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**ORGANIZATIONS AND COMBAT OPERATIONS  
THE GERMAN 10TH INFANTRY DIVISION  
ON THE WESTERN FRONT OF WORLD WAR I (1916-1917)**

This paper presents organization and combat actions of German 10th Infantry Division of 5th Army Corps on the Western Front of World War I (1916-1917) in the battles: Verdun, Aisne, Champagne region and Laon. The service of Poles in the German army and the German-Polish brotherhood are still somewhat of an inconvenient truth. However, many textual sources regarding the 10th Infantry Division of the 5th Army Corps indicate that this indeed took place. The analysis of available sources and subject literature has allowed a recreation of the 10th Infantry Division's organizational changes which took place during the war, the role of the division in respective battles, and the losses suffered by regiments, including soldiers of Polish nationality which were only partially trained.

*Key words:* German 10th Infantry Division; Western Front of WWI; battle of Verdun; battle of Aisne, battle in the Champagne, battle of Chemin des Dames; Poles in the German army.

The battles in which the 10th Infantry Division was involved before 1916 proved to be only an introduction to the forthcoming struggle. It was in this year on the Western Front that one of the most devastating battles of this war took place - the Battle of Verdun. The regiments of the 10th Infantry Regiment were sent to this line of the Front, which was already marred by thousands of bullets, in October 1916. The Battle of Verdun is present in Polish family stories because the Poles from the today's Greater Poland (*Wielkopolska* in Polish, known as the Province of Posen before 1918) were participating in it. These memories constitute the Polish national identity in the context of World War I. Therefore, the one of the objectives of this article is to reconstruct the involvement of the regiments of the 10th Infantry Division in the Battle of Verdun; battle of Aisne, in the Champagne (1-27 May 1917) and battle of Chemin des Dames (June 1917). In addition, the changes in the organization of units, tactics, and their armament and equipment are analyzed.

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The reorganization of the structure of troops and the introduction of new types of weapons were the result of the intense fighting in 1916 on the Western Front. In February, a divisional field recruit depot was created in each division. In August, increasing the number of heavy machine guns to 15 strengthened the regiment machine gun companies. Also that month, M1916 steel helmets were introduced in the individual equipment, which significantly improved the survival rate of soldiers on the Front. The M1916 helmet protected the head of the soldier from the debris and, in some cases, from rifle fire (helmet puncture depended on the angle of impact projectile) [1, p. 133].

The 10th Infantry Division filled the positions on the Silent Saint-Mihiel when the battle of Verdun begun in February 1916. The 6th Grenadiers Regiment, which was on the left flank of the Division and neighbored with the 154th Infantry Regiment of the 9th Infantry Division, filled the positions Northwest of the village of St. Remy. The 50th Infantry Regiment took positions further to the right of the grenadiers of von Kleist and Northwest of the Combres. The 47th Infantry Regiment filled the positions in a northerly and northeasterly. On the right wing of the 10th Infantry Division, was the 36th Landwehr Regiment from the 5th Landwehr Division. On August 28, the Front was pushed in a northwesterly direction to the town of Fresnes-Trésauvaux-North ridge of Cota 420 (southwest of Combres) as a result of the attack carried out on line of the 5th Landwehr Division and the 47th Infantry Regiment. When Posen regiments of the 5th Reserve Corps were attacking the village Vaux and Fort Vaux on the Northern line of the Battle of Verdun, the regiments from the 5th Army Corps still occupied positions in the Silent St. Mihiel in March and April 1916 [2, pp. 152–169, 3, pp. 216–229].

Due to the high activity of the French Division at Verdun, the 10th Infantry Division was moved within the 5th Army from the Armeekorps "C" to Gruppe "Lochow" and subordinated to the Generalkommando 54 (with staff in St. Laurent) at the beginning of October 1916 [4, p. 193; 5, p. 218]. Then, Posen regiments passed to the sector of Marville – Grand Failly – St. Laurent to the North of Verdun. On 5 October, due to the large losses, the 14th, 15th and 16th companies of the 47th Infantry Regiment were resolved. At the end of the month, the 20th Artillery Regiment was taken from the 10th Artillery Brigade, the 10th Infantry Division and assigned to Heeresfeldartillerie (the Army Field Artillery), where it remained until the end of the war [6, pp. 201–203].

