



Journal of Universal History Studies

Battles of Pleven: A Glorious Defeat in Military History¹

Plevne Muharebeleri: Harp Tarihinde Şanlı Bir Mağlubiyet

Submission Type: Research Article

Received-Accepted: 16.09.2023 / 19.11.2023

pp. 168-190

Journal of Universal History Studies (JUHIS) • 6(2) • December • 2023 •

Umut Akcakaya

Researcher, Dr., Ankara, Türkiye

Email: umutakcakaya@outlook.com

Orcid Number: 0000-0002-6285-5982

Cite: Akcakaya, U. (2023). Battles of Pleven: A Glorious Defeat in Military History. Journal of Universal History Studies, 6(2), 168-190. <https://doi.org/10.38000/juhis.1361452>

¹ This article is analyzed by three reviewers and it is screened for the resemblance rate by the editor/ Bu makale üç hakem tarafından incelenmiş ve editör tarafından benzerlik oranı taramasından geçirilmiştir.

* In this article, the principles of scientific research and publication ethics were followed/ Bu makalede bilimsel araştırma ve yayın etiği ilkelerine uyulmuştur.

*This work is licensed under a Creative Commons BY-NC-SA 4.0 (Attribution-Non Commercial-Share Alike)

*There is no conflict of interest with any person/institution in the prepared article/ Hazırlanan makalede herhangi bir kişi/kurum ile çıkar çatışması bulunmamaktadır.

Abstract

The Ottoman-Russian War of 1877-1878 was one of the most important events that marked the last century of the Ottoman Empire. In this war, the armies of both sides faced each other on the Balkan and Caucasian fronts, and the Balkan Front was the war's center of gravity. Having crossed the Danube, the Russian army quickly advanced south and captured the Shipka pass. Thus, the road to Istanbul was opened for the Russians. In the same days, the Vidin Corps under the command of Osman Pasha came to Plevne and took positions in the city. Before descending to the south of the Balkan Mountains, the Russians decided to capture Plevne and attacked the city three times. In Plevne, the Ottoman forces repelled these attacks and stopped the Russian operation for five months. In this way, they prevented a defeat that would come much earlier for the Ottoman Empire. Osman Pasha halted the Russian army by defending Plevne for five months. In this way, he allowed the Ottoman Commander-in-Chief to change the war's fate. The Ottoman command, however, could not be able to use this opportunity. Finally, the supplies in the city were exhausted and there was no possibility of defense. Osman Pasha decided to break the siege with a breakthrough operation, but was wounded and had to surrender. Shortly after the fall of Plevne, the Russian armies came to Istanbul and the war ended. Despite the defeat, the defense of Plevne had a great impact and was appreciated all over the world.

Keywords: Ottoman-Russian War of 1877-1878, Defense of Plevne, Gazi Osman Pasha, Ottoman Army, Bastion

Öz

1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus Harbi Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun son asrına damga vuran en önemli olaylardan biri olmuştur. Bu harpte iki tarafın orduları Balkan ve Kafkas cephelerinde karşı karşıya gelmiş, harbin ağırlık merkezini Balkan Cephesi teşkil etmiştir. Tuna nehrini geçen Rus ordusu süratle güneye ilerleyerek Şipka geçidini ele geçirmiş, böylece Ruslar için İstanbul yolu açılmıştır. Bu kritik anda Osman Paşa komutasındaki Vidin Kolordusu Plevne'ye gelerek burada mevzilenmiştir. Ruslar Balkan Dağları'nın güneyine inmeden evvel Plevne'yi ele geçirmeye karar vermiş ve üç defa şehre taarruz etmiştir. Plevne'de Osmanlı kuvvetleri bu taarruzları püskürtmüş ve Rus harekâtını beş ay kadar durdurarak çok daha erken gelebilecek bir mağlubiyete engel olmuştur. Osman Paşa Plevne'yi beş ay boyunca müdafaa ederek Rus ordusunu karşısında tutmuş ve Osmanlılara savaşın kaderini değiştirmek için fırsat vermiştir. Fakat Osmanlı komuta kademesi bu fırsatı kullanamamış ve harpten mağlubiyetle çıkmıştı. Nitekim şehirdeki erzakın tükenmesiyle müdafaa imkânı kalmamış, Osman Paşa bir huruç harekâtıyla kuşatmayı yarmaya çalışırken yaralanarak esir düşmüştür. Plevne'nin düşmesinden kısa süre sonra Rus orduları İstanbul önüne kadar gelmiş ve harp sona ermiştir. Alınan mağlubiyete rağmen Plevne müdafaası tüm dünyada ses getirmiş ve takdirle karşılanmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: 1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus Harbi, Plevne Müdafaası, Gazi Osman Paşa, Osmanlı Ordusu, Tabya.

Introduction

The 1877-1878 Ottoman-Russian War (93 War) was one of the toughest tests for the Ottoman army in 19th century. The main reasons for the war were the pan-Slavist policies followed by Russia and the nationalist movement that gained strength in the Balkans. The Ottoman and Russian armies fought on two fronts, namely the Caucasus and the Balkans. But the center of gravity was the Balkan Front. The Ottoman war plan on the Balkan Front was based on strategic defense. The Danube River was the first line of defense, and the Balkan Mountains were the second line of defense (Tacan, 1937, p. 757). Russians crossed the Danube in Sivisthov on June 26, captured Turnovo in a short time and headed for Shipka Pass. When the Russians captured the Shipka Pass on July 19, the second defense line was broken and the road to Istanbul was opened for the Russian army. On the same days, the forces of Süleyman Pasha, transferred from the Montenegro front, came to Shipka and blocked the way of the Russians. Süleyman Pasha tried very hard to recapture the Shipka pass, but had to withdraw with more than 7.000 casualties.

An easy victory for the Russians was on the horizon. Yet, the situation changed when Osman Pasha's forces came to Pleven. The Russian army would not dare to advance south of the Balkan Mountains without capturing Pleven. Osman Pasha was going to stop the Russian army by defending Pleven for five months. In this way, he would allow the Ottoman Commander-in-Chief to change the war's fate. The Ottoman command, however, would not be able to use this opportunity and would be defeated. The defense of Pleven was an event that left its mark on the Ottoman-Russian War and made an impact worldwide. Despite the eventual defeat at the end of the war, thanks to the defense of Pleven, the prestige of the Ottoman soldiers rose and was appreciated by the whole world.

In the field of military history, there is an extensive literature on the battles of Pleven. However, the majority of them are in Turkish and they especially highlight the heroic stories. In the English literature, the subject has been mainly examined through the war experience of the Russian army and Turkish sources have not been utilised. The aim of this study is to analyze the Battles of Pleven based on the Ottoman war experience. In this context, works of Ottoman authors and foreign authors will be discussed in a comparative approach. In this study, answers to the following questions will be sought in particular: Why was the Russian army defeated in all three battles despite its great superiority in the number of soldiers and firepower? What were the mistakes of the Russian command at the tactical level? How was the Ottoman defense in Pleven organized and commanded? How did Osman Pasha take advantage of the mistakes of the Russians? With the answers to these questions, the course of the battles and the combat performances of both armies will be better comprehended.

1. First Battle of Pleven

After crossing the Danube, the Russian army split into three groups. The 8th Corps would form the central group and would advance towards the Balkan passes. The left flank group consisted of the 12th and 13th Corps. This group would advance west and hold the Yantra line. Thus, it would cover the operation of the Russian central group against the Ottoman central army in Shumen and Ruse. The right flank group was formed from the 9th Corps under the command of General Krüdener. Krüdener was going to occupy Nikopol, Lofça and Pleven against a possible operation of Osman Pasha corps in Vidin (Greene, 1879, p. 164; Taşdemir, 2020, p. 16; Epanchin, 1900, p. 2). Pleven especially had strategic importance because this city was located at the

intersection of five critical roads in the north of the Balkans, such as Nikopol-Pleven road, Ruse-Byala-Pleven road, Plovdiv-Lofça-Pleven road, Sofia-Orhanie-Pleven road and Vidin-Pleven road (Ahmet Cemal, 2020, p. 39).

The Russian right flank group captured Nicopolis on 16 July. On July 18, General Krüdener dispatched a force under the command of General Schilder-Schuldner to Pleven. However, it was too late. The corps under the command of Osman Pasha was advancing to Pleven. This corps remained dormant in Vidin during the early days of the war. After the Russians crossed the Danube, Osman Pasha offered to the Front Commander Abdülkerim Pasha to go to Pleven with his corps. When he came to Pleven, he was going to attack Zhistove in coordination with the Danube Western Army in Shumen. But the Commander-in-Chief, who was not enthusiastic to weaken Vidin against the Romanian and Serbian forces, did not accept Osman Pasha's offer. Nonetheless with the rapid advance of the Russian army, the situation changed and the order was given to advance to Pleven on 10 July (Mahmud Celaleddin Paşa, 1983, p. 447; Öztürk, 2002, p. 117-131).

After making the necessary preparations, Osman Pasha took action with 18 infantry battalions, five cavalry squadrons and nine batteries on 13 July. There was a difficult road of 190 kilometers up to Pleven. In Vidin, he left 12 infantry battalions, one cavalry squadron and one battery. While Osman Pasha was advancing towards Pleven, the situation at the front became very critical. The Russians had begun to descend to the south by crossing the Balkan Mountains. In the telegrams sent from Istanbul on 14 and 15 July, it was reported that the situation was critical and demanded to act quickly (Ahmed Midhat Efendi, 1997, p. 204; Gencer and İpek, 1993, p. 241). Thereupon, Osman Pasha detached a regiment under the command of Emin Bey and sent it to Pleven on the evening of 15 July. The following day he started to move with the rest of his forces. The march of the corps took place in mid-July in sweltering weather. Deaths from sunstroke had begun among the soldiers. However, Osman Pasha, who knew how critical the situation was, continued his walk. During the march, a small force withdrawn from Nikopol joined him. In this way, Osman Pasha learned that Nikopol had fallen and that the Russians had captured Lofça. Osman Pasha accelerated the march and reached Pleven on the morning of 19 July (İbrahim Edhem, 1979, p. 37-39; Von Der Goltz, 1898, p. 4-8; ATASE, ORH.,10/11; ATASE, ORH.,8/101).

