

# Map Corner

## No Quiet on the Eastern Front

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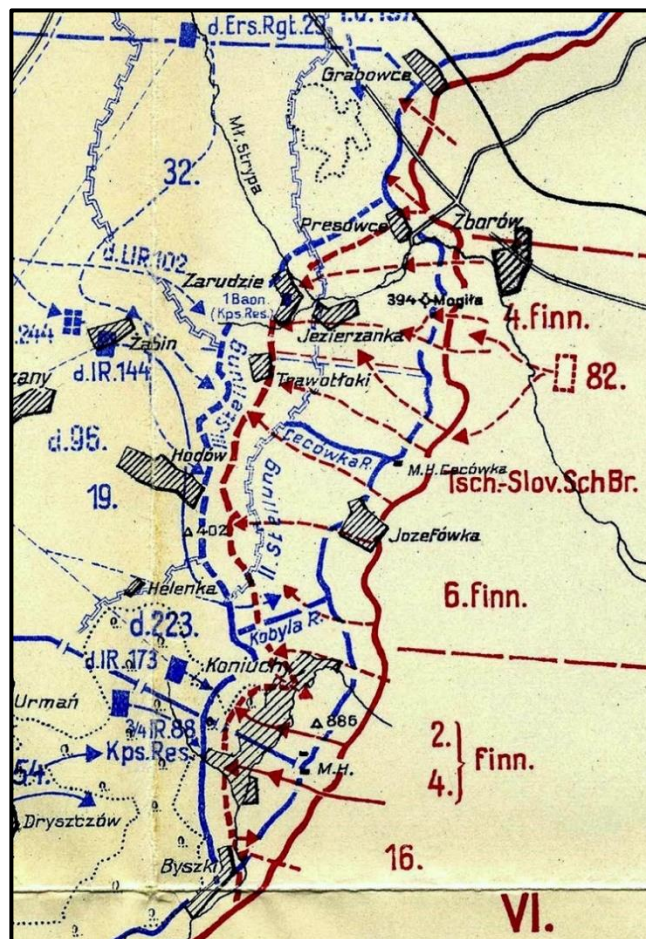
**IN THE SIMPLIFIED** world history I learned in high school, the timeline of World War I (WWI) closed very neatly: collapse of empires, armistice in 1918, peace treaties, establishment of new countries, and the rebuilding of Europe. Indeed, my grandfather, who built roads through the battle-grounds of France in 1918 and 1919 as an engineer for the American Expeditionary Forces, saw life there from a perspective which closely matched those later histories. However, if your ancestors lived in central Europe at the time, especially if they suffered through the extended tumult in eastern Galicia, their experience was quite different.

By the middle of 1917, the eastern front of WWI had stagnated along a 1,600 km (1,000 miles) line stretching between the Baltic and Black Seas; it ran directly through eastern Galicia, with Lwów and Stryj to the west, and Tarnopol and Buczacz to the east. The warring empires had weakened, giving hope to the many nations which made up Austro-Hungary that they might attain a measure of self-determination. While armistice came to western Europe in late 1918, in the east civil wars and multi-sided political wars continued to burn towns and villages for another two years.

## Competing National Aspirations

Nationalist strategies usually had a military aspect, so the maneuvering was not limited to political spheres. For example, even as crumbling Russian army forces retreated eastward through

Galicia in July 1917, they found vigorous reinforcement from the Czechoslovak Legion in the Battle of Zborów (between Złoczów and Tarnopol) as part of Russia's last offensive in the war. Czech and Slovak volunteers seeking independence for Habsburg-controlled Bohemia and Moravia victoriously overran Austrian trenches and pushed the front westward again for more than two weeks.



*The Battle of Zborów in July 1917.*

On both eastern and western fronts, and including in Galicia, Poles who were anxious to regain their own independence after more than a century of partition and foreign domination fought with and against all three of their occupying powers. Soldiers who self-identified with other nations deserted imperial armies to return home, or to band together in support of their own causes.

