

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT6: 23 – 27 August 1914 (August 6)

General Situation

The first battles of the war were fought in a fog of limited information and the commanders were prisoners of choices which had been made years previously. This was most true of the Austro-Hungarians who had one army criss-crossing Hungary looking for useful employment and the others were striking out across the Polish plain with no real knowledge of what they would encounter and where. With a quarter of Prussia lost, the Germans also regretted some of their initial deployments and reinforcements were soon entrained for the East. For the Western Powers it was also dawning on them that their pre-war plans might not be up to the present emergency. Paris was increasingly aware that it had not won any victory during the Frontier Battle, and London had to ask whether the small BEF could really influence the outcome of events.

Serbia

The Austrians reacted swiftly to the Serbian crossing of the Drina and ensured the Bosnian bridgehead was tightly contained. On 24 August, the Austrian river flotilla attempted to bombard Belgrade but they were frustrated by the conditions of navigation on the Sava River which would not permit anything that could damage the Serbians.

The Eastern Front



Figure 1: The Right Wing of the Austrian 4th Army at Krystynopol - Belz, 24 - 27 August 1914.

In late August, weeks of rising tension were finally released. The storm broke first on the Austrian front.

The first large action was at Bychawa (5-5.2804) about 30 kilometres south of Lublin. On 23 August, in the afternoon, the Austrian 1st Army struck at the centre of the Russian 4th Army. The Russians had done little to interfere with the Austrian advance. Further in accordance with Conrad's plans, the Austrian 4th Army had detached four divisions to support its neighbour and they came into action simultaneously ensuring the doom of the Russian 47th Division which had been most exposed to the attack. By evening, the Russians were defeated and streaming back towards Lublin. The Austrians were, however, cautious in exploiting this success. The losses inflicted by the Russians were not small and Denkl, the 1st Army commander, was wary of advancing into a trap.

The remainder of the Austrian 4th Army was engaged on 24 August over 150 kilometres further east at Krystynopol (5-5.3506). The Austrians had been moving towards the Upper Bug River, expecting their 3rd Army to come forward on their right. Six Austro-Hungarian divisions stumbled across the Russians (5 Infantry Divisions and a Cavalry Division). The Austrians fought with great spirit. So did the Russians. The road to the Bug was blocked and both sides suffered horrible losses but for the attackers it was worse. This action was only the start of the blood-letting because Pleve, the commander of the Russian 5th Army, ordered three further days of counterattacks on the Hungarian Divisions around Belz (5-5.3406). Pleve was denied the clear success he had counted on and the Russians suffered uncounted losses during this phase of the battle as the Hungarians found the courage to stand their ground and protected the left wing of the 4th Army.

While these battles were continuing, the Russian 3rd and 8th Armies were still advancing from the east. By 27 August, the 8th Army had reached the River Strypa and had effected a crossing of the Dniester (5-5.4614) not far from Czernowitz against light opposition.



Figure 2: The Russian Attack at Orlau, 26 - 27 August 1914

The Russian North West Front also spurred its Army commanders into action whether they liked it or not. Something had to be done to assist the French.

The Russian 1st Army, cautiously led, faced a strong German front at Insterberg (4-5.2006). Instead of attacking frontally, Rennenkampf shifted the strength of his Army west directly towards Königsberg and forced the Königsberg Ersatz Brigade to give up Taplaken (4-5.1805) on the north side of the Pregel. This did not, however, immediately threaten the main German positions.

Samsonov's 2nd Army was ordered to follow a different tactic. Since, the German XI Corps blocked the shortest road to Allenstein, Samsonov simply required them to be defeated by an attack in overwhelming strength. This resulted in the action at Orlau (4-5.1612) on 26 – 27 August in which eight Russian divisions (including some of the best) were decisively repulsed by well positioned German infantry who gave not an inch of ground. German losses were estimated to be no more than a quarter those of the Russians.

The Western Front

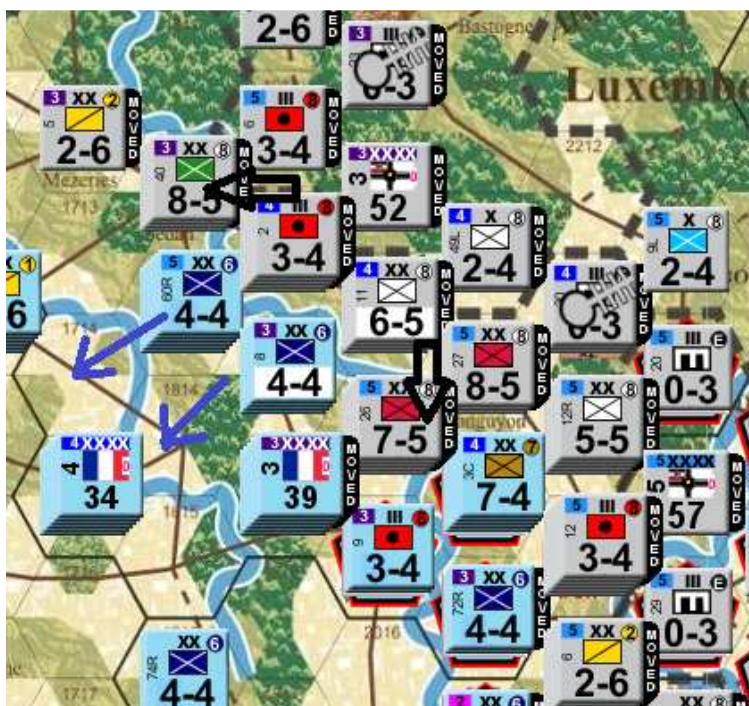


Figure 3: The Germans Cross the Meuse, 25 August 1914.