While Osman Pasha was advancing to Pleven, there was a force consisting of four infantry battalions, two cavalry squadrons and six artilleries under the command of Atif Pasha in the city. This force was sent from Nikopol after the Russian cavalry entered Pleven on 8 July. Atif Pasha came to the city on 10 July, forced the Russian cavalry to withdraw and began to fortify. This fortification would form the basis of the defense of Pleven. The force commanded by Emin Bey reached the city on 18 July. The Russian Front Commander, Grand Duke Nichola, was aware of the importance of Pleven. On July 17, he ordered General Krüdener to take the city rapidly. Thereupon, Krüdener sent two infantry regiments, four batteries and the 9th Don Cossack Unit under the command of General Schilder-Schuldner to Pleven. The Russians reached Pleven in the afternoon of 19 July and encountered Osman Pasha's forces in the city (Greene, 1879, p. 189-190; ATASE, ORH.,3/135; ATASE, ORH.,8/79).

Pleven was at the crossroads of the roads leading to the western Bulgarian and Balkan passes. The distance of the city to Lofça was 32 kilometers, 88 kilometers to Orhanie, 133 kilometers to Sofia, 117 kilometers to Ruse and 37 kilometers to Nikopol. Its population was about 17 thousand and the majority were Turks. Pleven was not fortified for a defensive operation before the war. However, the geographical structure of the city was advantageous for the defenders. Around the city were hills suitable for defense. The Vid River,

which ran right next to the city, formed a natural line of defense to the west. The most suitable direction for the attack was the valley stretching from the village of Grivitsza to the city in the east (Furmeaux, 1972, p. 54-55). When Osman Pasha entered the city on July 19, he immediately placed his troops on the hills in the north, east and south and began to fortify. The fortification work which started on the first day of the Pleven battles would continue until the fall of the city and solid defense line would be established around the city.

The Russians reached Pleven in the afternoon of 19 July and engaged in battle with the Ottoman outposts. Then, they deployed for the attack. Under the command of General Schilder-Schuldner there were 13.000 infantry, three cavalry regiments and 60 cannons. The forces of the defenders were 27 battalions, one cavalry regiment and 46 cannons. The Russians had not yet carried out the necessary reconnaissance operations and did not fully understand the Ottoman force and its positioning. Russian commanders, who had won easy victories since the beginning of the war, assumed that they would easily capture Pleven. Therefore, they did not hesitate to attack. Osman Pasha had deployed some of his forces to the defense lines and kept the rest as a reserve. In this context, three infantry battalions, two cavalry squadrons and two cannons were deployed in front of Grivitsza in the east under the command of Ahmet Hıfzı Pasha. The 4th infantry regiment and four cannons were stationed on the Bukovlak hill in the north. three battalions, two cavalry squadrons and two cannons under the command of Colonel Yunus Bey were stationed on Yanıkbayır. one infantry battalion and three guns were deployed on the ridges south-west of Pleven. two infantry battalions were in Opanec under the command of Hasan Sabri Pasha. The city, thus, was defended against possible attacks from the north, east and South (Süer, 1993, p. 162-163).

The Russian attack started with the bombardment on the morning of 20 July. The Russians advanced to the city in two groups, from the north and east. The first group under the command of General Knorring consisted of 2 infantry regiments and 1 cavalry regiment. This group attacked the Ottoman forces stationed in Bukovlak and Yanıkbayır. The Russians managed to seize some positions. Thereupon, Osman Pasha put the reserves into battle. The Russians were thrown back with the bayonet attacks of the Ottoman battalions. The battle was very bloody. General Knorring was badly wounded and the commander of the 17th Regiment died. The attack of the Russian first group had failed. The second attack group consisted of one infantry regiment and two cavalry squadrons under the command of Colonel Kleinhaus. This group advanced on Grivitsza from the west. At first, the attack of this group was also successful. However, the situation changed with the counterattack of the Ottoman reserves dispatched from Pleven. The Russians, who suffered a lot of losses, had to withdraw here as well (Albay Talat, 1997, p. 10-12; Maurice, 1905, p. 109-113; ATASE, ORH.,10/41).

Russian casualties were over 2.800. 74 officers, including two colonels, were killed or wounded. On the Ottoman side, 38 officers and 648 soldiers were martyred, 50 officers and 1357 privates were wounded. In addition, 17 ammunition carts, a cannon, a large amount of rifles, 300 tents and a large amount of material were seized from the Russians (Herbert, 1911, p. 116; Süer, 1993, p. 162-163). If Osman Pasha could carry out a pursuit operation the Russians would have suffered much more. However, after days of marching, the Ottoman soldiers were very tired and Osman Pasha did not have enough cavalry forces. The First Battle of Pleven was an important turning point in the war. For the first time since the beginning of the war, the Ottoman forces were able to stop a strong Russian attack and forced them to retreat.

2. Second Battle of Pleven

After the First Battle of Pleven, the importance of Lofça increased. The Russians had captured Lofça on 17 July before attacking Pleven. Osman Pasha dispatched a force of 6 infantry battalions and 1 battery to

Lofça on 26 July under the command of Refet Pasha. There were three or four Russian cavalry squadrons, 2 cannons and Bulgarian militia in the town. Refet Pasha captured Lofça on 27 July. The Russians attacked the next day to retake the town. However, they were defeated (Albay Talat, 1997, p. 13-14; Şapolyo, 1959, p. 197-198).

The defeat in Pleven greatly worried the Tsar. The deployment of an Ottoman corps in the city threatened the right flank of the Russian forces advancing south (Şirokorad, 2009, p. 422; Keçecizade İzzet Fuat, 1997, p. 52). The Russian headquarters saw that its forces in the Balkans were not sufficient to continue the war. Reinforcements had to be brought in from Russia, which would take long time. Therefore, the Tsar wanted the Romanian army to join the battle. Until the Battle of Pleven, the Russians did not want Romania to participate in the war. Nevertheless, the defeat in Pleven changed this situation. Romanian forces crossed the Danube and deployed to Nikopol. With the reinforcements, a force consisting of 36 infantry battalions, 30 cavalry squadrons and 176 cannons was gathered under the command of General Krüdener. The strength of this force was around 30.000. Krüdener overestimated the Ottoman force in Pleven. He thought that his forces were not enough for the attack and wanted reinforcements. However, Grand Duke Nichola insisted on attacking, and Krüdener reluctantly agreed (Hozier, 1878, p. 590-591; Keçecizade İzzet Fuat, 1997, p. 55). The Russian operation in the Balkans had stopped and the Russian army had gathered in front of Pleven.

Osman Pasha was quickly fortified Pleven. In a short time, two big bastions called Baştabya and Kanlıtabya were built in Yanıkbayır. A defensive line was created by digging trenches on the ridge extending from Yanıkbayır to Opanec. The construction of fortifications continued on other hills around the city (Furneaux, 1972, p. 68). The Commander-in-Chief gave the battalions in Sofia and Nis to the command of Osman Pasha for the reinforcement of Pleven. With these reinforcements, the force in the city reached approximately 20.000 soldiers, including 33 infantry battalions, five cavalry squadrons and 300 Circassian volunteers. This force was divided into two divisions, each consisting of 12 battalions of infantry, two squadrons of cavalry and two batteries. The 1st Division under the command of Adil Pasha was positioned on the defense line in the north, and the 2nd Division under the command of Hasan Sabri Pasha in the south and southeast. The rest of the forces were located in the rear area as a reserve (Albay Talat, 1997, p. 15; Hülagü, 1993, p. 90).

Before the attack Pleven, General Krüdener purposed to take control of the Plevne-Sevlievo-Timovo road by capturing Lofça. In accordance with this purpose, he sent the cavalry division under the command of General Skoblev to Lofça. There were six infantry battalions and one battery in the town under the command of Refet Pasha. As the Russians advanced to Lofça, Osman Pasha sent one infantry battalion and some cavalry to reinforce Refet Pasha. General Skoblev approached Lofça to attack on 28th July. However, he could not advance due to the artillery fire of the defenders. Refet Pasha attacked with infantry from the front and cavalry from the flanks and forced the Russians to withdraw. Russian casualties were more than 300 (Süer, 1993, p. 223).

The Russians, who could not capture Lofça, turned their attention to Pleven. General Krüdener's plan was to divide his force into two groups and attack from the east and southeast of the city. The right flank group was composed of two infantry divisions and 10 cavalry squadrons under the command of General Wilhelminof. This group would advance to Pleven from the east and attack Yanıkbayır. The left flank group consisted of one infantry division, one infantry brigade and one cavalry brigade under the command of General Prince Shakofskoi. This group was to attack from the southeast over Radishevo. Two cavalry regiments under the command of General Loshkareff would protect the right flank of the attacking force. The cavalry brigade

under the command of General Skoblev would secure the Lofça road on the left flank. Krüdener had held back an infantry brigade as a reserve. The center of gravity of the attack was in the right wing group with 18 battalions and 80 guns (Greene, 1879, p. 194).