While the French infantry was carrying out the strike that was developing successfully on 25 October, the 6th Grenadiers Regiment was thrown to counter-offensive in the region of Fort Douaumont. The Regiment stopped the progress of the enemy [7, p. 98, 592; 8, pp. 283–287]. Grenadier Jellenta from the 6th Grenadier Regiment described these dramatic moments in this way: "The German front position was inconvenient. It was not chosen and arranged deliberately. Indeed, it was cast during the fight on 24 October as ordered by combat location, regardless of the location on the terrain. So it was observed and shelled from the wing, and the position of the company of the regiment commander [Lt. Col. Max von Kaisenberg – BK] was on the combat line. Rifle and lead trenches were in largely destroyed and did not form a continuous line. The distance to the enemy ranged from 100 to 200 m, so foreground was short. There were no barber wire barriers in front of the trenches. Frequent and sometimes hurricane French artillery fire was constantly destroying the parts of trenches, which had been repaired. The positions, machine guns, grenades and mine throwers were being covered by pieces of iron. The access to the front positions was possible only from the back, during the night. The access was more than difficult because of muddy and similar to the deep water of crater field. The French fire almost always caused the losses " [9].

In mid-December 1916, the 10th Infantry Division, along with the 14th Reserve Division and the 39th Infantry Division, were part of the 5th Reserve Corps commanded by Gen. Lt. Otto von Garnier [10, p. 150]. The 6th Grenadier Regiment took positions in the center of the grouping of the 10th Infantry Division, in the forest of Chaufour. The forest was marked on the map but, in fact, there was no real forest but only tree stumps remained. Next to the Germans, were the French colonial units of the 2nd Regiment of Algerian Tirailleurs (French: 2e Régiment de Tirailleurs Algériens) of the 73th Brigade, the 37th Infantry Division, the 4th Regiment of Zouaves (French: 4e Regiment de Zouaves) of the 76th Brigades of the 38th Infantry Division. Both divisions were part of the 2nd Army commanded by Gen. Robert Georges Nivelles.

In the morning of 15 December 1916, the French artillery opened up a massive fusillade on positions of the 10th Infantry Division, focusing on the positions of German artillery. A significant part of the missiles fired were filled with combat gas. Soon all depressions on the

line of the 6th Grenadier Regiment filled up with clouds of deadly gas. The French infantry was preparing to attack, and the French artillery subsequently began shelling. The barrage moved towards the positions of the 10th Infantry Division. The French 73th Brigade was attacking, but it was stopped in the middle of the defense section of the 6th Grenadier Regiment in the Helly Gorge. However, the 2nd Battalion of the 398th Infantry Regiment, which was to the left of the grenadiers, was surprised. The enemy infantry broke through its positions at the junction of the 10th Infantry Division and the 39th Infantry Division. A similar situation existed on the right wing of the grenadiers, who were relegated to their positions and attacked by the one of the battalions of the 47th Infantry Regiment. The attack of the French infantry to wings of the Posen Grenadier Regiment threatened them with encirclement. At the same time, though, the French infantry attacked positions of the 3rd Battalion of the Grenadiers. The companies of the Battalion had to set up in a defensive circle and were temporarily prevented from attempts at breaking into their positions with grenades. The struggle was becoming bigger with every hour. In the machine gun company, only two Maxim 08 serviceable heavy machine guns were serviceable, but they were soon were hit by artillery debris and became silent. The French then introduced flamethrowers to the fight, which broke the resistance of the Posen grenadiers. Handle grenades were again used to eliminate these dangerous weapons. Lieutenant Gunter Perkiwicz (born 11 June 1887 in Ludwigsberg – Osowa Góra near Śrem), adjutant in the 3rd battalion, was decorated for this action. In addition, the French aircraft flew at low altitude, shooting grenadiers with the weapons they had onboard [7, p. 593, 9, 11, p. 17096].

