

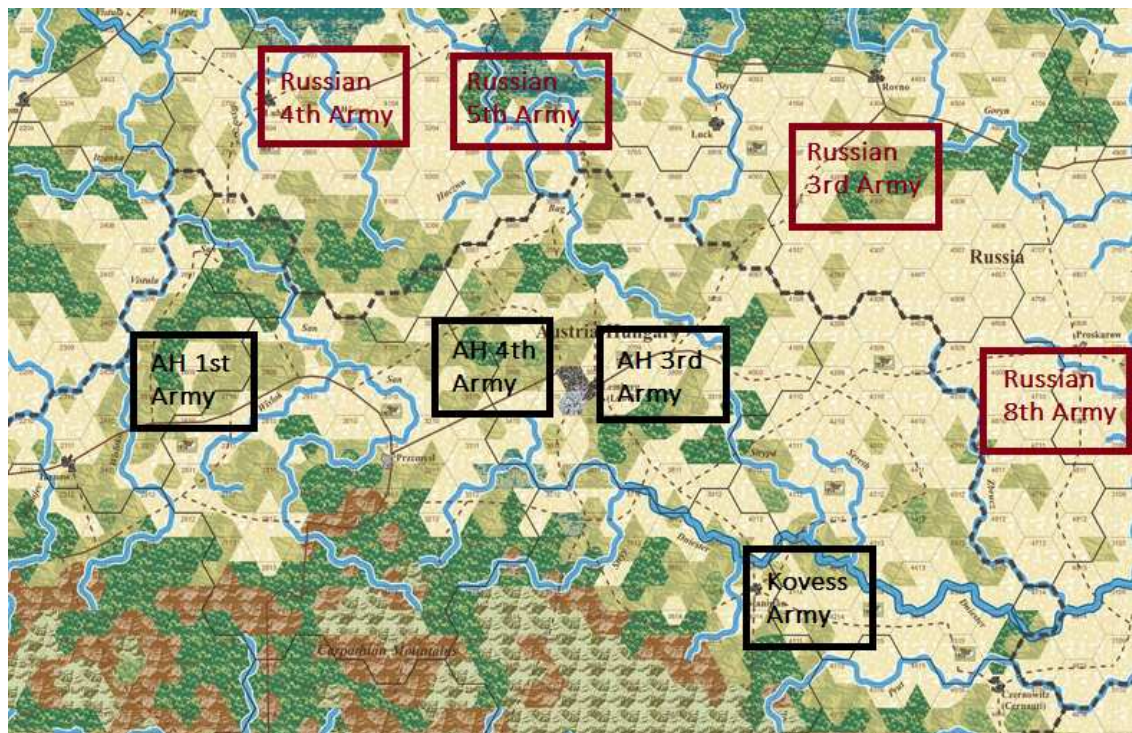
## Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary

**GT4: 15 – 18 August 1914 (August 4)**

### **General Situation**

The French had promised the Russians that they would launch an offensive within 14 days of mobilisation commencing. They did not intend to fail to meet that promise as four Armies were readied to unleash a truly titanic attack re-crossing the frontiers the Germans had already violated.

The mobilisation of the Russians was not so rapid, but not as slow as many had expected. Cossacks menaced the borders of Austria. The Austrian Chief of Staff, Conrad, had permitted Potiorek to commence action against Serbia, but now he was impatient to complete mobilisation against Russia. The Austrians wanted to take the initiative before the Russians could get their Army moving forward against the vulnerable provinces of Galicia and Bukovina. East Prussia already faced invasion.



**Figure 1: Mobilisation Zones of the South West Front and in Galicia.**

### **The Eastern Front**

On 17 August, the population of Prussia learned that the Russian 1<sup>st</sup> Army had crossed their borders and were advancing on a broad front south of the Nieman and towards the Rivers Pregel and Angerapp. It was soon reported that Russian cavalry had crossed the Tilsit-Memel railway. Russian news agencies were, however, denouncing German movements across their own border north and west of Warsaw which had occurred a few days previously.

The German 8<sup>th</sup> Army was all too conscious that the threat by the Russian 1<sup>st</sup> Army was matched by another from the Russian 2<sup>nd</sup> Army. German aviators reported that this was marching north from Warsaw.

In the extreme south west of Poland, the Czech 95<sup>th</sup> Landwehr Division occupied Czestochowa without encountering any opposition on 16 August.



Figure 2: The Russian 1st Army invades East Prussia, 17 - 18 August 1914.

## Serbia

The Austrian 5<sup>th</sup> Army continued its advance in Serbia. The Ljubovija Regiment fought alone against vastly superior Austrian forces at Durlače (6-5.1210) between 15 and 16 August. The Austro-Hungarian 42<sup>nd</sup> Division captured Durlače but the defence bought some time for the Serbians to pull back the units which they had optimistically pushed forwards across the Drina a few days before.

## The Western Front

The bombardment of Liege now rapidly reached a crescendo. No fort could long resist the German shells. By 17 August the only issue outstanding was the negotiation for the entry of the Germans into the undefended city.

