars fired out of their sight, they could not ascertain the position and reply effectively. Therefore, after the first days, the Russian did not attempt to answer the Ottoman bombardment and even abandoned their artillery redoubts.[360]

Even though the effective shelling of the Ottomans, the Russians were not expecting a direct attack by them. Therefore, this strong bombardment was regarded as a planned action to distract their attention. They thought that Süleyman Pasha would force the Shipka Pass because the bulk of the Ottoman army gathered in Shipka village and Kazanlak, and he was planning to attack elsewhere probably to cross the Balkans at other points. Telegrams to warn the commandants were sent to Gabrovo and Drenovo. Also, General Radetszky transferred more than half of the Shipka force to the north, important locations between the Balkan Mountains and Tırnova, to prevent a probable crossing of Süleyman Pasha.[361]

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[358] In addition to the troops before the Shipka Pass, 20244 men were also located in the important points such as Eskizagra, Plovdiv, Yeni Zagra and the other Balkan passages under the control of the Ottoman army. In this way, the total number of the Balkan corps reached up to 52040. Among them, about 6.000 men were located in the Elena and Hainköy passages in order to prevent a possible turning movement of the Russian army through these passages. ATASE, ORH. 94/2AO, 10 September 1877.

[359] Maurice, *The Russo-Turkish War*, p. 243.

[360] Hozier, *The Russo-Turkish War*, Vol. 4, pp. 650-651.

[361] Ibid., p. 651.

The aim of the Ottomans, in fact, was like the Russian commander predicted. Süleyman Pasha realized that without threatening the rear of the Shipka Pass, it would not be possible to capture such a strong defensive line, but there was no sign of a feint attack from neither Mehmed Ali Pasha nor Osman Pasha. Because of the immobility of the other army corps throughout the front line, the first reinforcements were sent from Tırnova and Sevlievno. For that reason, Süleyman Pasha intended to perform a turning movement with the help of Osman Pasha. In this context, with the arrival of the 16 battalions reinforcements sent from Istanbul, a column would be sent to Gabrovo to turn the rear of the Shipka Pass. Meanwhile, the other forces would attack simultaneously on front and flank.[362] To successfully implement this plan, the support of Osman Pasha was inevitable. He would advance on Sevlievno and Gabrovo simultaneously to close the line of retreat and reinforcement route to the Shipka Pass. According to Süleyman Pasha, without the help of Osman Pasha, the pass was impracticable for the Ottomans. However, before Osman Pasha and Süleyman Pasha put the plan into practice, the Russian army attacked Lovech, which connects Pleven to Sevlievno and Gabrovo, on 3 September, and prevented them from implementing this plan.[363]

The occupation of Lovech by the Russians led Süleyman Pasha to organize a surprise attack on the Shipka Pass. As indicated above, one of the main problems of the Balkan corps during the first phase was undisciplined movements of the reserves and irregulars. Therefore, Süleyman Pasha aimed to carry out the new attack plan mainly with the volunteer soldiers "*fedâi*". Three battalions were organized with volunteers to attack in the first line against Mount St. Nicholas. After these battalions, there would be five battalions in the second line, four battalions on the Berdek and six battalions on the Aykırıcebel.[364] Süleyman Pasha was planning to perform the plan without any problem because most of his orders during the attacks in August were not followed by

[362] ATASE, ORH. 25/83AF, 1 September 1877; ATASE, ORH. 25/83AE, 30 August 1877.

[363] ATASE, ORH. 94/2ALA, 3 September 1877; ATASE, ORH. 94/2AMA, 3 September 1877.

[364] Süleyman Hüsnü Paşa, *Umdetü'l-Hakāyık*, Vol. 2, p. 133.

the Ottoman columns. For him, this coordination problem among the forces was the first thing that should be solved. Therefore, a letter of instruction was prepared to make clear everything for the soldiers and avoid probable problems. In this regard, the volunteers would approach the foothills of St. Nicholas Mountain and attack the enemy redoubts in three columns around 3 o'clock. It had forbidden them to fire before arriving at the entrenchments to cover the attack as much as possible. If these volunteers managed to capture the artillery batteries, the other columns, which were sent to the Berdek and Aykırıcebel, would attack the rear of the Russians.[365]

At half-past three, the columns started the advance as previously arranged. They continued their march slowly without replying to the heavy Russian firing. The main motivation of them was to gain the summit at that moment. As soon as the volunteer column reached the entrenchments and a severe hand-to-hand struggle started among the Ottomans and Russians. Against the determined attacks, the defenders lost a large number of men and were obliged to abandon the first defense line on Mount St. Nicholas. The security of the St. Nicholas position was crucial for the defense of the Shipka Pass. Therefore, the Russian commanders rapidly directed reinforcements around the abandoned positions to confront the Ottoman volunteers. However, the Ottomans continued to ascend the mountain. After the sunrise, all three columns were on the top of Mount St. Nicholas.[366] After capturing the St. Nicholas, as indicated in the assault instruction, the other columns should attack the pass simultaneously from the Berdek and Aykırıcebel. This was inevitable to sustain the success of the volunteers and capture the pass. In addition, the advance of the volunteers on the second line of the St. Nicholas would allow the Berdek and Aykırıcebel columns to move forward. If they captured the artillery batteries on the St. Nicholas, turned to the Berdek and Aykırıcebel, the progress of these columns would be easier on the Russian flanks. However, the volunteers could not capture these batteries located on the right and left side of St. Nicholas Mountain. The other columns did not advance against the enemy

[365] ATASE, ORH. 101/8, 17 September 1877; Süleyman Hüsnü Paşa, *Umdetü'l-Hakāyık*, Vol. 2, pp. 134-136.

[366] Hozier, *The Russo-Turkish War*, Vol. 4, p. 652-653.

in time, which enabled the Russians to concentrate on the attacks towards the St. Nicholas entrenchments. Accordingly, the Berdek and Aykırıcebel columns, whose number was not enough to perform determined attacks under heavy firing, could not attempt to force the Russians positions on the Shipka ridge under these circumstances.[367] In fact, the volunteers understood that it was necessary to silence the batteries to give time to the Recep Pasha column, and managed to shoot down the Russian and had been forced to cease firing all batteries for a while, but there was no sign of advance from the flanks.[368] Even though the first column had managed to stay at the St. Nicholas for 6.5 hours, the other columns could not perform a determined attack against the Russian defense. Without the cooperation of the columns, the Russian forces mainly concentrated on the volunteers and forced them to retreat by surrounding their flanks.[369] The war correspondent accompanied the Balkan corps throughout the battles were describing the evolution of the attack by indicating the mistakes that caused to failure with these words:

> The only reason which can be assigned for the failure is that the points chosen by the right and left attack were found to be too strong; still, to capture them was one matter, but to make an important auxiliary movement is a far easier one. Very feeble flank attempts were made by the generals to whom the duty was assigned, and scarcely credible accounts have been bruited about of the inefficiency, and even absence altogether from the fight, of the officers with these troops. The action lasted until nearly mid-day, when the unsupported troops in the center, having no hope of co-operation from east or west, and having actually seen a large body of the enemy rapidly coming up to attack them, were very properly ordered to retire.[370]

No doubt that the attacks were miscarried by the Ottoman command like the preceding attacks. Süleyman pasha did not show himself at the scene by directing assault himself. Instead, he followed his old habit, leaving his subordinates to move as they pleased.

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[367] Süleyman Hüsnü Paşa, *Umdetü'l-Hakāyık*, Vol. 2, pp. 141-145.

[368] Hozier, *The Russo-Turkish War*, Vol. 4, p. 654.

[369] ATASE, ORH. 101/8, 17 September 1877; ATASE, ORH. 101/8AA, 17 September 1877.

[370] Daily News, *The War Correspondence of the Daily News 1877*, p. 497.

Therefore, albeit the bravery of the soldiers, the result could not be different from the other attacks due to bad management.[371] As a result of the skirmish lasted about 9 hours, the ottomans suffered 38 officers, one Lieutenant Colonel, two Majors, three Senior Captains, 32 Captains and Lieutenants, and 1.247 rank and file casualties, 188 of the total number dead and 1.097 wounded.[372] On the Russian side, the loss was considerable, especially in the attempts to drive the volunteers from the St. Nicholas, they lost 32 officers and more than 1.000 men.[373]

Consequently, the direct Ottoman attacks ended with the last attempt on 17 September. Against the trough terrain and strengthened Russian positions, the Shipka Pass became impracticable for the Ottomans. However, accepting this truth cost a heavy price for the Ottoman army. The Ottoman army was not only affected in terms of casualties but also the course of the war. Attacking the Shipka Pass was the beginning of the disagreement among the Ottoman commanders.

4.2.6. The Price of the Attacks and the Ottoman Health Service in Shipka

There is no doubt that the Ottoman army suffered many casualties during the Shipka battles, and the combat strength of the Balkan corps almost disappeared. However, the battles not only affected the combat strength of the army but also the cooperation among the other army corps. In this regard, the most striking effect of the Shipka battles showed itself as the command and coordination problem in the Ottoman army. It led to a big dispute among the Ottoman commanders, Mehmed Ali Pasha and Süleyman Pasha, regarding whether attacking the Shipka was necessary or not. While Süleyman Pasha had waited for the support of Mehmed Ali Pasha, as planned at the

[371] Hozier, *The Russo-Turkish War*, Vol. 4, p. 654.

[372] ATASE, ORH. 94/11DFA, 20 September 1877. Hozier and Maurice showed the Ottoman casualties around 3.000, but the real stated in the official report was not more than half of this number. Hozier, *The Russo-Turkish War*, Vol. 4, p. 654; Maurice, *The Russo-Turkish War*, pp. 244-245.

[373] Hozier, *The Russo-Turkish War*, Vol. 4, p. 654.

beginning, throughout the Shipka attacks, Mehmed Ali Pasha requested that Süleyman Pasha should pass the Balkan Mountains and assembly with his forces without attempting an attack on the Shipka. Both of them had a legitimate basis for their demands because there was not a superior-subordinate relationship among these commanders. Therefore, the army could not conduct a united and coordinated operation because of never-ending disagreement among the commanders. They mainly prioritized their own zone of responsibility and paid no attention to others. In this respect, appointing new commanders without determining the chain of command was the biggest mistake of the Ottomans throughout the war. This strategic mistake ruined the decision-making mechanism of the Ottoman army that was already problematic.[374]

During the August attacks, The Ottomans suffered 6.744 casualties, 1.602 dead and 5.142 wounded. The distribution of the casualties by rank was as follows: two Colonels, four Lieutenant Colonels, 12 Majors, 14 senior Captains, 82 Captains, 46 first Lieutenants, 74 Second Lieutenants and 6.512 rank and file.[375] Because of the severity of the attacks, the Balkan corps lost a quarter of its combat strength. After August 1877, the combat ability of the Balkan corps was heavily damaged, even the number of many battalions decreased to 200 men.[376] With about 1.300 casualties in the second attack on 17 September, the total loss of the Balkan corps in just one month was more than 8.000 combatants. The number of casualties noteworthy in considering the other main battles of the war. For example, the price of three Pleven battles for Osman Pasha forces was around 7.000 combatants.[377]

Most of the wounded Ottoman soldiers in the battle of Shipka were seriously injured. As Süleyman pasha indicated, only about 1.000 out of 514 wounded soldiers were

[374] For detailed information about the command and coordination problems among the Ottoman commanders, *see* Chapter 5.

[375] ATASE, ORH. 94/11CQA, 31 August 1877; ATASE, ORH. 94/2AL, 31 August 1877.

[376] ATASE, ORH. 94/11CEA, 26 August 1877.

[377] For detailed information about the casualties during the battle of Pleven from July to September, *see* Süer, *1877-1878 Osmanlı Rus Harbi Rumeli Cephesi*, p.170,247; Albay Talat, *Plevne Savunması*, ed. Talat Yazalan, (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 1997), p. 68.

slightly wounded that could be cured within 20-30 days, the rest were seriously wounded and required a critical treatment process.[378] The main reason for the serious injuries was the rugged terrain of the Shipka Pass. Since the Russians were located in the dominant heights, the Ottoman soldiers were mainly injured from the upper parts of their bodies, with the inclined direction of the bullet. Therefore, whenever the doctors saw the wounded soldiers, they could easily predict where these soldiers were injured.[379]

The casualties in officers both among the Russians and the Ottomans were enormous. The Turkish sharpshooters were able to shoot on the Russian officers who were conspicuous from their white color uniforms. Thus, some of the regiments lost almost all of the officers.[380] While the Russians could easily recover the wounded soldiers with the help of their better health service, it was not possible for the Ottomans. For example, while an English correspondent accompanied the Russian army was describing the health service in the Russian army with admirability, another English correspondent with the Ottomans described his observations after indicating great courage and devotion of the Turks with these words:

> I cannot close my letter without remarking on the inhuman indifference the Turks show to their wounded. The unfortunate Turkish soldier must take care of himself in about eight cases out of ten. If he can hobble away to some place of shelter, he may; but as to any organization, ambulance transport, medical comforts, or what not, he must not expect any. What is he that anybody should care about him? Let him go to the English ambulance, and have chloroform when his poor battered limbs are amputated, or beef-tea when he is so feeble he can swallow nothing else; but he must not expect his own countrymen to care about him in this kind of way, or, indeed, to care much what becomes of him.[381]

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[378] ATASE, ORH. 25/83AF, 1 September 1877.

[379] Erol Serdar Yurdakul, "1877-1878 Osmanlı Rus Savaşında Türk Ordularında Askeri Sağlık Hizmetleri", Doctoral Thesis, (Ankara: Gülhane Askeri Tıp Akademisi, 2015), pp. 379-380.

[380] Hozier, *The Russo-Turkish War*, Vol. 4, p. 648.

[381] Ibid., p. 648.

An Austrian doctor who served in the Ottoman army during the battles was indicating the poor health service of the Ottoman army similarly as follows:

> You would find amongst them men who had never handled any other instrument than their knives for cutting up sheep. It is impossible to estimate the numbers of the victims of ignorance and of the want of sanitary measures, but the non-observance of the most simple and primitive hygienic rules causes the Turks to succumb by thousands to dysentery, typhus, and fever. The losses of the Turks on the fields of battle are still more considerable, on account of the absolute imperfection of the sanitary service. The Turks have no litters for carrying the wounded; they have no ambulance-men to cheer them up ; they have no place devoted to the dressing of wounds; they have no means of effecting the transport of the sick and wounded to places where they can be better cared for. (…) Moreover, the doctors have neither material nor instruments sufficient to make surgical operations, and what little they have is their own property. I am not afraid of exaggerating in estimating that from 80 to 90 per cent, of wounded Turks succumb to their wounds. Under such circumstances it is only possible to explain their bravery and sang-froid on the field of battle by remembering the intensity of Oriental fanaticism, and the promised delights of Paradise.[382]

There were many observations about insufficient health service in the Ottoman army. These kinds of remarks were not only indicated by the foreigners but also Ottomans. For example, according to Basiretçi Ali, a famous Ottoman journalist, the Ottoman soldiers had been striving for keeping alive under terrible conditions. Although each battalion should have a doctor, a surgeon and a pharmacist, it was not possible to find a surgeon even for three battalions. Besides, the other services like transportation of the wounded soldiers could not be conducted sufficiently. Because of the lack of transportation means for wounded soldiers, they had to walk to the hospitals in Kazanlak and Plovdiv. However, the conditions of these hospitals were not suitable to provide good service.[383]

[382] Hozier, *The Russo-Turkish War*, Vol. 4, p. 649.

[383] Ali Efendi, *1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus Harbinde Yıldız'ın Hataları*, ed. Oktay Bozan, (Konya: Çizgi Kitabevi, 2018), pp. 46-47.

The complaints of Süleyman Pasha after the first attacks in August were in the same direction. In his telegram to Istanbul, he was indicating the lamentable conditions of the wounded soldiers. The Ottoman army did not have anything for the treatments of these soldiers, neither a sufficient number of doctors, pharmacists, nurses nor enough beds, basic medical materials, and even provision. The wounded soldiers had to walk themselves until the hospitals because of the lack of transportation means. During the long marching, their wounds were not dressed, and this caused huge maggots and great sufferings to the soldiers.[384]

Hundreds of wounded had to wait for their turn for relief on the battlefield because of the inefficient number of medics. They experienced the same inefficiency when they reached the hospital. For example, the care of more than 800 wounded in the Kazanlak hospital was left to only two Turkish surgeons.[385] In this context, the operations of the Stafford House Committee in the gathering points were too important for the Ottoman health service. The agents of the committee provided service to the Ottoman soldiers in many locations such as Shipka, Kazanlak and Plovdiv. Especially, their hospital in Plovdiv had admirable capacity compared to the Ottomans.[386] One of the surgeons of the Stafford House Committee presented a good example of the Ottoman soldier's painful journey between the battlefield and the hospitals with these words:

> There was a great deficiency of transport for the wounded from the height where the fighting was to the plain below. Poor fellows with lacerated limbs were obliged to work their way down, leaning on their rifles, and many died on the hillside from want of proper attention, or mayhap a little water! (…) We had some officers among our patients. One of these was a colonel of artillery. On starting, as was due to his age—he was over sixty-five—and position, we made him as comfortable as possible (…) He told me that his wounds had not been dressed for nine days, and I readily

[384] ATASE, ORH. 94/11CMA, 28 August 1877.

[385] Daily News, *The War Correspondence of the Daily News 1877*, p. 430.

[386] For detailed information about the services of the Stafford house committee during the 1877-1878 Russo Turkish War, *see Report and Record of the Operations of the Stafford House Committee: Russo-Turkish War 1877-1878*, (London: Spottiswoode, 1879).

> believed him, for they were crawling with huge maggots, and it was necessary to use pure carbolic acid in order to destroy them.[387]

The wounded soldiers were transferred to Istanbul after their first treatment in the main hospitals like Plovdiv and Edirne. The transfer of the wounded soldiers was inevitable under difficult conditions to make room for newly arrived soldiers.[388] During the transportation of the soldiers, the Safford House Committee was offering many services for the soldiers, even distributing soup. Their service was too important for the Ottoman soldiers and appreciated by them. In addition, the service of the committee was received with admiration by the Ottomans. According to the deputy commander of Edirne, the health service of the Stafford House Committee doctors was 10 times better than the doctors of the Ottoman Red Crescent Society (*Hilâl-ı Ahmer*).[389] The great service of the Stafford House Committee was also described with admiration by Süleyman Pasha. Even, he felt embarrassed due to their regular service system and efforts when compared with the primitive health service in the Ottoman army.[390]

[387] George Stoker, *With the Unspeakables: Two Years Campaigning in European and Asiatic Turkey*, (London, Chapman & Hall, 1878), pp. 72-73.

[388] ATASE, ORH. 24/36, 27 August 1877.

[389] BOA, Y. EE. D, 800/15, 20 Ağustos 1293, [1 September 1877].

[390] ATASE, ORH. 94/11CNA, 28 August 1877.

CHAPTER 5

ASSESSMENT OF THE BATTLE OF SHIPKA: STRATEGIC COMMAND AND COORDINATION PROBLEMS IN THE OTTOMAN ARMY

"None can see the strategy out of which victory is evolved.
Strategy without tactics is the slowest route to victory.
Tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat."
Sun Tzu

5.1. Assessment of the First Shipka Battle

The famous military theorist Carl von Clausewitz described his understanding of defense as preservation by not only performing a strict and immobile defense but also implementing a series of counterattacks on the important lines of the enemy. That is to say, he indicated that following a defense strategy without counterattacks was against the nature of the war concept. Clausewitz explained his opinion in this regard by saying that "When one has used defensive measures successfully, a more favorable balance of strength is usually created; thus, the natural course in war is to begin defensively and end by attacking."[391]

The strategy[392] followed by the Ottoman Empire throughout the Ottoman-Russian War of 1877-1878 was based on defense. However, the way of defense of the Ottomans,

[391] Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 357-358.

[392] The strategy is a concept that has many different definitions changed over time. Therefore, it is necessary to mention about the definitions of the strategy before analyzing the battle of Shipka within the context of the strategy. The military strategy is, for Napoleon Bonaparte "the art of using time and space", for Carl von Clausewitz "the use of battles for the purpose of war", for Helmuth von Moltke

especially during the first three months, was against the nature of the defense as Clausewitz pointed out. The Ottoman army under the command of Abdülkerim Nadir Pasha had performed a defense understanding that was based on absolute passivity against the Russian attacks without considering active defense understanding[393] that based on threatening the important supply lines and mounting points of the enemy. Even though it would be easy to attack such positions and restrain the enemy by destroying the supply line before the army gathered, the Ottomans did not consider exploiting the advantage even under such circumstances.

To illustrate, as Greene pointed out that the Ottomans should have destroyed the railway bridge on the Sereth River, which was near the Ottoman border and had key importance in the Russian supply line. Likewise, the towns of Galati, Reni, Braila and Ismail could be besieged to prevent the Russian advance. In this way, the Russian operations might be postponed months and also the ottoman army would gain time. However, the Ottoman army was sentenced to passivity unintelligibly and this offered big opportunities to the Russians to finish their preparations and carry out their war plan.[394]

The Danubian front was regarded as the center of gravity for both the Russian army and the Ottoman army. Both armies devoted their best opportunities in this front not only in manpower but also in equipment. Each mobilized around 200.000 men on the Danubian front. Even though they both deployed around the same manpower in Bulgaria, it is no doubt that the Ottomans had to deploy soldiers as much as possible

"the practical adaption of the means to reach the object in war", for Liddell Hart "the art of distributing and applying of the military means to fulfill the ends of policy". Osman Tekinalp, *Stratejiye Giriş ve Deniz Stratejisi*, (Istanbul: Doruk Yayınları, 2019), pp. 42-47. Having many definitions is a clear indication that it is difficult to explain the strategy. But the strategy can be defined as a detailed planning stage to determine the direction and ensure the coordination of the means to achieve the goal. Mehmet Tanju Akad, *Modern Savaşın Temel Kavramları*, (Istanbul: Kitabevi Yayınları, 2011), p. 192-193.

[393] Active defense is an understanding that based on not only performing defensive measurements but also counterattacks to prevent the maneuverability of the enemy and to increase the defensive ability. The primary goal in this regard is to disturb the balance of the enemy in order to force them to move out of their plan. Akad, *Modern Savaşın Temel Kavramları*, p. 23.

[394] Greene, *Report on the Russian Army and its Campaigns in Turkey in 1877-1878*, p. 161-162.

because they were planning to hold a wide defense line. However, while it was possible to deploy more soldiers on the Danubian front, more than 200.000 soldiers were positioned in the secondary localities, which would not change the outcome of the war, throughout the empire such as Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia, Crete, Greece.

On the Danubian front, the Ottoman defense was based on preventing the enemy from passing the Danube River that extends hundreds of kilometers in Bulgaria. To be able to defend this line the Ottomans focused on mainly the fortified zones and fortresses. However, the number of the soldiers was not enough to keep the safety of this huge line, and there was no extra force apart from positioned in the fortified positions to constitute a mobile detachment in the rear. In this context, one of the biggest strategic mistakes of the Ottoman army within the context of the war preparations was the inappropriate deployment of the mobilized force strategically. Even though the inefficiency of the force was understood during the first months of the war and the Ottoman decision-makers attempted to eliminate this mistake by dispatching troops from the secondary fronts mentioned above, the Ottoman army could not recover its operational capability that was damaged as a result of losing strategically important positions such as Tırnova, Sevlievno, Byala and the Balkan Mountains.

Upon crossing the Danube River on 27 June, the Russian army rapidly advanced on the Balkan Mountains and firstly captured Tırnova, which can be regarded as the heart of Bulgaria, within just 10 days. *Serdar-ı Ekrem* Abdülkerim Nadir Pasha, who had always complained about the insufficiency of the troops under his command, did not attempt to apply a significant operation to prevent the Russians. His main motivation was to remain in the defense position and detain the Russians with the help of fortified positions such as Ruse, Silistra, Shumen, Razgrad. To prevent the Russian advance, it was necessary to organize a mobile detachment in the rear of the Russian army. In this way, it would have been possible to restrain the Russian advance by threatening its line of supply. Nevertheless, there was no extra force to resist the Russian advance. Thereby, Abdülkerim Nadir Pasha preferred to remain in the strong fortifications without making a remarkable change in the deployment of the army except appointing a detachment under Ahmed Eyüb Pasha. The mission of this detachment was

determined as firstly conducting reconnaissance and surveillance activities, secondly threatening the rear of the Russian army marching towards Tırnova, and thirdly confronting the Russian advance on Ruse. However, the desire of moving with strict precaution avoided this detachment to perform such missions, and the headquarters ordered withdrawal after the first contact. Consequently, the Russian army managed to complete their preparations without any obstacles.[395]

According to the war plan of the Ottoman Empire, the defense of the Balkan Mountains line and the south of this line were under the responsibility of the military council. Within the scope of this plan, it was planned to prepare an army corps that comprised 40.000 men for the defense of the Balkan line. However, this army corps could not be constituted although more than two months have passed since the commencement of the war. Even before the eve of the Russian attacks on the Balkan passages, there was not an organized force under command of a determined commander. Most of the new battalions and equipment were sent right before the Russian attacks, and Rauf Pasha, who was appointed as the commander of these troops, was able to reach his zone of responsibility just three days before the Russian attacks on the Hainköy Pass.[396]

The fortification of the Balkan passages was an important matter for the Ottoman army. In this regard, the Ottoman staff officers had conducted investigations throughout the Balkan Mountains and prepared two reports about the conditions of the Balkan passes in March and May 1877. Both reports indicated the importance of especially three passes, Elena, Kazgan and Shipka passages. Yet, the Hainköy Pass, which would be the key point for the Russian army on the Balkan Mountains, was regarded as the secondary position.[397] Therefore the defense of the Hainköy Pass was not formed as much as the other passages. The inefficient reconnaissance and

[395] ATASE, ORH. 9/8A, 13 July 1877; ATASE, ORH. 71/49AB, 9 July 1877.

[396] BOA, Y. EE. D, 800/7, 27 Haziran 1293, [9 July 1877].

[397] ATASE, ORH. 96/200, 1 March 1877; ATASE, ORH. 96/201AE, 2 May 1877.

surveillance activities around this pass enabled the Russians to complete their preparations without noticed by the Ottomans and offered them a big opportunity to perform their operations on the disregarded Hainköy Pass successfully, which paved the way to the fall of the Shipka Pass as well because the only supply line of the Shipka Pass was closed by the Russians after the Hainköy. Under these conditions, the Shipka garrison had to retreat on 19 July because of the lack of provision and ammunition without showing remarkable resistance.