The crisis in the line of the 398th Infantry Regiment was resolved – companies of reserve of the Regiment under the command of Major von Stütz were alerted and stopped the French advance. At about 12 pm the French infantry captured the Hill 378, which dominated over the rear of the 3rd battalion of Grenadier Regiment position. The 1st Battalion of Grenadier Regiment and the remnants of the two companies from the 398th Infantry Regiment were designated to regain the Hill. The action succeed and the French troops were pushed from the Hill 378, where the already organized point of resistance was captured. Next, the attack stopped in craters full of water and mud on the road Louvemont-Ornes. The 2nd Battalion of the 6th Grenadier

Regiment reached this position soon. The 5th company of the Regiment recaptured Chambrette farm and filled it with half-platoon with two heavy machine gun MG-08 under the command of Sergeant Kubacki [8, 9, pp. 289–300].

Meanwhile, the fire from French machine guns and mortars was so intense on the line of the encircled 3rd Battalion of the 6th Grenadier Regiment that none of the liaisons were able to be dispatched for assistance. Carrier pigeons with dispatches were also captured by the French troops. The soldiers of the 3rd Battalion were not able to break through Chauffour Forest where they were. In the afternoon, African shooters hit on command position of Lt. Col. Max von Kaisenberg in Helly Gorge. Lt. Col. Max von Kaisenberg, along with his troops, officers and privates died at close quarters combat with his rifle in hand. The French officers commanding the action appreciated the bravery of the German commander of grenadiers and honored him. The death of the commander of the regiment motivated the soldiers of the 3rd Battalion to fight. However, they were attacked on all sides by the enemy and did not have much chance to survive. Soon, only a few defenders were left, including the commander of the 3rd Battalion. When they tried to withdraw to the shelter, the grenades that were collected there exploded. The battalion commander, together with the other surviving defenders was captured [8, p. 17070, 9, 11, p. 300–303].

In the fighting from 26 October to 19 December 1916, the units of the 10th Infantry Division suffered severe losses. According to Gen. Max von Gallwitz (About Gen. Max von Gallwitz wrote J. Jung, Max von Gallwitz (1852–1937). General und Politiker, Osnabrück 1995), on 15 December 1916 alone, the regiments of the 10th Infantry Division lost three infantry battalions in full, and two were lost by half [10, p. 151]. The losses of the 6th Grenadier Regiment totaled 292 soldiers. Among the dead were many Poles, for example second lieutenant Gunter Perkiewicz, senior private Anton Abrahamczyk and grenadiers: Andreas (Polish: Andrzej) Dzierla, Stephan (Polish: Stefan) Fronda, Mathias (Polish: Mateusz) Marcinkowski, Karl (Polish: Karol) Ponik and Martin (Polish: Marcin) Stróżyk. The losses of the 6th Grenadier Regiment amounted: 3 officers, 81 non-commissioned officers and grenadiers dead; 3 officers and 168 grenadiers injured; and 37 soldiers missing [8, 9, pp. 304–306]. The 47th Infantry Regiment suffered even bigger losses that amounted to 753 soldiers. The detailed losses of the 47th Infantry Regiment in 15–16 December 1917 amounted 24 dead (including 2 officers), 96 wounded (1 officer) and 633 missing (including 14 officers) [4, pp. 583–584].

The fierceness of the fighting of the 10th Infantry Division at Verdun is indicated by the consumption of artillery shells. For instance, 18 field guns FK 96 n.A 7,7 cm caliber of the 56th Field Artillery Regiment, fired 14 977 missiles in November 1916, and 26 983 shells in the following month. Eighteen light howitzer IFH 98 10,5 cm caliber fired 15 070 shells in November, and 23 408 in December. the losses of the 56th Field Artillery Regiment in 1916, amounted 22 non-commissioned and privates and 9 horses dead; 3 officers, 105 non-commissioned officers and privates, 26 horses dead; 1 officer and 7 non-commissioned officers and privates missing [12, p. 75, 230].

At the end of December 1916, the 10th Infantry Division was withdrawn from the 5th Army. The losses of the regiments of the Division was so severe that in January 1917, the Posen Division was withdrawn from the front and send to the region of Mars-la-Tour, where it went through a reorganization for three weeks. Then the position of commander of the pioneer battalion division was created in the staff of the 10th Infantry Division [1, p. 96]. Additional changes took place in the organization of the artillery. The 10th Artillery Brigade was dismissed on 15 February 1917. Its place was formed the Division Artillery Command No. 10 (German: *Artillerie-Kommandeur No. 10* - in short, *Arko No. 10*) on 27 February 1917. The 56th Field Artillery Regiment was the one, which recalled the organic artillery units in the structure of the Division. It was to remain like that until the end of the war. Additional artillery units were allocated to the Division where appropriate regarding the needs and tasks. The units of the 56 Artillery Regiment were sent temporarily to other units [13, pp. 16, 64, 259–260].