The attack started at 05:00 on 30 July. The right flank group advanced towards Pleven in the fog and took up positions in front of Kanlıtabya and Emin Bey Bastion at around 08:00. With the positioning of the Russians, artillery fire began. Russian artillery of five batteries took the Ottoman trenches under heavy fire. The defenders had only four guns in this area. Artillery fire continued until 14:30. The Russian attack started at 15:00. The 31st Russian Division with its three regiments advanced to the Ottoman trenches. The Russians managed to seize the outpost positions. However, they were stopped by the defenders at the second line positions. After that, they were thrown back by the Ottoman counter-attacks. The losses of the Russians were great. By 16:00 they had lost 29 officers and 1.006 soldiers. Thereupon, General Wilhelminof put his three reserve regiments into battle. Two regiments from the north and one from the south attacked the Ottoman positions. However, these attacks also encountered Ottoman fire. Although the Russian attacks continued until 18:00, they were not successful. Adil Pasha saw that the Russian attack was weakening and started a counterattack. General Wilhelminov had to use his last reserves to stop this offensive. With a final effort, General Krüdener ordered a general attack before the sun went down. However, this attack was also stopped in front of the Ottoman positions. The battle had been very bloody. The offensive power of the Russians was exhausted. After dark, the Russian troops withdrew devastated (Maurice, 1905, p. 125-126; Süer, 1993, p. 238-240).

The Russian left flank group, with two infantry regiments and four batteries from the 32nd Division, arrived in Radishevo in the morning. one brigade and four batteries were in reserve at south of Radishevo. Mutual artillery fire began. The Russians were responding with 60 guns to the eight guns of the defenders. Artillery fire continued until 14:30. The Russians attacked Tahir Pasha detachment with one regiment and Colonel İbrahim Bey detachment in the east with another regiment. The Russians took the first line positions. The Ottomans withdrew to the second line positions. General Shakofskoi continued the attack. The Ottoman defense was under great pressure. At this moment, the Commander of the 2nd Division, Hasan Sabri Pasha, put the reserves into battle and prevented the Russians from entering the second line positions. Thereupon, General Shakofskoi also brought a reserve infantry regiment into battle. With these reinforcements, the Russians could enter some points of the second line positions. Osman Pasha, who saw the criticality of the situation, sent his last reserves to this region. All reserves were put into battle, and there was no force left in the headquarters except for four companies. Osman Pasha immediately sent word and asked for some reinforcement battalions from the Adil Pasha Division. Without waiting for these battalions to arrive, he sent four companies under the command of Talat Bey to Hasan Sabri Pasha (Von Der Goltz, 1898, p. 16; Greene, 1879, p. 198-199; Süer, 1993, p. 235-236). It was the most critical moment of the battle. The defenders were out of reserve, and the Russians were about to break through the defensive line. At this critical moment, Osman Pasha stepped in. He took the head of the infantry battalion and four guns sent by Adil Pasha and counterattacked. With this attack, the Russian attack was halted. The Russians did not have the strength to attack. At 18:30, General Shakofskoi informed General Krüdener that he was in a challenging situation and asked for reinforcements. General Krüdener quickly led a reserve infantry regiment south of Grivitzsa. The Russian regiment, advancing towards İbrahim Bey's positions, was unable to advance due to a heavy artillery fire from Borabayın and had to retreat. The attack of the left flank group also failed. The Russians began to withdraw as darkness fell (Menning, 1992, p. 63).

The operation of General Skoblev's forces, which moved to the west of the Russian left flank, was as follows. The Caucasian Cavalry Brigade under the command of Skoblev advanced westward at 05:00 in the morning to secure the Lofca road. As they approached the Kovanlık Hill in the southwest of the city, they came under the fire of Colonel Yunus Bey's forces. General Skoblev returned fire with four cannons and an artillery duel began. At this very moment, Yunus Bey attacked with an infantry battalion and cavalry under heavy artillery fire and forcing the Russians to withdraw. Yunus Bey's detachment was in a critical position. He was able to take the Russian left flank group under fire from his position. To prevent this, General Skoblev decided to attack. He deployed some of his troops to secure the Lofça road. He reinforced his remaining forces with an infantry battalion and 4 cannons and attacked again. However, Yunus Bey stopped the Russian attacks and returned with a counterattack. Even though the Russians continued their attacks until it got dark, they were unsuccessful. General Skoblev withdrew his troops after dark (Albay Talat, 1997, p. 19-20; Greene, 1879, p. 198-199).

Russian casualties were more than 7.000. It was a big mistake to attack with classical tactics to the defensive lines prepared with modern techniques and protected by fire. The Russians paid a heavy price for this mistake. Although they had many artilleries than the defenders, they could not use them effectively. Artillery fire was not well coordinated with the infantry's maneuvers. The left and right attack groups could not move coordinately. Furthermore, General Krüdener had not spared a sufficient reserve force and had not used his reserves at the right place and time. When the battle was over, the Russian troops were exhausted and devastated. The Russians withdrew in panic. The next day, the news of the defeat reached Nikopol and Sivisthov. A complete panic began when the news spread that the Ottoman army was in pursuit. Roads and bridges were blocked by Bulgarians attempting to escape north of the Danube (Ali Fuad, 1326, p. 66; Erkan-ı Harbiye Kolağalarından Reşid, 2016, p. 48; Herbert, 1911, p. 165-166). The defeat in Pleven had a significant impact on the Russian command (BOA, Y.PRK.HR.,1/60).

In the Second Battle of Pleven, 18 officers and 341 soldiers were killed and 26 officers and 898 soldiers were wounded on the Ottoman side. Osman Pasha played an important role in the victory. He had correctly predicted the Russians' direction of attack. When organizing the defense, Osman Pasha preferred a well-organized fortification and an active defense based on rapid counter-attacks rather than the usual methods. The defense power of the Ottoman soldiers was world famous. Osman Pasha proved that the Ottoman troops could also be successful in the offensive with his active defense based on counter-attacks. His leadership style based on officers being at the forefront of the battle and commanding their troops gave great morale and encouragement to his soldiers (Uyar and Erickson, 2014, p. 382). The only issue that could be criticized in the command of the battle was the lack of a pursuit operation after the victory, because if the Russian troops having withdrawn in panic had been followed, the defeat could have turned into a rout. Nevertheless, Osman Pasha needed more cavalry and his troops were exhausted (Keçecizade İzzet Fuat, 1997, p. 67; Mehmed Hulusi, 2021, p. 138).

The Russians, who had been advancing quickly since the beginning of the war, had suffered a great defeat in Pleven. The effect of the defeat spread to the entire army. The Russian General Headquarters was in great anxiety. Grand Duke Nichola intended to gather forces and attack again quickly. However, the Tsar did not approve of this. The Russians were threatened from the east by the Danube Eastern Army and from the south by the Balkan Corps. If the Russian forces had rallied against Pleven and had been defeated once again, this could have been the end of the war. In this situation, the Tsar decided to bring reinforcements from Russia.

In addition, the Romanian army would come to Pleven. Prince Carol was going to join the Russian army in Pleven with a force of 38.000 soldiers. Until these forces were gathered, the Russian army in the Balkans would not make any forward operations and would remain on the defensive (Ahmed Saib, 1911, p. 181-182; Rosetti, 1993, p. 109; Şirokorad, 2009, p. 423).

3. Third Battle of Pleven

After the defeat in the Second Battle of Pleven, the Russian headquarters decided to wait until reinforcements arrived. The Russians moved a cavalry brigade west of the Vid River to cut off Pleven's connection with Sofia. Osman Pasha, on the other hand, planned an operation against Pelishat on 31 August. This town was protecting the left side of the Lofça-Sevlievo road. There were three Russian brigades and a large amount of cavalry in the Pelishat. Ottoman force to attack consisted of 19 infantry battalions, two cavalry regiments and three batteries under the command of Osman Pasha. However, the Russians were determined not to lose this position which they deemed essential for their attack on Pleven. They quickly sent reinforcements to Pelishat and tried to encircle the Ottoman forces from the left. Thereupon, Osman Pasha gave the order to withdraw. Ottoman casualties were 300 dead and 1.000 wounded. Russian casualties were more than 1.000 (Albay Talat, 1997, p. 29-32; Herbert, 1911, p. 177-178).

At the beginning of September, the Russians turned their attention back to Pleven. The first step of the Pleven operation would be the capture of Lofça. With the capture of Lofça, a critical supply route to Pleven and a possible withdrawal direction for the Ottomans would be cut off. The Russian force gathered in Sevlievo to attack the town consisting of 26 battalions of infantry, 80 cannons, and large numbers of cavalry. This force was commanded by General Prince Imeretinsky (Greene, 1879, p. 229). The Ottoman force defending Lofça consisted of eight infantry battalions and six cannons under the command of Rifat Pasha. General Imeretinsky began the attack in two arms on the morning of September 3. A very bloody battle took place throughout the day. The Ottoman forces defending the city resisted until the evening, but they had suffered great losses. Rifat Pasha had to withdraw to Pleven with the remaining two battalions. The casualties of the defenders were about 2.500. The loss of the Russians was around 1.600. Osman Pasha, who learned that Lofça was in danger, took action with a force of 22 battalions to help. However, when he approached the town, he saw that he was late and had to turn back (Herbert, 1911, p. 178-181; Von Der Goltz, 1898, p. 18; ATASE, ORH., 24/51).