The defense of the Shipka Pass had been designed considering attacks from the north because not only the positions of the redoubt were defined regarding that manner but also the needs of the garrison were planned to be provided from the Tundja Valley, in which on the south of the pass. Besides, two warehouses were constructed in the pass and Shipka village, each of which was large enough to contain the provision requirement for two months. Even though one month passed from the construction activities, nobody sent provision to fill these storehouses. There was not enough provision in the pass and the last chance of the Shipka was the supply convoy, which was sent from Plovdiv on 13 July, right before the Russians entered the Tundja valley through the Hainköy. However, it was captured by the Russians near the Shipka Pass.[398] The Russians were aware that the lack of provision and ammunition paved the way for them. In his report on 19 July, General Gurko indicated that it would have been a big trouble for them to attack such a fortified position if the Ottomans had prepared well.[399]

However, Colonel Reşid Beg, who witnessed the battle, drew attention to another point. According to him, it could have been possible to resist the Russians for at least one week by using the provision and ammunition economically. He accused Mehmed Hulusi Pasha as the commander that he did not consider resisting the enemy till the

[398] BOA, Y.A.RES, 3/13/4-5, 7 Cemâziyü'l-evvel 1296, [29 April 1879].

[399] Ali Fuad, *Musavver 1293-1294 Osmanlı-Rus seferi*, Vol. 1, p. 316.

last possibility.[400] This assessment of Reşid Beg brings the question of what might happen if the Shipka Pass was defended one week by the Ottomans. In fact, the reinforcements and Süleyman Pasha on the way during that period. Besides, Rauf Pasha could threaten the rear of the General Gurko detachment with about 15 battalions after the reinforcements, sent from Omurtag, arrived Sliven on 17 July. Nevertheless, what should be considered at this point is whether the Ottoman soldiers were ready or not to force their limits under such tough conditions. There is no doubt that the Shipka detachment, mainly constituted with the reserve units, were not capable of resisting the Russians psychologically. They had been struggling with the Russian attacks since 15 July. In the Uflani and Kazanlak battles, the Ottoman detachment, forwarded from the Shipka Pass, was heavily suffered. The remaining part of this detachment turned back to the Shipka Pass, but they were not ready to resist. In his report after the retreat, Mehmed Hulusi Pasha indicated the disturbance of the soldiers, and he also stated that although he was planning to remain in the pass one more day, it was not possible to stay at the Shipka under these conditions.[401]

Another reason for the psychological disorder among the Ottoman soldiers was the lack of accurate information about the number of enemy forces. The Ottoman troops that confronted the Russians in Uflani and Kazanlak were surrounded by the superior Russian force and had to retreat by leaving many casualties. During these conflicts, the Ottomans could not determine the number of the enemy force. Thus, the Ottomans overestimated the power of General Gurko detachment. The rapid advance of them led the Ottomans to perceive the number of the enemy two or three times more than the

[400] BOA, Y.A.RES, 3/13/4, 7 Cemâziyü'l-evvel 1296, [29 April 1879].

[401] ATASE, ORH. 6/146, 22 July 1877. In addition, the Daily News correspondents indicated that there was not enough water supply for the Ottoman forces, and the Ottomans might have defended the pass if they had enough supply of water. Daily News, *The War Correspondence of the Daily News 1877*, p. 272. However, there was no mention about the lack of water in the Ottoman sources. Considering the main water resources in the Shipka Pass were around the Aykırıcebel which was not occupied by the Russians at the moment, it would be possible to notice the wrong indication of the Daily News reporter.

real number. Gurko's force, which was actually around 10.000, was overestimated as more than 40.000 men by the Ottomans.[402]

Even if we consider that the Ottomans remained in Shipka one or two days, the consequence would not be different because the Russian detachment that attacked the pass from the northern hills of the pass was reinforced with the troops under command of General Skobelev. For that reason, it would be inevitable to abandon the pass against the simultaneous attacks of the superior Russian forces. Besides, under such circumstances, it would be difficult to perform a successful withdrawal. Therefore, the retreat of the Ottoman forces should be regarded as a successful withdrawal. Besides, the soldiers of the Shipka garrison were honored with the appreciation and salute message of Sultan Abdülhamid II after they successfully arrived at Plovdiv.[403]

Considering all of these developments mentioned above, the main reasons for the fall of the Shipka defense were the disregard of the Ottoman decision-makers and their cautious steps against the advancing Russian forces. The necessary measures were not regarded in time by them. The commander of the Ottoman forces, Abdülkerim Pasha, was acting like that the Balkan Mountains region was thousands of kilometers away from his responsibility area. He was trying to escape from the burden of this area by showing Istanbul as the responsible one for the defense of the pass. Even if we consider that he did not have a chance to help the Balkan defense, nobody could bring a light on the question of why he did not intend to carry out any operation in his responsibility area which was known by everyone. He determined to remain immobile and tried to keep his troops as assembled in certain fortified areas.

Abdülkerim Nadir Pasha was warned many times by the military council and the Sultan himself. Abdülhamid II was indicating Abdülkerim Pasha's command as the reason for the failure in his telegram date on 16 July. According to him, since between 160.000 and 170.000 men were kept immobile in the fortifications without mobilizing

[402] ATASE, ORH. 9/29, 19 July 1877.

[403] ATASE, ORH. 51/128, 20 July 1877.

a force among them, the Russians managed to advance rapidly. Therefore, he pointed out that a mobilized unit should be organized to threaten the rear of the Russians between Svishtov and Rahova. Besides, the Sultan indicated that if the necessary precautions were ignored and Edirne was occupied by the Russians, the empire would fall to the level of the Khanate of Bukhara because after that there would be no obstacle before the Russian army.[404] However, Abdülkerim Nadir Pasha did not attempt to change the deployment of his troops and continued his famous complaints about the insufficiency of his force. Even, after a while, he started to complain about his health problems because of his old age. Therefore, the commanders of the headquarters in the front line, Abdülkerim Nadir Pasha, *Serasker* Redif Pasha and Nazım Pasha were superseded and sent to the court-martial.

During the court-martial, Abdülkerim Nadir Pasha accused the military council of not deploying enough numbers to the Danubian front. He showed the inefficiency of his force as the reason for immobility again in the trial. According to him, even though a new force was supposed to be formed by Istanbul to locate on the Balkan Mountains, a remarkable part of the mobilized forces was appointed in the other regions such as Sokhumi and Batumi. Moreover, he pointed out that the military council had always intervened in the command without having enough information about the circumstances throughout the front line. Even though he planned to conduct a different defense strategy against the Russians in which based on attacking the flanks of the Russian army, the military council in Istanbul did not allow his approval of sending a division from Shumen and Omurtag on the left flank and the army corps under Osman Pasha from Vidin on the right flank of the Russian army. Instead, he was obliged to perform a totally different operation by sending Ahmed Eyüb Pasha detachment, which was not regarded as enough by Abdülkerim Pasha himself to stop the Russian advance.[405]

[404] Ahmed Mithat Efendi, *Zübdetü'l-Hakāyık*, pp. 204-206.

[405] Öztürk, "1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus Harbi Belgeleri: Abdi Paşa'nın Muhakemesi", pp. 129-133.

These complaints of Abdülkerim Nadir Pasha show the problem in the strategic command and decision-making mechanism in the Ottoman army. He did not want to accept his responsibility in the defeat of the Ottoman army and mainly accused the military council. However, these are not enough to explain the strict passivity of the Ottoman army of about 180.000 on the Danubian front under his command. Albeit all interventions and wrong deployment decisions, his force was enough to at least hinder the rapid advance of the Russian army even if they could not be stopped. Instead of exploiting the potential of his force, which was not sufficient as he complained, against the enemy, he planned to move cautiously and continue his complaints again and again. Rauf Pasha, the commander of the Balkan corps, also affirmed the effect of the passivity of Abdülkerim Nadir Pasha against the Russians on the fall of the defense in the Balkan Mountains. He pointed out that if the Ottoman corps around Ruse, Shumen and Razgrad threatened the rear of Gurko's force, the outcome of the Russian attacks would have been different.[406]

The fall of the pass became a subject matter at the court-martial which commenced after the war. The result of the trial offers important information about the fall of the pass. Mehmed Hulusi Pasha, the commander of the Shipka garrison, showed Mahmud Celaleddin Pasha, who served as the deputy *Serasker* throughout the war, as the responsible one for the fall of the Shipka Pass. According to him, Mahmud Celaleddin Pasha dispersed the assembled Shipka force and sent a remarkable part of this force to different positions.[407] Firstly, four battalions out of 13 battalions of the Shipka force were sent to Nova Zagora and some of the little passages between the north and the south of the Balkan Mountains around the Shipka Pass. After that, upon the crossing of General Gurko from the Hainköy Pass, three battalions were forwarded towards the Russian forces. In this way, the number of the Shipka Pass was reduced to half of its main force.[408] In fact, these orders were not direct decisions of Mahmud Celaleddin

[406] ATASE, ORH. 10/164AA, 16 July 1877.

[407] BOA, Y.A.RES, 3/13/1, 6 Safer 1296, [30 January 1879].

[408] BOA, Y.A.RES, 3/13/3, 7 Cemâziyü'l-evvel 1296, [29 April 1879].

Pasha himself. He was informing the commanders in the front line from the decisions of the military council. Besides, as indicated in the decision of the court-martial, it was inevitable to use the Shipka force because except for this force, there was no significant assembled force in the south of the Balkans. Therefore, the main reason for the fall was shown as the lack of ammunition and provision in the Shipka Pass.[409]

All of these different remarks were important to understand the strategic command problem in the Ottoman army throughout the war. There is no doubt that directly showing a person as the result of the immobility of the Ottoman army would not be appropriate. On the contrary, this was the outcome of many determinants. A series of wrong decisions as a consequence of the strategic command problem played an important role in the failure of the Ottoman army. The beginning of the chain of such kinds of decisions was the inappropriate deployment of the Ottoman forces at the beginning of the war. It damaged the self-confidence of the commander-in-chief who had to keep a wide defense line on the Danubian front. He depended on this reason and did not believe in success although he had a remarkable force. In addition, the Ottoman decision-makers ignored the Balkan line for a long time. When an army corps was tried to be constituted, it became too late to show an effective defense against the Russians due to timing. If the Balkan corps was founded in time with all its organization, the troops could be deployed in the region as it should be. Also, under these circumstances, the reconnaissance and surveillance activities could be conducted properly, and the Russian advance could be prevented in the Balkan Mountains.

[409] BOA, Y.A.RES, 3/13/5, 7 Cemâziyü'l-evvel 1296, [29 April 1879].

5.2. Assessment of the Ottoman Counteroffensive for the Shipka Pass

The Shipka attacks of the Balkan corps in August and September caused the loss of more than 10.000 men, around 2.000 dead and 8.000 wounded. That is to say, one out three of the force of the Balkan corps intensely suffered especially because of the advantage of the Russians on the terrain. The Shipka attacks caused one of the bloodiest battles for the Ottoman army throughout the war. Albeit using all possible opportunities in the Shipka Pass, the reasons for the failure of Süleyman Pasha were multiple. These were mainly triggered by the strategic command and coordination problems of the army.

It is no doubt that the Shipka Pass had key importance for the Russian war strategy, and thus they gave their maximum effort to retain this strategically important pass which would be one of the avenues of approach.[410] Despite the Russian enthusiasm to keep the pass and their advantage on the terrain, the Ottomans could take control of the pass. However, it could not be possible to obtain the pass because of the sequent wrong decisions intensified at the strategic level. In this respect, the main determinant for the outcome of the battle was firstly sufficient preparations for the attacks, and after that some kinds of tactical and operational mistakes.

The first and foremost decision that caused the real problem in the Ottoman army was the appointments after the expulsion of Abdülkerim Nadir Pasha. The command of the Danubian front was divided among Mehmed Ali Pasha, Süleyman Hüsü Pasha and Osman Pasha without a supreme commander who would determine the last decisions in the front line and ensure accordance among the commanders. That is to say, the unity of command was neglected during that appointments. Besides, these

[410] As Mikhail Gazenkampf, a senior staff officer in charge of the war diary of the Russian Army wrote that "The fate of this campaign is decided at Shipka (…) If we retreat, (…) the morale of the Turks would surge to such an extent, that not only Suleiman but also Osman and Mehmed-Ali would attack (…) We must spare no effort in throwing Suleiman down from the Balkan Ridge, and if we cannot do it, at the very least we need to hold our positions. If we make even a step back, we might have to retreat even beyond the Danube, and then this entire campaign would fail." Statiev, "The Thorns of the Wild Rose: Russian Ordeals at the Shipka Pass During the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878", pp. 373-374.

appointments were implemented without determining a certain chain of command contrary to the military tradition. This new command organization caused the separation of the command zone as well as spirit, and it appeared as one of the most significant reasons for many failures during the war. Even though all commanders depended on each other, there was no coordination among them. They mainly prioritized their command zone and did not attempt to help others. Therefore, the Ottoman army could not practice successful operations without coherence among the commanders.

The coordination problem among the commanders emerged mainly between Süleyman Hüsnü Pasha and Mehmed Ali Pasha because Osman Pasha was in defense position. One of the main efforts of the Ottoman army throughout that period was to prevent the concentration of the Russian forces on the front line, especially before Pleven. Both Mehmed Ali Pasha and Süleyman Pasha had a different method to reach this objective of the Ottoman army. Süleyman Pasha was planning to complete the orders given to him from Istanbul at the beginning of his service on the Danubian front, which was mainly based on capturing the Shipka Pass with the help of Mehmed Ali Pasha. On the other hand, Mehmed Ali Pasha's request from Süleyman Pasha was to abandon his plan regarding the Shipka Pass and assembly with his forces to commence a united operation towards the Russian troops around Tırnova and Byala. Both alternatives could be successfully ended with the support and coordination of them. However, they insisted on following their own paths, and neither Süleyman Pasha nor Mehmed Ali Pasha had no chance to successfully perform their operations without the assistance of each other. Due to the unity of command, the Ottomans could not exploit the important days, in which the Russian army was waiting for reinforcements in a defensive manner.

Another important reason for the failure of the Balkan corps under Süleyman Pasha was the problem in obtaining intelligence and conducting sufficient reconnaissance and surveillance activities, which caused the inappropriate deployment of the Ottoman forces. The cavalry organization in the Ottoman army was the weakest side of the Ottomans. Süleyman Pasha, like in most of the army corps on the Danubian front, did not have enough cavalry force. Because of the inefficiency of the cavalry units,

Süleyman Pasha directed his corps wrong on many occasions. These inappropriate decisions had a big impact on the outcome of the battle of Shipka. For example, the Balkan corps could not exploit the success as soon as defeating the Russian detachment in Stara Zagora. Since this detachment was not pursued, they easily reached the Shipka Pass and constituted the main body of the Shipka force while the Ottoman attacks under. In addition, because of the inefficient information about the enemy forces, Süleyman Pasha was unable to ascertain the locality of General Gurko. Therefore, he was easily misled by a wrong intelligence, indicating that a big Russian column was advancing on Nova Zagora, and he turned the direction of his army from the Shipka Pass to a totally different way. As a result of this decision, the Balkan corps spent many important days in Nova Zagora waiting for reinforcement, instead of exploiting success and rapidly advancing on the Shipka to take advantage of the unprepared situation of the defenders. The efficiency in reconnaissance and surveillance missions was also seen at the tactical and operational levels of the Shipka attacks. The Ottoman reconnaissance and surveillance column could not convey profound information about the pass, and the attack plan was prepared upon the insufficient terrain analysis of this column. Thus, it led to the wrong determination of the target as well as the center of gravity on the battlefield.[411]

The Strategy, which is explained as the art of war, is based on determining the principles of an operation and directing the main force at the most appropriate position and time.[412] There are three main principles for the military strategy, which are time, place and force. That is to say, to be successful on the battlefield, the operation should be planned and performed with the right force, which is suitable to reach the main objective. Also, it was necessary to direct the operation to the right place at the right

[411] The strategic command and coordination problems in the Ottoman army will be dwelled in the next subtopics detailly by pointing out their effects on the Shipka attacks.

[412] J. E. A. Whitman, *Tarih Boyu Strateji ve Taktik*, p. 11.

time.[413] All of these represent the strategic level before the combat. When the operation starts, the strategic level changes with the operational, tactical and technical levels on the battlefield. If the plan was not prepared properly during the strategic level, the tactical or the technical levels would define the course of the operation.[414] However, the preparations of an operation, in other words the strategic level, had the most determinant effect on the course of an operation because it determines the efficiency of the operative, tactical and technical levels. Considering the Ottoman attacks on the Shipka Pass, there were many problems at the strategic level that led to operational problems. Due to the strategic command and coordination problems in the Ottoman army mentioned above, the troops could not be directed in time by using a proper force in the right position during the battle of Shipka. Therefore, the outcome of the Shipka battle was determined by the decisions at the strategic level rather than the operational and tactical levels.

5.2.1. Strategic Command and Coordination Problems in the Ottoman Army during the Shipka Attacks

The Ottoman army had better opportunities regarding the communication alternatives throughout the Ottoman-Russian war of 1877-1878 because the war was on the Ottoman territories, and the Ottomans were able to use telegraphy constantly. The easy communication opportunities increased the effect of the *Meclis-i Askerî* on the course of the war. Even though the military councils had effect on the Ottoman wars before the 1877-1878 war, it has never been more effective than this war. While the effects of the *Meclis-i Askerî* mainly remained in the strategic level of the wars, it showed

[413] Ahmet Sefa Özkaya, "Kültür Tasnifi ve Türk Askeri Kültürüne Giriş", in *Türk Askeri Kültürü: Tarih, Strateji, İstihbarat, Teşkilat*, ed. Ahmet Sefa Özkaya, (Istanbul: Kronik Yayınları, 2019), p. 20; Tekinalp, *Stratejiye Giriş ve Deniz Stratejisi*, pp. 295-296.

[414] Özkaya, "Kültür Tasnifi ve Türk Askeri Kültürüne Giriş", pp. 20-21.

itself in every part of the Ottoman war command and decision-making mechanism during the Ottoman Russian War of 1877-1878.

The main reason for the foundation of such a high council under the name of *Meclis-i Umûr-ı Harbiye* in Istanbul, in fact, was to exploit the advantage of communication as much as possible and work in coordination with the front line against the enemy forces. The council was primarily composed of high-ranking commanders who were left in Istanbul. With the help of this council, it was planned to eliminate the organizational problems in the Ottoman army and ensure the strategic and operational coordination between the Ottoman corps. In addition, it was planned to control the logistics of the army in order to assure the rational utilization of the opportunities. However, the council could not satisfy the expectations due to the chaos in assuming authority.[415]

The rapid advance of the Russian army in July resulted in the dismissal of Abdülkerim Nadir Pasha. He was accepted as the reason for the failure, but the strategic organization on the Danubian front did not change as much as expected. Even, it was worsened because of the inappropriate appointments in the army without considering one of the necessities of the military tradition, the unity of command that based on determining a supreme commander among.[416] For example, although Mehmed Ali Pasha was replaced with Abdülkerim Nadir Pasha and appointed as the general commander of the Danubian front, he was not showed as the superior commander like Abdülkerim Nadir Pasha. Besides, he had just been promoted as Field Marshal, and

[415] Özbilgen, *Osmanlı'nın Balkanlardan Çekilişi: Süleyman Hüsnü Paşa ve Dönemi*, pp. 96-98. The purpose of the establishment of this council was announced in the newspapers with these words. "Muhârebe-i hâzıradan dolayı ordu-yı hümâyûnların hareket-i harbiyyesi kesb-i ehemmiyet etmiş ve her kumandan fenn-i harbçe dâire-i idâresi dâhilinde bulunan askerin sûret–i husûsiyede lâzım-ıl ittihâz olan kâ'ide-i ta'biye ve sevkinde ve harb manevralarının ta'yîninde Muhtar olması lâzım gelirse de orduların harekât-ı umûmîyyesinden dolayı makâm-ı seraskerîye mürâcaatları tâbi' olub bu cihetle nezd-i seraskerîyye bir hey'et-i askeriyye-i müşâvere bulundurulması lâzım gelmiş olduğundan." Merve Öter, "*Ahmed Saib'in Son Osmanlı-Rus Muharebesi Adlı Eserinin Transkripsiyonu ve Değerlendirilmesi"*, Master Thesis, (Batman: Batman University, 2018), pp. 85-86.

[416] The command problem was seen in the Ottoman navy as well. Like in the land forces, there was no clear command hierarchy in the navy. Thereby, the Ottomans could not use their technological capacity on the waters against the Russians during the war. Daniel Panzac, *Osmanlı Donanması (1572-1923)*, (Istanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Yayınları, 2018), p. 370.

both Süleyman and Osman Pasha were senior officers of him. He was informed by the Yıldız Palace that the other commanders would be under his command.[417] However, this was not directly dictated to the other pashas and the connection among them was not determined exactly. Even, both Süleyman Pasha and Osman Pasha had the chance to directly communicate with Istanbul without relying on a chain of command.[418] Therefore, they considered themselves independent commanders. This chaotic command structure became the main reason for the failure in the Shipka Pass.

Abdülhamid II had a big effect on this disorder in the command. Albeit not having military-based education, he closely followed the developments in the front line and was directly involved in most of the decision-making processes. The military council was a means for him in this matter. Also, he gave the opportunity of communication directly with the Yıldız Palace, in other words directly with the Sultan himself, to many officers in the front line. The order was given to high commanders, Mehmed Ali Pasha, Osman Pasha and Süleyman Pasha, to inform the Sultan constantly about their actions.[419] However, Abdülhamid II's eagerness to command and control everything negatively affected the decision-making process and command hierarchy in the Ottoman army which had been already problematic.[420]

One of the main actors for Abdülhamid II in this regard was the military council. The council was composed of mainly high-ranking generals who were loyal to the Sultan. The absolute intervention of the council on the movements of the commanders was

[417] The superiority of Mehmed Ali Pasha was expressed in the telegram on 17 July by: "Umûm kumandanlık me'mûriyyeti mühimmesi zât-ı dâverîlerine tevcîh buyurulduğu cihetle muhârebe-i hâzırada te'sîs ve icrâ olunacak kâffe-i harekât-ı askeriyye, evâmir ve ta'lîmât-ı müşîrîlerine tâbi olacağından ve müşîr Süleyman Paşa, Ahmed Eyüb Paşa ve Osman Paşa dâhî ma'iyyet-i 'alîlerinde bulunacaklarından" Sedes, *1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus ve Romen Savaşı*, Vol. 5, p. 21.

[418] The expression in this regard was on the telegram dated 21 July from the Yıldız Palace to Süleyman Pasha: "Bi-avnihi te'âlâ harekât-ı ta'arruziyeye teşebbüs mühim mes'ele olmak tâbi görülürse de seraskerlik makâmı ve 'umûm kumandanlıkla bi'l-muhâbere elbette kâ'ide ve mevkiye göre ittihâz buyurulacak hatt-ı hareket ta'yîn kılınır." Sedes, *1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus ve Romen Savaşı*, Vol. 5, p. 33.

[419] ATASE, ORH. 15/63, 27 August 1877.

[420] Uyar and Erickson, *A Military History of the Ottomans: From Osman to Atatürk*, pp. 183-184.

destroying the plans of the commanders who detected the circumstances and attempted to take measures accordingly.[421] For example, Abdülkerim Nadir Pasha asserted that despite having a totally different intention to prevent the Russian advance in the Balkans, the military council forced him to implement an entirely different measure. He planned to threaten the Russian flanks by sending two divisions. In this context, a division would be sent from Shumen to the left flank of the Russians. On the right flank, Osman Pasha would be forwarded to Pleven the second from Vidin. However, according to Abdülkerim Nadir Pasha, the military council did not accept his plan and ordered him to send a detachment under Ahmed Eyüb Pasha towards the enemy forces advancing on Ruse.[422]

Indeed, during those days in which the Russian army crossed the Danube River, Osman Pasha requested to advance on the enemy by leaving Vidin. Nevertheless, this request was not accepted because of intelligence from Austria, which was indicating

[421] Öter, "*Ahmed Saib'in Son Osmanlı-Rus Muharebesi Adlı Eserinin Transkripsiyonu ve Değerlendirilmesi"*, p. 87. There are many similar expressions about Abdülhamid II and *Meclis-i Askerî*. In the Turkish historiography, this consideration was mainly started to be expressed after the dethronement of Abdülhamid II in 1909 especially with the writings of the Sultan's opponents like Ahmed Saib and Basiretçi Ali. While the failure in the Ottoman-Russian War of 1877-1878 had been described as because of the individual mistakes of the commanders until the dethronement of the Sultan, after that time, the interventions of Istanbul became one of the main subject matters for the reasons of the failure. In fact, the starting point of the so-called individual failures was the inappropriate appointment method. The appointments without considering the military tradition and hierarchy led to a problem in the command and coordination among the commanders. With the emergence of a suitable political atmosphere, it became possible to make a connection between Abdülhamid II and the war. In fact, Abdülhamid II's desire of controlling everything in both military and civil affairs had started to be seen after that time. According to Francois Georgeon, the Ottoman-Russian War of 1877-1878 offered an important chance to the Sultan to consolidate his authority. He closed the parliament in February 1878 because of harsh criticisms of the deputies. Also, after that time, he had started to eliminate the officials who helped him to ascend to the throne such as Redif Pasha, Süleyman Hüsnü Pasha, Mithad Pasha, Hasan Hayrullah Efendi and Mahmud Celaleddin Pasha. Thus, by the year 1881, only those who owed their position to the Sultan were left around him. François Georgeon, *Sultan Abdülhamid*, (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2020), pp. 154-158. The influence of the palace on the army continued simultaneously with all these developments Georgeon indicated. With the regulations implemented after 1880, *Dâr-ı Şûra-yı Askerî* (military council) was abolished, and two alternative organizations to *Bâb-ı Seraskerî* (Ministry of War) and *Erkân-ı Harbiyye-i Umûmiyye* (General Staff) were established, these were *Teftîş-i Askerî Komisyonu* (military inspection commission) *Maiyet-i Seniyye-i Erkân-ı Harbiyye* (literally Sultan's private general staff). The latter had an important place in this regard by holding the control of the army for the Sultan. Many officers had the opportunity to direct communication with the *Maiyyet-i Seniyye* and Abdülhamid II himself. Yıldız, "Kara kuvvetleri", pp. 72-73.

