

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary

GT5: 19 – 22 August 1914 (August 5)

General Situation

The first major battles had begun on the French frontiers. The violence of the invasion of Belgium was spreading. Europe was hardly yet aware that this would not be a limited war decided by a siege and a decisive battle. The losses suffered by the French in their initial attacks would have been sufficient to determine the outcome of many previous European conflicts but this one was just starting.

The French were not advertising their losses and they dispatched messages to London and St Petersburg demanding more commitment and immediate action. The Germans knew they could not rest simply because they had enjoyed an early success. They had to redouble the assault on France if they were to defeat her before the rest of the Entente brought their full force to bear. Perhaps the Austrians then crossing the Polish borders would keep the Russians busy for a while.

The Western Front



Figure 1: The 2nd Phase of the Battle of the Frontiers, 19 - 22 August 1914

The fighting in Alsace-Lorraine did not end with the failure of the last French attacks. Instead the Germans pressed their advantage. The German 6th Army forced the French 2nd Army back all the way to Nancy and Lunéville. Two German Divisions (31st and 2nd Bavarian) forced their way into the gap between the two French Armies with the assistance of the 8th Cavalry Division. On 20 August they reached the Meurthe River, for the second time in ten days, near Baccarat (5-3.2618).

Further east, the French 1st Army was putting up more effective resistance in the Vosges. The Col du Donon (5-3.2719) was defended for two days but, after the loss of Baccarat, the French withdrew in order to re-establish contact with the 2nd Army behind the Meurthe.

Between 19 and 20 August, the exhausted survivors of the French 41st Division were trapped with no route of retreat at Le Markstein (5-3.2820). When it became apparent that this unit could not hold its positions it dispersed rather than surrender. French attacks from the south on 21 August which aimed to break through and rescue the 41st came 24 hours too late and in any event the German Landwehr (2nd Bavarian Brigade) guarding the German southern flank were able to hold off the French VII Corps which attempted to gain the Col du Bussang (5-3.2821).

There was equally significant fighting in the Ardennes where the German 3rd Army assisted the 4th and 5th Armies to exploit their defensive success at Longwy. The French were driven back from Arlon and Étalle (5-3.2113) in the south eastern corner of Belgium. By 21 August, the French 3rd and 4th Armies were in full retreat towards the Meuse River where they took up positions between Sedan and Verdun on the following day. Verdun was also threatened from the east as the French Reserve Divisions defending Jarny (5-3.2215) were unable to prevent another German thrust erupting from Metz towards the French fortified zones.