After Lofça, it was Pleven's turn. For the Russians, the capture of this critical city would unlock the road to victory. On the other hand, Osman Pasha made an intense effort to strengthen the defense. New bastions were built and a very modern and effective defense system was created around Pleven. The Ottoman force in the city had increased to 52 infantry battalions, 25 cavalry squadrons and 80 cannons with the reinforcements. The number of defenders is up to 40.000, including 35 thousand infantry, 3.000 cavalry, and 1.000 artillery (BOA, Y.PRK.ASK., 1/42; Albay Talat, 1997, p. 45). The Russian force was also increasing. The force of the Romanian corps that came to Pleven was 30.000 infantry, 4.500 cavalry and 126 cannons. With their participation, the Russian right-flank group had reached 105.000 soldiers. The Russian force to attack Pleven was organized as four corps. Tzar II. Alexander had given the command of these forces to Romanian Prince Carol. This force was over 90.000, including 74.000 infantry, 10.000 cavalry and 442 cannons. The Russians also brought heavy siege artillery against the Pleven fortifications (Greene, 1879, p. 234). It can be seen, there was a great disproportion between the Ottoman and Russian forces.

Russian right-flank troops began to approach defensive positions as of September 4. The Romanian Corps under the command of General Cernat was positioned in the north of Pleven, the 9th Corps under the

command of General Krüdener was positioned in the east of the city. The 4th Corps, under the command of General Krylof, was located in the Pelishat region to the southeast. The group of General Prince Imeretinsky was positioned south of the city. Caucasian and Don Cossack Cavalry Brigades were positioned on both sides of the Lofça-Pleven road. According to the Russian offensive plan, artillery positions would be prepared by approaching the defense lines first, and artillery would be deployed there. After a few days of artillery bombardment, the attack would begin. The center of mass of the attack would be to the east and southeast of the city. The main attack force would be the 9th and 4th Corps. The Romanian Corps would make secondary attacks from the north, and the General Imeretinsky's group from the south (Keçecizade İzzet Fuat, 1997, p. 101; Maurice, 1905, p. 204-205).

The deployment of the defenders was as follows: There were six bastions under the command of Ferik Adil Pasha in the north of Pleven. These were Süleyman Bey Bastion, Süleyman Pasha Bastion, Araptabya, Hayri Bey Bastion, Bastabya and Kanlitabya. 12 infantry battalions were deployed in these bastions. There were four bastions in the east of the city. These were Karaağaç Bastion, Atif Pasha Bastion, Ömer Bey Bastion and İbrahim Bey Bastion. There were nine battalions in these bastions. The southern front of the city was under the command of Tahir Pasha. There were 12 infantry battalions in the İsa Ağa Bastion, Kovanlık Bastion, Bağlarbaşı Bastion, Milas Bastion, Talat Bey Bastion and Yunus Bey Bastion. There were three infantry battalions in the Vid Köprübaşı Bastion, located on the west of Pleven. Osman Pasha kept nine infantry battalions as a reserve (Süer, 1993, p. 361-363).

The Third Battle of Pleven started with the Russian-Romanian bombardment on the morning of 7 September. While the Russian artillery was heavily firing the fortifications around the city, the attack forces were approaching and positioning for the attack. Despite the lack of artillery and ammunition, the defenders were responding successfully. The bombardment which continued throughout the day did not give the result that the Russians expected, and the Ottoman fortifications were not damaged much. The defenders had worked all night to repair the destroyed fortifications. The Russians were hesitant to attack the next day. The defenders had worked all night to repair the destroyed fortifications. That night a meeting was held at the Russian headquarters. The Russians were hesitant to attack the next day. As a result, it was decided to continue the bombardment for one more day, upon the proposal of General Krüdener (Greene, 1879, p. 238).

On the morning of September 8, the Russian bombardment resumed with more than two hundred artillery. Ottoman artillery could only respond with one shot against ten shots of the Russians. However, these shots were successfully and inflicted severe damage on the Russian batteries. The Russians attacked the forward positions in front of the Ottoman defense lines, forcing them to retreat. They also sent 34 cavalry squadrons to the west of the Vid River to cut off Pleven's connection with Orhanie and Sofia (Barnwell, 1877, s. 525-526; Erkan-ı Harbiye Kolağalarından Reşid, 2016, p. 55). The Russians had not achieved the desired result after two days of bombardment. The defensive fortifications could not be destroyed. After the defeat in the first two battles, they were more cautious. Therefore, they decided to continue the bombardment for two more days (Süer, 1993, p. 380-382).

In spite of the intense Russian bombardment, the Ottoman defense remained intact. This was the result of Osman Pasha's masterful tactics. The Ottomans deployed their cannons in small groups in the spaces between the bastions. For this reason, the fires of the Russians against the Ottoman artillery did not harm the infantry in the bastions. In addition, Ottoman artillery in small groups could easily change positions. During the artillery battle, the Ottoman infantry was waiting behind the bastions and was out of the range of the Russian

artillery. In the bastions, security detachments were left for observation. The fortifications, which were destroyed by artillery fire during the day, were fixed by working during the night, and the next day everything was starting over (Mehmed Hulusi, 2021, p. 182).

The bombardment continued on 10 September. In addition, the Russians attacked the forward line forces in front of the Kovanlık bastion with more than one division. This attack was successful and they captured the Green Hills south of the Kovanlık bastion. Osman Pasha considered this point very important for defense. The Green Hills had to be taken back. He appointed Emin Pasha for this objective. Emin Pasha launched a vigorous counterattack, albeit inefficacious. The Russians were well positioned on the hill and had reinforcements (Albay Talat, 1997, p. 51-52). At the end of four days, the Ottoman casualties were about 500 people. Some fortifications were demolished, and some were straightened by working at night. The Russians had lost 2000 men (Herbert, 1911, p. 192).

The Russian offensive began on morning of the September 11. Three targets were set as the weight center. These would be the Baştabya and Kanlıtabya in the north, the Ömer Bey bastion in the southeast and the Kovanlık bastion in the south. The Romanian forces approached forward at dawn and started an attack on Baştabya and Kanlıtabya at around 11:00 a.m.. The Ottoman force in these bastions consisted of only three battalions of infantry and six cannons. The attacking force was two Romanian divisions. Despite the significant imbalance between the forces, the defenders managed to break the waves of attacks. The casualties of the Romanians were very high. Thereupon, the Russian division from behind joined the attack. The casualties of the Ottomans, who were attacked by forces far superior to them, were also quite high. Adil Pasha reinforced Kanlıtabya with an infantry battalion. Russo-Romanian forces attacked once again in the evening. This time, they did not only attack from the front and maneuvered to besiege Kanlıtabya. At the end of the day, Kanlıtabya remained in the hands of the Russians. The Ottoman forces in Baştabya strove to take Kanlıtabya back by making a bayonet attack at night, but they were unsuccessful. The Russian-Romanian force, which participated in the attack in this region during the day, was about 25.000. By evening, the Russian casualties in this region had increased to 22 officers and 1.305 soldiers. On the other hand, the Romanians lost 56 officers and 2.511 soldiers (Greene, 1879, p. 244-246; Şapolyo, 1959, p. 145; Süer, 1993, p. 386-389).

Another area which Russian attacks concentrated on was the defensive lines southeast of Pleven. The bastions were under intense fire from sunrise. The Russians started an attack on Ömer Bey's bastion with three divisions at around 13:00. The bastion was defended by five and a half battalions of infantry and six guns. The defenders heroically resisted the Russian attack. However, with the reinforcements coming from behind, the Russians managed to enter the first line trenches. Tahir Pasha saw that the situation had become critical and started a counterattack with two infantry battalions in reserve. The Russians could not hold on to this sudden attack and had to withdraw. However, a new attack started with the Russian reinforcements coming from behind and the Russians were able to enter some positions of Ömer Bey bastion. Osman Pasha realized the danger and immediately reinforced the bastion with two battalions. Then the Ottoman forces counterattacked. The Russians, who could not hold on against this attack, retreated in a miserable condition. The Ottoman soldiers defending the Ömer Bey bastion and the surrounding trenches had defeated a force that was about six times their size. At the end of the battle, the Russian casualties in this region were 110 officers and 5.200 soldiers (Albay Talat, 1997, p. 58-59; Maurice, 1905, p. 222-224).

On September 11, there was a tough battle in the Kovanlık bastion area. The Russians had captured the Green Hills to the south of the bastion the day before. The force gathered by General Imeretinsiky for the

attack in this region was 22 infantry battalions, 25 cavalry squadrons and 94 cannons. There were only nine infantry battalions and seven guns on the defensive lines. Behind them, 11 infantry battalions and three cannons were assigned to counterattack under the command of Emin Pasha. The Russian attack started around 10:00. The main target of the attack was the Kovanlık bastion. Besides, another group attacked Yunus Bey bastion. Due to the dense fog, the neighboring bastions could not see the enemy and could not reinforce Kovanlık with artillery fire. The attack with a large force was successful and the Russians were able to enter the Kovanlık bastion. However, the defenders threw the Russians back from the bastion with a sudden counterattack (Ryan and John Sandes, 1897, p. 234-235; Süer, 1993, p. 394-397).

The Russians did not give up the attack on the Kovanlık bastion. General Skoblev brought reinforcements into battle and attacked once more. The defenders could not hold on against the superior Russian forces. The situation was critical. Osman Pasha dispatched four battalions from the reserve under the command of Rifat Pasha. As response of, the Russians were once again thrown back from Kovanlık. The defenders suffered many casualties. The Russians, however, did not give up. They brought reinforcements from behind and started the general attack at 15:00. As a matter of fact, they captured Kovanlık and İsa Bey bastions in the evening. Yunus Bey bastion remained in the administration of the Ottomans. This bastion was very important for the safety of Kovanlık. It was dark. The Russian soldiers in the bastions anxiously awaited an Ottoman counterattack throughout the night. Osman Pasha, on the other hand, was planning the counterattack the next day (İbrahim Edhem, 1979, p. 53-54; Süer, 1993, p. 397-400).