[422] Öztürk, "1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus Harbi Belgeleri: Abdi Paşa'nın Muhakemesi", p. 131.

that the Russians were planning to cross the Serbian border near the Timok River and unite with the Serbian army for a simultaneous attack. Therefore, Osman Pasha's request was accepted and his appointment in Pleven was delayed a couple of days.[423] There were many such kind of examples not only from the Danubian front but also the Caucasian front. However, the effects of Istanbul are mainly visible on the Danubian front regarding the Shipka case and the connection between commanders of this front.

Three commanders of the Danubian front were obliged to receive approval from Istanbul before implementing a specific plan. Yet, this long chain of communication led to miss the opportunities in the front line in which every second had strategic importance. For example, Süleyman Pasha realized that the Shipka attacks would not be successful if he continued to make frontal attacks without the help of Osman Pasha and Mehmed Ali Pasha in the rear of the Shipka garrison. It was necessary to prevent the reinforcements who reached the Shipka Pass from Gabrovo, Sevlievno and Tırnova. Therefore, he prepared a plan with Osman Pasha right after the first Shipka assault. The plan was based on attacking the enemy simultaneously to capture Gabrovo in order to cut the supply line of the Shipka Pass. In this regard, Süleyman Pasha would cross the Balkan Mountains throughout the narrow defiles with a detachment which was prepared from the reinforcements sent from Istanbul.[424] Osman Pasha, on the other hand, would leave 18 battalions in Pleven and advance on Lovech and Sevlievno with 40 battalions in order to close the retreat line of Gabrovo.[425] Although this plan was submitted to *Meclis-i Askerî* for approval at the end of August, they did not hesitate to make a decision and continued negotiations on this plan. However, Süleyman Pasha was looking forward to the approval of the council to conduct the plan as soon as possible. Therefore, he complained about this delay in his telegram on 2 September to the Yıldız Palace.[426] Notwithstanding, the development that took place on 3 September

[423] ATASE, ORH. 3/185, 7 July 1877.

[424] ATASE, ORH. 25/83AF, 1 September 1877; ATASE, ORH. 25/83AE, 30 August 1877.

[425] ATASE, ORH. 4/20/151, 29 August 1877.

[426] ATASE, ORH. 94/2AL, 31 August 1877; ATASE, ORH. 94/2ALA, 3 September 1877.

made the plan impracticable. While Süleyman Pasha had been striving with the problematic decision-making process, the Russian army attacked Lovech and Osman Pasha lost his flexibility.[427]

The effect of Istanbul on the Danubian front after the dismissal of Abdülkerim Nadir Pasha showed itself mainly at the strategic level, not at the operational and tactical levels. As mentioned above, the main reason for many command and coordination problems on the Danubian front was the appointments without following the military tradition and command hierarchy, and these problems had appeared especially among Süleyman Hüsnü Pasha and Mehmed Ali Pasha due to the interconnection of these commander's zone of responsibility. Even though both of them depended on each other to be successful, they could not establish a cooperation relationship among themselves, instead, they had attempted to dictate their plans to each other. The dispute among them firstly started with the scope of the Shipka plan, and then continued on a joint operation.

The mission of Süleyman Pasha which was determined by Istanbul based on two phases. In the first phase, as the commander of the Balkan corps, he was supposed to repel the Russian forces from the south of the Balkan Mountains and retrieve the Balkan passages. Secondly, after taking back the Balkan passages, it was expected that he would unite with Mehmed Ali Pasha or Osman Pasha to perform united operations on the Russian main body. Accordingly, during the first phase, Mehmed Ali Pasha had to pave the way for Süleyman Pasha to capture the Balkan passages by threatening the Russian left-wing from Omurtag. In this regard, a detachment of 14 infantry battalions and one cavalry regiment under Necib Pasha was appointed in Omurtag by Mehmed Ali Pasha at the end of July, in which Süleyman Pasha was attacking Stara Zagora.[428] In addition, a detachment of Mehmed Ali Pasha consisting of 18 battalions would

[427] ATASE, ORH. 94/2AMA, 3 September 1877.

[428] ATASE, ORH. 94/2AF, 28 July 1877; ATASE, ORH. 94/2AFA, 3 August 1877.

attack the Hainköy and Elena passages on 2 August in which Süleyman Pasha was attacking the Shipka Pass.[429]

However, the advance of Süleyman Pasha on the Balkan passages was delayed, and the Balkan corps was forwarded to Nova Zagora for supply. This decision paved the way for the dispute among Süleyman Pasha and Mehmed Ali Pasha. While Süleyman Pasha was waiting in Nova Zagora, the position of the Russian army was changed and therefore Mehmed Ali Pasha decided to focus on his zone of responsibility. According to an intelligence report that arrived throughout the Ottoman Ambassador in Vienna, the Russian army was forwarded its main forces to Byala, and planning to start a general attack on Mehmed Ali Pasha forces concentrated around Ruse, Silistra and Razgrad. This intelligence, which could not be verified by the reconnaissance and surveillance missions was accepted as accurate and thus Mehmed Ali Pasha decided to delay the attack plan from Omurtag to the Russian right-wing.[430] After that, he abandoned the plan completely and recalled most of the forces located in Omurtag. On 15 August in which Süleyman Pasha was attacking the Hainköy Passage, only six battalions remained in Omurtag.[431]

It is no doubt that the 6 battalions left in Omurtag were not capable of fulfilling the needs of the Balkan corps. Also, the connection between Mehmed Ali Pasha forces and the Balkan corps was lost. This movement of Mehmed Ali Pasha meant that Süleyman Pasha would be alone in his operations. The Russian army could easily support the Shipka garrison if Mehmed Ali Pasha did not threaten the Russians. Süleyman Pasha was aware of this problem. Therefore, in his telegrams, he constantly

[429] ATASE, ORH. 19/22, 8 August 1877; ATASE, ORH. 19/22A, 8 August 1877.

[430] ATASE, ORH. 8/54AB, 8 August 1877; ATASE, ORH. 20/92, 28 July 1877; ATASE, ORH. 19/22, 8 August 1877.

[431] ATASE, ORH. 99/138BRA, nd.

complained Mehmed Ali Pasha to Istanbul and tried to force him to forward troops for helping the attacks of the Balkan corps as soon as possible.[432]

However, Mehmed Ali Pasha insisted on the dangerous position of his army. Besides, the rapid advance of Süleyman Pasha in the Hainköy and Elena passages without any resistance was accepted as evidence by Mehmed Ali Pasha that the Russian army would attack on his positions.[433] Therefore, his main focus remained in his zone of responsibility and he did not pay attention to Süleyman Pasha's situation. These developments that took place on the Danubian during the first days of August determined not only the chance of the Balkan corps against the Russian forces but also Mehmed Ali Pasha forces because it could not be possible to ensure the connection between Mehmed Ali Pasha and Süleyman pasha any more after that time.

Moreover, when Süleyman Pasha was about to depart from Nova Zagora to conduct his operations towards the Balkan passages, on 11 August an assembly was commenced in the headquarters of Mehmed Ali Pasha with the participation of the staff officers. Among the participants, there were also Rauf Pasha, who had felt a big hostility to Süleyman Pasha because of the developments when he was under Süleyman Pasha at the beginning of the operations to Stara Zagora. In this meeting, they decided that directly attacking on the Balkan passages would be a wrong decision. Therefore, they prepared an alternative plan and sent it to Istanbul. In this plan, Süleyman Pasha had to abandon his plan and cross the Balkan passages to unite with Mehmed Ali Pasha instead of directly attacking the Shipka Pass. 15 battalions should be sent to Omurtag and after uniting with 6 battalions in there, they could force them to retreat by threatening the rear of the Balkan passages.[434] This proposal led to a big meeting in Istanbul on 13 August. The *Meclis-i Askerî* was gathered in the Yıldız

[432] ATASE, ORH. 19/27, 8 August 1877.

[433] ATASE, ORH. 19/34, 12 August 1877.

[434] ATASE, ORH. 19/30, 11 August 1877.

Palace under the patronage of Abdülhamid II himself. Süleyman Pasha was informed that he should not advance more until the decision of the *Meclis-i Askerî*.[435]

However, Süleyman Pasha was willing to complete his operations and capture the Shipka Pass as planned before his appointment on the Danubian front. According to him, even if the army would be challenged with some difficulties, it could have been possible to drive the Russian forces in the Shipka Pass. Besides, for him, it would be possible to unite with Osman Pasha throughout Sevlievno after capturing the pass, and this would be the most important achievement for the next operations of the Ottoman army. Consequently, the military council authorized Süleyman Pasha to implement his operations on the Shipka Pass after three meetings.[436]

The proposal of Mehmed Ali Pasha, in fact, was informed right after the Balkan corps completed preparation in Nova Zagora and started marching on the Balkan passages. Until this time, both Mehmed Ali Pasha and Süleyman Pasha were showing the Shipka Pass as the target in the correspondences between themselves.[437] Even, in his telegram to Süleyman Pasha on 8 August, just 3 days before the proposal of Mehmed Ali Pasha, he was stating that Süleyman Pasha should advance on firstly the Hainköy and Elena and then Shipka Pass as soon as possible. According to Mehmed Ali Pasha, the forces under Süleyman Pasha were strong enough to capture the Balkan passages without much difficulty.[438] These expressions of him showed that the decision of Süleyman Pasha and the *Meclis-i Askerî* regarding the Shipka attacks were not incomprehensible in terms of the circumstances, and the pass could be taken back under the current conditions. However, the success of Süleyman Pasha depended on the assistance of Mehmed Ali Pasha and Osman Pasha. Without their assistance, the Shipka garrison could be easily reinforced by the Russians, and the pass would be impassable for the

[435] ATASE, ORH. 19/75, 13 August 1877.

[436] ATASE, ORH. 99/138BRA, nd.

[437] ATASE, ORH. 94/2AG, 5 August 1877.

[438] ATASE, ORH. 19/22, 8 August 1877.

Ottomans. Nevertheless, these three commanders of the Danubian front could not show the necessary cooperation, and the Balkan corps failed in front of the Shipka Pass.

Since the Russian forces were not threatened, they managed to send reinforcements not only from the nearby district like Tırnova and Sevlievno but also from the remote localities. For example, the Russian army was able to forward soldiers from Svishtov, which was located on the Romanian border.[439] Therefore, many telegrams were sent to the front line from the military council, and Sultan himself to ensure the cooperation among the commanders and prevent the Russian movements. In these telegrams, the importance of the coordination for the success of the Ottoman army was particularly emphasized.[440] However, nothing was changed in the front line for a long time throughout the attacks of Süleyman Pasha on the Shipka redoubts. After the failure of Süleyman Pasha in August, Mehmed Ali Pasha was finally declared that he would start his operation against the Russians on 29 August.[441]

Nevertheless, the answer did not meet one of the main expectations from him to ensure coordination among the commanders. The expectation of the palace from Mehmed Ali Pasha was the same as the request of Süleyman Pasha, which was a demonstration on Tırnova to leave the Russians in the Shipka Pass alone. During those days, he had been still complaining about Süleyman Pasha and his Shipka attacks. Under these circumstances, he did not pay attention to the Shipka Pass. Instead, his attack plan was based on his responsibility area without assisting the others directly. He asserted that if he managed to capture Byala, in which the Russians were mainly concentrated, the enemy forces in Tırnova would have to abandon the city.[442] In addition, Mehmed Ali Pasha was still trying to get the support from Istanbul for directing Süleyman Pasha to

[439] ATASE, ORH. 106/17, 2 September 1877.

[440] BOA, Mâbeyn-i Hümâyûn İrâdeler (=MB.İ), 39/72, 15 Ağustos 1293, [27 August 1877]; BOA, MB.İ, 39/30, 10 Ağustos 1293, [22 August 1877].

[441] ATASE, ORH. 15/62, 27 August 1877.

[442] ATASE, ORH. 4/20/76, 29 August 1877.

abandon the Shipka attacks throughout that period. He even sent an officer, Keçecizade İzzet Fuad, from the front line to Istanbul to negotiate with the Sultan and the important officials to direct them against Süleyman Pasha.[443]

The most reasonable answer to the requests from Istanbul came from Osman Pasha. While Mehmed Ali Pasha was avoiding directly assisting the Balkan corps, Osman Pasha, on the other hand, declared that even though the number of his force was not enough to separate a force, he could force himself to attack the Russians to help Süleyman Pasha. According to him, his movement was dependent on Mehmed Ali Pasha's attack on Tırnova because, without such a threat, the Russians in Tırnova were able to close the retreat line of his army. Therefore, if Mehmed Ali Pasha drew the attention of the Russians in Tırnova, he would leave 18 battalions in Pleven and advance on Lovech and Sevlievno with 40 battalions.[444]

As can be seen clearly, albeit both Süleyman and Osman Pasha were looking forward to the attack of Mehmed Ali Pasha on Tırnova, he got stuck around the Lom River, in his area of responsibility. Because of the lack of a superior commander and strict orders to be followed, the Ottoman army was losing crucial times by striving for ensuring collaboration among the commanders, which meant that the Russian army

[443] Keçecizade İzzet Fuad, *Kaçırılan Fırsatlar: 1877 Osmanlı-Rus Savaşı Hakkında eleştiriler ve Askeri Düşünceler*, ed. Rasim Süerdem, (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 1997), p. 45, 78. Mehmed Ali Pasha was very angry at Süleyman Pasha. Even their relationship had turned to hostility. The expression of Melton Prior who interviewed with him during those days represents the considerations of Mehmed Ali Pasha about the disagreement and Süleyman Pasha: "Mehemet Ali, when Commander-in-Chief, told me several times, with almost tears in his eyes, that he had ordered Suleiman twelve times to give up Shipka, and come and join him. "Let the Russians have Shipka," he said. "What harm could this do?" With Suleiman's extra army he would have taken Biela, the Russian base, and thus have forced Gourko to fall back from that difficult pass, instead of which he had to retreat, after pushing the enemy back over nine miles to within almost a rifle-shot of the great Russian base at Biela. It was said that Suleiman was jealous of Mehemet Ali, and was pulling the wire at Constantinople for the downfall of that fine General so as to supplant him, which eventually he was successful in doing. Suleiman in those days was called a traitor, and I see no reason even now to challenge that remark. When I remember that with Biela within our grasp after all the severe fighting, and the Russians demoralized, we were ordered from Constantinople to fall back on our original positions, I cannot help feeling that there was treachery somewhere, and that an awful loss of life at Shipka might have been spared and the troops used to better purpose Melton Prior, *Campaigns of a War Correspondent*, (London: Edward Arnold, 1912), p. 71. As can be seen easily, Mehmed Ali Pasha was full of anger at Süleyman Pasha and under these circumstances, it could not be possible to constitute coordination among these commanders.

[444] ATASE, ORH. 4/19/167, 3 September 1877.

could easily find a chance to get stronger by the reinforcements. Against this Russian army, which was getting stronger every day, the Ottoman commanders could not implement a united plan.

The most interesting thing in this regard was why Istanbul could not solve the problem and force them to follow a determined plan. The chaotic command and coordination mechanism in the front line led to the direct involvement of the Sultan himself after the failure in the Shipka Pass. He sent a memorandum consisting of questions to the *Meclis-i Askerî* on 29 August. At the beginning of this memorandum, he indicated that Although the commanders were independent in their action, the mission of the *Meclis-ı Askerî* was to inform them about their opinions regarding a case. In this context, his questions were as follows: 1. Is it appropriate for Osman Pasha and Mehmed Ali Pasha to start the attacks? 2. If it is considered appropriate what is the main reason for such a decision? 3. If this is not deemed as appropriate, what is your consideration about the proposal of Osman Pasha to attack Gabrovo? 4. If these three questions are not accepted as suitable, what kind of path Süleyman Pasha should follow hereupon? In the last question, he also added four different alternatives for Süleyman Pasha army and asked for the considerations of the military council whether he should remain in the Shipka Pass or abandon the attacks to be used in a different region determined by the military council.[445]

In fact, Abdülhamid II summoned the *Meclis-i Askerî* to take responsibility and put an end to the chaotic atmosphere in the front line. However, the council avoided taking direct responsibility at this point and decided to leave all responsibility to the commanders. In the answer to Abdülhamid II's memorandum, they evaded giving direct answers to the questions by indicating that everything depends on the information which would be sent from the commanders regarding the issues.[446]

[445] ATASE, ORH. 17/66, 29 August 1877.

[446] ATASE, ORH. 17/66AA, 31 August 1877.

Even though the conditions on the Danubian front were suitable to perform a united operation on the Russians, both Mehmed Ali Pasha and Süleyman Pasha insisted on their plans.[447] Süleyman Pasha remained in front of the Shipka Pass and forced the pass without any assistance like the attacks between 21-26 August. Mehmed Ali Pasha, on the other hand, moved on the enemy forces at the end of August after many warnings from Istanbul. Nevertheless, he had continued to forward his troops cautiously. Albeit his forces managed to gain ground in the vicinity of the Lom River, these movements did not serve any strategic purpose that would take an effect on the course of the war. He had mainly forced the Russian covering forces around Targovishte and Razgrad instead of marching on Byala to reach a strategic acquisition.[448]

Because of the inefficient movements of Mehmed Ali Pasha, Abdülhamid II intervened in the situation and sent a telegram to Mehmed Ali Pasha after the first week of September 1877. In this telegram, The Sultan urged Mehmed Ali Pasha to conduct a visible operation on the Russian positions as soon as possible to distract their attention to be able to relieve Osman Pasha in Pleven, whose burden against the enemy had been increasing day by day. Otherwise, it could not be possible to even carry out a successful withdrawal under such conditions.[449] However, Mehmed Ali Pasha could not advance beyond the covering forces of the Russians, and the conditions of Osman

[447] Richard Graf von Pfeil described the conditions of the Russian army during those days from the Russian point of view that he witnessed in the Russian headquarters and he indicated that a joint attack against the Russians would be very advantageous for the Ottomans with these words. "I spent another evening with the Prince, when he pointed out the great danger to which the Russian army in Bulgaria had hitherto been exposed, by which he meant that, but for the petty jealousies between Suleiman and Mehemed Ali Pasha, the Russians would have been attacked simultaneously from three sides, and either driven / back over the Danube or made prisoners ; and indeed this danger existed even now, but in a few days the whole of the Guard Corps and other reinforcements would arrive at the seat of war." Richard Graf von Pfeil, *Experiences of a Prussian Officer in the Russian Service During the Turkish War of 1877-1878*, (London: Edward Stanford, 1893), pp. 33-34.

[448] Necati Tacan, "1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus Seferinde Türk Sevk ve İdaresinde Sevkulceyşi Hatalar: Balkanlar Şimalindeki Harekat, *Askeri Mecmua*, Vol. 11, No. 119, (1940), pp. 749-751.

[449] BOA, MB.İ, 39/179, 28 Ağustos 1293, [9 September 1877].

Pasha would be as Abdülhamid II estimated. He was surrendered at the end and could not find a way to successfully retreat.

The movements of Mehmed Ali Pasha in September were criticized by many officers as well as those who served the army under his command. For example, Keçecizâde İzzet Fuad, who was a big fan of Mehmed Ali Pasha, asserted that the operations around the Lom River were performed within a wide field without concentration on a certain point and therefore these were not useful attacks.[450] According to Francis Vinton Greene, the American Military attaché in St. Petersburg who witnessed the war with the Russian army, the Ottomans had a fair chance of driving the Russians to the opposite shore of the Danube River If Mehmed Ali Pasha started a general attack on Byala. In case of a failure, they could easily take position again in Ruse and Shumen.[451] After wasting all September without a significant gain instead of the constant warnings from Istanbul, Mehmed Ali Pasha had followed the path of his processor Abdülkerim Nadir Pasha by moving cautiously, and superseded at the end of September like his predecessor.

The failure of Süleyman Pasha in the Shipka battles led many people to consider that Mehmed Ali Pasha's proposal about abandoning the Shipka attacks would be the best move for the Ottoman army. It was acknowledged by many historians and soldiers, and Süleyman Pasha was accused in many sources of following an impossible path. The main argument of all these sources was that if the advice of Mehmed Ali Pasha had been accepted by Süleyman Pasha, the course of the war would have resulted quite differently. In this regard, it was asserted that the main cause of the failure was Süleyman Pasha's actions without considering the orders of his superior Mehmed Ali Pasha.[452] Besides, some of these people, such as Keçecizâde İzzet Fuat, who served

[450] Keçecizade İzzet Fuad, *Kaçırılan Fırsatlar: 1877 Osmanlı-Rus Savaşı Hakkında eleştiriler ve Askeri Düşünceler*, p. 71.

[451] Greene, *Report on the Russian Army and its Campaigns in Turkey in 1877-1878*, p. 220-221.

[452] Hozier, *The Russo-Turkish War*, Vol. 4, p. 632, 756, 787; Schem, *The War in the East*, p. 298, 445; Maurice, *The Russo-Turkish War*, p. 148; Stanley, *St. Petersburg to Plevna: Interviews with Leading Russian Statesmen and Generals*, pp. 73-74; Keçecizade İzzet Fuad, *Kaçırılan Fırsatlar: 1877 Osmanlı-Rus Savaşı Hakkında eleştiriler ve Askeri Düşünceler*, p. 45; Richard Graf von Pfeil, *Experiences of a*

under Mehmed Ali Pasha and directly witnessed the anger of him toward Süleyman Pasha, and Francois Stanley, who had listened all developments from Mehmed Ali Pasha after the war, were strictly accused Süleyman Pasha with insulting expressions.[453] It is possible to find criticisms of Süleyman Pasha in the Russian sources regarding the Shipka attacks. According to the Russian historians who dealt with the Ottoman-Russian War of 1877-1878 such as Nikolay Ilyich Belyaev, Platon Aleksandrovich Geisman and Ivan Ivanovich Rostunov, Süleyman Pasha should have united with Mehmed Ali Pasha or Osman Pasha forces to attack on the Russian flanks.[454]

It is no doubt that the failure of the Ottoman corps should be analyzed by considering the wrong steps of each side. It was the fact that if not only Süleyman Pasha but also Mehmed Ali Pasha followed the proposal of the other commander the result of the war would be different. It is not reasonable to look at the event just from the side of

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Prussian Officer in the Russian Service During the Turkish War of 1877-1878, pp. 33, 34, 134, 322, 324; Albay Talat, *Plevne Savunması*, p. 150; Prior, *Campaigns of a War Correspondent*, p. 71; Tacan, "1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus Seferinde Türk Sevk ve İdaresinde Sevkulceyşi Hatalar: Balkanlar Şimalindeki Harekat", pp. 748-749; Wentworth Huyshe, *The Liberation of Bulgaria: War Notes in 1877*, (London: Bliss, Sands and Foster, 1894), pp. 104-105; *Historical Narrative on the Turko-Russian War*, (London: Adam Co, 1889), p. 227.

[453] Keçecizade İzzet Fuad, *Kaçırılan Fırsatlar: 1877 Osmanlı-Rus Savaşı Hakkında eleştiriler ve Askeri Düşünceler*, p. 45. In his book, Keçecizade criticized Süleyman Pasha hatefully and accused him as not following the orders of the commander-in-chief, led to missing the opportunities during the war, and destroyed everything in vain with the help of his influence in Istanbul. According to him, Süleyman Pasha was planning to be the war minister. Therefore, he attempted to attack the enemy under the shelter of the rugged terrain to achieve success without giving any share to the others. Ibid., pp. 78-79. Yet, there is no doubt that he prejudiced against Süleyman Pasha by the effect of Mehmed Ali Pasha. He was a close officer to Mehmed Ali Pasha and probably affected by his ideas about Süleyman Pasha. Stanley was describing his thoughts after the interview with Mehmed Ali Pasha. These words were in fact could be accepted as the reflection of Mehmed Ali Pasha's feelings about Süleyman Pasha: "Suleiman, the only one who had a really effective, well-disciplined force at his command, dissolved it in the most foolish fashion by his vain attempts to retake positions at Shipka, which nothing but madness the effect of the old Latin proverb could ever have allowed to pass into Russian hands (…) Dissension, jealousy, and want of patriotism were rife amongst the Turkish leaders ; the organization of the army was not such as to encourage and develop the splendid fighting powers of the gallant units composing it; its generals feared the intrigues of the stay-at-home pachas, and devoted more attention to countermining these than to checking the common enemy; but, worse than all, there was no decided plan of action, no authority strong enough to force on all a unanimous action of concentrated defense" Stanley, *St. Petersburg to Plevna: Interviews with Leading Russian Statesmen and Generals*, pp. 73-74.

[454] Kutlu, "*Rus Kaynaklarına Göre 1877-1878 Osmanlı Rus Harbi*", pp. 123-124.

Mehmed Ali Pasha. Even it is clear that most of them were repeating the same manner which shows that the starting point of these considerations was same. The main argument of all accusations was that Süleyman Pasha did not pay attention to the orders of commander-in-chief Mehmed Ali Pasha. All of them considered Mehmed Ali Pasha as the superior of Süleyman Pasha and most of the comments resulted from this consideration. However, what they did not take into account is that there was not a determined command hierarchy among these pashas, which was one of the main mistakes of *Meclis-i Askerî* at the strategic level of the war.

The same matter also had been discussed during the court-martial after the war. Süleyman Pasha was accused of not obeying the orders of Mehmed Ali Pasha by the court members. However, Süleyman Pasha indicated that he was not under the command of Mehmed Ali Pasha, instead he was under the control of Istanbul. He was taking the orders from *Serasker* Mahmud Celaleddin Pasha and *Meclis-i Askerî*.[455] Besides, the telegrams between Mehmed Ali Pasha and Süleyman Pasha shows that there was no superior-subordinate relationship among them. For example, in his telegram to Süleyman Pasha dated 18 September, Mehmed Ali Pasha was requesting him to abandon the Shipka attacks to unite with his corps by using demanding expressions instead of giving an order. He was asking him to help if he deemed his proposal appropriate.[456]

Considering the dispute from Süleyman Pasha's point of view, he believed that it would be dangerous to cross the Balkan Mountains without driving the Russians in the Shipka Pass. According to Süleyman Pasha, in case of implementing such a plan, they would have to separate his main force in the important positions throughout the marching route. Also, they would have to leave a remarkable force before the Shipka Pass to keep the south of the Balkans safe. However, they did not have enough men to separate his force like this as well as enough transportation and logistics means to

[455] Duran, "*Süleyman Paşa'nın Divan-ı Harp'te Yargılanmasına Dair Defterin Transkripsiyonu ve Değerlendirilmesi (1878-1879)"*, p. 14.