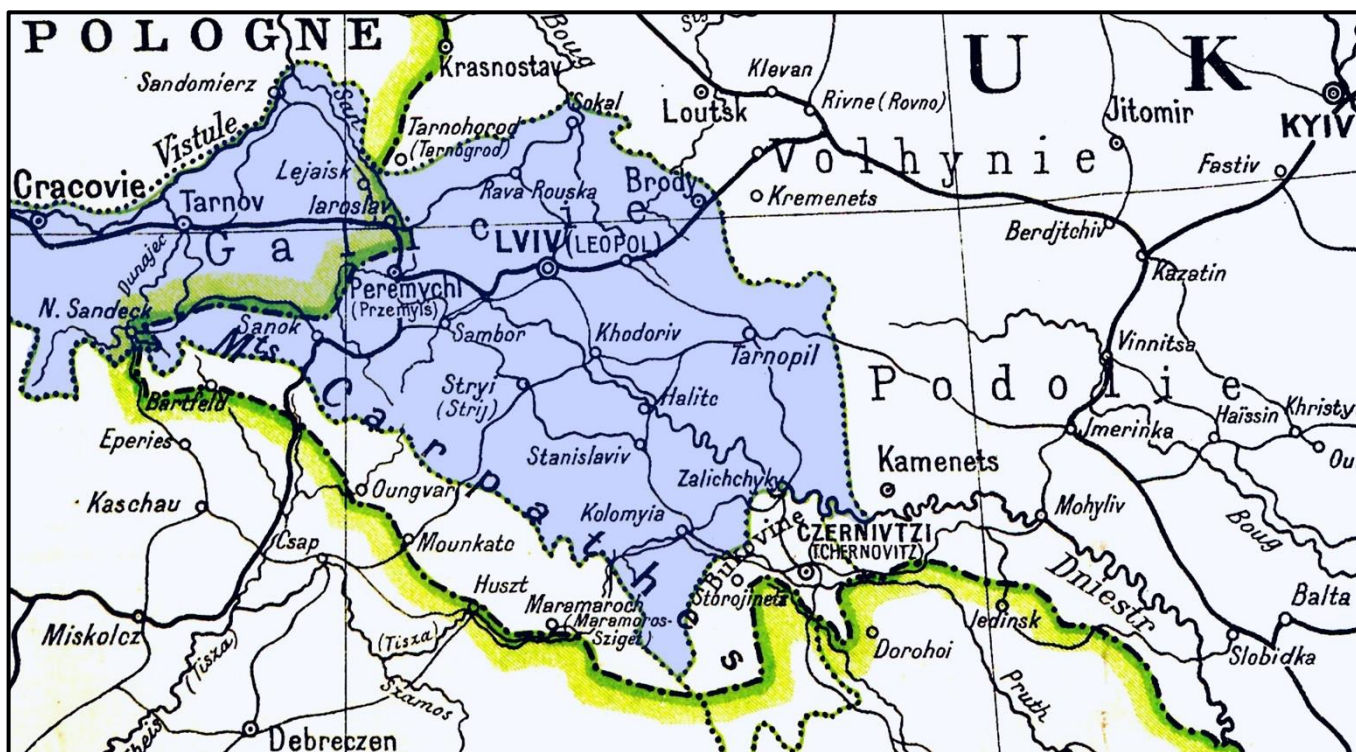
Bolshevik uprisings in Petrograd and Kiev in early November 1917 ignited a Ukrainian war of independence from Russia, with impact far to the west in the Ukrainian-majority region of eastern Galicia. Even while WWI continued, new republics were declared, defended, and extended, usually with guns. Now maps became diplomatic and propaganda tools, useful in negotiations, but often quickly made obsolete by swiftly changing battle lines before they could be printed. The teetering German and Austro-Hungarian Empires, as well as the new Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic, continued to negotiate secret agreements with often short-lived republics on their own in an effort to preserve and even expand their access to food and other resources.

