

## URAI DEZSÖ, HUNGARIAN WAR CORRESPONDENT IN MACEDONIA

**Lajos NEGYESI\***

From the Macedonian War reported two Hungarian war correspondents. Andor Adorján<sup>1</sup> between 02 November 1915 and 20 January 1916 from Bulgarian Army Headquarter, and Dezső Urai<sup>2</sup> between 06 February 1916 and 19 of April from the Headquarter of the Mackensen's Army. Even in this time in Macedonia worked Gyula Jelfy<sup>3</sup>, the press photographer.

Probably it was a coincidence that they took turns on the battlefield, although Adorján mostly stayed at the Bulgarian Army Headquarters and from there visited some interesting places. Between February and April, Urai traveled from Üsküb, through Velez the Babuna Pass, Prilep, Monastir, Ochrida and finally to Dojran. In this article, I would like to explain the Urai's path to follow through and flash some interesting episodes of his experiences. Fortunately, he took pictures with his small camera, and thanks to Thomas Nemeth, photo collector and digitizer, who uploaded the pictures, all the interested can view them on the Internet at the Fortepan.hu<sup>4</sup> website.

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<sup>1</sup> Andor Adorján (1883-1966). The original family name Lackenbacher. Journalist. During the First World War he published his reports in the newspaper "Az Est" (The Evening), and in 1917 in his book "Under Snowy Mountains, Bloody Roads: My War Diary from the Balkan War".

<sup>2</sup> Dezső Urai (1875-1966). The original family name Uffenheimer. Translator, newspaper reporter and editor.

<sup>3</sup> Gyula Jelfy. Press photographer of the newspaper Vasárnapi Újság (Sunday Newspaper). During the First World War he was delegated to the Press Corps of the Imperial Ministry of War.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.fortepan.hu/?view=owner&lang=hu&name=N%C3%A9meth%20Tam%C3%A1s>

**Üsküb (Skopje), February 6**

Urai's first stop was Üsküb (Skopje). He arrived in the city on 6th of February.

*“Üsküb is completely a Turkish city and has a European quarter. So when we're adrift to real Üsküb, we are fascinated by the multitude of colors, light, sweet clamor which stupefies us like in northern nations, the Italian port cities and all the Eastern provinces.”<sup>5</sup>*

*The people are very kind. They are proud to be Macedonian, but when we try to ask whether someone is Serbian or Bulgarian, he replies:*

*- I am a Macedonian!”<sup>6</sup>*

His first impression about the town, the Turkish cemetery, is as such:

*“The excellent Turkish cemetery covers the hills near Vardar. The Serbs regularly looted and deprived the centuries-old graves from the tombstones. Several private courtyards are covered beautifully with white engraved marble blocks.”<sup>7</sup>*

The Turkish cemetery played a very important role during the war. In October 1915, 3000 Serbian soldiers took defending positions at the Kazibaba hill and they were hiding behind the tombstones. On 23rd of October started the Bulgarian attack with heavy artillery barrage.

*“When the Bulgarian army reached the city, the Turkish inhabitants rose up against the Serbs. The peaceful shoemakers, coffee makers, water distributors rushed home, took their hidden weapons and attacked the Serbian army. Allah, let us take revenge – he (The Turk) murmured as he fired walnut sized lead balls from an ancient rifle.”<sup>8</sup>*

Urai observed the Bulgarian soldiers: *“They move familiarly in the narrow alleys, they can talk to people and the whole milieu is not*

<sup>5</sup> Pesti Hírlap, 09.03.1916. 9.p.

<sup>6</sup> Urai Dezső: Mackensen katonáival. Budapest, 1916. 119.p.

<sup>7</sup> Urai Dezső: Mackensen katonáival. Budapest, 1916. 104.p.

<sup>8</sup> Urai Dezső: Mackensen katonáival. Budapest, 1916. 105.p.

*unknown to them. They daily exercise out at fields or cemeteries near the town side at noon and in the evening they eat on the streets and squares. No soldier individually receives food like our soldiers each one of whom has his own mess tin. The Bulgarian rota<sup>9</sup> (I counted usually six to eight people) get a pot of food and the dish are put down on the ground. Soldiers are crouched around and spoon out the food with great appetite.”<sup>10</sup>*

### **Velez (Köprülü), February 17**

In Velez (Köprülü) Urai visits a chapel at the hill. The church is not too old, maybe 150 years. The yard is covered with stone slabs. Here is the water well which is surrounded by a Turkish style house. Its graceful colonnade leads around the church. Beneath in the Valley of Vardar the road leads and disappears behind the rock of Tapolka Valley. At the other side, on the hilltop there is a white monastery (Monastir). Behind the church, there are mixed Serbian and Bulgarian graves of soldiers. During the fight, between 12 and 24 of October, both sides transported the dead soldiers here in the evening.