The Germans were already half way to Brussels. They were nevertheless slowed by the activity of French cavalry which had been sent to Antwerp to encourage Belgian resistance. In Namur, the Belgian defenders sensed the growing concentration of enemy forces gathering around.

Namur was not actually the Germans next target. That honour fell to Givet which had been successfully assaulted by the German 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, led by the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Guards Divisions, on 16 August.



The French 6<sup>th</sup> Division was close by but withdrew to avoid being drawn into a determined defence of a weak fortress.

The French 5<sup>th</sup> Army was then in a state of great uncertainty as to its mission. Joffre had taken a couple of Divisions from Lanzerac to support the 4<sup>th</sup> Army in its forthcoming offensive and had demanded the 5<sup>th</sup> provide a strong flank guard to the 4<sup>th</sup> in the Ardennes. This meant the 5<sup>th</sup> Army was stretched over a great distance. Its left flank was near Brussels. It could not defend the Sambre-Meuse positions between Namur and Givet which the Germans now occupied. Contact with Namur was lost and, on 18 August, Lanzerac ordered that the fortress of Hirson be abandoned. The British were asked to hurry their own mobilisation and move into Belgium. Only a single corps was ready for this and it moved forward to Soignes (5-3.1409) in order to protect the French left and give the Belgians some hope.

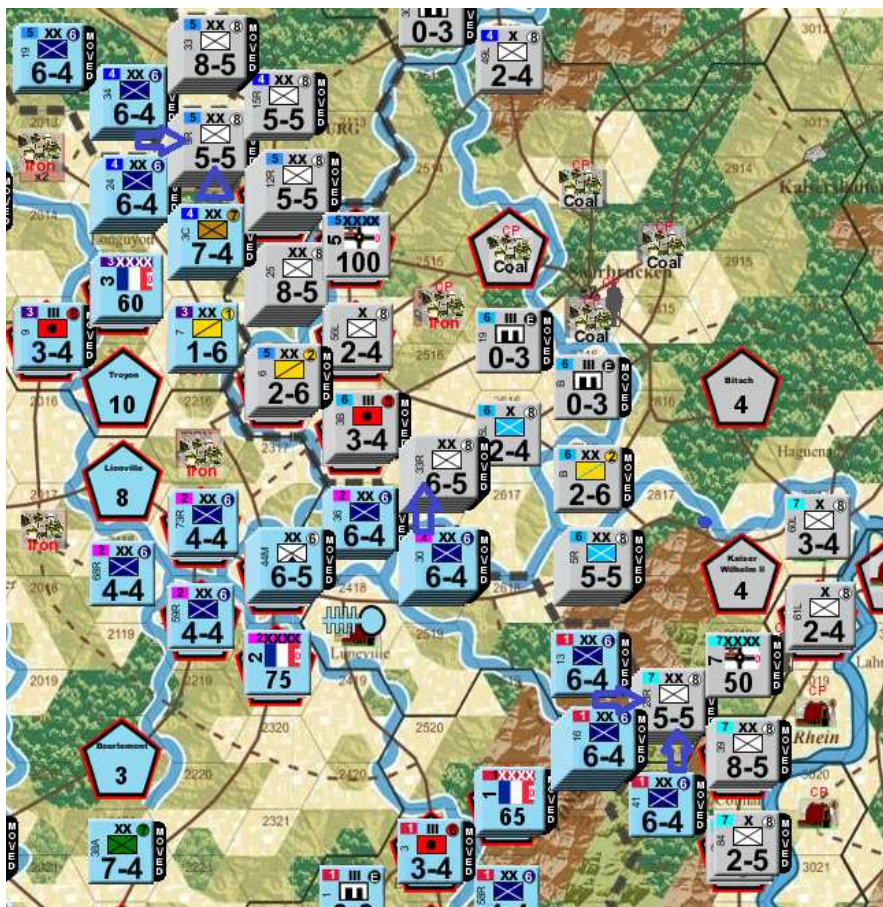


Figure 3: Battle of the Frontiers, the French attack, 17 - 18 August 1914.

None of these difficulties commanded much attention at Joffre's headquarters where the final decisions were being made for the great French offensive. The first into action were the French 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Armies which converged on German held Longwy from both the west and the south. It was impressive that the French put two whole armies (15 Divisions) into action simultaneously. However, the French can have had little idea of what they were about to confront. Their movement was directed towards the centre of a German concentration which consisted not only of the German 4<sup>th</sup> Army but also elements of the 5<sup>th</sup> Army with parts of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army only a couple of days march away to the north.

In the morning of 17 August, waves of French infantry advanced through woods and open ground towards German infantry which were all too prepared for them. No Frenchman got within sight of Longwy. French losses were appalling and the worst of it occurred as the Germans counterattacked. By the end of the day twelve French Divisions reported losses exceeding a third of their front line strength. Comparatively the German losses were perhaps only a sixth of those of the French. German officers in combat reported an impression that when the French stopped to fire their weapons they were setting their sights too low.