[456] ATASE, ORH. 94/2AQ, 18 September 1877.

supply ammunition and provision to such a scattered force.[457] The logistic system of the Balkan corps was not sufficient to supply ammunition and provision even to two days' distance between Nova Zagora and Shipka.[458] Furthermore, he asserted that crossing the Balkans without considering the Shipka Pass would lead to a threat for the supply line of both the Pleven and Balkan corps throughout the south of the Balkan Mountains. Therefore, he decided to force the Shipka Pass first to capture the pass and ensure the security of the rear of the army. In the second phase of the plan, he planned to leave 24 battalions in there and then advance on Tırnova to conduct a united attack with Mehmed Ali Pasha or Osman Pasha.[459]

Because of all of the process, it was not unreasonable that Süleyman Pasha did not want to abandon his main plan, which was given to him by Istanbul and he had prepared for a long time, just before he started the operation. It is not appropriate to explain Süleyman Pasha's stability as ambition and greediness because it was not meaningless determination under the circumstances. Moreover, not only Süleyman Pasha but also Istanbul and even a couple of days before his proposal Mehmed Ali Pasha were regarding that Süleyman Pasha could capture the pass without facing big trouble. However, the key factor in this failure became his loneliness in the Shipka Pass despite his success depended on the assistance of Mehmed Ali Pasha. If he did not insist on his proposal and prepared a feint on Tırnova to draw the Russian attention, the outcome of the Shipka battle would be different. He had the most powerful force of the Ottoman army and was capable of performing such an operation.[460]

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[457] Duran, "*Süleyman Paşa'nın Divan-ı Harp'te Yargılanmasına Dair Defterin Transkripsiyonu ve Değerlendirilmesi (1878-1879)"*, p. 14; Süleyman Hüsnü Paşa, *Umdetü'l-Hakāyık*, Vol. 2, pp. 27-28.

[458] Süleyman Hüsnü Paşa, *Umdetü'l-Hakāyık*, Vol. 2, p. 109.

[459] ATASE, ORH. 20/15, 18 August 1877; ATASE, ORH. 20/15A, 18 August 1877.

[460] In August 1877, there were about 150 infantry battalions under the command of Mehmed Ali Pasha, which was almost three times bigger than the forces under Osman Pasha and Süleyman Pasha, who had about 50 battalions. The deployment of the troops under Mehmed Ali Pasha on 15 August was as follows: 48 battalions in Razgrad, nine battalions in Eskicuma, 16 battalions in Omurtag, 14 battalions in Hacıoğlupazarcık, 12 battalions in Shumen, 10.5 battalions in Varna, 20 battalions in Ruse, 13 battalions in Silistra. These numbers were excluded from the artillery and cavalry soldiers, and 30

Likewise, if Süleyman Pasha abandoned the Shipka and united with Mehmed Ali Pasha, the Russians in the Shipka Pass could be forced to leave the pass by threatening its rear. In fact, there was no need to be afraid of the security of the south of the Balkan under the current conditions if an adequate force remained to hold the way of the Shipka Pass. Also, the Russian army did not have a chance to start a general operation on the south of the Balkan Mountains by leaving the main body of the Ottoman army behind. Even if it was intended to be performed, the line of supply could be easily threatened in such a long-distance transportation route. Therefore, both Süleyman and Mehmed Ali Pasha were able to agree on a united plan. Nevertheless, both of them did not attempt to give up their plans and Istanbul could not solve the dispute either. The main mistake in this regard was undoubtedly the inappropriate appointments of Istanbul that ignored the unity of command without determining a superior commander and following the military tradition. If the unity of command was considered by the Ottoman decision-makers at the beginning of the appointments, they could not insist on their way and one united plan would be conducted successfully.

5.2.2. Time Management Problem in the Ottoman Army

The only mistake which would not be fixed in strategy is time. While it is possible to correct mistakes in using force and place, it is not possible to obtain the missed opportunities and correct the failures in timing which is unstoppable and irreversible.[461] Using time efficiently has been the main objective of the strategy for thousands of years. It is possible to see the same remarks on time in the book of famous Chinese commander Sun Tzu who lived thousands of years ago. He described the importance of time with these words: “Rapidity is the essence of war: take advantage

battalions would be sent to Mehmed Ali Pasha in the forthcoming days. ATASE, ORH. 94/11BRA, 15 August 1877.

[461] Tekinalp, *Stratejiye Giriş ve Deniz Stratejisi*, p. 317.

of the enemy's unreadiness, make your way by unexpected routes, and attack unguarded spots."[462]

Time management had an important place in the course of the Shipka battles. The Ottoman army could not use its time advantage both during the preparation and operation stages against the Russians who were focused on supply and reinforcements after the Pleven defeats. Osman Pasha emerged as a danger for them therefore the Russian army changed its war plan and took up a defensive position until the reinforcements arrived throughout the Danubian front. Under these conditions, Süleyman Pasha had to perform his plan without giving the Russians what they needed most, namely enough time. Since it was obvious that the Russian army would be getting stronger day by day, the preparation had to be completed as soon as possible.

However, Süleyman Pasha could not use the advantage well from the beginning to the end of his service in the Balkan corps. His movement was delayed three times throughout the operations. The first delay of the operation had started during the transfer of the Balkan corps from Montenegro to the Balkan and continued in the south of the Balkan Mountains. The second delay occurred in gathering the troops in Karapınar (Gılıbovo), which was defined as the assembly point after Edirne. Thirdly, the marching of the troops on the Shipka Pass was postponed after capturing Stara Zagora. In addition to the preparation stage, the time management problem was also clearly visible throughout the Shipka attacks at the operational level. On the battlefield, Süleyman Pasha had not deployed his forces in the right place at the right time. Thus, he missed the chance of using the weakest conditions of the Russian army during the first days of August.

Süleyman Pasha was appointed as the commander of the Balkan corps on 3 July in which he was commanding the Ottoman forces in Montenegro and Herzegovina. He was summoned to the Danubian front by *Meclis-i Askerî* as soon as possible with his troops. It was planned to transfer the army with ships from between Antivari and

[462] Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Lionel Giles, (North Clarendon: Tuttle Publishing, 2008), p. 49.

Dedeağaç. Although Süleyman Pasha rapidly had gathered his forces in Antivari until 11 July, the transportation was delayed because the ships did not have enough coal. Therefore, the operation was organized in two stages on 13 and 15 July.[463] In fact, the transportation of this force that comprised about 20.000 men was a very significant operation for the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, considering the operations took place in the Balkans, the delay in the transportation process prevented Süleyman Pasha from achieving a better result.

The number of ships was not enough to transport the troops with all equipment and pack trains. This problem led to the delay of the operations for the second time and the troops could not advance on the Russians rapidly. Since the pack trains and ammunition of the army did not reach, the troops could not reach the assembly point, Karapınar.[464] He was able to reach Karapınar on 25 July after completing the preparations in Edirne.[465]

After the Balkan corps gathered in Karapınar, it was forwarded on Stara Zagora. Süleyman Pasha was planning to advance on the Shipka Pass after capturing Eskizaga, However, General Gurko appeared in the rear of his army when Süleyman Pasha was before Stara Zagora. He captured Nova Zagora in the main supply line of the Ottomans and defeated Rauf Pasha forces in Curanlı (Kalitinovo). Therefore, Süleyman Pasha postponed the advance of the army on the Shipka Pass and turned its direction on Nova Zagora.

In strategy, everything is very simple, but not easy to implement. That is to say, when a strategy was determined by considering the political conditions and what would be the way for this, it requires great strength of character, lucidity and firmness of mind to carry out the plan without interruption. One should carry out the plan and not be

[463] Sedes, *1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus ve Romen Savaşı*, Vol. 5, p. 30.

[464] ATASE, ORH. 94/2, 22 July 1877.

[465] Sedes, *1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus ve Romen Savaşı*, Vol. 5, pp. 49-50.

thrown off course by thousands of diversions.[466] However, Süleyman Pasha made changes in his plan after every diversion and each of these changes triggered the next delay and prevented the Ottomans to exploit the unprepared conditions of the Russians. If Süleyman Pasha managed to reach Karapınar without facing problems during the transportation of his forces and equipment, the Ottoman army was able to attack Stara Zagora when General Gurko had been waiting in Kazanlak. In this way, both of General Gurko's and Süleyman Pasha's operations would not have coincided at the same time. Besides, 15 battalions of the Rauf Pasha column would have united with Süleyman Pasha without facing General Gurko in Curanlı. Under such conditions, Süleyman Pasha could attack the Shipka Pass in the first days of August.

One of the other important reasons for the problematic time management of the Balkan corps was the lack of intelligence about the enemy movements. The army was unable to ascertain the enemy force and position throughout that period mainly because of the inefficiency in the reconnaissance and surveillance activities in the Ottoman army. Therefore, Süleyman Pasha was misled by an intelligence that the Russian were around Nova Zagora with a remarkable force, and he turned the direction of his army to Nova Zagora instead of directly marching to the Shipka Pass. This change in the direction of Süleyman Pasha offered the Russian army to easily reinforce the Shipka Pass and get ready for the Ottoman attacks.

The time management mistakes of the Balkan corps became a matter during the court-martial. Süleyman Pasha was accused that he did not move to exploit the advantage of the available conditions. According to Ali Nizami Pasha, who was the prosecutor of the court-martial, despite Süleyman Pasha was ordered to forward immediately on 31 July after the second defeat of the Russians in Pleven to take the advantage, he wasted time in Stara Zagora as if he was appointed to maintain the public order. Besides, for Ali Nizami Pasha, he should have advanced on the Shipka Pass after Stara Zagora, but he turned the direction to Nova Zagora with the excuse of supplying his forces and caused the opportunity to be missed. The main accusation in this regard was that while

[466] Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 178.

the European armies were conducting operations with provision enough for eight days and Süleyman Pasha had enough provision, he wasted the days in Nova Zagora to increase the provision of his army enough for 21 days.[467]

Süleyman Pasha defended himself against these accusations by stating that they should have at least 15 days of provision to start advance on the Shipka. According to him, it was inappropriate to make a comparison between the European armies and the Ottoman army because they had excellent transportation and roads for the continuity of supply. But his army did not have sufficient pack trains. The Ottoman supply line was organized with the oxcarts collected from the villagers, and the continuity of the supply was likely to confront a problem. Therefore, it was necessary to take more than the necessary amount of provision before marching to correct the problems due to insufficient transportation organization. In addition, for Süleyman Pasha, the ammunition of the army was insufficient at that moment.[468]

Süleyman Pasha understandably aimed to fulfill all needs of the army to not challenge with any trouble before the Shipka Pass. However, the supply of the troops did not have vital importance for the Ottoman army. Bearing in mind that Süleyman Pasha had started his operations on Stara Zagora with eight days provision on 29 July,[469] It can be seen that the provision and ammunition of the Balkan corps would have been enough to practice operations on the Balkan passages which should have been the first and foremost target of Süleyman Pasha. However, he remained in Stara Zagora for three days instead of directly moving on shipka and turned to Nova Zagora not to take a risk. In this regard, this decision of Süleyman Pasha was one of the most determinant mistakes of Süleyman Pasha on the Shipka attacks.

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[467] Duran, "*Süleyman Paşa'nın Divan-ı Harp'te Yargılanmasına Dair Defterin Transkripsiyonu ve Değerlendirilmesi (1878-1879)"*, pp. 23-24.

[468] Ibid., pp. 58-59.

[469] Süleyman Hüsnü Paşa, *Umdetü'l-Hakāyık*, Vol. 2, p. 11.

The vital thing for the Ottoman army throughout that period was to ensure the connection of Süleyman Pasha with Osman Pasha and Mehmed Ali Pasha. Thus, he should have rapidly advanced on the Shipka Pass without trying to make everything complete for his troops considering that there had been about 3.000 men in the Shipka Pass, and the redoubts of the pass had not been strengthened yet. Even though the Russians had enough time to turn the pass themselves as an impregnable fortress after capturing it, they were acting like the war was already about to finish. They believed that the rugged terrain would cover them in case of an attack. For that reason, they had remained in the pass for days without strengthening their position within a clear plan and lived in a picnic atmosphere.[470]

Beyond doubt that Süleyman Pasha did not have the ability to take initiative by calculating all options like General Gurko did in the Balkans. As a matter of fact, during his operation on the Balkan passages in July, General Gurko left most of his weight behind in Tırnova and advanced on the passes with provision enough for only five days.[471] He was aware of the importance of time management. Therefore, he considered the vital option for his army and started operation without waiting to make everything perfect.

The main reasons that led Süleyman Pasha to conduct elaborative preparations were probably because of inefficient information about the enemy and the threat of court-

[470] An artillery officer who served in the Shipka described the daily routine of the Shipka garrison with these words: "The garrison was stationed as if camping, and nothing resembled a combat position. The Orel Regiment band played daily; men strolled at their leisure across the mountain St. Nicholas and walked along ravines in search of strawberries. Nobody thought of the Turks. Waking up rather late, men drank tea and after wandering around, gathered for dinner. The food was abundant. At dinner, men received 60 grams of pure alcohol. After dinner, men rested in their tents, then drank tea, had supper, and went quietly to bed anticipating their next day to be as uneventful as the previous one." Statiev, "The Thorns of the Wild Rose: Russian Ordeals at the Shipka Pass During the Ottoman-Russian War of 1877–1878", p. 373. Since the Russian decision-makers did not pay attention to provide sufficient supply and strengthen the redoubts considering a probable attack of the Ottomans, the Russian army experienced heavy conditions throughout the Ottoman attacks. For example, the Bulgarian militia, repelled from Eskizagra by Süleyman Pasha, had neither sufficient clots nor provision. It could not be possible to provide them in the pass. Therefore, the daily ratio of the soldiers was limited to 100 grams of bread. Kutlu, "*Rus Kaynaklarına Göre 1877-1878 Osmanlı Rus Harbi*", p. 129.

[471] Osman Nuri, *Bilinmeyen Abdülhamid: Abdülhamid-i Sani ve Devr-i Saltanatı - Abdülhamid'in Hususi ve Siyasi Hayatı*, ed. Osman Selim Kocahanoğlu, (Istanbul: Temel Yayınları, 2017), p. 276.

martial in case of a failure. It was a well-known fact that the Ottoman commanders had considered all of their actions timidly without taking initiative because the burden of a failure would be on their shoulders. After every failure, Istanbul was looking for a guilty to be punished. Therefore, Süleyman Pasha was aiming to prepare his movements by considering all probable troubles. The only information of Süleyman Pasha about the enemy corps was not beyond what Rauf Pasha informed him, which was the exaggeration of Rauf Pasha. Since Rauf Pasha informed that the Russian army had many battalions in the south,[472] Süleyman Pasha avoided directly marching without making every preparation perfect.

According to Carl von Clausewitz, making an important decision in strategy requires more strong willpower than in tactic. In the latter, one is always under the pressure of the moment. In the strategy, on the other hand, the pace is much slower than the tactic and one had opportunity for comprehension. Everything has to be considered in strategy. Consequently, although they had to move, most commanders got stuck in unnecessary doubts.[473] The situation of Süleyman Pasha during his operations in the south of the Balkans was like Clausewitz described.

Time had crucial importance in this regard and the commander cannot be successful by sticking to the problems. Therefore, Süleyman Pasha should have preferred the most important option, directly marching the Shipka Pass, to the important one, fulfilling all needs of his army. To exploit the success, General Gurko took a risk against the superior Ottoman forces at the end of July and carried out an operation on Nova Zagora and Stara Zagora to disrupt the advance of Süleyman Pasha. In other words, he preferred taking a risk to slow down Süleyman Pasha, which was the most important option for General Gurko, to ensure the security of his forces without taking any risk. While Süleyman Pasha could not determine all options by obtaining information about the enemy because of the inefficient reconnaissance and surveillance activities, General Gurko reached much important information about the

[472] Süleyman Hüsnü Paşa, *Umdetü'l-Hakāyık*, Vol. 2, p. 23.

[473] Clausewitz, *On War*, pp. 178-179.

movements of the Ottoman forces and was able to take a risk by considering all possibilities.

The Russian sources indicated the strategically inappropriate decisions of Süleyman Pasha by describing the operations in the south of the Balkan Mountains from the Russian point of view. Epanchin stated that:

> "Suleiman's three days' halt near Eski is accounted for by the fact that he could not make up his mind to leave only a small garrison there, whilst it was out of the question to leave a large one, as to take Nova Zagora would, in his opinion, require the efforts of the whole of his army. To leave only a few battalions there would be to expose them to attack from the Russians at Kazanlak. Accordingly, he suggested to the inhabitants of Eski that they should emigrate, and delayed his march on Yeni till that had been carried out. Thus, the defeat of Rauf, which was largely owing to Suleiman's not supporting him, and, later, he want of proper intelligence as to our strength, caused Suleiman to make the great detour to Yeni before moving on Shipka. Had Rauf been victorious he might have pursued Gurko's column, and Suleiman, after taking Stara Zagora, could leave pursued the Russians in the direction of Shipka. It is possible that he might have gained possession of the Shipka Pass, as at that time our force there was very small, only eight companies of the Orlov Regiment and the Bulgarian Legion, with a few cavalry and artillery. But things turned out differently, and Suleiman's attention was wholly distracted towards Nova Zagora."[474]

In his memoirs, Süleyman Pasha admitted her mistake in using time against the Russian army. He stated that if I did not turn the direction of the army and continued to move on the Shipka Pass, General Gurko, whose ammunition was exhausted, would not endanger himself and the Shipka Pass would have been easily captured without suffering as in August and September attacks.[475] Even though Süleyman Pasha accepted his mistakes, he accused Rauf Pasha as the main reason for his mistakes. According to him, the only information given to him by Rauf Pasha was that there was a remarkable number of Russian forces in the south of the Balkan Mountains.

[474] Epanchin, *Operations of General Gurko's Advance Guard in 1877*, pp. 281-282.

[475] Süleyman Hüsnü Paşa, *Umdetü'l-Hakāyık*, Vol. 2, p. 22.

Süleyman Pasha indicated that the inefficiency of the cavalry force prevented them from perceiving the circumstances. Therefore, before accusing Rauf Pasha, he showed Istanbul as the main reason of the failure without sending cavalry force for the Balkan corps.[476] As Süleyman Pasha indicated, the inefficiency of his cavalry became one of the main reasons for the failure during the war for him. He could not carry out reconnaissance and surveillance activities and make many wrong decisions.

One of the other effects of the delay of the Shipka attacks was damage in the cooperation among Süleyman and Mehmed Ali Pasha. They were planning to start a simultaneous operation to capture the Shipka Pass. In this regard, Mehmed Ali Pasha would attack the Elena and Hainköy passages on 2 August, in which Süleyman Pasha should have been in front of the Shipka Pass.[477] However, the delay resulted in missing the last chance for them to move together. When Süleyman Pasha was waiting in Nova Zagora for supply, a Russian threat appeared against Mehmed Ali Pasha. Therefore, he felt in danger and took a defensive position without paying attention to the other localities.

The time management problem of the Balkan corps continued during the Shipka battles. Although he wasted about 20 days to reach the Shipka Pass, he still had a big chance to capture the pass. However, he was not aware of the importance of time for the outcome of the battles. The Balkan corps managed to reach the foothills of the Shipka Pass, but the attack could be started on 21 August after the preparations. The casualties in the first day's attack led Süleyman Pasha to move cautiously by considering that he had enough time to take back the pass. The thing he missed was that the Shipka defense had been getting stronger day by day. Since he did not expect the Russian reinforcements soon, he did not intend to implement a general attack plan by using all of his forces and left about half of the battalions in the rear during the first

[476] Süleyman Hüsnü Paşa, *Umdetü'l-Hakāyık*, Vol. 2, pp. 22-23.

[477] ATASE, ORH. 19/22, 8 August 1877.

three days.[478] Consequently, on 23 August, in which the Russian defense in the Shipka Pass reached the end of its power and signs of defeat began to be seen, the reinforcements under General Radetzky reached the Pass from Tırnova and the advantageous atmosphere in the Shipka Pass for the Ottomans changed.

5.2.3. The Problem in Force Distribution and Center of Gravity during the Shipka Attacks

The commanders are supposed to determine the enemy conditions and make terrain analysis at the strategic level in order to prepare the most suitable battle plan. To ensure this, one has to ask himself wherever his main target should be to defeat the enemy. That is to say, it is necessary to define where the mass of the enemy is concentrated. After determining the main target, the center of gravity must be directed toward this position to be able to damage the enemy defense because the primary aim on the battlefield should be controlling or capturing the enemy's center of gravity.[479]

Süleyman Pasha could not ascertain the most suitable objective and accordingly the center of gravity properly during the first days of the Shipka battles. Although the most convenient position to consider as the center of gravity was the Aykırıcebel ridge, which was covered with forest and possible to approach the Russian positions without being under fire, the Ottomans planned the main attack from the Berdek ridge, which has open and broken terrain. In addition to the Berdek, a demonstration would be carried out in front of St. Nicholas Mountain. However, the direction of the Ottoman attacks was the strongest position of the Russians, and the terrain feature was not suitable to conduct an operation without suffering much.

[478] Süleyman Hüsnü Paşa, *Umdetü'l-Hakāyık*, Vol. 2, p. 55.

[479] Nejat Eslen, *Tarih Boyu Savaş ve Strateji*, (Istanbul: Truva Yayınları, 2005), pp. 116-117; Tekinalp, *Stratejiye Giriş ve Deniz Stratejisi*, pp. 489-490.

In his memoirs, Süleyman Pasha admitted the failure in determining the center of gravity by saying that I should have located the concentration forces on the Aykırıcebel during the first days of the battle instead of the Berdek. According to him, the main reason for this inappropriate decision was the ignorance of the Ottoman staff officers regarding the terrain of the pass. The only information of Süleyman Pasha about the conditions in the Shipka Pass was from an Austrian map and the indication of Hulusi Pasha and Rasim Pasha, who commanded the Ottoman detachment in the Shipka Pass against General Gurko during the battle. Since General Gurko attacked the pass from the Berdek ridge, they showed the Berdek as the most favorable position to attack the Russian redoubts. Besides, the information provided by the reconnaissance column without performing a proper terrain analysis was showing the Berdek ridge. Therefore, the plan of the Balkan corps was constructed regarding these indications.[480]

Although the Shipka Pass had been the main target for Süleyman Pasha for almost two months, he did not have a proper plan when he reached the foothills of the pass. He should have prepared during this time for the assault, but he just depended on what was described to him right before the attacks. The force under Süleyman Pasha was far superior to the Russians in the Shipka Pass. If he used his superiority and paid attention to the reconnaissance and surveillance activities, he might have prepared the most convenient plan by using the Aykırıcebel. However, Süleyman Pasha could not realize the importance of the Aykırıcebel ridge during the first three days.

The Berdek ridge remained as the center of gravity for the Ottomans until the third day of the attacks as a result of the advance of a small column sent to this direction on 23 August. Nevertheless, the number and quality of the soldiers used in this position were not enough to determine it as the center of gravity. The forces in the Aykırıcebel consisted of mainly reserve battalions, and not only their number but also the quality was lower than the forces in the Berdek. It could not be possible to make a remarkable change until the next day since the mass of the Balkan corps was still on the Berdek and they were unable to change position. Even most of them could not be positioned

[480] Süleyman Hüsnü Paşa, *Umdetü'l-Hakāyık*, Vol. 2, pp. 110-111.

in the Aykırıcebel on 24 August. Therefore, it was clear that the Balkan corps did not have flexibility during the Shipka battles.

At the strategic level, it was necessary to establish a balance between the target and the force. If the force used against the concentration of enemy is not enough, this led to strategic risk for the attackers. Therefore, determining the force to be used is one of the most important steps of strategic planning.[481] In this respect, the strategy is the management of the force. It was necessary to select the force enough to meet the requirements, to determine the appropriate position to use this force and to balance the force with the target by the flexibility of the force.[482]

According to Clausewitz, if a force is located in a position where it is not sufficiently busy with the enemy, in other words, left idle while fighting with the enemy, it would mean that the commander is using the force uneconomically. Nevertheless, even using the force improperly is better than wasting them by leaving away from the action. Thus, the first necessity should be using all forces during the action because even the least favorite task will occupy some enemy forces and reduce their strength[483]

The other important mistake of Süleyman Pasha during the Shipka battles took place in this regard, which is the force deployment. He was planning to surrender the rear of the pass to force the Russians to retreat. Even though the Balkan corps reached the Shipka with 50 battalions, only 24 battalions were used in the attacks on 21 and 22 August, and the remaining force was kept in reserve unreasonably. He did not attempt to attack the Russian positions by using all of his force until the third day. For this reason, the Ottomans could not use the advantage in force at the operational level and offered a big chance for the Russians to reinforce the Shipka garrison. Süleyman Pasha failed to consider the importance of quickness against the Russians and wasted the first

[481] Tekinalp, *Stratejiye Giriş ve Deniz Stratejisi*, p. 297.

[482] Eslen, *Tarih Boyu Savaş ve Strateji*, pp. 75-76.

[483] Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 213.

days. He moved cautiously as if he had had enough time to take back the pass without considering that the defense would be reinforced soon.[484]

Consequently, the Balkan corps failed to take advantage of the damaged condition of the defenders by organizing a general attack. If Süleyman Pasha moved to the Aykırıcebel with the reinforcements when the Ottoman troops reached the nearby hill of the Shipka Pass on 23 August, in which the most critical moment for the Russian defense, the pass could be captured. Even though he constantly criticized the officer under his command that they did not attend the clashes with their forces, he had always remained away from the engagement positions by contradicting himself.[485] Even if we consider that Süleyman Pasha remained away to be able to follow all developments in all positions, beyond doubt that he should have arrived at the Aykırıcebel which became the main combat position on 23 August.

The attacks of Süleyman Pasha did not meet the main requirements of the strategy. He could not use the right force in the right place. Besides, time management was problematic during the attacks. Albeit these failures, the Shipka defense seemed to fall on the third day, in which the reinforcements arrived. Süleyman Pasha offered them enough time to reach the pass. This was clear evidence for the failure in the strategic management during the Shipka attacks. He already accepted that they could not prepare an appropriate battle plan regarding force deployment, determining the target and time management. He stated that I should have sent the main column to the Aykırıcebel on the first day, and if I had started the attacks with this formation from the Aykırıcebel, the pass would have been captured before the arrival of the Russian reinforcements.[486]

Francis Vinton Greene described the Ottoman attacks as unskillful maneuvers. For him, even though Süleyman Pasha controlled the flanks of the pass, he insisted on

[484] Süleyman Hüsnü Paşa, *Umdetü'l-Hakāyık*, Vol. 2, p. 55.