Based on this description we can identify the Holy Pantelejmon chapel. He made two photos about the place, and some about the town.

*“The Serbs in Velez (Köprülü) exert a tenacious resistance. The Bulgarian trenches are on the one bank of the river; and on the other side the Serb positions. It was 300 meters between the two. When they did not shoot each other, they loudly reviled one another. The water level was very high, which made it difficult to cross the river. The Serb command post was in Hotel Belgrade. When the Bulgarian artillery learned it, concentrated the artillery fire on it, so the Serbian Headquarter had to flee. Finally, with the strong support of artillery the Bulgarian troops crossed the river in the north and occupied the Serb positions. On October 28 the city was also occupied.”<sup>11</sup>*

<sup>9</sup> Infantry or cavalry unit.

<sup>10</sup> Urai Dezső: Mackensen katonáival. Budapest, 1916. 109.p.

<sup>11</sup> Adorján Andor: Havas hegyek alatt, véres utakon. Budapest, 1916. 80-81.p.

**Babuna Pass, February 24**

From Velez, they went to Prilep, but first they had to cross the Babuna Pass. On the way there was a very heavy traffic. Long rows of carts were moving on the left side. The old road, which had been built by the Greeks, was leading in sharp curves up to the mountain. They went ten times north and ten times south. Finally, they reached two steep peaks towering like two horns. When they reached the 1,400 meter high pass, they took a short break. Suddenly, he heard some Hungarian words. Two Hungarian insurgents were talking in the horse-drawn carriage.

**Prilep, February 26**

In Prilep, Urai visited the famous ruins of Marko's Castle (Markovi Kuli) where a monk told them the story of the wooden tower which had been erected in the town center. In the Ottoman period, when the army of Eugen von Savoyen occupied Üsküb, some Hungarian horseman arrived in Prilep and kidnapped a woman. She was baptized forcibly, but later she ran away and came home. The tower was built in memory of her release.

**Monastir (Bitola), February 27**

The bustle of the congested city left a deep impression on Urai. „*On the street vendors, beggars, soldiers and dervishes. The real eastern chaos.*”<sup>12</sup> He met with Sheikh Esrebkenzi effendi, who was the leader of Dervish Sect. He invited him to the *tekke* (dervish lodge), and showed a painting which was made by Enver Bey. Enver's father was the member of this dervish sect in Monastir. This was the Rouffay sect. Enver's sister lived in Monastir in 1915, and she was very poor.

Halil bey also came from Monastir, and the war correspondent saw his sister's tomb in another *tekke*. There was a very nice *türbe* (*tomb*) with a broken lily.

**Negocsani, February 28**

On 28th of February Urai took a journey to Greece.

*“Being six kilometers from the Greek border, I could not*

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<sup>12</sup> Urai Dezső: Mackensen katonáival. Budapest, 1916. 138.p.



*stand not to step into the land of Greece and see at least one of those soldiers who have been so eagerly trying to seduce the Entente...Here begins the neutral zone. Two kilometers wide area, prohibited to step in for the Bulgarian and Greek soldiers to prevent all kinds of frictions and border violations. A few steps behind the (Bulgarian) insurgent a barricade blocked the way. Three cars of field railways lay on the road to block the traffic to either way.*

*Not knowing the way forward, we negotiated with the insurgent with a sign language, and it turned out that we had to go back a hundred steps to talk to the commander who lived there in a hut dug into the ground. This happened very quickly, and the Bulgarian officer willingly gave permission for us to cross the border and we were even accompanied by a sentinel. Meanwhile we were informed that the Greek border did not begin where the maps indicated. It was a couple of kilometers behind us. The village which we see in front of us, is Negocsani and it is Greek territory.*

*In front of the outer house, there was a military sentry facing the road, his gun on his shoulder and the bayonet sparkling in the sunlight. Behind the sentry stood a group of soldiers, and they were watching us. Then three of them started walking with slow steps towards us. They were not carrying weapons and just had walking sticks. Their uniforms were long green-yellow cloaks and they wore caps similar to those of sailors. From a distance away, the English officers watched them. They were the Greek border guard commander, and two NCOs (non-commissioned officers).”<sup>13</sup>*

### **Struga, March 14**

In Struga, Urai met a Bulgarian officer who recounted the battle by the Black Drin River. Here he led the way on which the Serbian army had retreated to Albania.