From 24 January 1917 the units of the 10th Infantry Division led operations in positions between the rivers The Meuse and The Moselle on the hilly terrain Côtes de Lorraines. There were numerous clashes with French troops until 1st May in the Forest Loclont and Seuzey [5, p. 262]. Particularly intense fighting took place on 5-7 March, which was associated with the French offensive on the front stretch. The 10th Infantry Division remained in the above line until the beginning of May 1917 [7, pp. 181–183; 8, p. 594; 14, pp. 309–315; 15, p. 103].

Trench warfare activity, due to new weapons and improved tactics, led to the subsequent changes in both the weapons and the organization of German troops in 1917. Twenty-four *Granatwerfer M16* grenade throwers were assigned to the infantry regiments in February.

The regiments were organized into three detachments, each with four throwers. The *Granatwerfer M16* was a primitive design, with low firepower and range. A fragmentation grenade Weighing 1.9 kg, was designed to destroy the live force, but only had a range of 460 m. It soon became clear that this model of organization was impractical. In August, a troop of the mine throwers in the regiment was dissolved. Two pitchers were assigned to each infantry company. At the same time, the use in infantry caps' grenade was discarded because it turned out to be impractical [1, p. 113].

Twelve *Leichter Minenwerfer 7.85 cm M16* light mortars were introduced to infantry regiments at the end of February. In each infantry battalion deployed one troop with four mortars. On 17 October 1915, the 10th Mortar Company (German: *10. Kompagnie Minenwerfer*) was formed in the 10th Infantry Division. The Company had troops with mortars of three different calibers. The troops were assigned to individual regiments. The 6th Grenadier Regiment had the Troop of Heavy Mortars no. 55 (German: *Schwerer Minenwerfer Abteilung Nr. 55*), armed with heavy mortars with a caliber of 250 mm - *Schwerer 25 cm Minenwerfer n/A*. The Troop of Medium Mortars No. 145 (German: *Mittlerer Minenwerfer Abteilung Nr. 145*), which was armed with medium-caliber mortars of 170 mm - *17 cm Mittlerer Minenwerfer*, was assigned to the 47th Infantry Regiment. The Troop of Light Mortars No. 235 (German: *Leichter Minenwerfer Abteilung Nr. 235*) and the Troop of Light Mortars No. 266 (German: *Leichter Minenwerfer Abteilung Nr. 266*) were assigned to the 398th Infantry Regiment. The embodiment of mortal troops significantly strengthened the capacity of defense of the regiments of the Division. The mortar grenades were also very good for breaking the barbed wire barriers of the enemy, and thus clearing the way for infantry during the attack [16].

At the beginning of April 1915, Colonel Friedrich Stadthagen was removed from the position of commander of the 20th Infantry Brigade, and his place was taken by Gen. Maximilian Sydow [17, p. 244]. During this time, infantry regiments of the 10th Infantry Division deployed for training purposes four machine guns MG-08/15, which then represented a new approach to combat maneuverability. In May two MG-08/15 was introduced in the armament company of infantry, and in September its number was increased up to four. In December, the infantry section of communication was formed [1, p. 113].

Then the regiments of the 10th Infantry Division were to take part in the double battle of Aisne and in the Champagne region, which took

place on 1–27 May 1917. On 1 May 1917, the regiments of the 10th Infantry Division were flipped by rail from the Mars-la-Tour by Conflans, Montmédy, Sedan, Cherleville and Hirson to the North of the Aisne River (Picardy region). There they occupied the positions of the North-West of Bray-en-Laonnois. They were then assigned to the Grupee “Bailly” (11th Army Corps) from the 7th Army. The change on the commander position in the 5th Army Corps had place in May. Infantry Gen. Adolf von Oven took command of Gruppe “Metz” [5, pp. 102–103; 18, p. 268, 270]. The fight began on 6 May and lasted until the end of May on this line [15, p. 103]. The losses of the 6th Grenadier Regiment amounted to 5 officers, 1 officer’s aspirant, 10 non-commissioned, 62 privates dead and 8 officers, 26 non-commissioned and 351 grenadiers and Fusiliers (privates) wounded [8, p. 343].