[485] Sedes, *1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus ve Romen Savaşı*, Vol. 8, p. 88.

[486] Süleyman Hüsnü Paşa, *Umdetü'l-Hakāyık*, Vol. 2, pp. 110-112.

dividing his forces and directing his main effort to the strongest position of the Russian army, which is the Mount St. Nicholas. In this way, the Russians had a fair chance to hold their ground until the arrival of the reinforcements. Therefore, Greene stated that if Süleyman Pasha used the whole of his force into one of these flanks attacks, he would probably capture the pass.[487]

5.3. Reconsidering the Shipka Attacks within the context of the Principles of War

The military leaders in history have noted certain principles that tended to produce victory. Over time, this inclination resulted in the emergence of certain truths of warfare under the name of principles of war.[488] The principles of war were a product of the history of warfare over 2.500 years from the famous Chinese General Sun Tzu who came up with 13 principles in 500 BC. After the cumulative accumulation of the information by Napoleon, Clausewitz and Nelson,[489] the British soldier and military historian J.F.C. Fuller ended the cumulative principles by developing eight principles between 1912 and 1924. Each of the principles of warfare has been redefined by different nationalities after Fuller set the main principles in accordance with their experiences, culture, perceptions. Therefore, every nation has almost the same principles with certain differences. For example, the British principles of war are selection and maintenance of the aim, maintenance of morale, offensive action, security, surprise, concentration of force, economy of effort, flexibility, cooperation and sustainability. On the other hand, United States principles of war, which would be our main consideration in the evaluation of the Shipka attacks in terms of the principles of war, are objective, offensive, mass, economy of force, maneuver, unity of

[487] Greene, *Report on the Russian Army and its Campaigns in Turkey in 1877-1878*, p. 214.

[488] USAF, *Air Force Basic Doctrine: Document 1*, p. 19.

[489] Frank Johnson, "The Principles of War", *Naval War College Information Service for Officers*, Vol. 4, No. 2, (1951), p. 3.

Command, security, surprise and simplicity.[490] The principles of war are necessary to keep the commanders on the right route.

The principle of objective is based on directing operations toward a defined and attainable objective that may contribute to the defined goals at the strategic, the operational and tactical levels.[491] Therefore, every military step must be planned to reach the defined aim of the war, which is the destruction of the enemy forces and their operational capability.[492] It is the foremost principle because of dominating every movement in the course of operations. Many of the other principles are supposed to contribute to achieving the first principle. Thus, without determining an objective, every other principle of war became meaningless.[493] The objective of the Balkan corps under Süleyman Pasha was defined as regaining the control of the strategically important Shipka Pass which was captured by General Gurko on 19 July. This was an attainable goal for Süleyman Pasha considering his force and the circumstances throughout the front line. During that period, the purpose of the Ottoman forces at the strategic level was to relieve Osman Pasha and organize a joint attack by enabling a connection between the Ottoman corps. Also, the Russian army was in a defensive position to be able to complete preparations for a general attack on Pleven. Therefore, determining the objective as capturing the Shipka Pass was a necessary movement that could serve the strategic purpose of the Ottoman army. The main necessities in this context were conducted by Süleyman Pasha as soon as identifying the objective. To be able to ensure success, all opportunities of the army were directed for capturing the Shipka not only at the strategic level but also the operational level. Every action of Süleyman Pasha forces in the south of the Balkan Mountains should be considered regarding the objective of the Balkan corps. He had started extensive preparations

[490] Nazmi Çeşmeci, "*Perceptions on strategy in general and strategic management: a survey on common strategic perception among medium-high level managers in Turkey*", Doctoral Thesis, (Istanbul: Işık University, 2010), pp. 30-34.

[491] USAF, *Air Force Basic Doctrine: Document 1*, p. 21.

[492] Eslen, *Tarih Boyu Savaş ve Strateji*, p. 153.

[493] Johnson, "The Principles of War", p. 5.

before the attacks, carried out reconnaissance and surveillance activities, and deployed his force in the context of the determined objective at the operational stage which was flanking the enemy and threatening their rear to be able to force them to retreat.

The purpose of offensive principle is to retain the initiative and sustain it by exploiting the opportunities provided by holding it. The offensive action is the most effective way to reach the defined objective of war. It offers freedom of action and the opportunity to dictate the place and time.[494] However, the principle of offensive does not suggest only considering attack by ignoring defensive measurements. Both should be embedded on the battlefield.[495] During the operations of the Balkan corps, the Ottoman army was holding the initiative by conducting the attacks. Except for the preparation stage in Nova Zagora between 3 and 14 August, Süleyman Pasha had always inclined to perform his operations by considering offensive actions. In fact, he should exploit success by continuing his offensive attitude after driving General Gurko from the south of the Balkan Mountains. If he attempted to retain the initiative by moving directly to the Shipka Pass after the battle of Stara Zagora, the Russian forces could not find a chance to prepare against the Ottoman attacks. Upon reaching before the Shipka, the Ottoman forces had followed an offensive manner until the fourth day of the attacks on 24 August to reach the defined objective, which was the destruction of the operational ability of the Russian forces by surrounding them. The Balkan corps became successful in flanking the Russian positions and achieved to limit the maneuverability of the Russians albeit many wrong selections regarding the other necessities such as timing, the economy of force and mass. On 23 August, the signs of exhaustion started to be seen among the Russian soldiers against the perpetual Ottoman attacks. However, maintenance of offensive could not be enough to complete the operations successfully without appropriate application of the other measurements, especially timing and deploying force considering the developments. After 23 August, the Russians took the initiative with the help of the reinforcements, arrived at the pass

[494] Eslen, *Tarih Boyu Savaş ve Strateji*, p. 154.

[495] G. K. Carmichael, "The Principles of War and their Application to the Strategy and Tactics", *Naval War College Information Service for Officers*, Vol. 3, No. 2, (1950), pp. 31-32.

on 23 August, and started offensive movements to reach the freedom of action. After that, the Ottoman motivation turned to be keeping their positions instead of performing new offensive actions. This stability had continued until the end of war except the surprise attack on 17 September.

The principle of security is to never permit the enemy to obtain an unexpected advantage. This principle offers freedom of action by reducing the vulnerability of friendly forces, and provides avoidance from surprises.[496] It depends on acquiring information about enemy actions to ascertain the better security measurements. Although it indicates a defensive attitude, it also embraces offensive occasions when assuming offensive became necessary to gain advantage and security of their own force.[497] Süleyman Pasha conducted his operations by planning every stage of his movements. He had always considered avoiding surprises on the battlefield. Therefore, he did not start marching before supplying all needs of his forces, which caused wasting many important days for the Shipka attacks. After capturing the Hainköy and Elena Passages, Süleyman Pasha separated nearly 10 battalions to sustain the security of these passes and accordingly the rear of his army. Also, Süleyman Pasha followed a cautious manner before the Shipka Pass and kept a remarkable force in reserve to be able to prevent surprises and confront the unexpected developments by using the flexibility of having extra force in the rear.

The purpose of the principle of surprise is to strike the enemy by attacking them at an unexpected time, place, or in an unexpected manner. The main motivation in this regard should be surprising the enemy forces when they are not ready to react. Surprise offers a chance to shift the balance by destroying the command and control system of the enemy, that is to say, their combat power.[498] The Russian forces in the Shipka Pass were not ready to confront a strong Ottoman attack when the Balkan corps appeared

[496] USAF, *Air Force Basic Doctrine: Document 1*, p. 25.

[497] Carmichael, "The Principles of War and their Application to the Strategy and Tactics", p. 38.

[498] Eslen, *Tarih Boyu Savaş ve Strateji*, p. 159.

in the south of the Balkan Mountains. Therefore, there is no doubt that the most beneficial movement would have been directly marching on the Shipka Pass to exploit the success after capturing Stara Zagora on 30 July. It would be a surprise for the Russians and the Ottoman forces might easily defeat them by exploiting their disadvantageous conditions in terms of living conditions, numbers and defensive ability. However, the Balkan corps was kept in Nova Zagora until 14 August and the opportunity of surprising the enemy was lost. In addition, Although the Balkan corps reached in front of the Shipka Pass on 19 August, Süleyman Pasha again did not attempt to carry out his operation by considering a surprise attack. Instead, he focused on preparations and the first attack became possible on 21 August, in which the surprise opportunity was lost. The Russian reinforcements arrived from Sevlievno and Gabrovo during this preparation stage and they became ready for the Ottoman attacks. In fact, the last assault of the Ottoman forces was a determined surprise attack. The Ottoman forces attacked the pass on 17 September before the daybreak and applied the necessities of surprising the enemy. Yet, the outcome was not different from the attacks in August because of inefficiency in the other measurements.

The purpose of mass is to concentrate the combat power at the most suitable place and time to reach decisive results. All military operations at the operational stage should be directed with superior and concentrated combat power to be successful.[499] However, it does not necessarily indicate just superiority in numbers, instead indicates the superiority of fighting power at a decisive point.[500] In this regard, the time factor is an important consideration because this principle requires the simultaneous execution of force.[501] The concentration of the Ottoman forces was not directed at the most suitable place at the most suitable time during the first three days in the Shipka Pass. Even though the better position to ensure victory and reach a decisive result was the Aykırıcebel ridge, located on the west of the pass, the concentration of the Balkan

[499] USAF, *Air Force Basic Doctrine: Document 1*, p. 22.

[500] Carmichael, "The Principles of War and their Application to the Strategy and Tactics", p. 32.

[501] Johnson, "The Principles of War", p. 9

corps was the Berdek ridge on the eastern side of the Shipka Pass. The selection of place prevented the Ottomans to use the advantage of place even though the numbers used in the Berdek constituted as the center of gravity. The terrain features and the Russian positions against the Berdek did not offer a suitable chance for superiority in fighting power. For example, the rugged terrain prevented the Ottomans to locate field guns in this position to be able to successfully shell the enemy redoubts. On 23 August, the importance of the Aykırıcebel ridge was noticed, but it could not be possible to gather the mass on this side instantly. The mistakes in the terrain analysis and planning stage paved the way for wasting time by directing forces on the least suitable place. In this regard, the wrong selection of place led to the inappropriate timing of the concentration, and this operational error became the main reason for failure in holding superiority of fighting power.

The economy of force based on reasonable exploitation and distribution of forces. The purpose of it is to expend resources minimally to the secondary efforts. Therefore, it is important to define the most suitable objective to select the best proportion. To ensure combat power, the main effort should be directed to the primary objectives. Therefore, the commanders should be aware that any effort towards the secondary objectives does not offer them an achievement of the larger operational or strategic objectives.[502] Since it is not possible to be strong everywhere, calculated risks should be considered in the secondary areas to gather the main effort for the primary objective.[503] In this respect, the economy of force does not imply parsimony but wise use of force. There must be always a balance between the principles of offensive, concentration and security.[504] The main problems for the Ottoman attacks in the Shipka attacks were determining the place and using time inefficiently, which affected many other concepts although the forces had shown a remarkable enthusiasm to capture the pass. Even though the best way for using resources reasonably is the

[502] USAF, *Air Force Basic Doctrine: Document 1*, p. 24.

[503] Eslen, *Tarih Boyu Savaş ve Strateji*, 156.

[504] Johnson, "The Principles of War", p. 13.

distribution of forces at the appropriate place and time, Süleyman Pasha kept almost half of his combat power in the rear during the first days instead of exploiting this force flexibly by balancing his objective and means. It was considered that they had enough time to capture the pass and followed a cautious manner instead of taking calculated risks to maximize the fighting power of the Ottoman forces to reach the objective. Therefore, the most reasonable step would have been attacking the pass by devoting all effort, as the subordinate commanders suggested, after the first two days. However, Süleyman Pasha made a big mistake by not attempting to deploy the best proportion for such a general attack, instead, followed a parsimonious method until the Ottomans lost their advantage against the Russians.

The principle of Maneuver is the ability to react to disadvantageous conditions and flexible application of combat power. The aim in this regard is to gain positional advantage, exploit success, preserve freedom, reduce vulnerability and keep the enemy away to protect the force.[505] The best option for the Balkan corps after capturing Stara Zagora was to continue marching on the Shipka Pass in order to exploit the success and exploit the unprepared conditions of the defenders in the pass. Nevertheless, the direction of the army was quickly turned to a different direction after Stara Zagora and another attack plan was prepared, which was based on firstly capturing Elena and Hainköy passages and then the Shipka. Although this decision caused many problems for the Balkan corps in the other aspects, the rapid change shows the flexibility of the Balkan corps by considering the unprepared changes that took place after capturing Stara Zagora. Besides, during the battle of Shipka, the first attacks were directed to the Berdek and St. Nicholas positions on 21 August. However, the fire superiority of the Russian forces against the Ottoman mountain batteries led Süleyman Pasha to carry out a good maneuver by sending heavy field guns to the Berdek ridge. He reacted to this disadvantageous condition to increase the combat power of the Berdek column. After the first three days, the importance of the Aykırıcebel became clear and Süleyman Pasha intended to use the positional advantage by increasing the numbers

[505] Çeşmeci, "*Perceptions on strategy in general and strategic management*", p. 33.

on that ridge. This was another remarkable maneuver of Süleyman Pasha during the first days, but it could not be possible to benefit from such a maneuver. Deploying the battalions could not be implemented rapidly due to the harsh terrain features and dispersed positioning of the Ottoman forces. Thus, the Ottomans failed to take advantage of the help of this maneuver. Another reaction of the Ottoman forces on the battlefield came after the Russian advance on 24 August. The Russian forces started remarkable attacks on the Aykırıcebel to gain the positional advantage after the arrival of the reinforcements under General Radetzky and forced the Ottomans to abandon Little Woody Mountain (Küçük Yeşiltepe). Süleyman Pasha quickly reacted to these disadvantageous conditions by organizing a counterattack to Little Woody Mountain and the Ottoman forces managed to take back the initiative again.

Unity of command is to give the authority of all military forces and means to a single commander towards a defined objective. It enables coordination and cooperation of possibilities with each other against a single common goal. Also, it ensures directing all efforts to a common objective in order to reach a decisive result. On the other hand, the other forces and means outside the command should provide coordination and cooperation for the objective.[506] The command of the Balkan corps was under a single commander, Süleyman Hüsnü Pasha. Although there were many interventions from Istanbul to the command of the forces in the front line, at the operational level all maneuvers were conducted by the order of Süleyman Pasha. The main command and coordination problem for the Ottomans during the battle of Shipka was organizing the attacks with three columns, which did not have a connection between themselves. Therefore, the Balkan corps experienced many problems while applying the orders of the superior commander. These problems affected the operational capability of the ottoman forces negatively and kept them away from success. For example, the mission of the Ottoman column sent to Mount St. Nicholas was to implement a feint attack to help the main attack from the Berdek ridge. However, the strict order of Süleyman Pasha, not advancing beyond the first Russian position on the road leading to the

[506] Eslen, *Tarih Boyu Savaş ve Strateji*, pp. 157-158.

Russian entrenchments, was not followed by the column commanders and the attack turned to the main attack due to the enthusiasm of the subordinate commanders. They considered the immobility of the Russians against the advance of their columns as an opportunity and took the initiative to reach a more reasonable result. In addition, after the clashes intensified around the Aykırıcebel ridge, Süleyman Pasha planned to send battalions from the Berdek to the Aykırıcebel, but the commander of the Berdek column, Recep Pasha, was obstinate to decrease the force under his command and did not carry out the order in time. The dispersed formation of the Ottoman columns also enabled the Russians flexibility in shifting power from one position to another quickly because of the desultory attacks of the Ottoman columns.

The principle of Simplicity aims to avoid the possibility of misunderstandings and mistakes in every phase of war such as organization, maneuver, order writing and planning.[507] Simple plans short and concise orders increase the possibility of success. Therefore, short and clear order should be preferred at both the operational and tactical levels.[508] The battle plan of the Balkan corps was simple and understandable for every soldier. It was based on forcing the Russians to abandon the pass by turning their flanks. Nevertheless, conducting the plan with three different columns led to an increase in the possibility of mistakes. The Ottoman columns experienced the same coordination problems during the attack on 17 September and could not perform their attacks simultaneously.

[507] Carmichael, "The Principles of War and their Application to the Strategy and Tactics", p. 41.

[508] Eslen, *Tarih Boyu Savaş ve Strateji*, p. 159.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The main determinant factor for the outcome of the Ottoman-Russian War of 1877-1878 was the problems at the strategic level seen on the Danubian front from the beginning of the war to the end. Due to the strategic decisions especially intensified in the deployment of the forces, unity of command, assignment of the commanders and planning, the maneuverability of the Ottoman army was devastated. The most effectual events within the context of the strategic failures that affected the course of the war were the Shipka and Pleven battles. While the battle of Pleven offered a remarkable chance for the maneuverability of the Ottoman army against the Russian advance, the strategic command and coordination problems triggered by the developments in the scope of the Shipka battles, deeply influenced the operational capability of the Ottoman army and paved the way for the Russians to easily conduct their operations.

As it will be seen throughout the third chapter, although the Ottoman center of gravity was the Danubian front, a significant part of the mobilized manpower had been located in the secondary positions throughout the Ottoman territories such as Bosnia, Montenegro Macedonia. However, the most reasonable step would have been expending sources minimally in the secondary positions to ensure the combat power against the primary objective, which was being successful against the Russian army. The Ottoman decision-makers attempted to be strong everywhere and did not consider taking calculated risks in the secondary areas to focus on the primary one. This strategic decision had a big impact on the course of the war since the commander-in-chief Abdülkerim Nadir Pasha, who had been trying to ensure the security of a wide defense line throughout Bulgaria, had always complained about the insufficiency of

the force under his command in his responsibility area. Thus, he adopted a defense strategy against the Russian army as practiced in many wars throughout the nineteenth century. However, his defense understanding was not like Ömer Lütfi Pasha, who showed a notable defense performance against the Russian army during the Crimean war by combining the defensive and offensive measurements efficiently. Instead, Abdülkerim Nadir Pasha had followed the passive defense strategy based on prudence. His main plan was to keep the Russians in the north of the Danube River with the help of the fortified zones throughout the Danube. Thus, more than 100.000 soldiers remained immobile in these fortified positions such as Shumen, Vidin, Silistra and Ruse. However, the war plan of the Russian army was based on directly marching on Istanbul. While the cavalry based advance guard of the Russian army was advancing on the Balkan Mountains, Abdülkerim Nadir Pasha, who preferred to remain immobile, was waiting to prevent the Russian advance by detaining them with the fortifications.

On the other hand, the Balkan Mountains line, which was regarded as the second defense line by the Ottomans after the Danube River was not strengthened in time. It was planned to prepare an army corps that comprised 40.000 men for the defense of the Balkan line at the beginning of the war, but this army corps was not constituted even though more than two months have passed since the declaration of the war. This strategically important line had not been considered much by the Ottoman decision-makers, not only the command echelon but also the *Meclis-i Askerî* in Istanbul, for a long time. Therefore, after passing the first defense line, the Russian army advanced on the Balkan Mountains to perform the second phase of their war plan without any resistance from the commander-in-chief.

The Balkan passages which consisted of many defiles were offering an important defense opportunity to the Ottoman army because of the rugged terrain. To strengthen the fortification of the positions, the Ottoman staff officers conducted terrain analysis throughout the Balkan Mountains and determined the context of the preparations. Two reports were prepared regarding the passes, and the constructions were completed at the end of June 1877. However, the Ottoman decision-makers made another strategic

mistake in this regard and did not position enough number in time on the Balkan passages to sustain the defensive capacity of the passages. Even though it had been two months from the beginning of the war, there was not an organized force under command of a determined commander. The disposition of the battalions under a regular organization became possible right after the passage of the Russian forces from the Danube river. Even, Rauf Pasha, the commander of the Balkan corps, was able to reach his zone of responsibility just three days before General Gurko's attacks.

Turning the rear of the Shipka garrison and closing the main supply line of the pass provided an easier attack chance for General Gurko. He managed to capture such an impracticable position, which is convenient to show a strong defensive performance, without any remarkable resistance. One of the other strategic mistakes in this regard was not providing the necessities of the Shipka garrison in time to ensure its defensive ability. Although it had been one month since the construction of the storehouses was finished, nobody sent provision for the supply of the Shipka forces. The Ottoman forces had to retreat after resisting just 2 days to the Russian attacks due to the lack of provision and ammunition. Thus, the defense opportunity offered by the terrain conditions on the Balkan Mountains could not be utilized by the ottoman army because of the failures at the strategic level.

As detailly explained in the third, fourth and fifth chapters, after the fall of the Shipka Pass, the strategic command and coordination problem had been perceived more deeply in the Ottoman army. The commander-in-chief was superseded because of his passivity against the rapid advance of the Russian forces. Yet, a new commander, bearing the command of the entire Danubian front, was not assigned after Abdülkerim Nadir Pasha's disposal, instead, the command of the front was divided among Mehmed Ali Pasha, Süleyman Hüsü Pasha and Osman Pasha without considering the military tradition and unity of command. Each of them was responsible for different regions without the authority of a superior, who could ensure accordance among them. The new command organization not only caused separation as the command zone but also as spirit. Therefore, the appointments without considering the unity of command and

the other military necessities appeared as one of the most significant reasons for many failures during the war.

The primary causes of the complex command mechanism were Abdülhamid II and *Meclis-i Askerî*. Both paved the way for the strategic command and coordination problems among the Ottoman commanders. Abdülhamid II closely followed the developments in the front line and directly involved the decision-making processes. Also, the commanders in the front had the opportunity to communicate directly with the Sultan by demolishing the military tradition. The means for the Sultan in this regard was the *Meclis-i Askerî*, which showed itself in every stage of the decision-making mechanism. Although it was founded to eliminate the organizational problems among the Ottoman corps and ensure the strategic and operational coordination between them, the appointments and external interventions led to a chaotic atmosphere in the front line. The commanders were obliged to get the approval of Istanbul before performing a plan and this caused missing the opportunities in the front line while waiting for the approval from this long chain of communication.

The effects of the disorder in the front line had continued until the end of the war and destroyed the operational capability of the Ottoman army. There is no doubt that Istanbul affected the course of the war and the biggest mistake in this respect was the appointments. However, it is not possible to explain the process as Abdülhamid II and the members of the *Meclis-i Askerî* had been intervening the front line without getting enough information about the developments, and the chaotic coordination was a consequence of the Sultan's deliberate intention to sustain the commander's loyalty, at least regarding the battle of Shipka and development in this regard. In fact, the main motivation of them was to show a more effective performance against the Russian army, but the missing thing in this regard was the importance of the unity of command. Without a responsible commander who could ascertain the last decisions in the front line, it could not be possible to implement the strategic necessities. Since the study focused on the strategic effects of the relationship between Abdülhamid II, the military council and the front line in the context of the Shipka battles, the same relationship should be investigated regarding the other battles and important developments

throughout the front line in order to reach a certain conclusion about the effect of the interventions over the strategic command and coordination ability of the Ottoman army.

The strategic command and coordination problem in the Ottoman army after Abdülkerim Nadir Pasha showed itself explicitly with the dispute between Süleyman Hüsnü Pasha and Mehmed Ali Pasha. During these days Osman Pasha was in a defense position, and one of the main efforts of the Ottoman army was to help Osman Pasha against the Russians. Due to the interconnection of these commander's zones of responsibility, both Mehmed Ali Pasha and Süleyman Pasha depended on each other. Notwithstanding, there was no coherence among them, and without a first among equals, that is to say, primus inter pares, it could not be possible to carry out successful operations by the cooperation of the Ottoman forces. They mainly prioritized their own zone and paid no attention to others.

The atmosphere on the Danubian front after the battle of Pleven was suitable to organize a united attack simultaneously against the Russians who took a defensive position until the arrival of the reinforcements. The Ottoman army could not execute united operations against the Russian army and failed in keeping the initiative because of the incoordination. Both Mehmed Ali Pasha and Süleyman Pasha insisted on following their path without paying attention to others. Consequently, the dispute among them not only ended with the defeat of their forces but also led to the defeat of Osman Pasha in Pleven. Osman Pasha had lost his chance of success and became desolate in Pleven day by day without any assistance from Süleyman Pasha and Mehmed Ali Pasha. Although the military council did not hesitate to intervene on many occasions throughout the war, the members of the council could not make any visible effect on Süleyman and Mehmed Ali Pasha to prevent them.

One of the other important issues regarding the strategic mistakes, in addition to the abovementioned ones, was the inefficiency in obtaining information and intelligence in the Ottoman army. The Russians were able to conduct proper reconnaissance and surveillance missions by exploiting the advantage of their noteworthy cavalry force.

Also, the Bulgarians provided important information and intelligence to them. On the other hand, as could be seen throughout the study, the cavalry force of the Ottoman army was the weakest side of the Ottomans. Therefore, it became one of the main reasons for many strategic failures in the context of the Shipka Pass. The cavalry force of the Balkan corps failed to provide information about the enemy to define a suitable plan and be aware of their actions to defend themselves. During the first Shipka battle, the inefficiency of the cavalry force around the Balkan Mountains to perform reconnaissance and surveillance missions enabled the Russians to complete their preparations around the Hainköy Pass without noticed by the Ottomans who mainly focused on the other main passes like the Shipka and Kazgan.

The effects of the inefficient reconnaissance and surveillance missions were especially seen during the second stage of the Shipka battles. Süleyman Pasha had only about 2.000 irregular cavalries and this number was not enough to determine the enemy and led to the inappropriate deployment of the Ottoman forces. Süleyman Pasha made many mistakes in directing his corps at the beginning of his march to Stara Zagora and also before the Shipka attacks. These inappropriate decisions had a big impact on the outcome of the battle of Shipka. Even though it was obvious that the Russian army would be getting stronger day by day, the movement of the Balkan corps was delayed three times before the Shipka attacks. Instead of choosing the most important decision by directly marching to the Shipka Pass in order to take advantage of the unprepared condition of the Russian detachment, Süleyman Pasha wasted time around Nova Zagora. He was misguided many times because he could not reach accurate information about the enemy. The time management problem of the Balkan corps continued during the Shipka battles. He was not aware of the importance of time therefore preferred to move cautiously and did not intend to implement a general attack. Therefore, Süleyman Pasha offered the Russians enough time to reinforce the Shipka defense.