When the Bulgarian army reached Struga, they first occupied the Turkish quarter. The Serbs in the Bulgarian quarter wanted to defend

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<sup>13</sup> Urai Dezső: Mackensen katonáival. Budapest, 1916. 148-150.p.

to the last man, because from Dibra and Kicsevo some troops had retreated in this direction.

The 30-meter-wide river stopped the Bulgarians. It was only possible to cross the river via the bridge because the riverbank was marshy. Three (Serbian) machineguns aimed at the bridge which was burned.

The commander of the Bulgarian brigade, Colonel Passinov, a few kilometers from the bridge, started a bogus attack with two battalions. This distracted the attention of the Serbs. At 09.30 pm, an attack towards the bridge started. First, under the cover of the artillery fire, the sappers rushed to the bridge and extinguished the fire with sandbags. The first attack was swept away by the Serbs' machineguns. A Bulgarian officer, named Bajev, ran alone across the bridge. This disrupted the Serb gunner, and the infantry attack started again. The Bulgarian soldiers were shouting: Na nozs - With knife! The Bulgarians occupied the city with bayonets. There were no prisoners.

### **Hungarian War Prisoners**

One of the senseless tragedies of the Serbian war is the sufferings of the Austro-Hungarian war prisoners, who had been captured by the retreating Serb forces. After the Serbs, sick and exhausted people stayed in the cities.

*“After the fight, miserable-looking, fully starved figures emerged from all sides. They went out from houses, cellars and migrated on the road to the city. Hungarian and Austrian prisoners of war were the wretched people, who had been carried by the Serbs till now. Most of them could barely stand on their feet and giddily groaned:*

*- Bread ...*

*The Bulgarians immediately took care of them with food, but unfortunately for some this was too late. They had died on the conquered lands as unarmed heroes in the last battle ...”<sup>14</sup>*

### **Ochrida, March 19**

*“Ochrida, the town, lay on the shores of the lake nicely,*

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<sup>14</sup> Urai Dezső: Mackensen katonáival. Budapest, 1916. 164.p.

*a greater part of the town was in the hills. One time I (Urai) talked to General Bojadjev, one of the great Bulgarian military leaders and he spoke of Ochrida:*

*- The Bulgarian Jerusalem.*

*At the waterside, the first row of houses belong to rich Turkish landlords, but most of them are now deserted because the wealthy Turks fled during the Balkan Wars.*

*He visited a tekke in the city. After drinking coffee a dervish led me to the first floor and showed the rooms in which every poor person would get a bed when he knocked at the gate of tekke. Poor and hungry people also received food from dervishes at tekke.*

*Four of the wealthy families send victuals and support the old dervish well,*

*I said to him:*

*- Look dervish, I admire that in such advantageous conditions, half of people in the world don't live with you.*

*He quietly shakes his head and says slowly, with a smile:*

*- The poor after resting and eating, are no longer poor... ”<sup>15</sup>*

### **Sveti Bogorodica Convent, March 20**

On 22 March, Urai took an exciting excursion by boat across the lake.

*“Three lads are driven by unwieldy fishing boat carrying us to the other side. After three hours of slow rowing, we arrive at the Sveti Bogorodica convent with its roughhewn bell-fry erected on a lonely rock. This is our destination. In the next moment, a little bell welcoming the slowly approaching boat is heard. In the clear and sunny air, the sound is so kindly and friendly, the mountains are very close to the beach and the quiet white chapel intimately invites us. This is a peaceful moment. Peace reigns in this remote countryside if we ignore*

<sup>15</sup> Urai Dezső: Mackensen katonáival. Budapest, 1916. 168.p.

*the far sound of bang, which is the sound of the heavy artillery by Elbasan.*"<sup>16</sup>

### **Dorjan, April 19**

The last stop on Urai's journey was a city near the front line.