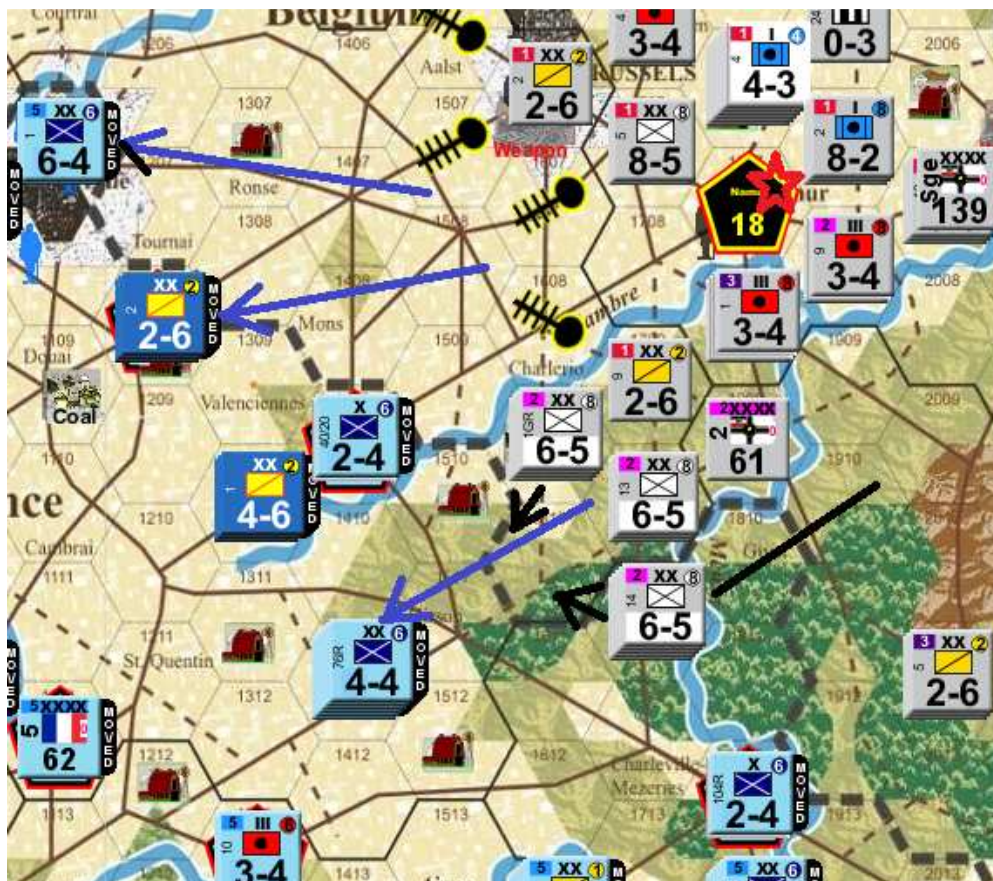


Figure 2: The French and British fall back after the Action at Chimay, 20 - 22 August 1914

The situation in Central Belgium was also deteriorating for the Entente. The German siege artillery had transferred their targets from Liege to Namur. The Belgian 4th Division had waited in vain for relief from the French or British and was now subjected to a shell storm that caused terrible

casualties to the defenders of Namur. Nevertheless the sacrifice of the Belgians was not without value for von Kluck's 1st Army was delayed passing Namur by small but important acts of resistance even as the Belgian zone of control was diminished. Behind German lines, civilians raided German supply centres as the occupation embittered the Belgian population.

The German tide could not be denied by Belgian efforts alone. Brussels heard the clatter of hooves of the horses of the German 2nd Cavalry Division on the morning of 20 August. To the north, German artillery was firing on the outer works of Antwerp where French cavalry were still operating.

There was a further important engagement on 20 August at Chimay (5-3.1610) where the German 2nd Army concentrated to attack four French Divisions. This force was all the scattered French 5th Army could deploy to block the roads into France. The Germans were here surprised by effective French defensive firepower from units hidden in woods. Indeed the Germans suffered nearly as much loss in this single action as they did in the whole French offensive in the Ardennes and Alsace-Lorraine. Despite this success, the French positions around Chimay were rapidly outflanked and the 5th Army ordered a further retreat towards St Quentin.

This meant that all other British and French forces operating in western Belgium had to pull back as well. The commandant in Lille ordered the demobilisation of the Lille fortifications in order to discourage a siege defence that would repeat the errors of 1870. The BEF retired into France behind the Maubeuge position and to Condé. Sir John French affected to be disgusted by this retreat as his force had hardly encountered any sign of the enemy during its brief foray into Belgium.

The Eastern Front

The Armies in the East still faced long marches before encountering the enemy. The Russian 1st Army crossed the Pregel and Angerapp while a detachment of cavalry raided Memel and took the harbourmaster and his staff prisoner. Meanwhile, Rennenkampf scanned the horizon worriedly wondering where the Germans were for nowhere had he yet faced organised resistance.

Samsonov's 2nd Army also trudged north. On 22 August its leading elements crossed the Prussian frontier. Russian scouts reported the presence of substantial German forces between them and Allenstein. However, the Russians were in no hurry to make any attack as the army supply corps was still struggling across the Polish plain a long way to the rear.

The German 8th Army had withdrawn in the face of the Russian 1st Army. Though it still protected Königsberg, its intentions were unclear. Some 8th Army units were operating south of the Vistula and the 35th Reserve Ersatz Division was less than 100 kilometres from the centre of Warsaw on 20 August. Other German soldiers were passing through Lodz at the same time. Did they hope to surprise the Polish capital?

The Austrian forces in Galicia were streaming out of their mobilisation areas and moving towards the pre-planned operational zones. The Austrian 1st Army crossed the bridges of the San River on 20 August with an evident intent to move against Lublin which was defended by the Russian 4th Army.

The Austrian 4th Army was spread out over a large area and its left wing was designated to reinforce the offensive against Lublin. The rest of this force remained for the moment in closer contact with the Austrian 3rd Army around Lemberg.

The Russians were also now active on these fronts. The Russian 8th and 3rd Armies moved forward in great strength over the north eastern borders of Galicia. At Czernowitz in Bukovina, Austrian and Russian riflemen watched each other from opposite banks of the River Prut. By 22 August, some Russian cavalry were 60 kilometres inside Austrian territory.

The Russian 3rd Army advanced more slowly towards the River Bug which was the major barrier between it and Lemberg. The 3rd Army advanced its right wing more rapidly to effect a junction with the forward wing of the adjacent 5th Army which concentrated a large force at Krystynopol (5-5.3506). Within a few days of the start of the campaign, thirteen Russian infantry divisions were converging on Lemberg from a distance of about 100 kilometres. Their marches had so far been unopposed.