The Ottoman reconnaissance and surveillance column, which was sent on the Shipka Pass before the attacks to make terrain analysis, could not provide sufficient information about the positions of the Russians as well as the most suitable points to

organize the plan. Determining the force to be used is one of the most important steps of strategic planning. Nevertheless, the attack plan was based on the inefficient terrain analysis of the reconnaissance and surveillance column. Thus, Süleyman Pasha failed to meet the main requirements of the strategy because of the trouble in the deployment of the forces, determining the target and the center of gravity properly. Therefore, the troops could not be directed and in time by using a proper force in the right position.

After the last attack attempt on 17 September, the desultory bombardment of the Ottoman forces had continued from the right and left flanks of the Shipka Pass until January 1877. A remarkable force remained around the Shipka Pass after Süleyman Pasha was appointed in Shumen, but the Ottomans did not attempt to organize an extensive attack on the pass as experienced throughout August and September. Instead, a little force, positioned on the flanks, continuously shelled the pass and the remaining part of the force was located in Sheynovo, near Shipka village. After the fall of Pleven, the Balkan corps comprised of 40.000 men positioned in Sheynovo, which was the only considerable Ottoman force in the south of the Balkans, could not resist the Russian attacks and surrendered. The surrender of the Balkan corps is a case that needs special attention because it was the only hope of the Ottoman army to encounter the Russian advance. It should be examined separately by dealing with the developments after the service of Süleyman Pasha as the commander of the Balkan corps.

This thesis is contented with particularly revealing the reasons for the fall of the Shipka Pass, the failures at the strategic level during the Shipka attacks under Süleyman Pasha and the effects of the attacks on the outcome of the war. On this basis, in this study, I have indicated the following conclusions. Firstly, the Ottoman commanders had to follow a passive defense strategy against the Russian advance on the Danubian front because of the wrong decision in the planning stage such as the deployment of the forces throughout a wide defense line, using time inefficiently to complete the preparations and the confusion in authority with the interventions of the military council. As a result of these conditions, the defense of the Balkan Mountains was ignored by the Ottoman decision-makers, and this paved the way for the Russian army to be able to perform their war plan without facing any obstacles.

Secondly, the appointments after Abdülkerim Pasha led to the strategic command and coordination problem in the Ottoman army, especially among Süleyman and Mehmed Ali Pasha. The decision of the *Meclis-i Askerî* and accordingly the Sultan himself led to this dispute by not considering the unity of command and not following the military tradition, and damaged the unity of command which was the crucial factor for the military administration. Under these conditions, the Ottoman army lost its operational capacity and could not exploit the success of Osman Pasha in Pleven. Therefore, the command and coordination problem became one of the main reasons for the loneliness of Osman Pasha against the Russian forces. In this regard, even though there were many causes for the problem in command, coordination, planning… etc., the real reason for such problems was the Ottoman political and military system itself.

Thirdly, the inefficiency of the cavalry units caused the problem in determining the enemy force and positions adequately, which eventually affected the strategic planning ability of the Balkan forces. Therefore, this paved the way for the failure in determining the center of gravity, time management and deployment of the force.

Consequently, it was seen that the Ottoman army successfully determined the objective as capturing the Shipka Pass to be able to ensure the connection between the Ottoman army corps, devoted his efforts and means in this way. In this regard, there was a balance between the means and the objective. However, the Ottoman forces failed during the battle of Shipka since the other necessities of the war were not considered and not fairly implemented at the operational and strategic levels. The Ottoman forces mainly failed in time management, the economy of force, unity of command, and mass during the battle of Shipka. All these paved way for the failure of the Ottoman attempts albeit the Ottomans had an important advantage against the Russian forces after the successful defense in Pleven.

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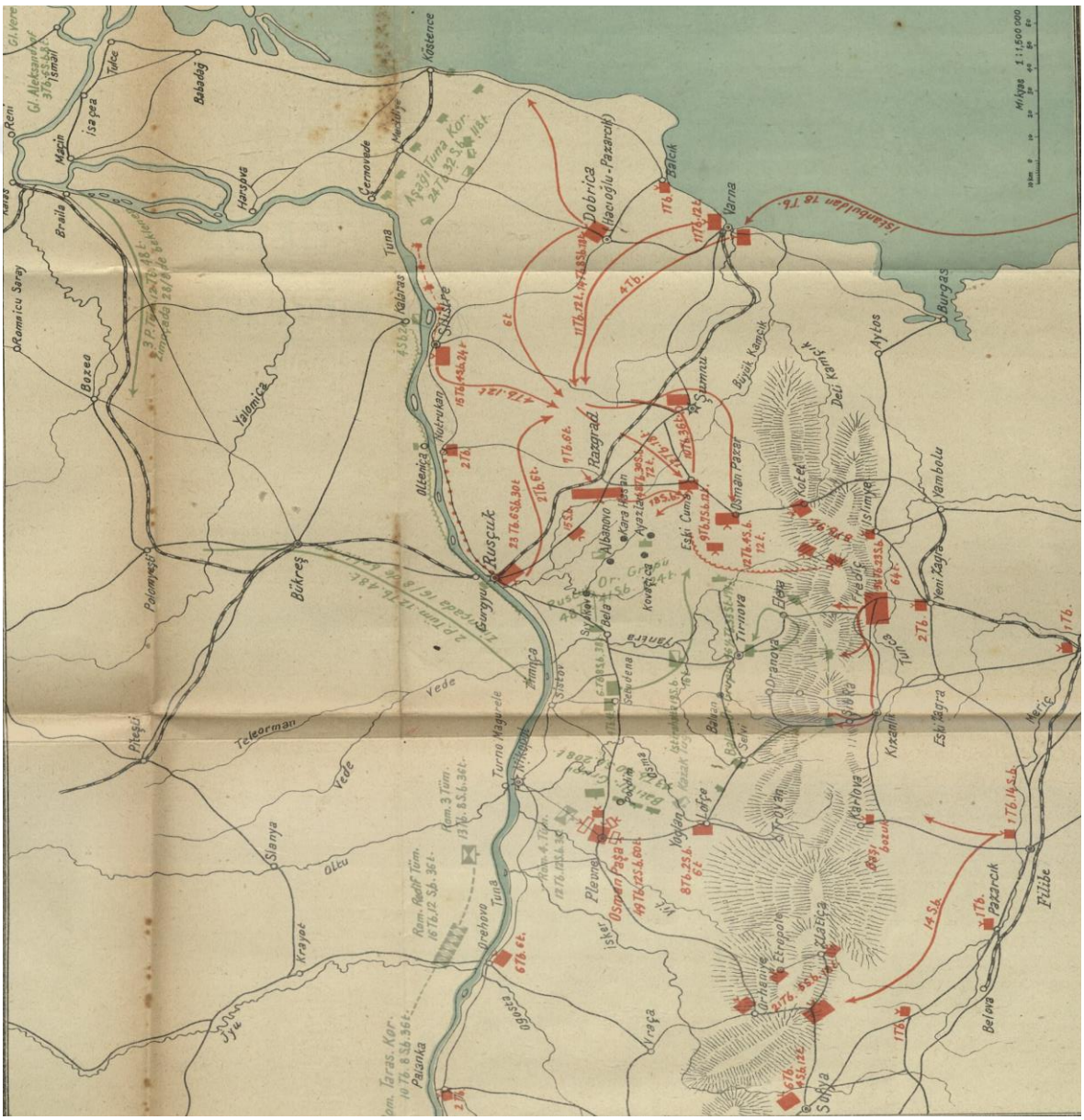
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_defeat_of_Shipka_Peak,_Bulgarian_War_of_Independence.JPG

APPENDICES

A. MAPS

Appendix 1. The Changes on the Danubian Front Between 13 and 21 August

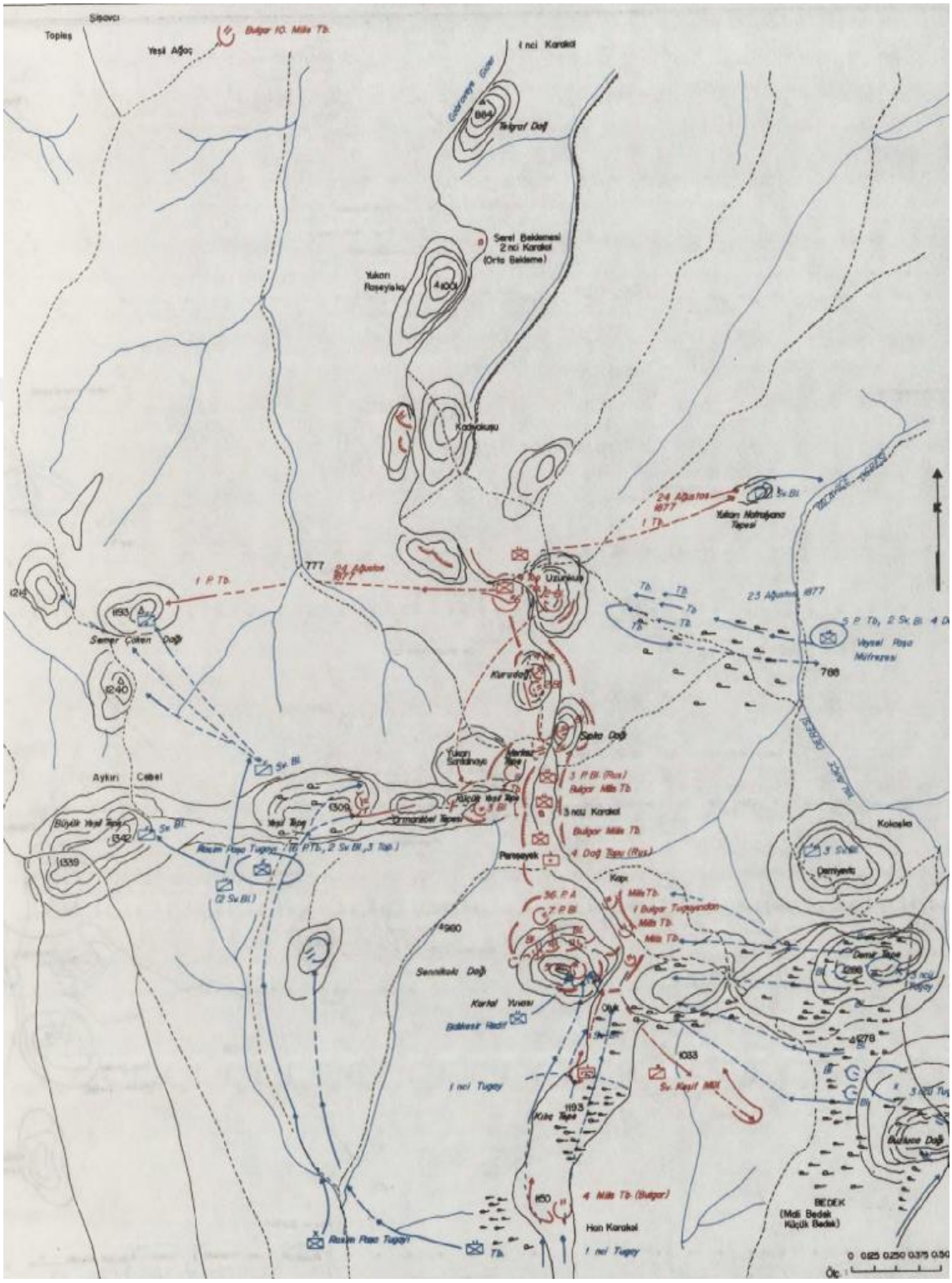


Source: Sedes, *1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus ve Romen Savaşı*, Vol. 8.

Appendix 2. The Russian and Ottoman Position on 21 August Morning

Source: *Sedes, 1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus ve Romen Savaşı*, Vol. 8.

Appendix 3. The Developments in Shipka Pass During the August Attacks



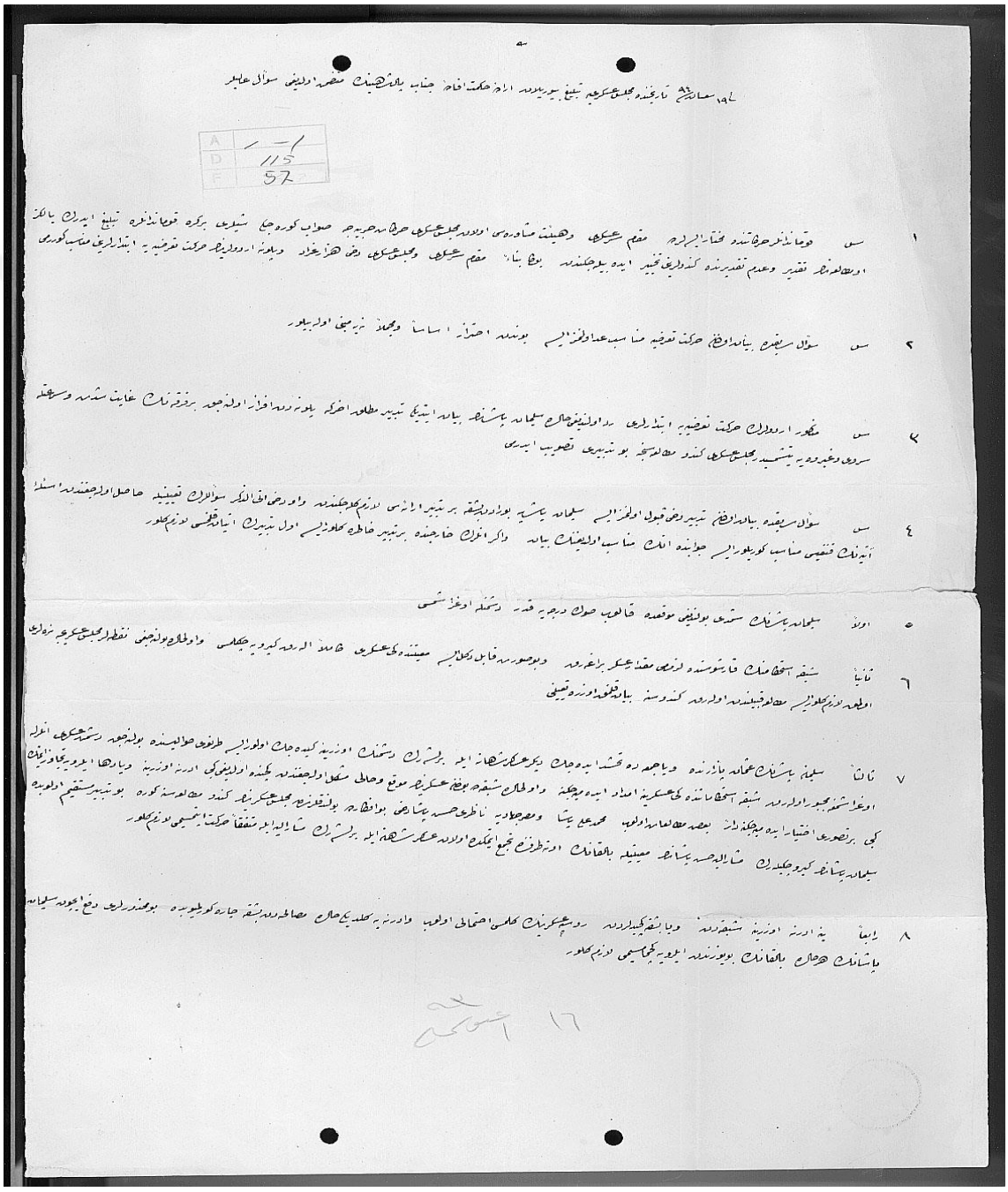
Source: Süer, *1877-1878 Osmanlı Rus Harbi Rumeli Cephesi.*

Appendix 4. The Positions in Shipka Before the Russian Reinforcements on 23 August

Source: *Sedes, 1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus ve Romen Savaşı*, Vol. 8.

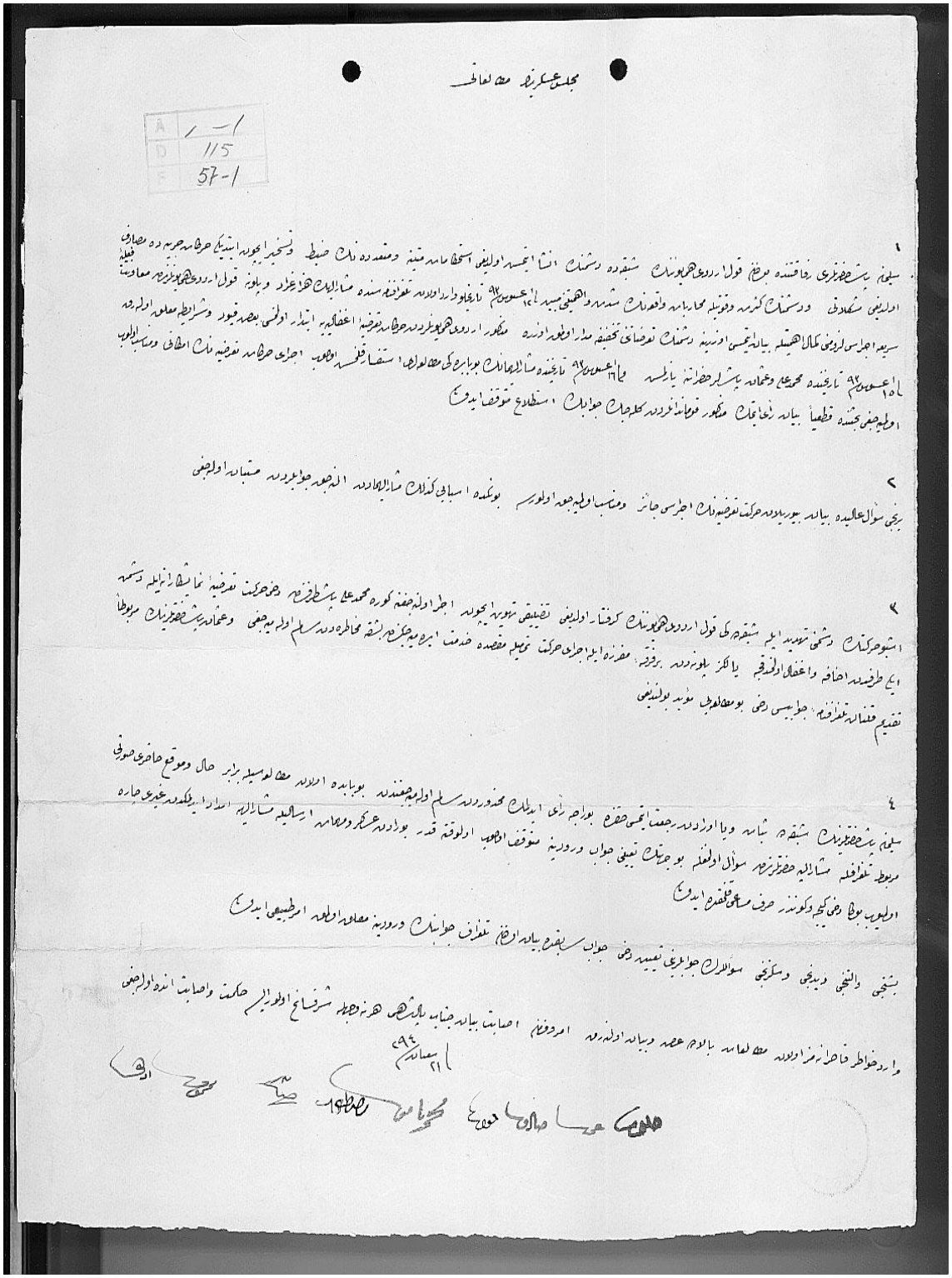
B. ARCHIVAL DOCUMENTS

Appendix 5. Memorandum of Abdülhamid II to the Meclis-i Askerî



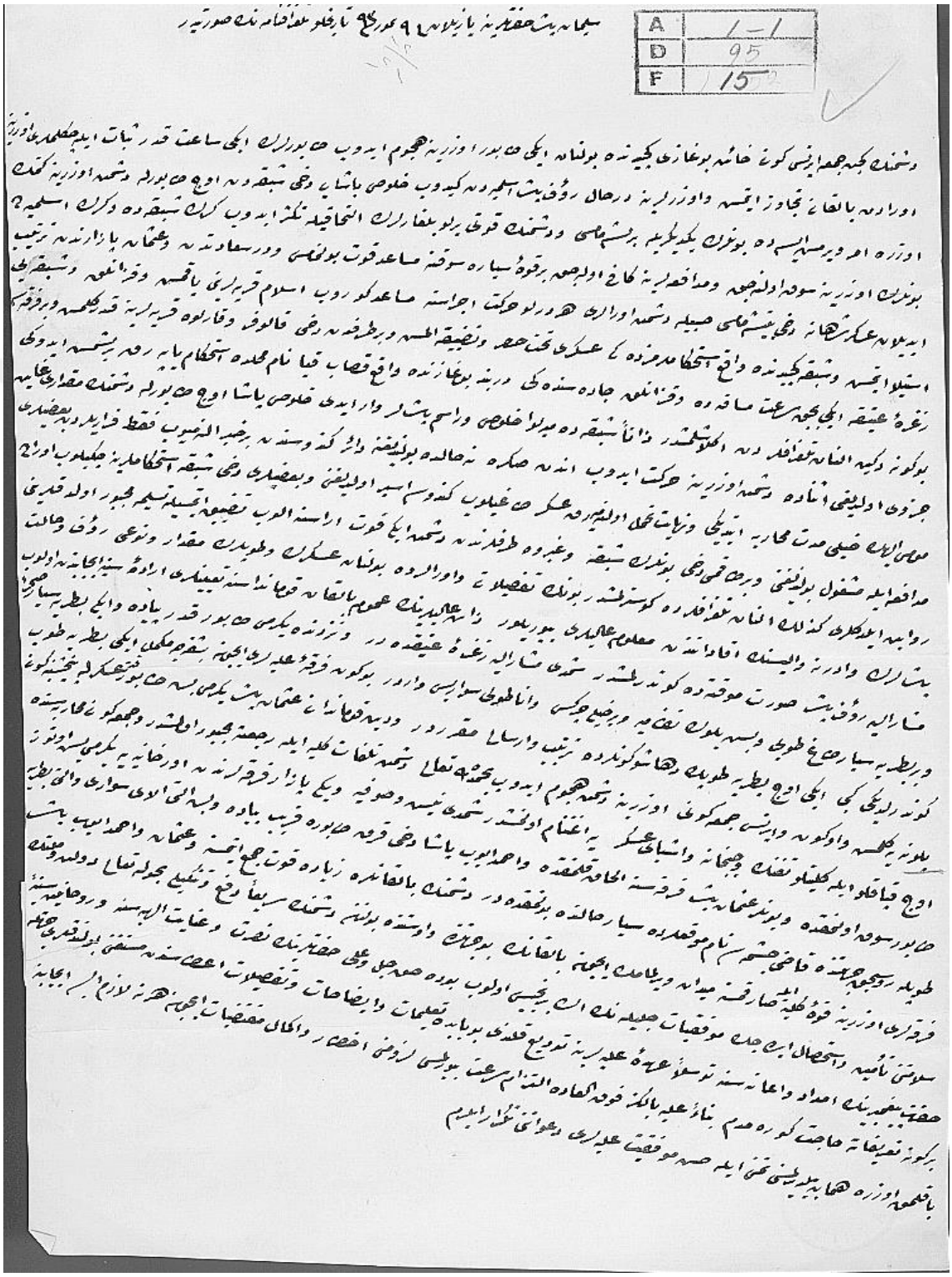
Source: ATASE, ORH. 17/66, 31 August 1877.

Appendix 6. The Answer of the Meclis-i Askerî to the Sultan's Memorandum



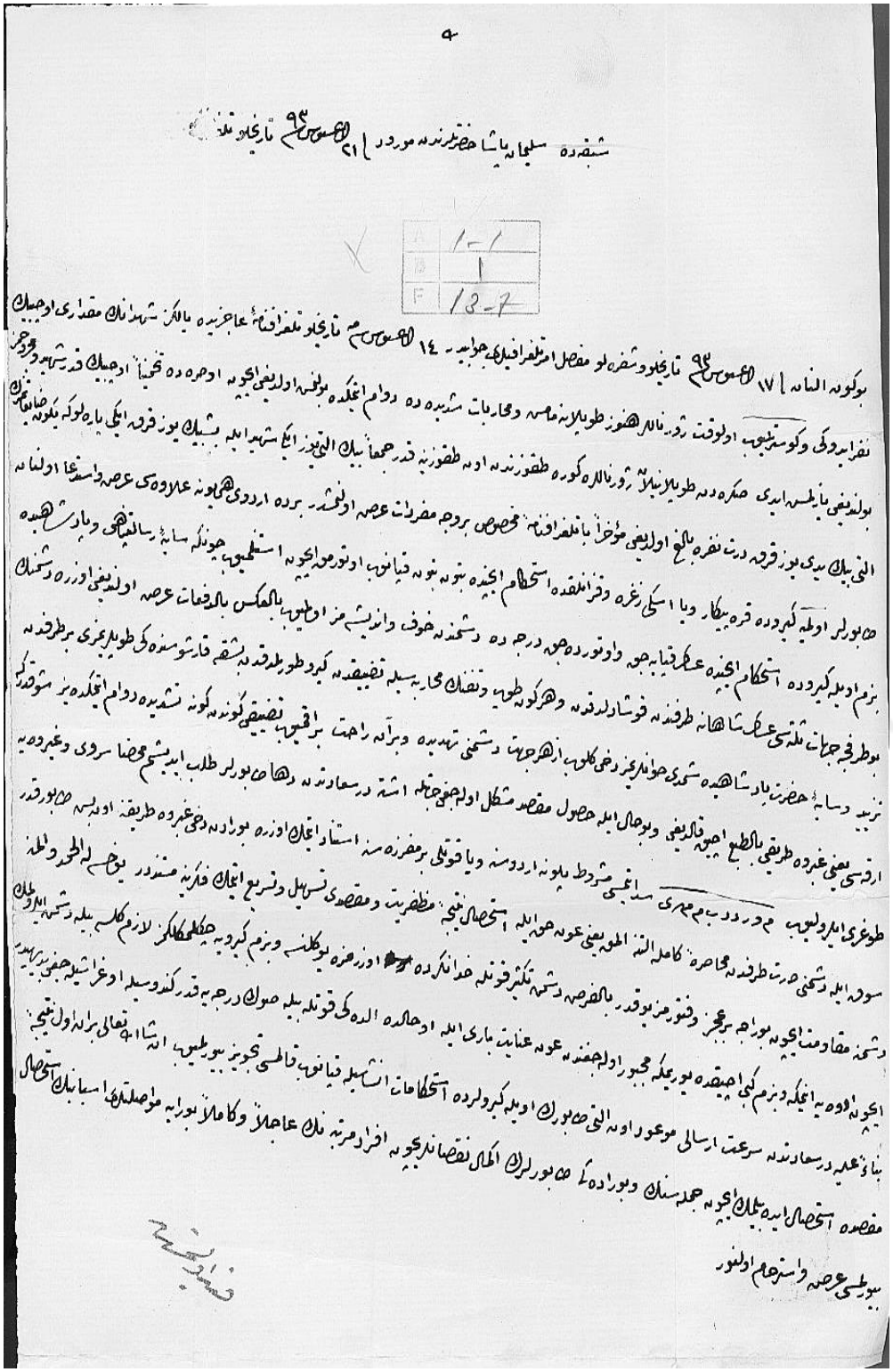
Source: ATASE, ORH. 17/66AA, 31 August 1877.