*"Dorian - that explains the psychological state of the town - lies between the two frontlines. This is the reality: the German front behind the town, the French front stretches in front of the town. The French can observe every house and every man. When any time a conflict happens, the place thoroughly suffers and fighting begins.*

*- The hill is ours, over there are the French. From here the first French sentry is only 3000 steps away, but from our first line only 1500 steps. We never shoot at each other because it does not make sense. Here we are just observing one another.*

*I can only see the machine gun, when they place it in my hand: Mastery is hiding among the bushes.*

*After a while he stops and points forward: But I can see that. At the covered place, there are hidden gorgeous homes and fine beamed huts with windows. Their roofs are covered with turf. One small and three bigger. This is an outpost camp.*"<sup>17</sup>

During the First World War he published his war reports in the Pesti Hírlap (Pester Herald), and in his book "Mackensen's Army" in 1916<sup>18</sup>

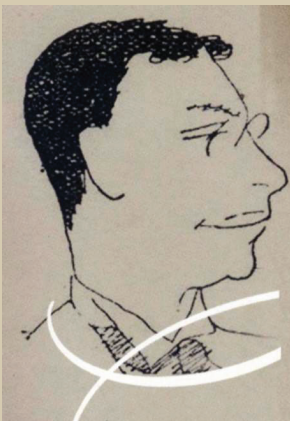
<sup>16</sup> Urai Dezső: Mackensen katonáival. Budapest, 1916. 171.p.

<sup>17</sup> Urai Dezső: Mackensen katonáival. Budapest, 1916. 188-189.p.

<sup>18</sup> Urai Dezső: Mackensen katonáival. Budapest, 1916.



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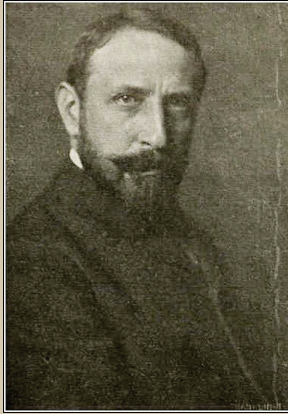


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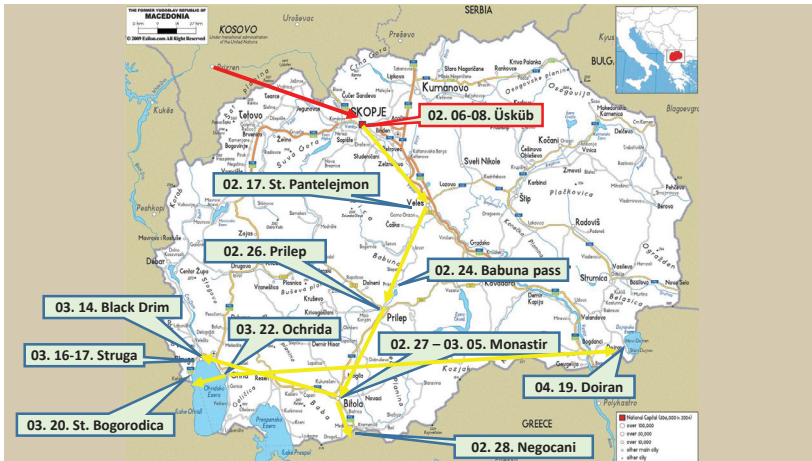