The night of September 11 was very worrying for both sides. Despite their enormous losses, the Russians were unable to capture the city. Capturing the Kovanlık and İsa Bey bastions was a success for Russians. However, they were not sure that they could hold these bastions. They had suffered many casualties and the Russian soldiers were exhausted. The Ottomans were also concerned. Especially the loss of Kanlıtabya and Kovanlık bastions worried Osman Pasha. He was planning to take back these two bastions with counterattacks on the morning of September 12. He assigned five infantry battalions under the command of Sadik Pasha to take Kanlıtabya back. Sadik Pasha began to advance towards Kanlıtabya at dawn and engaged in battle with the Russian force of 12 battalions. But he was unsuccessful and had to withdraw. The enemy could not be driven out of Kanlıtabya. However, Baştabya was in the hands of the defenders. Baştabya controlled Kanlıtabya due to its position. As long as this bastion was held, the defense of the city could continue (Süer, 1993, p. 404).

The loss of Kovanlık and İsa Bey bastions was also a great danger for the Ottomans. The Russians had gathered a force of five regiments here. General Skoblev did not consider these force sufficient and demanded reinforcements. But the Russians had no troops left. The Ottoman force to counterattack was only 8 infantry battalions under the command of Tahir Pasha. Also, the batteries were running out of ammunition. The Ottoman attack began at 06:30. However, it was not successful against the Russian force of five regiments. For Osman Pasha, Kovanlık should be taken back at any cost for the defense of the city. Thereupon, he took several battalions from other regions for a new attack and sent them to Kovanlık under the command of Colonel Tevfik Bey. Tevfik Bey's attack began at 09:00. This attack, supported by fire from neighboring bastions, was successful. The Russians were thrown back from Kovanlık and İsa Bey. Thus, a great danger was averted (Albay Talat, 1997, p. 64-67; Fumaux, 1972, p. 169-173; Herbert, 1911, p. 212-221). By the evening, the Russians were not able to attack.

The Third Battle of Pleven ended on the evening of 12 September. The losses of the Russian-Romanian forces at the end of the battle amounted to 865 officers and 18.216 soldiers (Erkan-ı Harbiye Kolağalarından Reşid, 2016, p. 57; Greene, 1879, p. 256). Ottoman casualties were between 4.000 and 6.000. The Russians had suffered a great defeat. The Russian generals, who could not learn the necessary lessons from the Second Battle of Pleven, paid a heavy price. The Russian offensive plan was based on the coordinated attack of three groups from the north, southeast and south. The northern group had achieved some success by taking Kanlıtabya. However, the attacking group from the southeast failed to succeed. In this way, Osman Pasha was able to reinforce the southern region by drawing forces from other fronts (Stanley, 1878, p. 190). Under the superior command of Osman Pasha, the Ottoman soldiers fought heroically and managed to defeat the enemy who was far superior to them.

The Battle of Pleven received great attention in the European press. Especially after the Ottoman victory, a lot of news and articles about the war took place in the newspapers. Newspapers blamed the Russian generals for the defeat (Furneaux, 1972, p. 180-181). The news about Pleven and Osman Pasha continued for a long time and some legends sprang up. For example, in the news of the New York newspaper dated October 4, 1877, “*Who is Osman Pasha?*” question was analyzed. In response, it was said that he was actually the famous French General Achille Francois Bazaine, or that he might have been an American or Prussian soldier. In another American newspaper, it was claimed that Osman Pasha was the American Colonel R. Clay Crawford (Jessup, 2000, p. 89-90; Keçecizade İzzet Fuat, 1997, p. 139).

The Pleven victory was greeted with great joy in Istanbul. The Russians were once again stopped in front of Pleven and were devastated. On September 21, the government decided to give Osman Pasha the rank of “*Gazi*” with a medal, a sword and two horses (BOA., Y..EE., 1294 N. 19, 84/102).

4. The Siege of Pleven

The Tsar and his generals were in great despair after the defeat (BOA., Y..PRK..HR., 1294 N. 10, 1/72). The Russian army needed a new plan. For this, a war council was convened under the chairmanship of the Tsar. Two plans were discussed at this meeting. The former was to leave a sufficient force in front of Pleven and march on Edirne with the rest of the army. The latter was to give up the offensive movement and seize Pleven by siege. The tsar did not approve of the first course of action. It was very dangerous to go to the south of the Balkans without taking Pleven. Consequently, it was decided to put the city under siege, cut off its contact with the outside and condemn it to starvation. For this, reinforcements had to come from Russia. To isolate the city until reinforcements arrived, the Cavalry Corps (52 cavalry squadrons and 30 cannons) under the command of General Kriloff would cross to the west of the Vid River and take control of the Pleven-Sofia road. General Todleben would lead the siege of Pleven. Todleben gained fame by building the Sevastopol fortifications during the Crimean War and was considered the best engineer officer of the time. The general's plan was to build a line of siege by making strong fortifications and gradually narrowing this siege. In order to complete the siege, the Guard and Grenadier corps would be brought from Russia (Menning, 1992, p. 71).

The Third Battle of Pleven was also very difficult for the Ottomans. Reinforcements had to be brought in immediately. There was also a shortage of ammunition and supplies. Osman Pasha, in the report he wrote to Istanbul right after the battle, asked for immediate reinforcement. Thereupon, 17 infantry battalions, six cavalry squadrons, two batteries and 500 carloads of provisions and ammunition under the command of Ahmet Hıfzı Pasha departed from Orhaniye on 17 September. This force engaged in battle with the Russian cavalry first in Telish and then in Gorni Dibunik. Ahmet Hıfzı Pasha forced the Russians to withdraw and reached

Pleven on September 24. This reinforcement gave some relief to the defenders. But there was a shortage of animal feed. For this purpose, Osman Pasha prepared a force consisting of two infantry brigades, four cavalry squadrons, two batteries and 300 cars and assigned them to collect animal feed in the surrounding villages. Although this force entered into battle with the Russian cavalry around Mitropoliya, it was able to bring food to the city. Despite this, Osman Pasha was having great difficulties in logistics. A second support group set out from Orhanie on 5th October to reinforce Pleven. The group under the command of Şevket Pasha consisted of 15 infantry battalions, two cavalry regiments, two batteries and 500 cars. This force reached the city on 8th October. With the last reinforcements, the force in Pleven had increased to 76 infantry battalions and 20 cavalry squadrons. In order to feed this force, the supply route had to be kept open. For this purpose, Osman Pasha deployed a force of 16 battalions in the Gomi Dıbnik, Dolni Dıbnik and Telish regions (Albay Talat, 1997, p. 72-82). However, with such a force, it would not be possible to keep the Orhanie-Plevne road, which is more than 90 kilometers, open.

While the Ottomans were trying to keep the Sofia-Plevna road open, the Russian army around Pleven was constantly getting reinforcements. By mid-October, the Guard and Grenadier corps of 70.000 had reached the operating area. The Russian command reinforced the cavalry corps west of the Vid River with infantry units and placed it under the command of General Gurko. Gurko's force consisted of 44 infantry battalions, 86 cavalry squadrons and 150 cannons. Gurko's plan was to capture Gomi Dıbnik, Dolni Dıbnik and Telish in a simultaneous operation. There was an Ottoman force of 16 battalions under the command of Ahmet Hıfzı Pasha in Gomi Dıbnik, Dolni Dıbnik and Telish. The Russians took action from three directions on October 24. General Gurko attacked Dolni Dıbnik with the bulk of his force, while the other two branches attacked Gomi Dıbnik and Telish. The battle in Dolni Dıbnik was very bloody. The offensive waves of the Russians continued throughout the day. Ahmet Hıfzı Pasha resisted until the evening. However, he had suffered many casualties and his ammunition was on the verge of running out. Finally he had to surrender. Along with Ahmet Hıfzı Pasha, 53 officers and 2.235 soldiers were captured. The casualties were over 1.500. The loss of the Russians was 116 officers and 3.195 soldiers (Greene, 1879, p. 271-277). Colonel Veli Bey, who was in Gomi Dıbnik, learned that Dolni Dıbnik had fallen and reported the situation to Osman Pasha. Thereupon, Osman Pasha ordered Veli Bey to withdraw to Pleven. Dolni Dıbnik, therefore, fell into the hands of the Russians.

The Russians also attacked Telish on October 24. The town was defended by 5 infantry battalions under the command of Hakkı Pasha. The Telish attack was not easy for the Russians. They were worried about Ottoman reinforcements from Orhaniye, because there were 16 infantry battalions in Radomirski and Orhanie. As the battle continued, two infantry battalions, two cavalry companies and two cannons under the command of Colonel Ömer Nazif Bey reached Telish. Thereupon, the Russians had to stop the attack. Russian casualties were over 1.000. Şevket Pasha came to Radomirski from Orhanie with seven infantry battalions the next day (Süer, 1993, p. 471-475).

Thereupon, General Gurko planned a simultaneous attack on Telish and Radomirski. On October 28, the Russians besieged Telish with 16 infantry battalions and 66 guns and began shelling the town. Hakkı Pasha had only four cannons. He panicked and agreed to surrender. About 10 officers, 3000 soldiers, four cannons and a large amount of ammunition fell into the hands of the Russians (Sedes, 1955, p. 246-247; Albay Talat, 1997, p. 135; ATASE, ORH., 29/8). On the same day, another Russian force attacked Radomirski. There were seven infantry battalions under the command of Şevket Pasha. Şevket Pasha managed to stop the Russian offensive. However, he did not dare to advance towards Telish with his forces. When he came to know that

Telish had fallen, he retreated to the Karadağ strait 3-4 hours behind Radomirtsi. With the Orhanie-Pleven road being cut off, the siege circle was completely closed. The countdown for Pleven had begun (Schem, 1878, p. 324).