On 3 June 1917, the French troops stormed the position the 10th Infantry Division at the Chemin des Dames in the Northwest of the village of Froidmont-Ferme [15, p. 103]. The attack was repulsed with large losses for the attacking troops. The Germans captured 6 French officers, 126 non-commissioned officers and soldiers and 20 machine guns [5, p. 280]. On 14 June, the regiments of the 10th Infantry Division started to storm out from their line of defense at the Chemin des Dames on French positions to the North of Braye [15, p. 103]. The Germans seized them. On June 20, the Division was sent to rest in Crécy-sur-Serre, where it stayed until 25 July [8, p. 356; 12, pp. 83-87]. Then there was a change in the position of commander of the 20th Field Artillery Brigade. The commander Gen. Hermann Eugen Rudolf Ludwig von Gostkowski went on another post and was replaced by Gen. Karl Hugo Paul Meyfarth [17, p. 498].

After the regeneration, the 10th Infantry Division was deployed from Crécy-sur-Serre to the near of the village of Giza (to the North-East of Laon). It was planned that the Division would participate in the trench fighting between July 1917 and February 1918. The particularly fierce fighting took place on 30 July in the Ailles Hurtebise, where intense artillery shelling of the allied countries was causing a large losses in the ranks of the Division. In addition, the Posen regiments fiercely resisted the French attacks several times. The first resistance took place on 15th August near Hurtebise-Ferme, and the second – from 30th August to 2nd September – to the South of Ailles and Hurtebise-Ferme [15, p. 103].

On 6th September, the 10th Infantry Division was assigned to the Gruppe “Crépy” which was under the authority of the 8th Reserve

Corps. It remained there until 30th November 1917. The regiments of the Posen Division from 15th September for five consecutive days took Saint-Gobain sector (North of Soissons) [4, pp. 181–183; 14, p. 290]. In September 1917, there were changes in the structure of the staff of the Division. New positions were created: division commander of communication, anti-gas officer and an officer for training [1, p. 96].

In September 1917, a innovative tactic of assault troops, which were named *Stosstruppen*, was applied to the units of the 10th Infantry Division. The assault troops were intended for special tasks. This kind of troop - the *Kommando* was formed in the 47th Infantry Regiment. The *Kommando* was composed of three subunits of the assault, which were formed by volunteers only. An experienced non-commissioned officer or Lieutenant commanded each assault subunit. The cast of the subunit was 14-16 soldiers including 2-3 non-commissioned officers. The *Kommando* also consisted of 5 pioneers from the 2nd company of the 5th Pioneer Battalion. The pioneers were experts on the use of explosives and were led by the non-commissioned officer. The first subdivision was equipped with two machine guns Maxim MG 08/15, which were to provide firepower overpowering during rapid movement. The armament of the assault soldier, who was not equipped with weapon team, included a dozen handle grenades that were carried in bags which were hung by the arm and made of light fabric. This system of transportation of grenades in combat was innovative, simple and effective. It enabled more grenades for each soldier, which increased the firepower of the troops. Cold weapons were also imperative in the assault. Cold weapons included the statutory assault knife and weapons produced by the soldiers, such as shortened bayonets or a tightened shovel. Firearms were different models of guns and pistol Mauser *Gewehr 98a*. The *Stosstruppen Kommando* was a special troop and its aim was to capture prisoners with the purpose of obtaining intelligence, the destruction of crucial points in the opponent's defense, staffs, magazines, and carrying out reconnaissance [4, pp. 299 – 300].

In October the 10th Infantry Division was located in the vicinity of the town of Crépy-en-Valois, where it rested. At the end of October 1917, the French troops had gone on the offensive, and the Posen Division regiments were in emergency mode, directed at the front line. On the night of 23/24 October 1917, the 10th Infantry Division covered the retreat of smashed troops. From 24 October to 2 November,

the Division led the fight to the South of the Ailette, and from 3 November to 1 December - to the North of the Ailette [15, p. 104]. At the end of November, the Posen Division was moved from the 7 Army of to the 2 Army [7, p. 564].