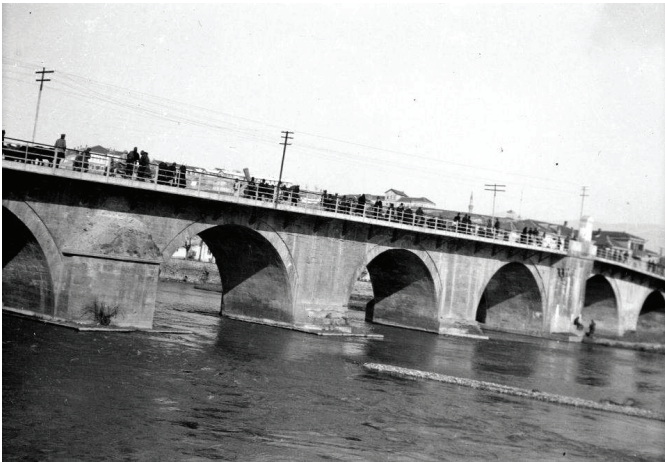


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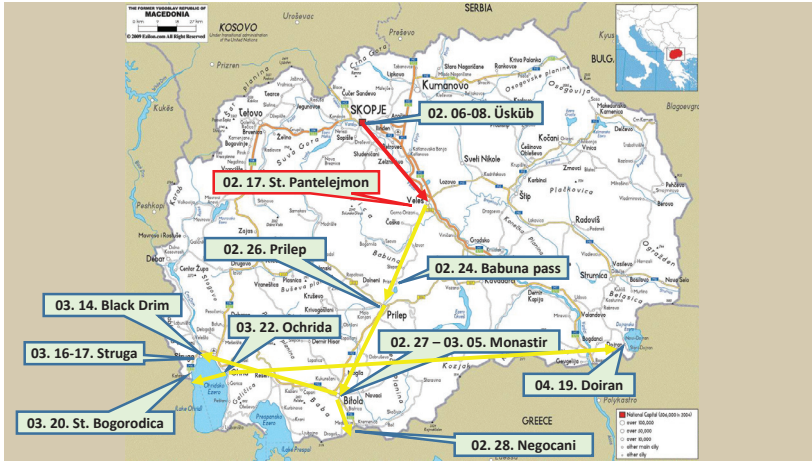
Gyula Jeffy. Press photographer of the newspaper Vasárnapi Újság (Sunday Newspaper). During the First World War he was delegated to the Press Corps of the Imperial Ministry of War.







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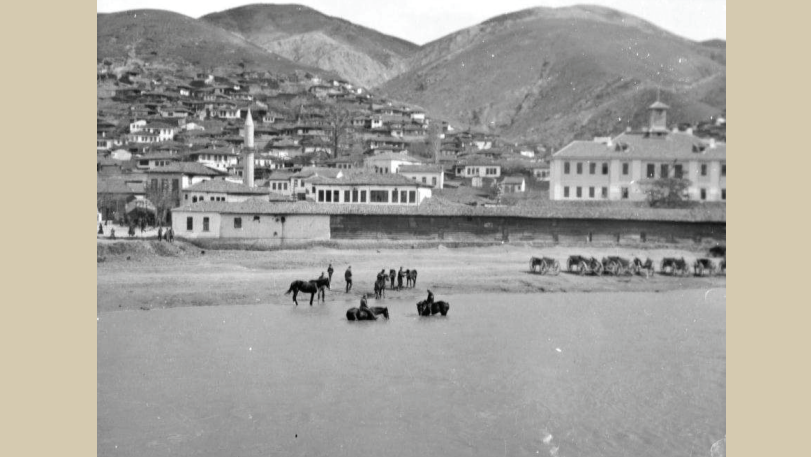




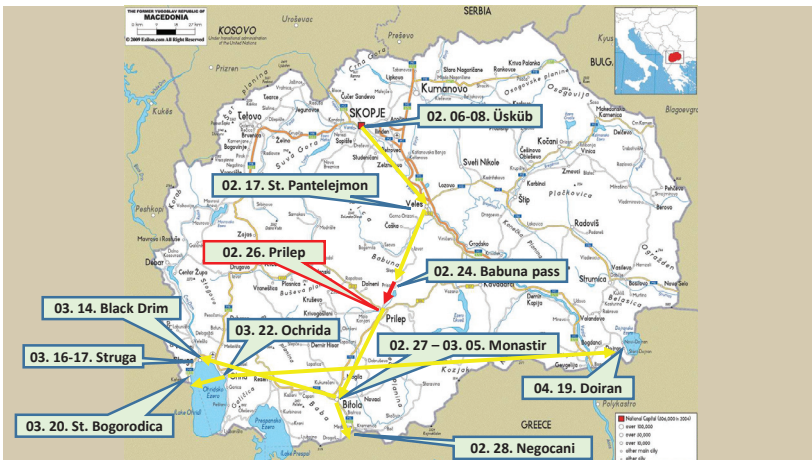
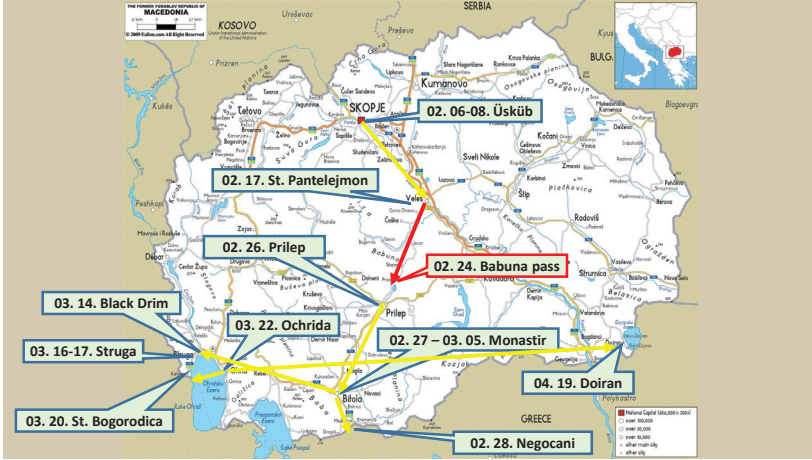
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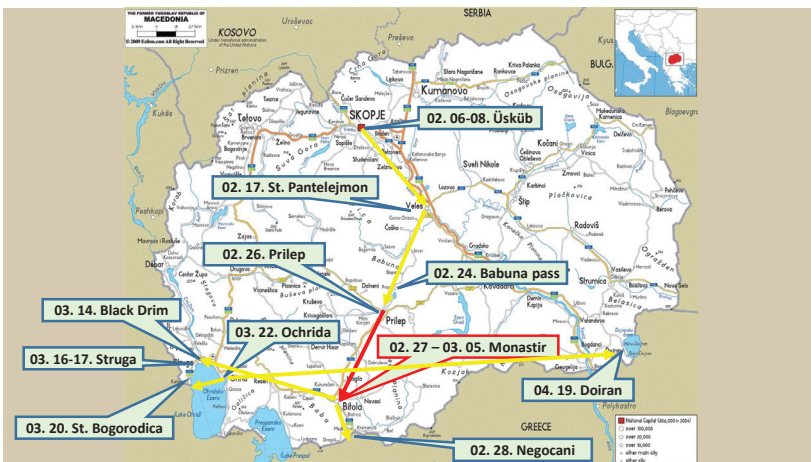