In fact, Osman Pasha saw that he would be under siege and requested permission to withdraw from Pleven as of the beginning of October (Süer, 1993, p. 454; BOA. Y. EE., 1294 L. 21, 76/26). Osman Pasha was planning to withdraw to Orhanie to meet the forces there and to prevent the Russians from descending to the south of the Balkans. However, he did not receive an answer from Istanbul.

The situation in Pleven was getting more and more critical. Osman Pasha once again asked permission to withdraw on 11 October. On the condition that the permission wouldn't be given, he demanded that the Orhanie-Pleven supply line be kept open. Unfortunately, Istanbul did not allow Osman Pasha to withdraw and failed to keep the Orhanie-Pleven road open (Ahmed Midhat Efendi, 1997, p. 276; Mahmud Celaleddin Paşa, 1983, p. 470-471). The war council gave permission to withdraw from Pleven at the end of October, but it was too late (BOA, Y.EE, 76/26). On October 28, the siege circle around Pleven was closed. The Russians believed that Osman Pasha would be helpless and intimidated. Grand Duke Nichola sent a letter to Osman Pasha on 12th November asking him to surrender, but Osman Pasha rejected this offer (Albay Talat, 1997, p. 92; Herbert, 1911, p. 269).

At the beginning of November, the Ottoman force in Pleven was approximately 40.000, consisting of 72 infantry battalions, 21 cavalry squadrons and 88 cannons. The Russian-Romanian force surrounding the city consisted of 170 infantry battalions, 152 cavalry squadrons and 571 cannons (Herbert, 1911, p. 266). General Todleben had organized the siege forces into six groups;

- The Romanian Corps under the command of General Cernat is in the north of the city,
- The 9th Corps under the command of General Krüdener is in the east of the city,
- The 4th Corps under the command of General Zotov is in the southeast of the city,
- Corps under the command of General Skoblev, south of the city
- The Granadier Corps under the command of General Ganetski, in the west of the city,
- The Guard corps and cavalry forces under the command of General Gurko were stationed on the Pleven-Orhanie road (Maurice, 1905, p. 265).

The Russians made great efforts to wear down the defenders. They were trying to narrow the siege circle by taking their positions further around the city. For this purpose, they were suppressing the Ottoman positions with artillery fire almost every day. They were occupied in seizing new positions by attacking different points. General Skoblev attacked and captured the Green Hills with a force of five battalions on 24th October. Skoblev tried his luck again on 14th November and launched an attack on Yunus Bey's bastion. However, he had to withdraw with 400 casualties. Such attacks disturbed the defenders. Nevertheless, the real danger for the Ottomans was the approach of winter and the shortage of supplies. There were not enough tents. The existing tents could not be set up because they were the target of Russian artillery. The only solution was to build shelters behind the trenches. Yet, there was not adequate wood. The cold was getting worse. Besides building shelters, it was very difficult to even find wood for cooking and heating. Most of the soldiers did not have winter clothes. Due to the rains and severe cold, frostbite had emerged (Albay Talat, 1997, p. 96-97).

Nutrition also became a major problem for the defenders. With the decline of wheat flour, soldiers could be given with 440 grams of bread made from half wheat and half corn flour, and a very small amount of meat. As of November 22, wheat flour was exhausted, and the food ration had decreased to 300 grams of corn flour and one corn cob. It was also not possible to grind the existing corn. The Russians had rendered the mills in Pleven unusable. The soldiers who were not fed enough were weak and sick. At the beginning of December, the number of sick and injured had reached 10.000. On the other hand, much needed medicine and sanitary supplies for the sick and wounded were exhausted. Even the bandage was exhausted (Albay Talat, 1997, p. 97-98; Herbert, 1911, p. 277; Ryan and John Sandes, 1897, p. 273-274). The Ottoman army in Pleven was getting exhausted day by day.

5. Fall of the Pleven

Despite all the troubles, the defenders of Pleven did not lose their hope until the last days of the siege. They believed that sooner or later reinforcements would come. But they never came. By the end of November, hope was gone. Due to hunger and disease, the forces in the city were being depleted day by day. Nearly 4.000 soldiers had died in the last six weeks, mostly of disease (Herbert, 1911, p. 288).

Osman Pasha at this term knew that he had to make a decision. On December 1, he gathered the division and brigade commanders in his headquarters. Two courses of action were discussed at this meeting. In the first course of action, they would fight until the supplies ran out and then surrender. Or they would break the siege with a breakthrough operation and try to withdraw. As a result, Osman Pasha decided on the second course of action. The breakthrough operation was to be carried out in the direction of the Vid River in the west.

The Russian-Romanian force around the city was 160.000, including 191 infantry battalions, 120 cavalry squadrons and 650 cannons. Osman Pasha's force was about 40.000 people, of which 30.000 were combatants. Some battalions, whose numbers were greatly reduced, were abolished and 62 infantry battalions were formed from this force. Osman Pasha organized his forces into two divisions for the operation. The 1st Division would consist of 34 battalions under the command of Mirliva Tahir Pasha. The 2nd Division, which would consist of 28 battalions, would be under the command of Ferik Adil Pasha. Several bridges were built over the Vid River for the operation. All ammunition, provisions and pack animals were equally distributed among the battalions (Albay Talat, 1997, p. 105-106; Greene, 1879, p. 290).

There were around 1.500 seriously wounded and sick soldiers in the Pleven army. It was not possible for them to participate in the attack. Osman Pasha decided to leave these sick and wounded soldiers in the city. For their needs, several medical officers, an imam and a nurse were assigned. There were also enough provisions left for a month. Despite this, Osman Pasha was worried. He was concerned that the Bulgarians would mistreat the sick and wounded soldiers until the Russians took control of the city. Osman Pasha gathered ten people from the priests and Bulgarian notables and asked them not to torture the wounded and sick soldiers to be left in Pleven. The Bulgarians also promised that they would not do anything wrong. However, with the failure of the breakthrough operation, this promise would be forgotten and all the sick and wounded in the hospitals would be killed (Herbert, 1911, p. 294).

Another issue that worried Osman Pasha was the civilian population in Pleven. There were approximately 200 Muslim Turkish households in the city. Osman Pasa knew that if the civilians participated in the attack, the civilians would both suffer a lot and slow down the operation. Therefore, he intended to leave the civilians in Pleven. However, the civilian population realized that the army would be withdrawn and did not

agree to stay in the city. Women and children gathered in front of Osman Pasha's headquarters and almost begged. Osman Pasha changed his mind due to the insistence of the people. Civilians would leave the city behind the army. However, this was the wrong decision. With the participation of civilians in the operation, there would be a great turmoil and it would interrupt the operation (Ahmed Saib, 1911, p. 289).

Ottoman forces in Pleven began to gather on the banks of the Vid River after dark on December 9th. Subsequently, the 1st Division crossed the river using the three bridges built earlier. The Russians noticed that Ottomans would start operation in the morning and started artillery fire. Osman Pasha personally took the command of the 1st Division. The Ottomans began to attack the siege bastions held by the forces under the command of General Ganetski. Despite heavy fire from the Russian positions, the Ottomans continued the attack and were able to enter the first line positions. Osman Pasha attacked the second line positions without wasting any time. The Ottomans also captured some of the second line positions of the Russians. However, the Russians were alarmed on the entire front and began sending reinforcements to the offensive zone. The Russian-Romanian force gathered against Osman Pasha was increasing every minute. The Ottoman forces, on the other hand, were weakened by casualties. The Ottoman troops could not hold on under the intense fire of the Russians and had to withdraw to the first line positions. However, they were unable to hold on and had to retreat. At this moment, the 2nd Division behind should have caught up and entered the battle. However, this division could not leave Pleven due to the Russian attack. At this very moment, Osman Pasha, who was on the front line to encourage the soldiers, was wounded in the foot. In addition, most of the brigade, regiment and battalion commanders were wounded or killed (İbrahim Edhem, 1979, p. 73; Süer, 1993, p. 483-484).

Events were not going well for the 2nd Division either. The Russian-Romanian army noticed the breakthrough operation and attacked the defense lines in Pleven. The rearguard forces of the 2nd Division tried to stop these attacks, but the Russians managed to seize some bastions. While the 2nd Division units were advancing to the Vid bridges, they were attacked by the Russians from behind and from the side. Only a part of the division managed to cross the bridge. Remaining troops who could not cross the river were trapped between the superior Russian forces (Süer, 1993, p. 485). The breakthrough operation failed and Osman Pasha was wounded. It was no longer possible to return to Pleven, because very important bastions were lost. At the request of the division and brigade commanders, Osman Pasha decided to surrender. White flags were hoisted and representatives were sent to negotiate terms of surrender. Meanwhile, the Russians did not hesitate to continue firing on the soldiers and civilians for half an hour, by ignoring the white flags. Hence, the defense of Pleven, which had been going on for 145 days and made a sound all over the world, came to an end (Albay Talat, 1997, p. 118; Hülügü, 1993, p. 233).

According to the report given by General Todleben after the battle, the Russians realized that Osman Pasha was preparing for an operation. The Bulgarians fleeing from Pleven had informed the Russians. In particular, reports from frontline troops on December 9 confirmed this information. In this case, Todleben took action to take the necessary measures. As a matter of fact, the breakthrough operation had turned into a pitched battle. The Ottoman soldiers had fought for five hours against the Russian-Romanian forces, which were far superior to them. However, it was not possible to break the siege. At the end of the battle, the Russian-Romanian casualties amounted to 60 officers and 1.299 soldiers. Ottoman casualties amounted to 6.000. Ten generals, including Osman Pasha, more than 2.000 officers and 40.000 soldiers were captured, and 77 cannons fell into the hands of the Russians (Greene, 1879, p. 311).