On 1 December, the 10th Infantry Division was included in the Gruppe "Quentin" (command of the 9th Army Corps) [7, p. 564]. The Division filled the position on the Siegfried Line (German: *Siegfried Stellung*) and was fending off attacks by the Allied troops on 1-9 December [15, p. 104]. Then, the Division received orders to leave the position and returned to the 7 Army, where it ran a fighting position to the North of the Ailette. On 31 December 1917, the regiments of the 10th Infantry Division were let-up by the 211th Infantry Division and passed on the back of the front in the Berlacourt-Marle region (40 km to the West of Saint Quentin). After reorganizing the ranks, incorporating of supplies, equipment and weapons, the regiments of the 10th Infantry Division returned to the front line and took over the position in the North of the Ailette, by loosening the 211th Infantry Division on 1st January 1918. The Posen Division came to the Gruppe Liesse which was under the authority of the 39th Army Corps, where it remained until 8 February 1918 [4, p. 385, 8; p. 307-308; 15, p. 104].

The extreme environment of the Verdun Battle at the end of 1916 was for the German 10th Infantry Division a test of its effectiveness – the fighting value of soldiers, the quality of command, level of training and tactics. The defeat of this unit could be decided by many unfavorable factors, and the morale of its soldiers was subjected to a hard test. In October 1916, in extremely difficult conditions, the regiments of the 10th Infantry Division stabilized their sectors on the front line at Verdun, and in December 1916 they stopped a strong French blow, however, incurring significant losses amounting to 1/3 of the division's state. The combat activities of the 10th Infantry Division from 1917 had nature of trench warfare. This year, the tactics of the assault units *Stosstruppen* was used for the first time in this unit. The fights of 1917 brought significant losses to the 10th Infantry Division. In the German *Verlustliste*, many Polish surnames were published - residents of the *Province Posen*. The scale of losses 10th Infantry Division is confirmed by data from April 1917 regarding the 47th Infantry Regiment. Then 72 officers, 16 of which were in active service (before 1914), and 46 were reserve officers (conscripted during the mobilization in 1914 or later) served in this unit. The ratio

of professional officers for the reserve officers reveals the scale of the loss of the first group. Out of the 3130 non-commissioned officers and privates, 760 soldiers had two years of combat experience, 900 soldiers – one-year experience, 430 soldiers – over six months experience, and 1040 – less than six months. A large percentage of veterans had an impact on the unit's effectiveness in battle [4, p. 236]. The last year of the World War I – 1918 was particularly bloody for the 10th Infantry Division. Again soldiers of Polish nationality in German uniforms were to die for Kaiser Wilhelm II, fighting for the strange matter.

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### **Крушинські Бартош ОРГАНІЗАЦІЯ І БОЙОВІ ДІЇ НІМЕЦЬКОЇ 10-Ї ПІХОТНОЇ ДИВІЗІЇ НА ЗАХІДНОМУ ФРОНТІ ПЕРШОЇ СВІТОВОЇ ВІЙНИ (1916 – 1917)**

У статті відображено організацію та бойові дії німецької 10-ї піхотної дивізії 5-го армійського корпусу на Західному фронті Першої світової війни (1916–1917), зокрема її участь у боях під Верденом, на Ені, у Шампані та під Лаон. Служба поляків у німецькій армії та німецько-польське братство все ще є дещо незручною правдою. Однак багато текстових джерел щодо 10-ї піхотної дивізії 5-го армійського корпусу вказують на те, що в ній поряд з німцями служило багато поляків. Аналіз доступних джерел і літератури дозволив відтворити організаційні зміни 10-ї піхотної дивізії, що відбулися під час війни, роль дивізії у бойових діях та втрати, яких зазнали полки, включаючи солдатів польської національності, які досі лише частково вивчені.

*Ключові слова:* німецька 10-та піхотна дивізія, Західний фронт Першої світової війни, битва під Верденом, битва на Ені, битва у Шампані, битва за Шемін де Дамс, поляки у німецькій армії.