The 1918 armistice ended the fighting in western Europe, but dissolution of the defeated empires left a power void in the east; slow negotiation of treaties in Paris and elsewhere, uncertainty about new state borders, and long delays in implemen-

tation allowed instability—and open warfare—to persist in what had been multiethnic Galicia and nearby lands. Meanwhile the broken Austro-Hungarian military leadership noted with alarm that more than two million of its men (both soldiers and civilians) had been taken prisoner by Russia and transported far to the east; they now had no clear means to return home. In haste, barracks were erected in eastern Galicia and elsewhere for quarantine and support of these “homecomers” (*Heimkehrer* in German), but some prisoners could not return for another two years.

## Forming the New States

Woodrow Wilson's “Fourteen Points” were among many principles western leaders used to guide peace negotiations; key among them were that “the people of Austria-Hungary [...] should be accorded the freest opportunity to autonomous development,” and “an independent Polish state” should be created to include “the territories



*A tentative proposal for the boundaries of Ukraine (yellow line), 1919. Former Galicia is shown in added blue shading.*



inhabited by indisputably Polish populations.” These ideals would prove difficult to carry out in areas with mixed ethnic populations, and did not address the concerns of minorities spread over a broad geographic range, like the Jews of Galicia.

National activists did not wait for the Entente powers to create new states, and instead began claiming territories and declaring their own

governments. A Ukrainian People's Republic had been declared in early 1918; a separate but allied West Ukrainian People's Republic was also declared later in the year. The latter comprised primarily eastern Galicia, and also portions of the historical regions of Bukovina, Carpathian Ruthenia, and the western Carpathians. These claims were disputed in subsequent declarations by the Lemko Republic (which then suffered opposition from the



*A Soviet map depicting advances of its forces in eastern Galicia in summer 1920.*

Eastern Lemko Republic), and the Hutsul Republic. Few of these republics would last more than a few months.

Meanwhile, local Polish politicians and organizations were organizing and aggregating into what would become the Second Polish Republic, aiming to control territories historically under Polish monarchs, even those with minority Polish populations. A week before the WWI armistice, the Polish-Ukrainian War broke out in Lwów; in three weeks the city and a rail link to Przemyśl were under Polish control, but Ukrainian forces kept Lwów surrounded on three sides and held the rest of eastern Galicia to the middle of 1919.

Western leaders struggled to agree on new borders in former Austrian Galicia while the regional conflicts continued. The Polish-Ukrainian border was especially vexing, and numerous provisional boundaries were drafted by politicians and the press. The map excerpted here from 1919 proposals, and never implemented on the ground, shows the difficulty in reconciling competing Polish and Ukrainian territorial claims (*page 28*).

Eventually, Polish military successes to the east of Warsaw and Lublin were incorporated into treaties ratified by the world powers, significantly extending Polish eastern borderlands (*kresy* in Polish) and absorbing all of former Austrian Galicia into newly independent Poland. The former eastern border of Galicia between the Austrian and Russian empires at the Zbrucz River was again re-established in April 1920 in the Treaty of Warsaw, this time, though, as a border between Poland and embattled Ukraine. Both countries, bitter enemies only a short time ago, became united against the threat of Bolshevik Russia.

A few days later, Poland and Ukraine together attempted to force Soviet armies out of Kiev, but ultimately failed, and the Soviet army then pushed westward; by August the Soviets had nearly

reached Warsaw and Lwów, taking much of eastern Galicia again (*see map on page 29*). Only a crushing counteroffensive by Polish forces stopped the Soviet advance and led to a ceasefire in September 1920—the final peace treaty was signed six months later. This brought an end to the protracted series of wars that had first torn Galicia apart nearly seven years earlier, but left many residual aspirations unsatisfied, and conflicts unresolved.

## FACES of GALICIA



*Herman Sicherman (1896–1951), raised in Baligród, Galicia, with one-year volunteer Sobel (seated). Photographed in 1915 at the army hospital at Drahatusch (then Moravia). Submitted by Carol Sicherman, Gesher Galicia.*