Appendix 7. The telegram of Mahmud Celaleddin Pasha on 21 July, indicated the as the commander of the Balkan army



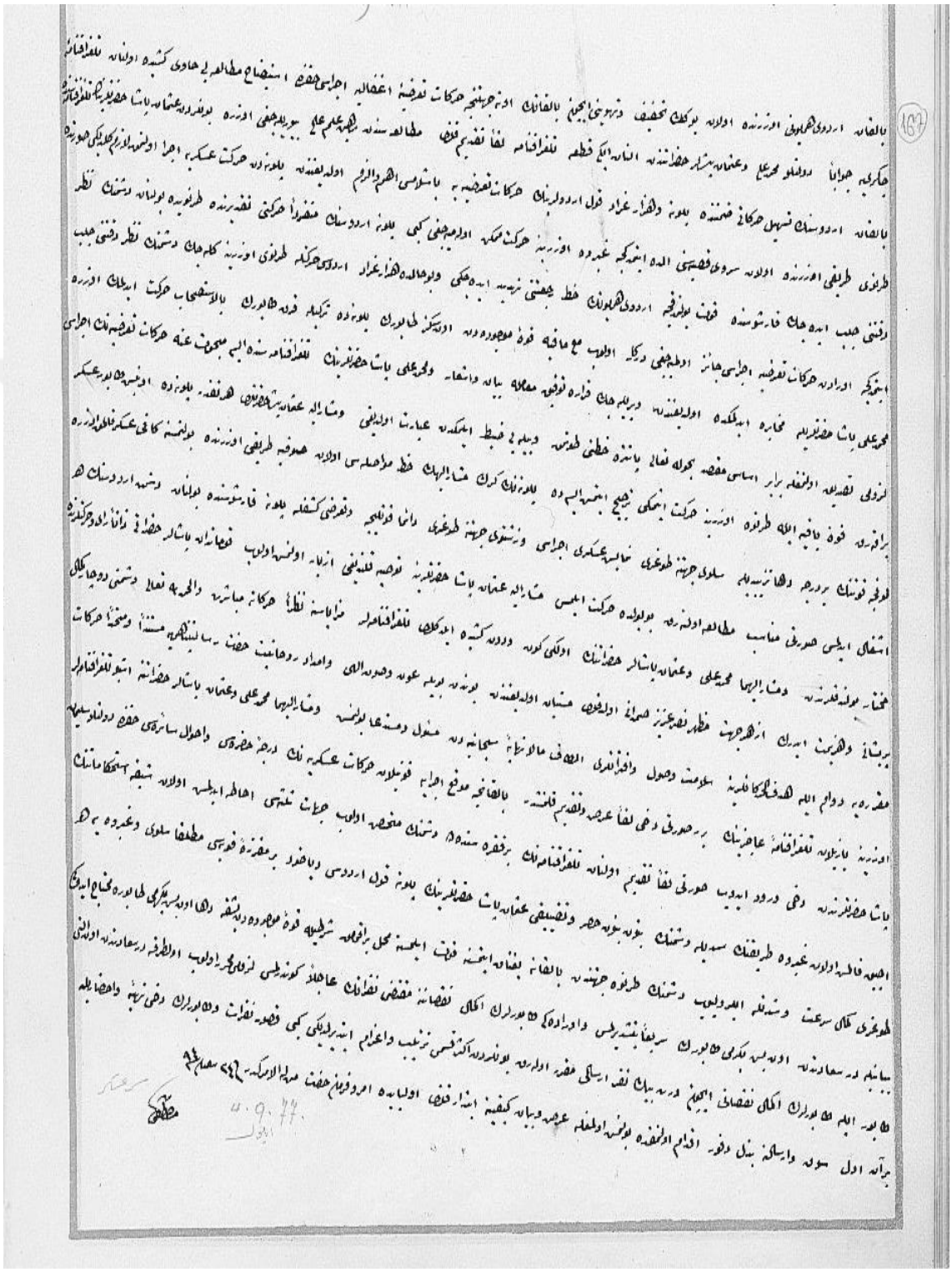
Source: ATASE, ORH. 6/137, 21 July 1877.

Appendix 8. The Report of Süleyman Pasha About the Attacks in August



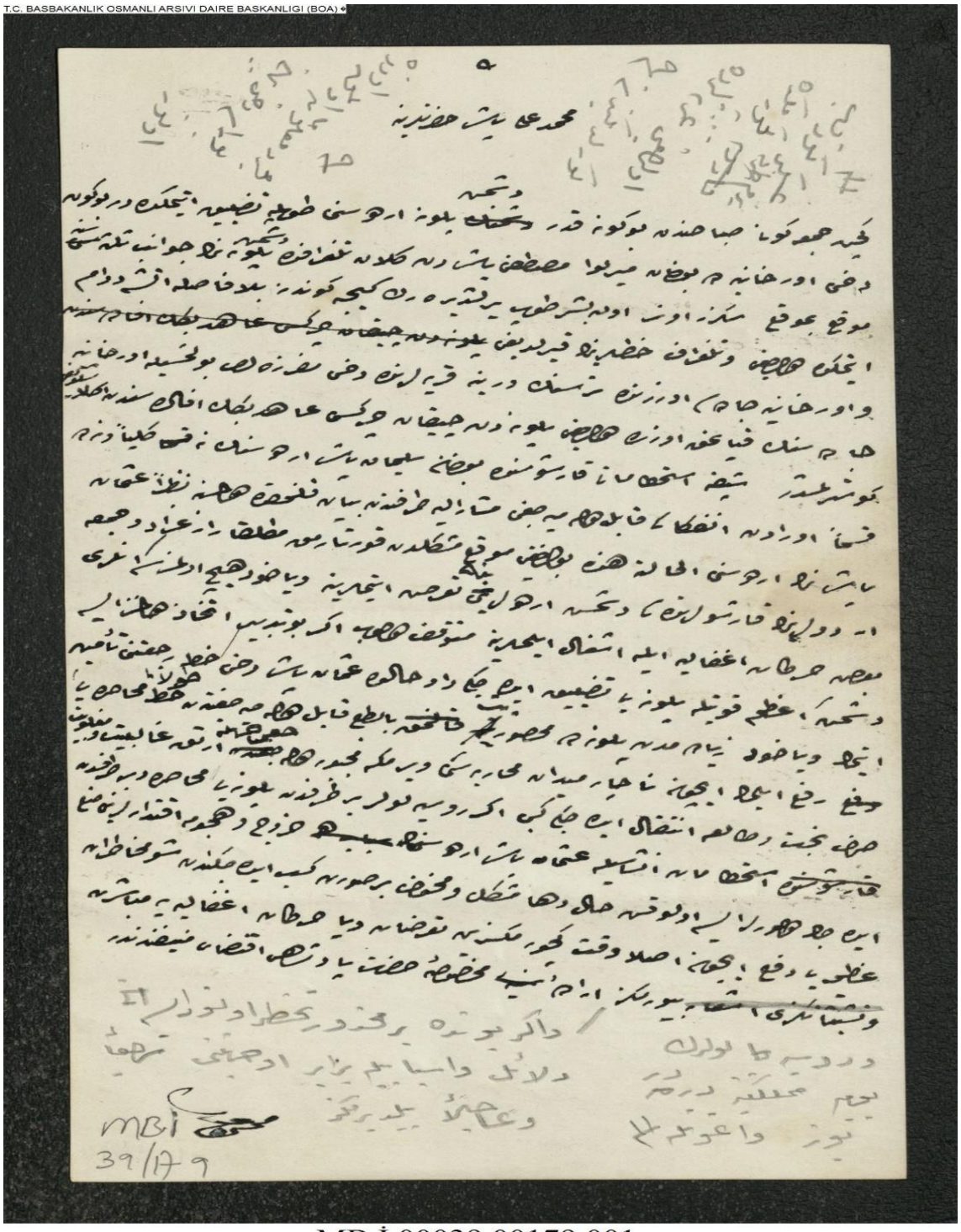
Source: ATASE, ORH. 25/83AG, 2 September 1877.

Appendix 9. Warnings of Meclis-i Askerî to Mehmed Ali Pasha to Help the Operations of Süleyman Pasha and Osman Pasha



Source: ATASE, ORH. 4/19/167, 3 September 1877.

Appendix 10. Warning of Abdülhamid II to Mehmed Ali Pasha to Attack the Russians without losing time to Help Süleyman Pasha and Osman Pasha



MB.İ.00039.00179.001

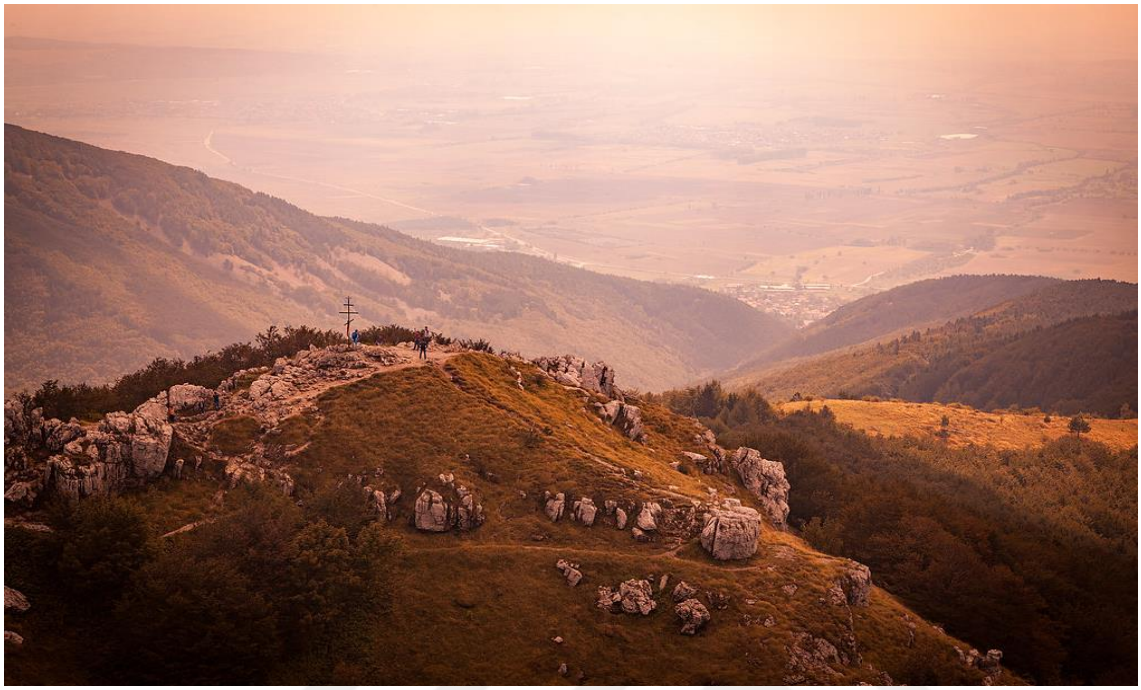
Source: BOA, MB.İ, 39/179, 28 Ağustos 1293, [9 September 1877].

C. ILLUSTRATIONS AND PICTURES

Appendix 11: The View of Shipka Pass and Shipka Village at the Beginning of the twentieth century

Source: Istanbul University Sultan Abdülhamid II. Photography Collection
http://nek.istanbul.edu.tr:4444/ekos/FOTOGRAF/91384---0039.jpg

Appendix 12: Contemporary View of Shipka from St. Nicholas Mountain



Source: https://www.flickr.com/photos/psychomichael/33596113383/

Appendix 13: A Drawing of the Defense of St. Nicholas Mountain

Source:https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_defeat_of_Shipka_Peak,_Bulgarian_War_of_Independence.JPG

Appendix 14: Illustration of Süleyman Hüsnü Pasha

Source: Ollier, *Illustrated History of the Russo-Turkish War*, Vol. 1, p. 372.

Appendix 15: Illustration of Mehmed Ali Pasha

Source: Ollier, *Illustrated History of the Russo-Turkish War*, Vol. 1, p. 354.

D. TABLES

Appendix 16: The Ottoman and Widespread Usages of the Geographical Names

The Ottomans Usage	Widespread Usage
Şıpka	Shipka
Hainköy	Gurkovo
Ferdiç	Elena
Kazgan	Kotel
Yeni Zağra	Nova Zagora
Eski Zağra	Stara Zagora
Filibe	Plovdiv
Plevne	Pleven
İslimye	Sliven
Tırnova	Tırnovo
Ziştovi	Svishtov
Kızanlık	Kazanlak
Lofça	Lovech
Selvi	Sevlievno
Gabrova	Gabrovo
Osmanpazarı	Omurtag
Biela	Byala
Hazergrad	Razgrad

Orhaniye	Botevgrad
Eski Cuma	Targovishte
Niğbolu	Nikopol
Berkofça	Berkovitsa
Yambolu	Yambol
Curanlı	Kalitinovo
Karapınar	Gılıbovo

E. TURKISH SUMMARY / TÜRKÇE ÖZET

Savaş teorisi denilince akla gelen ilk isimlerden olan Prusyalı General Clausewitz savunmayı bir darbenin savuşturulması olarak açıklar. Fakat hareketsiz mutlak savunma Clausewitz'in savaş kavramına tamamen ters düşmektedir. Çünkü bu durumda yalnız bir taraf savaşı sevk ve idare etmiş olacaktır. Ancak savaşan her iki tarafı da düşmana kendi hamlesini yapabilmelidir. Sadece düşman saldırısını savuşturup karşı saldırıyı düşünmemek anlamsızdır. Savunma bazı durumlarda yerini taarruza bırakmalı, mutlak bir pasifliğe gark olmamalıdır. Osmanlı devletinin 93 harbinde belirlediği strateji de temel olarak savunma üzerine kuruluydu. Ancak savaşın özellikle savaşın ilk üç ayında izlediği yol, savunmanın doğasına ters olarak durağan şekilde beklemekten ve kayda değer hamle yapmaktan kaçınmaktan ibaretti. Nitekim daha hazırlık aşamasında kolaylıkla düşmanın ulaşım yollarını tahrip etme fırsatı bile değerlendirilmemiştir. Savaşın başında böylece kendisini gösteren pasif savunma anlayışı uzun süre devam etmiştir.

Tuna cephesi Osmanlı ve Rus orduları için ağırlık merkezi olarak addedilmiş, her iki ordu da en iyi imkanlarını burada seferber etmiştir. Rus savaş planı olabildiğince hızlı şekilde Tuna Cephesi üzerinden İstanbul'a ulaşmak üzere kuruluydu. Osmanlıların esas hedefi burada Rus ilerleyişine karşı koymaktı. Bu yönüyle Tuna Cephesi savaşın kaderini tayin edecek yerdi. Ancak Osmanlı ordusu daha savaşın planlama aşamasında savaş boyunca devam edecek stratejik bir hata yapmıştır. Osmanlı devleti seferber ettiği kuvvetleri azami surette ağırlık merkezi olan Tuna'da cephesinde kullanmak yerine, bütün imparatorluk topraklarını savunmaya odaklanmıştı. Tuna harp sahasında daha fazla asker görevlendirmek mümkünken, binlerce asker tali cephelerde memleketin dört bir yanında beyhude bekletilmiştir. Osmanlı ordusunun silah altına aldığı 500 bin civarındaki geçkin askerin sadece 200 bin e yakını Rus ordusuyla en önemli muharebelerin cereyan edeceği Tuna Cephesi'ne sevk edilmişti. Bu bağlamda

Osmanlı ordusunun 93 harbindeki en büyük hatalarından biri eldeki kuvveti stratejik olarak doğru konuşlandıramayarak kuvvet tasarrufunu iyi yapamaması oldu.

Tuna Cephesi'nde kilometrelik savunma hattını korumaya çalışan ancak düşman unsurlarının planı ve harekâtı hakkında yeterli bilgi sahibi olmayan Osmanlı ordusu Rus ordusunun ilerleyişine engel olamadı. Tuna nehrini zorlanmadan geçen Rus ordusu hızla ilerleyerek birçok önemli noktayı ele geçirdi. Bu süre zarfında elde yeterli asker olmadığından şikâyet eden Serdar-ı Ekrem Abdülkerim Nadir Paşa Rus ilerleyişini engelleyecek kayda değer bir adım atamadı. Paşa, tüm cephe hattında ihtiyatlı şekilde beklemeyi ve Rusları müstahkem kale savunmaları ile oyalamayı planlıyordu. Abdülkerim Nadir Paşa'nın bu planı tatbik edebilmesi için elinde seyyar bir kolordunun olması gerekirdi. Düşmanın gerisi bu seyyar kolordu vasıtasıyla tehdit edilerek ilerleyişin engellenmesi mümkün olabilirdi. Ancak bu dönemde süvari bakımından yetersiz Osmanlı ordusu, Bulgaristan'da Rus taarruz kıtalarının gerisini tehdit edebilecek miktarda asker seyyar birliğe sahip değildi. Serdar-ı Ekrem de sürekli elinde seyyar hale getirilerek düşman üzerine gönderilebilecek askerin olmamasından şikâyet etmekteydi. Rus ordusunun Tuna Nehri'ni geçmesi üzerine düşmanı tespit etmek ve ilerlemesinin engellemek adına Tuna Şark Ordusu bölgesinden kuvvet ayırarak Ahmet Eyüp Paşa komutasında bir seyyar kolordu kurulmaya teşebbüs edildi. Ancak, bu kolordunu Osmanlı karargahının ihtiyatlı yaklaşımı ve karşısında üstün düşman olmasından dolayı herhangi bir başarı elde edilmeden Ruslarla ilk temastan sonra geri çekildi. Bu şartlar altında Rus ordusunun Balkan Dağları üzerine gönderdiği General Gurko herhangi bir engelle karşılaşmadan harekâtını gerçekleştirme imkânı buldu.

Savaş öncesinde yapılan harp planı mucibince Balkan Dağları'nın savunması için Edirne'de 40 bin kişilik bir ihtiyat ordusu hazırlanacak ve bu hattın tesviyesine çalışılacaktı. Bu kapsamda mayıs ayı itibariyle Balkan geçitlerinin müstahkem hale getirilmesi için inşa faaliyetlerine başlandı. Geçitlerin önem sırasına göre çalışmalar yöreden halkın yardımı da alınarak 2 ay içerisinde tamamlandı. Ancak her ne kadar çalışmalar tamamlanmış olsa da bütün geçitler düşman taarruzuna karşı koyabilecek kadar güçlendirilmemişti. Osmanlılar geçitleri önem sırasına göre tahkim etmiş, daha

çok Şıpka ve Kazgan gibi Balkan Dağları üzerindeki kolordu seviyesinde harekata elverişli noktalara odaklanmıştı. Ayrıca Balkan savunması için bir diğer önemli sorun savaşın başında kurulması planlanan ihtiyat ordusundan Rusların temmuz ayındaki taarruzlarına kadar hala kurulmamış olması idi. Öyle ki Balkan Dağları hattına kayda değer seviyede asker sevki dahi Rus ordusunun Tuna'yı geçmesinden sonra, Balkan kumandanı olarak atanan Rauf Paşa'nın bölgeye ulaşması ise Rusların Hainköy geçidine taarruzundan birkaç gün önce olmuştu. Bu da Tuna Nehri'nde olduğu gibi Osmanlı ordusunun ikinci savunma hattını teşkil eden Balkan Dağları'nın da Rus taarruzları karşısında güçsüz kalması demekti.

General Gurko, 8 Temmuz'da Tırnova'yı ele geçirdikten sonra Balkan Dağları üzerine gerçekleştireceği harekata odaklandı. Yapılan keşif ve gözetleme faaliyetleri ile alınan istihbarata göre, esas hedef konumundaki Şıpka Geçidi yaklaşık 6 bin kişilik kuvvetle tutulmaktaydı ve geçit Osmanlılar tarafından müstahkem hale getirilmişti. Bu şartlar altında Şıpka'nın cepheden taarruzla elde edilmesi zor idi. Bu yüzden General Gurko durumu iyi şekilde tahlil ederek farklı bir yol arayışına girerek, Şıpka'yı çevirme harekâtı ile elde etmeyi planlamıştır. Böylesi bir harekâtı gerçekleştirebilmek için en müsait yer Osmanlılar tarafından ikincil önemde görülen ve iyi şekilde tutulmayan Hainköy Geçidi hedef olarak belirlendi. Hainköy Geçidi her ne kadar ulaşım için elverişli olmasa da General Gurko'nun planını tatbik etmek için yeterli idi.

Osmanlı ordusu için temmuzun ikinci haftasını içine alan bu günlerdeki en büyük hata, ilerleyişine engel olamadığı Rus ordusu karşısında keşif ve gözetleme faaliyetlerini de layıkıyla yapamamasıydı. Bölgede yeterli süvari kuvvetinin bulunmaması ve bütün organizasyonu takip edecek bir komutanın atamasının da zamanında yapılmamasından dolayı Osmanlılar Rusların Hainköy civarındaki hazırlıkları haber alamadı. Bu yüzden Ruslar kayda değer karşılık görmeden 14 Temmuz'da Hainköy Geçidi'nden geçerek Tunca Vadisi'ne inmiş ve esas hedef olan Şıpka Geçidi üzerine yürüyüşüne başlamıştı.

General Gurko Hainköy üzerine yürüyüşe geçtiğinde bir kolu da Tırnova'dan Gabrova üzerine sevk etmişti. Bu kol Gurko'nun Şıpka Geçidi'nin güneyine ulaşmasını bekleyecek ve aynı anda hem kuzey hem de güneyden geçide taarruz edilecekti. Bu

kapsamda Gurko'nun 17 Temmuz'da Şıpka'nın güneyine ulaşması planlanmış, 17 Temmuz günü birleşik taarruz günü olarak belirlenmişti. Ancak, Rus kuvvetleri Uflani ve Kızanlık'ta karşılaştığı az sayıdaki Osmanlı askeri karşısında zaman kaybetmiş, 17 Temmuz'da Şıpka'ya ulaşamamıştı. Bu yüzden Gabrova müfrezesi 17 Temmuz'da tek başına taarruz gerçekleştirmek zorunda kaldı. Gabrova müfrezesinin cepheden gerçekleştirdiği taarruz, Şıpka'nın cepheden taarruzla zapt edilmesinin ne kadar zor olduğunu gözler önüne sermişti. Üç koldan taarruzu gerçekleştiren Rus kuvvetleri Osmanlılar karşısında çok ilerleyemeden geri çekilmek zorunda kalmıştı. General Gurko her ne kadar 17 Temmuz'da Şıpka'ya ulaşamamış olsa da Şıpka'nın tek ikmal hattını kesmiş, geçide ulaştırılmaya çalışılan ikmal konvoyunu ele geçirmişti. Bu dönemde Şıpka'daki Osmanlı kuvvetlerinin eksikliğini en çok hissettiği şey, zahire ve mühimmat eksikliği idi. Tamamen kuzeyden gelecek saldırılara karşı dizayn edilmiş Şıpka Geçidi'nin ihtiyaçlarının Tunca Vadisi'nden karşılanması planlanmıştı. Ayrıca Şıpka köyüne ve geçide ikişer aylık zahire ihtiyacını karşılayacak büyüklükte ambarlar yapılmıştı. Ancak inşa faaliyetleri üzerinden 1 aydan fazla geçiş olmasına rağmen Osmanlılar bu ambarlar için gıda maddesi temin etmemişti. Şıpka'daki Osmanlı kuvvetlerinin Ruslar karşısında mücadele edebilmesi için tek şans olan mühimmat ve zahire katarları da 15 ve 17 Temmuz'da Yeni Zağra ve Şıpka köyü dolaylarında General Gurko'nun süvarileri kolları tarafından ele geçirilmişti. Böylece Osmanlıların elinde sadece geçitte bulunan üç dört günlük erzak kalmış oldu. Bu durum Osmanlı kuvvetlerinin stratejik öneme sahip Şıpka Geçidi'ni mücadele etmeden terk etmesinin başlıca sebeplerinden biri oldu.

Bütün bu gelişmeler göz önünde bulundurulduğunda, Şıpka gibi stratejik öneme haiz noktanın düşmesinin esas nedeni Osmanlıların Ruslar karşısında pasif kalması ve Balkan savunma hattının zamanında takviye edilmemesidir. Buna savaşın başından sonuna kadar Osmanlı ordusunda görülen stratejik harekât ve yönetim zafiyeti da eklenince Osmanlı kuvvetleri arasındaki gerekli koordinasyon sağlanamamış, Balkan savunması Ruslar tarafından kolayca geçilmiştir.

Gerek Rus ordusunun Tuna'yı geçişi gerekse de sonraki süreçte Osmanlı ordusunun Ruslar karşısındaki acziyetinin sebepleri hakkında birçok farklı yorum mevcuttur. 93

harbinde Osmanlı ordusunun içinde bulunduğu kaosu ve stratejik yönetim zafiyetini görmek için bu farklı yorumlar ziyadesiyle önemlidir. Çünkü savaşın ilk aylarında Osmanlı ordusunun yaşadığı tutukluk yalnızca bir kişinin sebep olacağı kadar küçük kapsamlı bir hata değildi. Aksine, bu durum birden çok sorumlusu olan, stratejik yönetim zafiyetinden kaynaklı hatalar silsilesi üzerine gelişmiştir. Bunun başlangıcı savaşın başında stratejik olarak yığınak planının hakkıyla yapılamaması ile olmuştu. Savunulması gereken yüzlerce kilometrelik hattı tutmak için yeterli sayıda asker olmaması başarıya inancı olmayan Abdülkerim Nadir Paşa'nın en büyük dayanağı olmuş, paşa sürekli eksikliklerden şikâyet ederek müstahkem mevkilerde pasif halde beklemeyi tercih etmişti. Bir diğer stratejik hata da Balkanlarda oluşturulması gereken Balkan ordusunun zamanında oluşturulmayarak Rusların kolayca Balkan Dağları'nı aşmasına zemin hazırlanması olmuştu. Eldeki askerlerden mümkün mertebe Balkan Ordusu'nun teşkili için kuvvet tefrik edilse ve bunlar da zamanında muayyen bir komutan ile geçitlere konuşlandırılsa idi Rus ordusunun Balkan Dağları'nı aşarak Şıpka Geçidi'ni zorlanmadan elde etmesi mümkün olmazdı.