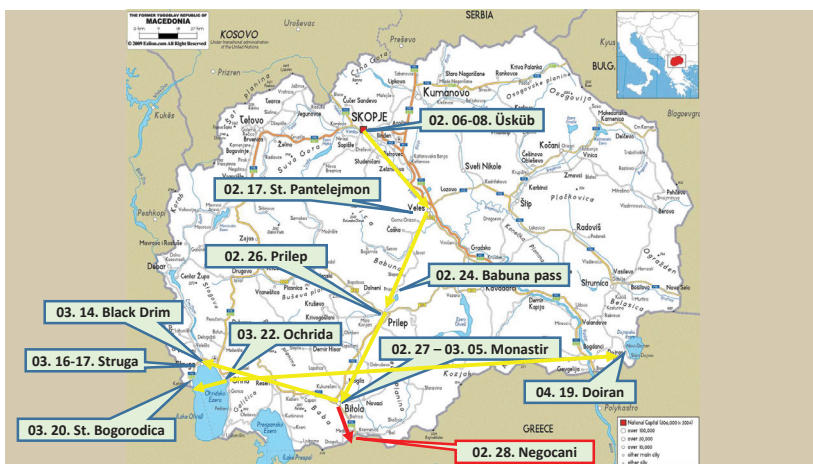
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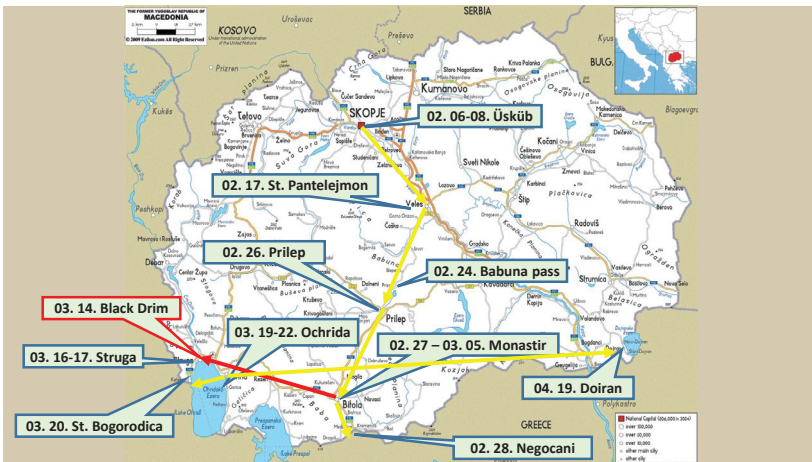