The French had other cards in play. The attack on Longwy also coincided with even larger operations in Alsace-Lorraine. Joffre had hoped that the French 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Armies would operate closely together. Between 15 – 16 August, the German 6<sup>th</sup> Army retreated from the position it had gained on the Meurthe River and withdrew to German territory pursued by the French 2<sup>nd</sup> Army. The Germans made a stand on the 17 August at Chateau Salins (5-3.2518). The French 2<sup>nd</sup> Army commenced two days of attacks to try and dislodge them and uncover thereby the southern flank to the Metz fortifications. This was never very likely, but the French were in some respects more successful than were at Longwy and gave the Germans more punishment. Nevertheless, another eleven French Divisions suffered heavy losses and the survivors could make no headway.

The French 1<sup>st</sup> Army might have given the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army more help by pressing north towards the Saar but its commander was too concerned about his right flank and considered he had to first engage the German 7<sup>th</sup> Army in Alsace. This meant that its operations were centred on Le Hohwald (5-3.2819) where nine French Divisions fought five German Divisions on 18 August. The French had been slow getting into position and the units which advanced on the flanks of the German positions could not use their artillery to good effect. Two regiments of French heavy artillery had been dragged into the hills with the idea of blasting the Germans off the slopes. This never came close to happening and the Vosges were soon covered by the results of suicidal French attacks which lost all sense of direction and effect in the tangled wooded rough terrain.

The French 1<sup>st</sup> Army had another disaster on 18 August for the staff of the 14 Division conceived a plan to attack Neu Breisach from the direction of Mulhouse which was somehow approved as a diversionary operation to support the main action further north. The outcome was a complete massacre as infantry attacked Germans defending undamaged fortifications. Subsequently the 14 Division was afterwards deleted from the French order of battle.

The French Army suffered a terrible baptism of fire on 17 – 18 August. All the good work of the French mobilisation and deployment had been negated by the sanguinary outcome of the initial offensive.

#### *Player Comments*

*CP: On the WF 1st Army exploits, after crossing the Meuse, into Belgium whilst continuing to reduce Liege. I need to clear the French blocking position at Givet which I allocated to 2nd Army. For the rest, I opted to concentrate my forces and prepare for French attacks. I even decided on some tactical withdrawals in Lorraine.*

*Serbia - I want to continue attritioning the Serbs so conduct another limited attack after establishing lodgements on the east side of the Drina River. I am trying to limit supply expenditure, but the mountainous terrain makes it difficult. I need 12 infantry strength points to only spend 2 supply and*

guarantee a 10 strength attack to cause casualties but have to spend 3 supply on this attack. I also decided to deploy the Danube flotilla to block possible crossing options for the Serbs. I noted posts on CSW about when the Flotilla mobilizes. Given that, historically, the 1st shots of the war - fired at the end of July - were from Danube ships into Belgrade, I would suggest they are mobilized from the start of Aug T1.

E Prussia - I need to spread my resources across a wide area, so deploy 2 x corps HQs from 8thArmy. I want to disrupt Russian rail networks, so use 35XX to raid into Russian Poland. The rest of 8XXXX take up blocking and delaying positions.

Galicia - limited mobilizations. German brigades attached to AH 1XXXX start using column moves to get within supply range. My intent with AH divs is to advance towards the enemy whilst occupying personnel centres of Russia's and destroying Russian rail network.

### DM Situation – August 1914

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Month	Total	Morale
Germany	-	30*	-	21				51	51	Good *Mulhouse Lost
Austria-Hungary	-	-	1	1				2	2	Good
Central Powers	-	30	1	22				53	53	
France	-	2	2	75				79	79	Good
Great Britain	-	-	-	-				-	-	Good
Russia	-	-	-	-				-	-	Good – Czestochowa lost
Belgium	-	-	(10)	(20)				(30)	(30)	N/A
Serbia	-	-	(1)	(1)				(2)	(2)	N/A
Entente	-	2	2	75				79	79	

AP: Most of my mental effort this turn was expended in the West and the centrepiece of the turn is the French offensive. The positions adopted by the German armies allowed me to complete the whole mandatory requirement. That is a small plus point but overall I was forced into four very disadvantageous attacks. One of my priorities here is ensuring that the German counterattack cannot surround units and reach HQs. I also conserved a little supply by allowing a portion of the attacking force to be unsupplied (the ability to attack unsupplied should be seen as an advantage you have with good morale). The loss ratio in the French offensive was 16:71 (German:French). I am disappointed that I did not inflict more losses on the Germans but I only had two decent attacks and rolled low at Longwy where a high die would have been much more satisfactory.

Many people think the mandatory attacks are a problem and they do not like them. I see them as a fundamental starting point for an interesting game. There is a decent amount of flexibility in how the attacks are met and executed and both sides have some interesting choices. I am regretting slightly not committing the 1<sup>st</sup> Army further north.