After being captured, Osman Pasha was personally visited by Grand Duke Nichola and Romanian Prince Carol and congratulated for his heroic defense. The next day, Tsar II. Alexander had dinner with Osman Pasha in Pleven. The Tsar made many compliments to Osman Pasha and returned his sword which had been taken when he surrendered (Mufassal Osmanlı Tarihi, 1972, p. 3316; Stanley, 1878, p. 239-241). Osman Pasha was highly respected during the time he was a prisoner in Russia and he returned to Istanbul on March 25, 1878.

Unfortunately, the care shown to Osman Pasha was not shown to the captured Ottoman soldiers and civilians. Nearly 4.000 Ottomans died in 14 days due to the ill-treatment of the Russians, cold and hunger. Most of the prisoners were transferred to Russia a week after Pleven fell. 5.000 Ottoman soldiers died on the 200-kilometer road between Pleven and Bucharest. Only 15.000 of the 40.000 people captured in Pleven were able to reach Russia. Only 12.000 of them were able to return to their homeland after the war (Furneaux, 1972, p. 277-278; İbrahim Edhem, 1979, p. 76-78; BOA, HR. SYS., 1/4). During the war, 40.5% of the Turkish prisoners in Russia died (Karakulak, 2018, p. 248; Ürkmez, 2020, p. 817).

6. Conclusion

The 1877-1878 War was a great destruction for the Ottoman Empire. Major mistakes made in the strategic command of the war brought the defeat. On the Balkan Front, the Russian army advanced rapidly and reached the Balkan passes and the road to Istanbul was opened for the Russians. The arrival of Osman Pasha forces, who were in Vidin at the beginning of the war, to Pleven and their deployment here changed the course of the war. The heroic defense of Pleven's defenders stopped the Russian army for five months and created an important opportunity for the Ottoman army to seize the initiative. But this opportunity was missed. A month and a half after the fall of Pleven, the Russian army arrived in front of Istanbul.

In the First Battle of Pleven, the Russians attacked without making the necessary reconnaissance and with insufficient forces. Russian commanders, who had won easy victories since the beginning of the war, thought that they would easily capture Pleven. Osman Pasha advanced at great speed and reached Pleven before the Russians, immediately deployed for defense and stopped the Russian attack.

In the Second Battle of Pleven, the Russians achieved numerical superiority. However, this numerical superiority was not sufficient for frontal attacks on fortified positions. Osman Pasha correctly predicted the direction of the Russians' attack with an accurate assessment and took the defensive order accordingly. The defenders worked relentlessly, by improving the fortifications and establishing a modern defense system. Russian attack groups could not attack in a coordinated way, Osman Pasha was able to take advantage of this and shift his forces to different regions.

In the Third Battle of Pleven, the Russian army had a great numerical superiority. Before the attack, the Russians tried to break up the Ottoman defense with artillery shelling that lasted for four days. However, the Ottoman defense system minimized the effect of the Russian bombardment and the Ottoman loss was minimal. The Russians had lost a lot by making frontal attacks on the fortified positions with classical tactics. Russian offensive groups could not act in coordination. Osman Pasha took advantage of this skillfully and stopped the Russian attacks by using the reserves at the right time and point. Osman Pasha, with his leadership in the most critical moments of the battle, raised the morale of his soldiers and increased their determination.

Osman Pasha had an important role in the success of the defense of Pleven. When organizing the defense, Osman Pasha preferred a well-organized fortification and an active defense based on rapid counter-attacks instead of the usual methods. The defence power of Ottoman soldiers was world famous. Osman Pasha

proved that the Ottoman troops could also be successful in the offensive with his active defense based on counter-attacks. He gave great morale and courage to his soldiers by being on the front lines when necessary. Ottoman soldiers proved to the whole world how well they could fight under the command of a competent and determined commander.

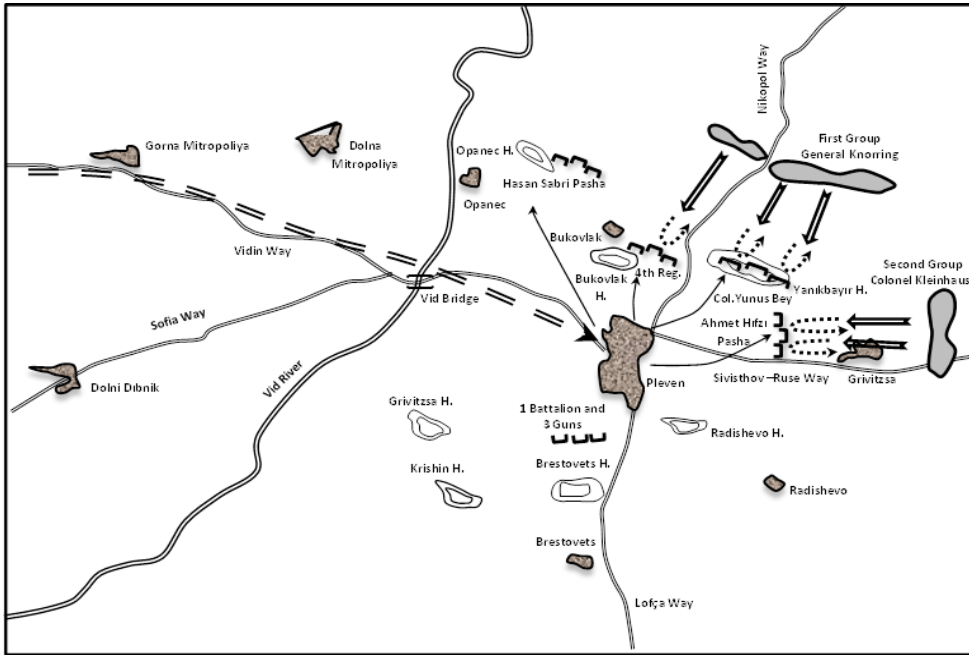
References

- [1] Ahmed Midhat Efendi (2015), Zübdetü'l Hakayık, 93 Harbi'nin Arka Planı, (Ed. Ö.F. Can), Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, Ankara.
- [2] Ahmet Cemal (Cemal Paşa) (2020), Plevne Müdafaası, (Ed. S. Özdemir), Ötüken, İstanbul.
- [3] Ahmed Saib (1911), Son Osmanlı-Rus Muharebesi, Hindiye Matbaası, Kahire.
- [4] Albay Talat (1997), Plevne Savunması, Genelkurmay Basımevi, Ankara.
- [5] Ali Fuad (1326), Osmanlı Rus Seferi, C.2, Matbaa-i Osmaniye, İstanbul.
- [6] Archive of the Directorate of Military History and Strategic Studies of the Turkish General Staff (ATASE), Ottoman-Russian War (1877-1878) Collection (ORH); ATASE, ORH.,3/135; ATASE, ORH.,8/79; ATASE, ORH.,10/11; ATASE, ORH.,8/101; ATASE, ORH.,10/41; ATASE, ORH., 24/51; ATASE, ORH., 29/8.
- [7] Grant, Barnwell R. (1877), The Russo-Turkish War, John E. Potter And Company, Philadelphia.
- [8] Erkan-ı Harbiye Kolağalarından Reşid (2016), 1293 Osmanlı-Rus Sefer-i Ahiri, (Ed. H. Kazancıoğlu), Kayhan Yayınları, İstanbul.
- [9] Epanchin, Nikolay (1900), Operations of General Gurko's Advance Guard in 1877, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner Co., London.
- [10] Fumeaux, Rupert (1972), Tuna Nehri Akmam Diyor, Milliyet Yayınları, İstanbul.
- [11] Gencer, Ali İhsan and İpek, Nedim (1993), 1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus Harbi Rumeli Cephesi Vesikaları (Temmuz 1877), Belgeler, 25/19. (205-244)
- [12] Greene, Francis Vinton (1879), Russian Army and its Campaigns in Turkey in 1877-1878, D. Appleton And Company, New York.
- [13] Herbert, William von (1911), The Defence of Plevna 1877, Smith, Elder&Co, London.
- [14] Hozier, Henry Montague (1878), The Russo-Turkish War, William Mackenzie, London.
- [15] Hülügü, Metin (1993), Gazi Osman Paşa, İstanbul.
- [16] İbrahim Edhem (1979), Plevne Hatıraları, İstanbul.
- [17] Jessup, John E. (2000), "Contemporary Western Perceptions of the Events Surrounding the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-1878", I. Uluslararası Plevne Kahramanı Gazi Osman Paşa ve Dönemi (1833-1900) Sempozyumu. (80-96)
- [18] Karakulak, Mesut (2018), "93 Harbi'nde Esir Olmak: Rusya'daki Osmanlı Savaş Esirleri ve Gündelik Hayatları", 1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus Savaşı (93 Harbi) -Vatan Neresi? - Uluslararası Sempozyumu. (230-257)
- [19] Keçecizade İzzet Fuat (1997), Kaçırılan Fırsatlar, 1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus Savaşı Hakkında Eleştiriler ve Askerî Düşünceler, Genelkurmay Basımevi, Ankara.
- [20] Mahmud Celaleddin Paşa (1983), Mir'at-ı Hakikat, Berekat Yayınevi, İstanbul.
- [21] Maurice, Frederick (1905), The Russo-Turkish War 1877, Swan Sonnenschein, & Co., London.
- [22] Mehmed Hulusi (2021), Niçin Mağlub Olduk: 1877-78 Osmanlı-Rus Seferi: Avrupa Cephesindeki Harekât, (Ed. H. Habib, A. Eymir), Kayhan Yayınları, İstanbul.
- [23] Menning, Bruce W. (1992), Bayonets Bofore Bullets, The Imperial Russian Army 1861-1914, Indiana University Press, Indianapolis.
- [24] Öztürk, Mustafa (2002), "1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus Harbi Belgeleri: Abdi Paşa'nın Muhakemesi", Belgeler, S. 23/27. (117-139)