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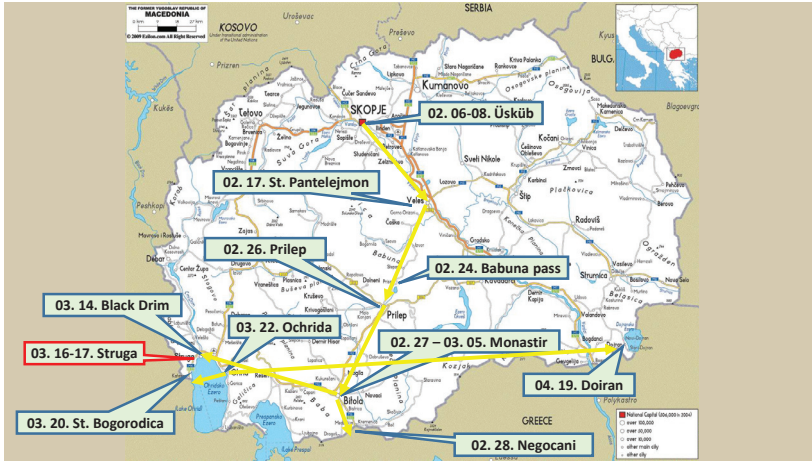
Ferme Serbe à NEGOCANI, près Monastir (Serbie)



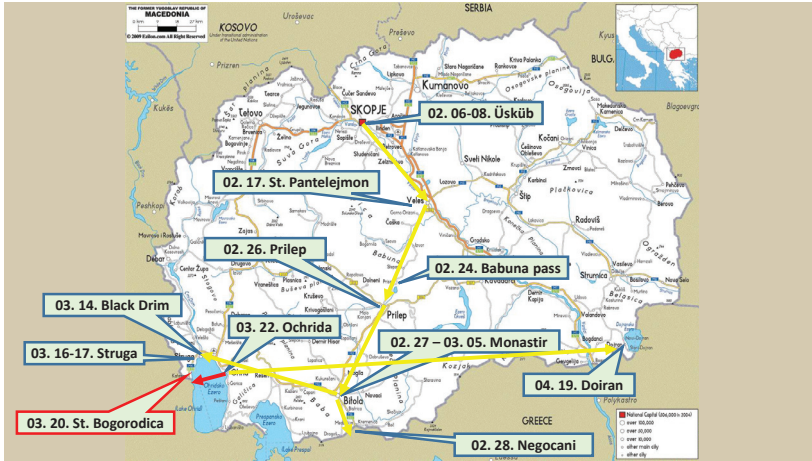


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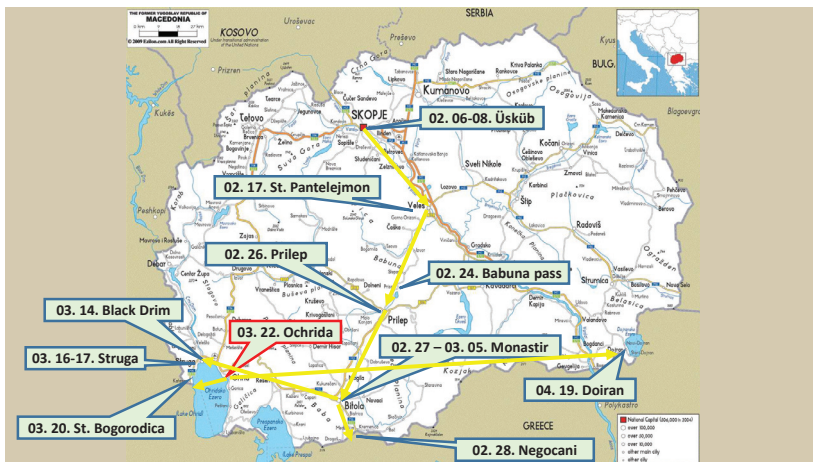
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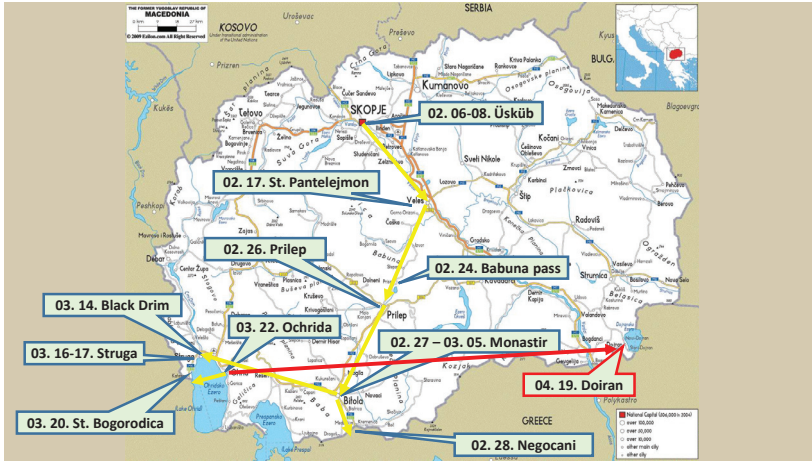






