

The Battle of Tannenberg

The most important battle on the eastern front took place at Tannenberg in East Prussia (now the northern part of Poland) from August 26–31, 1914. When the guns ceased firing after six days, the Russian army had suffered a defeat from which it would never recover.

After the Germans had overrun Belgium in early August and were pushing toward Paris, France urged Russia to attack in the east. They hoped to force Germany to fight on two fronts. Even though its large army was ill-prepared for war, Russia complied. Russian equipment was outdated and in short supply, and Russia's leaders lacked foresight and good judgment. Still, the Russians won several battles against the Germans and Austro-Hungarians in East Prussia and Galicia, an Austrian province. The Germans were alarmed. They rushed reinforcements to the east by railroad and stopped the Russians at Tannenberg.

The Battle of Tannenberg resulted in the destruction of the entire Russian 2nd Army. Russian soldiers who weren't killed in the initial onslaught were driven back into a swamp, where many drowned. German soldiers, horrified at the sight, opened fire with machine guns to end the agony of the drowning men. The Russians lost 125,000 troops at Tannenberg, while the Germans lost 13,000.

Two weeks after the battle of Tannenberg, a second Russian army was destroyed at the Battle of the Masurian Lakes. This time more than 100,000 Russians were killed. Although the Russians fared better against the Austro-Hungarians, their loss on the eastern front ended any threat they posed to Germany's border.

Determine whether the statements below are true or false. Write T or F in each blank.

1. ____ The Russian army lost 125,000 troops in six days of fighting at Tannenberg.
2. ____ Russia attacked Germany in the east at the insistence of Poland.
3. ____ In 1914 Galicia was a province of Austria-Hungary.
4. ____ Russian and German losses at Tannenberg were roughly the same.
5. ____ Russian losses on the eastern front ended any threat of Russia invading Germany.
6. ____ On the eastern front, Russian troops fought more successfully against the Austro-Hungarians than they had against the Germans.
7. The Russian army in 1914 was so poorly equipped that not all Russian soldiers had rifles. Many were forced to wait until a comrade was killed or injured to claim a weapon. How do you think such conditions might affect an army's will to fight?