Figure 3: The Crossing of the San River, 20 August 1914

Serbia

With the campaign in Poland about to begin, Conrad could no longer afford to leave excessive force operating against Serbia. By 19 August, units from the Austro-Hungarian 2nd Army were entraining for transfer to Galicia.

It appeared that Potiorek would be satisfied with the tactical gains made in his recent offensive and further attacks were suspended as troops started to be withdrawn from this front. The Serbians had other ideas and on 21 August an assault was made by the Uzice Army over the vulnerable bend of the Drina River. This was defended by an unsupported Austrian Mountain Brigade (9th) which was

unable to hold such an exposed front and allowed the Serbians to recover a new bridgehead in Bosnia, east of Srebrenica (6-5.1211).

DM Situation – August 1914

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Month	Total	Morale
Germany	-	30*	-	21	32			83	83	Good *Mulhouse Lost
Austria-Hungary	-	-	1	1	1			3	3	Good
Central Powers	-	30	1	22	33			86	86	
France	-	2	2	75	26			105	105	Good
Great Britain	-	-	-	-	-			-	-	Good
Russia	-	-	-	-	-			-	-	Good – Lodz occupied
Belgium	-	-	(10)	(20)	(19)			(49)	(49)	N/A – Brussels and Liege occupied
Serbia	-	-	(1)	(1)	(1)			(3)	(3)	N/A
Entente	-	2	2	75	26			105	105	

CP: As the fronts start opening up, I will address each in turn from now on.

East: My intention in E Prussia is to fall back to effective defence positions and bolster up forces where I can. At the same time, I wish to threaten his S flank so advance to occupy Lodz.

Galicia: I have to meet mandated attacks in Galicia by T6, so I have to start concentrating the AH 1st and 4th Armies to be best placed to conduct these offensives. I also feel it prudent to draw the cavalry screen back to enjoy some protective support from infantry divisions.

Serbia: I create a corps HQ from the 11th Army HQ in the SW to allow for more efficient C2 and supply provision in the mountains. Much of the 2nd Army entrains to head towards Galicia.

West: This is the main event. By moving a French cav div into the SE suburbs of Antwerp, he effectively hinders my N wing and forces me to bombard Antwerp. I need to commence a turning movement by advancing strongly through Belgium, so must first invest and neutralise Namur. My greatest deliberation is whether to commit my 2nd Army to attacking elements of the French 5th Army NE of the former fortress of Hirson. My advance there will force him to withdraw, but at the same time I wish to stretch and deplete the 5th Army. If I don't attack, he will likely be in a better position to use 5th Army to delay and disrupt me. By attacking him in favourable defensive terrain, I will take some grievous casualties. However, I am guaranteed at least 9 hits against him (these assumptions proved false – I made several planning errors by foolishly looking at the wrong CRT, that of 1917-18). This will not force him to retreat, but if I get better than average results he may be forced to do so. Even if I get the worst results, he is likely to opt to withdraw to reduce losses and preserve combat power, so I am banking on this to also mitigate my own loss risks and therefore am certain attacking is the right

option. Therefore, I throw the whole 2nd Army into this attack. I hope it will force him out of the forested terrain (it didn't). There are several excellent opportunities for me to attack along the length of the front where limited use of supply will still guarantee that he is forced to retreat, leaving other stronger force concentrations vulnerable to isolation. I have thus selected objectives to try and force his entire line backwards into French territory. Limited attacks in the Vosges will eliminate 3 of his divs as they have no retreat option (also wrong due to wrong CRT). The only location to retreat into already has the remnants of 6 divs in it, so I hope to induce the targeted French divs into surrender and push the French out of the mountains on my S border. Success here, for very limited supply expenditure, hopefully will force him to vacate Mulhouse without a fight there. Fingers crossed!

AP: The losses the French suffered last turn prevented a continuation of their offensive even though the German attacks this turn were characterised by low rolls which to some extent mitigated the situation. My sole attack in the west was in Alsace where I had a hope a taking a hex that would disrupt a German food resource. Otherwise my play was conservative and challenges the Germans to attack now to make some territorial gains. I cannot use rail movement yet so I cannot strengthen my left wing sufficiently to prevent the need for some withdrawals. My moves are designed to channel and delay the German advance and prevent the German 1st, 2nd and 3rd Armies supporting each other.

Since I cannot make a major attack with the French at the moment, I would like the Russians to get into action in Prussia but the German deployments are delaying contact. The Serbian attack reflects the fact that any Entente attack on the Austrians is a good investment. A journey of 1000 DM starts with a single step loss. It is not in my interest that we play with a low tempo. I would like as much action as possible on as many fronts as possible and I don't mind if the Serbians pay a price for it.