Balkan Dağları savunmasının çökmesinden sonraki süreç Osmanlı ordusunun stratejik yönetim zafiyetiyle en çok yüz yüze kaldığı dönem oldu. Mağlubiyetin faturası, emrinde hatırı sayılır miktardaki kuvvet bulunmasına rağmen Rus ordusu karşısında tutuk Serdar-ı Ekrem Abdülkerim Nadir Paşa ve Serasker Redif Paşa'ya kesildi. Bu azillerden sonra yapılan atamalar stratejik yönetim ve koordinasyon sorununun keskinleşmesine yol açtı. Abdülkerim Nadir Paşa gibi bütün cephe komutasını deruhte eden bir komutan atayarak emir komuta birliğini sağlamak yerine, Tuna Cephesi'ndeki komuta Mehmed Ali Paşa, Süleyman Hüsnü Paşa ve Osman Nuri Paşa arasında paylaştırıldı. Bu üç komutanın direkt bağlı olduğu tek söz sahibi bir komutan olmadığı gibi, İstanbul'daki Meclis-i Askerî de bu karmaşık yönetim mekanizması içinde önemli rol üstlenmekteydi. Ayrıca atamalar yapılıyorken paşaların arasındaki kıdem farklarına da riayet edilmemiş, kıdemi yüksek paşalar kendilerinden kıdemsiz olanların emrine verilerek yönetim zafiyetine yol açacak bir karar verilmiştir. Abdülkerim Nadir Paşa'nın azlinden sonra ortaya çıkan yönetim yapısı savaşın kaybedilmesindeki en önemli nedenlerden biri olarak karşımıza çıkmaktadır.

Stratejik yönetim ve koordinasyon problemi kendisini özellikle Süleyman Paşa ve Mehmed Ali Paşa arasındaki anlaşmazlıkla göstermiştir. Mehmed Ali Paşa Abdülkerim Nadir Paşa'nın yerine Tuna Umum Komutanı olarak atanmıştı. Ancak, Abdülkerim Nadir Paşa gibi yetkileri yoktu. Normalde Mehmed Ali Paşa'nın emrinde olması gereken Osman ve Süleyman Paşalar daha yeni Müşir olmuş Mehmed Ali Paşa'dan daha kıdemliydiler. İstanbul'dan Mehmed Ali Paşa'ya diğer komutanların kendisine bağlı olduğu yazılıyorken, Osman ve Süleyman Paşa'ya da sürekli İstanbul ile muhabere halinde olmaları, her gelişmeyi haberdar etmeleri söylenmiş, kendilerine direkt Sultan Abdülhamid ile iletişim imkânı verilmiştir. Askeri temayüllere uymayan bu tutum paşaların bağımsız oldukları yönündeki izlenimini güçlendirmiştir.

Savaşın başında Karadağ'da görevli olan Süleyman Paşa, Rus ordusunun hızlı ilerleyişinden sonra Balkanlara emrindeki kuvvetle çağırılmıştı. Bu kapsamda 20 bini geçkin Süleyman Paşa kolordusu temmuzun ikinci haftası deniz yolu ile Dedeağaç'a oradan da trenler ile Edirne'ye ulaştırıldı. Edirne'de gerekli hazırlıklarını tamamlayan Balkan ordusu, peyderpey Bulgaristan'daki toplanma yeri olarak belirlenen Karapınar'a sevk edilmekteydi. Cephe hattına ulaşır ulaşmaz Süleyman Paşa'ya İstanbul tarafından tevdi edilen görev öncelikle Balkanların güneyine geçmiş ve Eski Zağra – Yeni Zağra hattına kadar ulaşmış olan General Gurko kuvvetlerini püskürtmek ve Balkan Dağları üzerindeki düşman unsurlarını Balkan Dağları'nın ötesine atmaktı. İkinci aşamada Süleyman Paşa'nın Balkan Dağları'nın kuzeyine geçerek Mehmet Ali Paşa ile Tırnova'da konuşlu Rus kuvvetleri üzerine müşterek harekât gerçekleştirmesi beklenmekteydi.

Süleyman Paşa Balkanların güneyine ulaştığında bu bölgede sadece Şıpka'dan Filibe yönüne çekilmiş 7 taburluk Mehmed Hulusi Paşa komutasındaki kuvvet ve Yeni Zağra'da konuşlu eski Balkan kumandanı Rauf Paşa komutasındaki 10 taburluk kuvvet bulunmaktaydı. Süleyman Paşa'dan kıdemli olan ve daha önce Süleyman Paşa'nın komutanlığını da yapmış olan Rauf Paşa yeni yapılanmada Süleyman Paşa'nın emri altına verilmiş, kıdem farkına bir kez daha riayet edilmemişti. Bu durum ilerleyen günlerde gerçekleşecek iletişim kopukluğunun nedenlerinden biri oldu. Harekât planının ilk aşamasını gerçekleştirmek üzere Eski Zağra üzerine hareket eden

Osmanlı kuvvetleri, Eski Zağra'yı ele geçirmesine rağmen bir dizi koordinasyon problemi yaşamış ve bu yüzden başarıdan faydalanamamıştır. Eski Zağra üzerine üç koldan yapılan yürüyüş esnasında Rauf Paşa müfrezesi Curanlı'da General Gurko tarafından mağlup edilmiş, Süleyman Paşa'dan herhangi bir yardım görememişti. Curanlı olayı ve sonrasında süvari kuvvetinin verimli kullanılamamasından kaynaklı keşif ve gözetleme ile istihbarat sorunları harekatın ikinci aşamaya geçirilmesine, yani Şıpka üzerine yürünmesine engel olmuştu. Eski Zağra'dan sonra Balkan Ordusu'nun yönü Şıpka'ya değil, Şıpka ile tamamen ters istikametteki Yeni Zağra'ya çevrilmişti.

Süleyman Paşa Yeni Zağra'da mühimmat ve erzak tedarikini sağladıktan sonra Şıpka üzerine hareket etmek niyetindeydi. Ancak zaman Rus ordusunun lehine işlemekte ve Şıpka'daki Rus savunması günden güne daha hazır hale gelmekteydi. Ordunun yönünün değişmesinin ve Balkan Ordusu'nun zaman kaybının yol açtığı bir diğer problem de Mehmed Ali Paşa'nın desteğinin kaybedilmesi oldu. Süleyman Paşa Şıpka üzerine yürüyorken Mehmed Ali Paşa Şıpka'nın gerisini tehdit edecekti. Böylece takviye alamayan Şıpka'daki Rus kuvvetlerinin geri çekilmek zorunda bırakılması planlanıyordu. Ancak, Balkanların güneyinde kaybedilen zaman dilimi içerisinde Mehmed Ali Paşa ordusu karşısındaki Rus kuvvetlerinin hareketliliği artmıştı. Aynı dönemde Avrupa'dan gelen Rusların Mehmed Ali Paşa kıtaları üzerine taarruza geçeceği yönündeki bilgiler Mehmed Ali Paşa'yı tüm cephe hattı boyunca ihtiyatlı hareket etmeye sevk etmişti. Öyle ki, Süleyman Paşa'nın harekâtını kolaylaştırmak adına Osmanpazarı'nda konuşlanan müfreze dahi geriye alınmıştı.

Ağustos'un ikinci haftasında Süleyman Paşa Yeni Zağra'daki hazırlıklarını tamamlayıp Balkan geçitleri üzerine harekata başlayacağı zaman, Mehmed Ali Paşa ve Süleyman Paşa arasındaki ayrılık iyice keskinleşti. Mehmed Ali Paşa gelen istihbaratları da göz önünde bulundurarak Süleyman Paşa'nın Şıpka harekâtından vazgeçmesini ve Balkan Dağlarını Kazgan Geçidi üzerinden geçerek kendi kuvvetleriyle birleşmesini istemekteydi. Böylece müştereken Ruslar üzerine taarruz edilebilecekti. Süleyman Paşa bu talebe karşı çıkarak kendisine verilen görevi, yani Şıpka'nın düşman işgalinden kurtarılmasını, her ne olursa olsun yerine getirmekte kararlıydı. İstanbul'da yapılan Meclis-i Askerî toplantılarında da Süleyman Paşa'nın

Şıpka taarruzuna onay çıktı. Ancak bu onaya rağmen Şıpka taarruzlarının başarı ile sonuçlanmasını sağlayacak yegâne şeylerden biri olan Şıpka'daki Rusların ikmal hattının tehdit edilmesini için adım atılmamıştı. Talebi kabul görmeyen Mehmed Ali Paşa tamamen kendi bölgesine odaklanmıştı. Süleyman Paşa'nın 21-26 Ağustos ve 17 Eylül tarihlerinde Şıpka üzerine gerçekleştirdiği taarruzların hiçbirinde Mehmed Ali Paşa ordusu tarafından harekâtı kolaylaştıracak harekette bulunulmadı. Bu şartlar altında gerisi tehdit edilmeyen Şıpka'daki Ruslar bütün zorluklara rağmen gelen takviye ile Şıpka Geçidi'ni savunmayı başardı.

Şıpka muharebelerinin şiddetinden ve arazinin zorlu şartlarından dolayı Balkan Ordusu mevcudunun üçte biri nispetinde zayiat vermişti. 21-26 Ağustos ve 17 Eylül taarruzlarında 2 bini geçkin şehit ve 7 bin civarında da yaralı ile zayiat 10 bini aşmaktaydı. Bu haliyle Şıpka taarruzları Osmanlı ordusunun 93 harbinde en fazla zayiat verdiği muharebelerden biri idi. Çok sayıdaki zayiata rağmen Osmanlı ordusunun Şıpka'da başarısız olmasının esas nedeni stratejik ve taktik seviyede birbirini izleyen hatalar silsilesiydi. Özellikle stratejik seviyede Osmanlı ordusu savaşın bu evresinde birçok yanlış adım atmış ve bu yanlışların telafisi de sonrasında mümkün olmadığı için muharebeler ve sonrasında da savaş kaybedilmiştir.

Savaşın Osmanlı topraklarında yapılması Osmanlılara haberleşme imkanlarını daha etkin kullanım imkânı vermekteydi. Bu avantajdan yeterince yararlanmak için İstanbul'da bir Meclis-i Askerî tesis edilmişti. Her ne kadar bu organizasyon ile cephe hattı ile koordinasyon halinde olarak Osmanlı ordusundaki organizasyon sorunlarını gidermek ve kolordular arasındaki eşgüdümü sağlamak planlansa da, komuta kademesindeki yetki paylaşımının iyi yapılmaması, askerlik sanatına uymayan atamalar ve Meclis-i Askerî'nin birçok karar sürecine dahil olarak cephe hattında yönetim zafiyetine neden olması bu teşebbüsten beklenen verimin alınmasını engellemişti. Sultan Abdülhamid cephe hattındaki bütün olayları yakından takip ederek karar süreçlerine direkt dahil olmak istiyordu. Cephe hattındaki komutanlara verilen kesin emir de padişahın sürekli harekât ve planlar hakkında bilgilendirilmesi yönündeydi. Ancak sultanın emir komutayı elinde tutmaya gösterdiği aşırı heves, zaten problemli olan Osmanlı ordusundaki karar verme süreçlerini olumsuz

etkilemiştir. Kurallara riayet edilmeden yapılan müdahaleler ile komuta yapısı iyice bozularak ve üst kademedeki yetki karmaşası önü alınamaz hale getirilmişti. Sultanın emir komutadaki etkinliğinin esas aktörlerinden biri Meclis-i Askerî idi. Askeri meclisten giden bir çok emir gelişen olaylara göre tertibat almaya çalışan komutanların planlarını alt üst etmekteydi. Ayrıca uygulanmaya konacak yeni manevralar için İstanbul'dan onay alınması gerekmekteydi ve bu durum geçen her saniyenin çok önemli olduğu cephe hattında birçok fırsatın değerlendirilmeden yitirilmesine neden oluyordu.

Cephe hattında son kararı verecek komutanın olmayışı Osmanlı kuvvetlerinin koordinasyonsuz şekilde hareket etmesine ve zamanla ordunun operasyonel kabiliyetini yitirmesine neden olmuştu. Mehmed Ali, Osman ve Süleyman Paşa kendi sorumluluk bölgelerinde kalarak diğerlerinden yardım talebinde bulunuyordu. Savaşın bu devresinde Osmanlı ordusunun esas çabasının Plevne üzerindeki Rus yığınağını engellemek olduğu ve Plevne'de Osman Paşa'nın savunma halinde olduğu göz önünde bulundurulunca, Osmanlı ordusundaki koordinasyon eksikliğinin esas nedeninin Süleyman Paşa ve Mehmed Ali Paşa'dan dolayı kaynaklandığı söylenebilir. Mehmed Ali Paşa uzun süre Süleyman Paşa'yı Şıpka taarruzundan vazgeçip kendi kuvvetleriyle birleşmeye ikna etmeye uğraştı. Süleyman Paşa da Şıpka'daki harekatın gerekli olduğunu belirterek bunun kolaylaştırılması için Mehmed Ali Paşa'nın kendisine yardım etmesini ve Rus ordusunun sol yanına taarruz etmesini sağlamaya çalışmıştı. Şıpka harekatının kapsamı üzerine başlayan tartışmalar sonrasında bununla bağlantılı olarak müşterek harekât üzerinden devam etti.

Aslında her iki alternatif de bu dönemde Osmanlı ordusu için tercih edilebilir idi. Ancak bunların başarısı iki kolordunun da müştereken hareket etmesine bağlıydı. Süleyman Paşa için Karadağ'dan gelmesinden tutun da Balkanların güneyindeki harekât ve hazırlıklara kadar her şey Şıpka Geçidi'ne gerçekleştirilecek taarruz üzerine kuruluydu. Süleyman Paşa'nın bu hedeften direkt emir olmadan hemen vazgeçmesi beklenemezdi. Zaten bu harekatın başarı şansı da yüksek görülüyordu. Mehmed Ali Paşa bile ilk başlarda Şıpka taarruzunu başarıyla sonuçlandırılabileceğine dair yorumlar yapıyordu. Bu yüzden, eğer Şıpka taarruzları Mehmed Ali Paşa tarafından

desteklense ve Rus ordusunun sol kanadını taciz edilerek Şıpka geçidini düşmekten kurtaran takviye kuvvetin 23 Ağustos'ta gelmesi engellense idi Şıpka harekâtı başarıyla sonuçlandırılabilirdi. Osmanlı ordusunun en güçlü kuvvetini elinde bulunduran Mehmed Ali Paşa böylesi bir manevra için kuvvet tefrik etmeye muktedir idi. Hakeza Süleyman Paşa da değişen koşulları göz önüne alarak Şıpka'yı es geçip Balkan Dağları'nı geçerek Mehmed Ali Paşa ile müştereken Tırnova üzerine taarruz gerçekleştirebilirdi. Aslında Süleyman Paşa'nın böylesi bir manevrayı gerçekleştirmesi halinde en çok üzerinde durduğu şeylerden biri olan Balkan Dağları'nın güneyinin güvenliğinden çekinmesine de pek gerek yoktu. Çünkü mevcut şartlar altında Rus ordusunun Osmanlı sıklet merkezini es geçerek Balkan Dağları'nın güneyine uzanan uzun bir hatta şiddetli bir manevra gerçekleştirme şansı pek yoktu.

Bu yüzden Şıpka'daki başarısızlığın esas sebebi, askeri temayüllerin göz ardı edilerek atamaların yapılmasından kaynaklanmıştır. Askeri gelenek takip edilerek emir komuta birliği sağlanarak görevlendirmeler yapılmış olsaydı iki paşa da kendi fikirlerinde diretemezdi. Şıpka taarruzuna yardım edilmesi veya Süleyman Paşa'nın balkanların kuzeyine geçirilmesi kararlarından biri verilir, muhtemelen başarılı neticeler de elde edilebilirdi. Ancak, stratejik seviyede verilen hatalı kararlardan dolayı cephe hattında karmaşası uzun süre hüküm sürdü. Her iki komutan da ortak noktada buluşamadığı için başarısızlık her ikisi için de kaçınılmaz oldu.

Strateji en basit ifadesiyle orduları idare etme sanatı olarak açıklanır. Askeri stratejinin uygulanabilmesi için üç temel araç vardır. Bunlar zaman, mekân ve kuvvettir. Yani stratejik seviyede bir harekatın başarılı olabilmesi için bir orduyu doğru zaman, doğru mekân doğru kuvvet ile sevk ve idare etmek gerekir. Şıpka muharebelerinde Balkan ordusunun başarısızlığının en belirgin nedeni emir komuta birliğinin tesis edilememesi olsa da stratejinin üç ana faktörü olan zaman mekân ve kuvvetin uygun şekilde kullanılamamasının da muharebelerin başarısızlıkla sonuçlanmasındaki etkisi büyüktü. Süleyman Paşa'nın komutası altında yeteri miktarda süvari olmadığı için keşif ve gözetleme faaliyetleri verimli şekilde icra edilememişti. Düşman kuvvetleri ve hareketleri layıkıyla tespit edilemiyor, ona göre strateji geliştirilemiyordu. Bu da

muharebeler esnasında zaman mekân ve kuvvet kullanımında hatalar yapılmasına ve sevk ve idare sorunlarıyla karşılaşılmasına neden olmaktaydı.

Osmanlı ordusu gerek Şıpka muharebeleri öncesindeki hazırlık döneminde gerekse de muharebeler esnasında elindeki en büyük silah olan zamanı doğru şekilde kullanamamıştı. Plevne'de Osman Paşa'nın Rus ordusu için büyük tehlike olarak ortaya çıkması Rusları takviye kuvvetler gelene kadar tüm cephe hattı boyunca ihtiyatlı hareket etmeye sevk etmişti. Rus ordusunun her gecen gün güçleneceği aşikâr olduğu için Süleyman Paşa'nın Ruslara ihtiyaç duyduğu zamanı vermemesi gerekiyordu. Ancak, Süleyman Paşa kolordusunun Karadağ'dan Balkanlara transferinden tutun da Balkan Dağları'nın güneyindeki ve Şıpka'daki operasyonlar esnasında zaman verimli kullanılamamıştı. Gerekli hazırlıklar tam yapılamadığı için Süleyman Paşa ordusunun transferi ve Balkanların güneyinde harekata hazır hale gelmesi yaklaşık 4-5 günlük gecikmeye sebep olmuştu. Süleyman Paşa Eski Zağra'yı geri aldıktan sonra hızla Şıpka üzerine yürüyüp düşmanın hazırlıksız durumundan faydalanmak yerine harekât esnasında yaşanan sorunlardan dolayı taarruzu ertelemiş ve Rusların yaklaşık 20 gün rahat şekilde Osmanlı taarruzları karşı hazırlanmasına imkân sağlamıştı. Muharebeler esnasında ise Süleyman Paşa yine aceleci davranmayarak Rus ordusuna zaman kazandırmıştı. Osmanlı ordusu 19 Ağustos'ta Şıpka önlerine gelmiş olmasına rağmen taarruza ancak 21 Ağustos günü başlayabilmişti. İlk gün verilen zayiat 22 Ağustos'ta Osmanlı kuvvetlerini ihtiyatlı hareket etmeye ve planda değişiklik arayışlarına sevk etmişti. Hatta, Ruslara yakın zamanda takviye gelmesine ihtimal vermeyen Süleyman Paşa, yeterli zamanı olduğunu düşünerek fazla zayiat vermemek için ilk günlerde emrindeki kuvvetlerinin büyük kısmını ihtiyatta bekletmişti. Nihayetinde Şıpka'daki Rus garnizonu gücünün sonuna geldiği ve bozgun emareleri görülmeye başlandığı 23 Ağustos'ta takviye kuvveti yetişerek Şıpka'daki atmosferi tersine çevirmişti. Bu yüzden, eldeki kuvvetin layıkıyla kullanılarak kapsamlı bir taarruz gerçekleştirilmemesi de Şıpka muharebelerinin dönüm noktalarından biri olmuştur.

Stratejik seviyede yapılması gereken en önemli şeylerden biri düşmanın durumunun iyi şekilde tahlil edilerek taarruz için en uygun noktanın belirlenmesidir. Bu yüzden

stratejik planlamada sorulması gereken esas sorulardan biri düşmanı nereden vurursam yıkılır olmalıdır. Hedefin belirlenmesinden sonra yapılması gereken düşmanın dengesini bozmak ve onu etki altına alabilmek için sıklet merkezinin buraya yönlendirilmesidir. Keşif ve gözetleme faaliyetlerinin yetersizliği ve Balkan ordusu kurmay heyetinin bölge hakkındaki bilgisizliği yüzünden arazi etüdü doğru şekilde yapılamamış, en uygun hedef noktası belirlenememişti. Taarruz için Şıpka'nın solundaki top tabiyesi için elverişsiz ve korunaksız Berdek ciheti seçilmişti. Aynı zamanda Şıpka savunma hattının güney ucundaki St. Nikola istihkamına da gösteri taarruzu düzenlenecekti. Ancak bu noktalar Rus kuvvetlerinin en yoğun olduğu ve en güçlü şekilde mevzilendiği noktalar idi. Oysa Şıpka'nın sağındaki Aykırıcebel ciheti taarruz için daha elverişliydi. Aykırıcebel ormanla kaplı olduğu için buradan ateş altında kalmadan Rus mevzilerine yaklaşmak mümkündü. Ayrıca, Şıpka'nın tek ikmal yolu olan Gabrova şosesi buradan ateş altına alınabilir, düşmanın gerisi buradan çevrilebilirdi. Bu yönüyle Aykırıcebel stratejik olarak en doğru hedef noktasını teşkil etmekteydi. Ancak, Osmanlılar planlama aşamasında arazi etüdünü etkin şekilde yapamadığı için ilk üç gün buranın farkına varamayarak bütün enerjisini zorlu Berdek ve St. Nikola cihetlerine harcadı. Aykırıcebel'in öneminin anlaşılmasından sonra 23 Ağustos'ta buradan taarruzlar gerçekleştirilerek ilerleme kaydedilse de aynı gün Rusların takviye kuvvetinin yetişmesi bu ilerlemeden yararlanılmasını engellemişti.

Stratejik planlamada hedefler ile kuvvet arasında denge olmalıdır. Eğer kullanılan kuvvet ele geçirilmek istenen hedefe göre yetersiz kalırsa bu durumda stratejik risk oluşur. Bu yüzden kullanılacak kuvveti doğru saptamak gerekir. Bu yönüyle strateji bir anlamda güç yönetimidir, yani şartları karşılayacak gücün seçilmesi, geliştirilmesi tatbik yerinin ve kullanılmasında uygulanacak konseptin belirlenmesi, güç ile hedefin dengelenmesi, yetersiz olduğu durumlarda ise hesaplı risklerin kabul edilmesiyle üstünlüğün sağlanması ile ilgilidir. Ancak Süleyman Paşa taarruzlar esnasında emrindeki hatırı sayılır kuvveti doğru şekilde kullanamamış, özellikle ilk günler taburların çoğunu beyhude yere bekletmiştir. Şıpka önlerine yaklaşık 50 taburla gelen Süleyman Paşa 21 ve 22 ağustosta sadece her biri 8 tabur olan üç livayı taarruzda kullanmıştı. Böylece Osmanlı askerlerinin 3 de 1'i nispetinde olan Ruslara karşı baskın

prensibini uygulayarak kuvvetli bir taarruz gerçekleştiremedi. Hızla takviye alması muhtemel olan Şıpka'da Osmanlı ordusu ilk iki günü daha çok mevzi kazanmak ve taarruz planını netleştirmek adına bir dizi taarruzlar ve manevralarla harcamıştı. Ruslara takviyenin yakın zamanda gelmesine ihtimal vermeyen Süleyman Paşa, emrindeki kumandanların taleplerine rağmen her taraftan şiddetli taarruz gerçekleştirmekten imtina etmiş, fazla zayiat vermemek için Şıpka'yı kuşatıp ikmal hattını tehdit ederek teslime mecbur etmek istemiştir. Osmanlı ordusu düşman için en kritik anda bütün enerjisiyle taarruz gerçekleştirmesi gerekmekteyken, yanlış kuvvet kullanımından dolayı bunu başaramamıştır. Nitekim Süleyman Paşa hedef tespiti ve kuvvet kullanımında yaptığı bu hataları hatıratında da kabul etmektedir.

Sonuç olarak, bu tez Şıpka Geçidi'nin düşüşünün ve Osmanlı ordusunun Şıpka taarruzlarındaki başarısızlığının nedenlerini ve bunların savaşın gidişatındaki etkisini incelemiştir. Bu kapsamda ulaşılan sonuçlar şöyle sıralanabilir. Öncelikle, Osmanlı komuta heyeti yığınak planının yanlış yapılması ve planların zamanında uygulamaya konulmamasından dolayı Tuna Cephesi'nde pasif savunma stratejisi izlemiştir. Bu da ikinci savunma hattı olarak belirlenen Balkan Dağları hattının göz ardı edilmesine ve Rus ordusunun bu bölgede herhangi bir sorunla karşılaşmadan ilerleyerek Şıpka geçidini ele geçirmesine yol açmıştır. İkinci olarak, Abdülkerim Nadir Paşa'nın azlinden sonra emir komuta birliği ve askeri temayüller gözetilmeden yapılan atamalar orduda stratejik komuta ve koordinasyon problemlerine neden olmuştur. Özellikle Süleyman ve Mehmed Ali Paşa arasında hissedilen bu problem Osmanlı ordusunun manevra kabiliyetini yitirmesine ve Plevne zaferlerinin yarattığı fırsatlardan yararlanılamamasına neden olarak 93 harbinin Osmanlılar için mağlubiyetle neticelenmesinde önemli etken olmuştur. Üçüncü olarak, süvarinin etkin kullanılamamasından dolayı Şıpka taarruzları esnasında hedef tespiti, sıklet merkezi teşkili, zaman ve kuvvet kullanımı gibi birçok sorunla karşılaşılmış, bunlar da Şıpka taarruzlarındaki başarısızlığın en önemli sebeplerinden olmuştur.

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