- [25] Rosetti, R. (1930), "Roumania's Share in the War of 1877", The Slavonic and East European Review, S. 8/24. (548-577)
- [26] S. Ryan, Charles and Sandes, John (1897), Under The Red Crescent, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York.
- [27] Schem, Alexander Jacob (1878), War In The East: An Illustrated History of the Conflict Between Russia, H.S. Goodspeed & Co., New York.
- [28] Sedes, Halil (1955), 1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus ve Romen Savaşı, C. XII, Askeri Basımevi, İstanbul.
- [29] Stanley, Francis (1878), St. Petersburg to Plevna, Richard Bentley and Son, London.
- [30] Süer, H. Hikmet (1993), 1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus Harbi Rumeli Cephesi, Genelkurmay Basımevi, Ankara.
- [31] Şapolyo, Enver Behnan (1959), Gazi Osman Paşa ve Plevne Muharebesi, Türkiye Yayınevi, İstanbul.
- [32] Şirokorad, A.B. (2009), Rusların Gözünden Osmanlı-Rus Savaşları, Selenge Yayınları, İstanbul.
- [33] Tacan, Necati (1937), "1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus Seferinde Türk Sevk ve İdaresinde Sevkulceyi Hatalar: Başkomutanlık", Askeri Mecmua, 8/107. (755-760)
- [34] Taşdemir, Ahmet (2020), "Osmanlı Ordusunda Stratejik Yönetim Zaafiyeti Örneği: 93 Harbi'nde Balkan Savunmasının Çöküşü", Harp Tarihi Dergisi, S.1. (1-40)
- [35] Turkish Republic Presidency Ottoman Archives (BOA); BOA, Y.EE., 1294 N. 19, 84/102; BOA, Y.EE., 76/26; BOA, Y.EE., 1294 L. 21, 76/26.; BOA, Y.PRK.HR., 1/60; BOA, Y.PRK..HR., 1294 N. 10, 1/72; BOA, Y.PRK..ASK., 1/42; BOA, HR. SYS., 1/4.
- [36] Uyar, Mesut and Erickson, Edward J. (2014), Osmanlı Askeri Tarihi, Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, İstanbul.
- [37] Ürkmez, Naim (2020), "Savaşın Öteki Yüzü: Romanya'daki 93 Harbi Esirleri", Belleten, S. 84/300. (789-824)
- [38] Von Der Goltz Paşa (1898), Plevne: Tarih-i Harpten Asakir-i Redife Kısımına Dair Tedkikat, Mahmud Bey Matbaası, İstanbul.

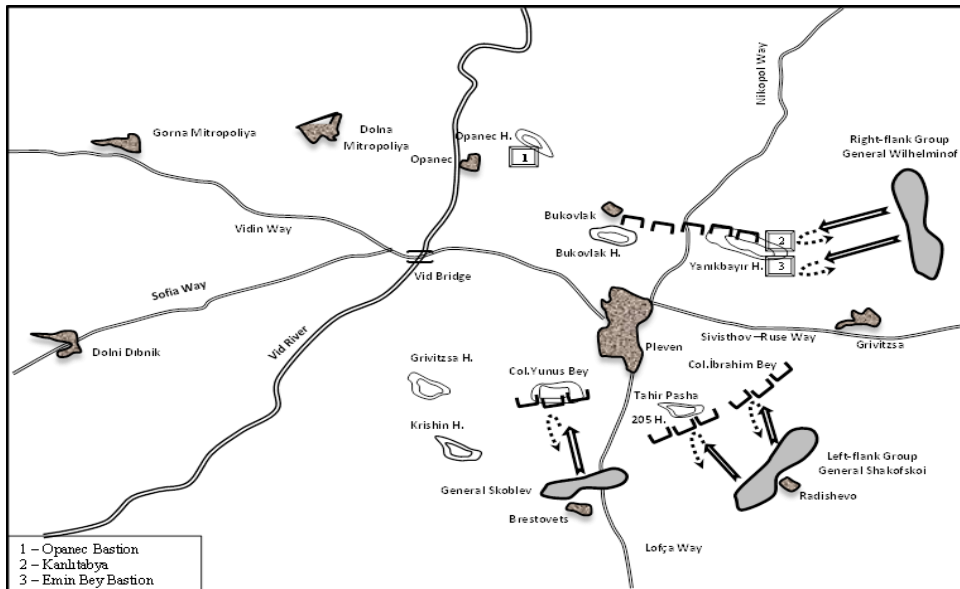
APPENDICES

Appendix -1: First Battle of Pleven (20 July 1877)



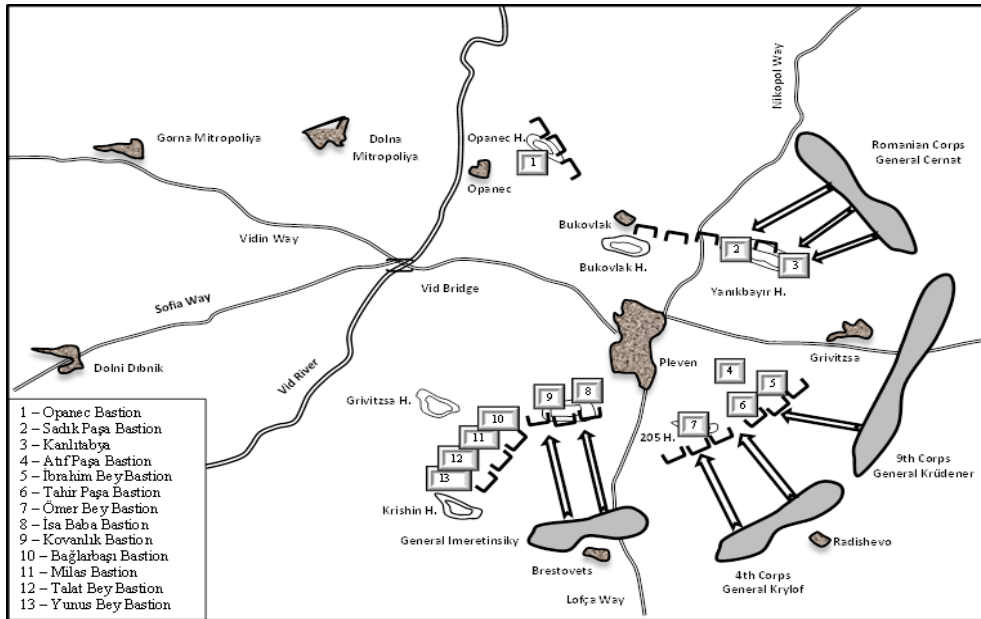
Reference: Süer, H.Hikmet (1993), 1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus Harbi Rumeli Cephesi, Sketch 14.

Appendix -2: Second Battle of Pleven (30 July 1877)



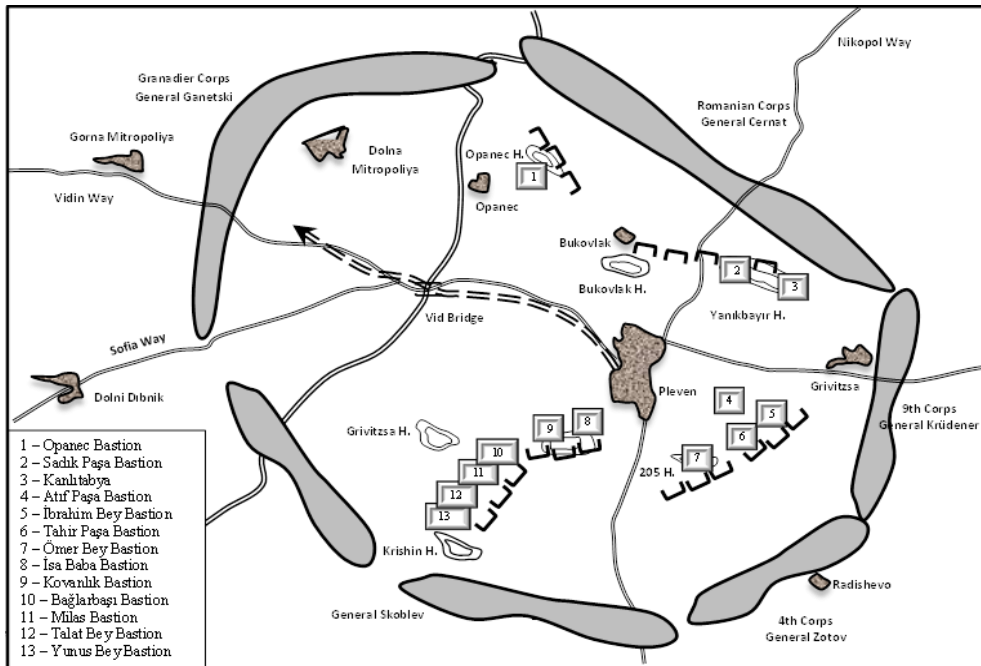
Reference: Süer, H.Hikmet (1993), 1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus Harbi Rumeli Cephesi, Sketch 18.

Appendix -3: Third Battle of Plevna (11-12 September 1877)



Reference: Süer, H.Hikmet (1993), 1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus Harbi Rumeli Cephesi, Sketch 27.

Appendix -4: Breakthrough Operation (09-10 December 1877)



Reference: Süer, H.Hikmet (1993), 1877-1878 Osmanlı-Rus Harbi Rumeli Cephesi, Sketch 33.