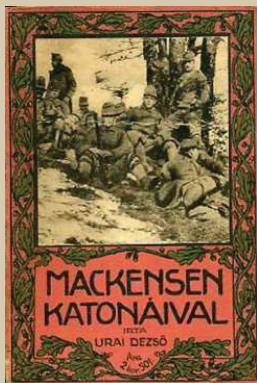
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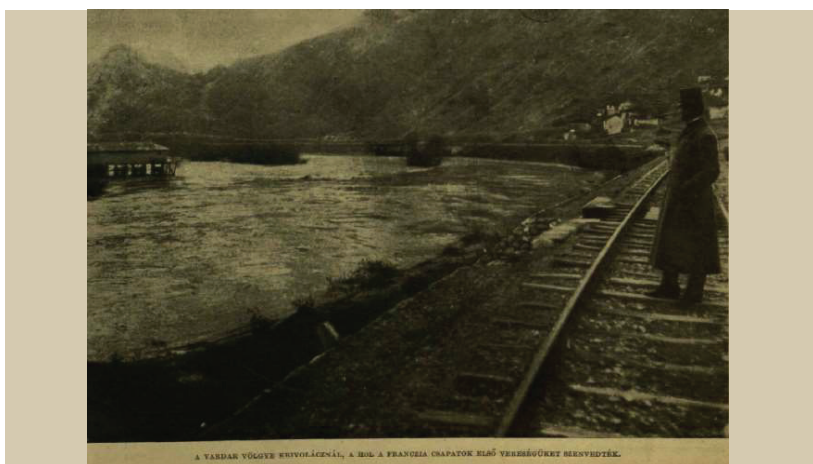
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Mackensen's Army



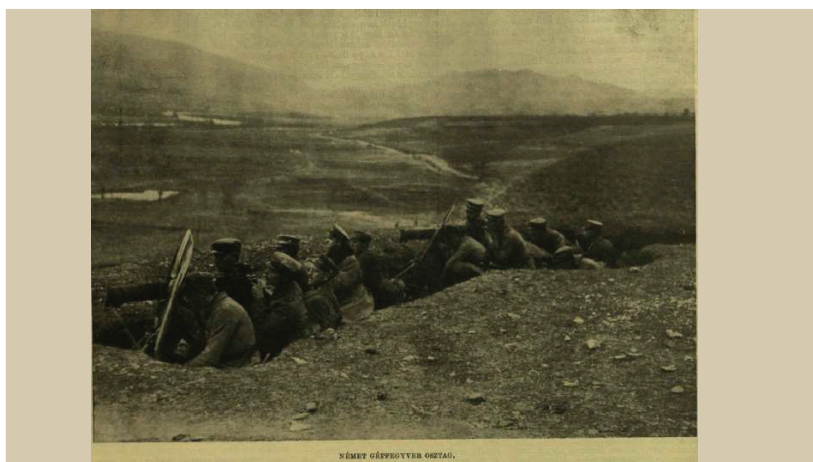
Under snowy mountains, bloody roads.  
My war diary from the Balkan War.



A YARDAR VÖLGYE KNYVJÉNEI, A HOG A FRANCOZA CSAPATOK ELŐ VERESÉGÜNK BEKÜLDÉK.



A BOLGÁROK KIÁRÁK A SÉRBEN ÁLTAL FÜRRENNÉL ELÉRTETTY ÁGYÚRÁT. — Jolly Gyula, a kasztélyos kérdésben szerkesztőnk fényképe.



NÉMET GÉPFÜZVÉR ORSZÁG.



MACÉDON ÖNKÉNTES CSAPATOK BEFOLYÁSÁRA KEMANOVÁRA.  
A MACÉDONIAI HADSZÍNTERBŐL. — Jolly Gyula, a kasztélyos kérdésben szerkesztőnk fényképe.



Macedón katonák őrségben



MACEDON ÖNKÉNTER CSAPATOK BEVONULÁSA KUMANOVÁRA. — Jály Gyula a katonák közötti szállítások Előttel.



BOLGÁR-MACEDON KATONÁK A KRIVA FÖLDTŐ MELLETT. — Jály Gyula a katonák közötti szállítások Előttel.