The news for the Entente in the West was increasingly worrying. By 24 August, it was plain that Namur could hold out on a little longer and its final surrender was expected hourly. Similarly, the French fortress of Sedan (5-3.1812) was lost on 25 August following an assault by the German 3rd Army.

25 August was also a key date as the German 4th Army then gained a secure bridgehead over the Meuse River at Dun (5-3.2015), north of Verdun. The French had clearly lost the line of the river and their 3rd and 4th Armies drifted back to the South West. The French lost the bulk of their iron ore fields at this time.

Large scale fighting continued in Alsace-Lorraine. At some cost, the French were able to prevent the German 6th Army making a crossing of the Meurthe (5-3.2519). However, the Germans continued to gain ground in the Vosges and by forcing their way forward to Senones (5-3.2720), the Germans were heading downhill and towards to outer limits of the French fortifications covering Épinal.

Other critical events were unfolding at the other end of the German front. The French and British were still falling back. The German 2nd Army pursued slowly, apparently anxious not to advance without proper support on its flanks. The German 1st Army was still some way behind, though some heavy guns were brought far enough forward to begin a bombardment of Maubeuge on 25 August.

In an isolated episode which achieved a lot of press attention and notoriety at the time, the German 2nd Cavalry Division occupied an undefended Brugge on 24 August. This blocked the road to Antwerp from the West. The French quickly sent their 1st Division and a Territorial Division to recover the city. Unfortunately, because of the suddenness of the orders, the French were unable to bring all their equipment. The German cavalry were cut off, but the French were unable to get them out of the town despite two days of fighting up to 27 August in which many famous historic buildings were damaged.

DM Situation – August 1914

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Month	Total	Morale
Germany	-	30*	-	21	32	33		116	116	Good *Mulhouse Lost
Austria-Hungary	-	-	1	1	1	16		19	19	Good
Central Powers	-	30	1	22	33	49		135	135	
France	-	2	2	75	26	27		132	132	Good
Great Britain	-	-	-	-	-	-		-	-	Good
Russia	-	-	-	-	-	24		24	24	Good
Belgium	-	-	(10)	(20)	(19)	(18)		(67)	(67)	N/A -Brugge occupied
Serbia	-	-	(1)	(1)	(1)	-		(3)	(3)	N/A
Entente	-	2	2	75	26	51		156	156	

Player Comments

CP: Robert and I discussed and agreed – tentatively – on a house rule on corps HQs. That is that they are capable of fully supporting 2 x full divs of their nationality as opposed to the 2 support points maximum. This seems to make sense as it fulfils the role of the early 2 x div corps. If it seems to unbalance things, then we can rethink it. It seems particularly pertinent to me for the Germans in the east at this stage in covering their broad front with a single army HQ. After all, the point of a corps HQ was to manage the deployment of the 2 x divs under the corps HQ, until corps HQs became more capable and it expanded to 3 and later 4 divs per corps. We started to use this approach this turn where its advantage became obvious against Samsonov's 2nd Army on the outskirts of Allenstein.

- *East: My intention in E Prussia is remained an effective defence and rather than follow the historical example of depleting the German 2nd Army to send divisions eastwards, I opted to use the now available (but halved) German rail capacity to dispatch the reinforcements eastwards. They are weaker but will get there far*

quicker. I also used some rail capacity to detach 2 cav divs from the W to send E, where they have more room to manoeuvre and threaten flanks and supply lines. In the W they are just becoming expensive cannon fodder, as I discovered when the 2nd Cav of 1st Army, which I sent to occupy Bruges, became isolated and took a loss which amounted to 8 DMs! His 2nd Army attacked elements of my 8th Army, serving under XII Corps, and was brutally punished by my counter-attack. This allowed both 8-5 divs to be fully supplied under the house rule. Standard rules would have reduced Russian casualties by 2 hits. I am interested in the views of others on this house rule.

- Galicia: I conduct the mandatory attacks by 1st and 4th Armies, which forces me to split the 4th Army. The 1st Army attack comes off fairly successfully but the 4th Army attack is punished; although it holds its ground with the follow-up Russian attack. My 2nd Army units start to arrive now after being railed over from the Serbian Front.
- Serbia: I reconfigure my stance on the Drina River to be more defensive in posture after his bridgehead was seized. With limited Mt units there, my options for manoeuvre within his ZoCs is very constrained.
- West: I am finding it heavy going through Belgium as he consistently places speed bumps in my way. The ZoCs generated by these weak units help protect his stronger divs as they shake out to defend in depth. I am gaining some ground in the areas of Lorraine, but it is in the W I need to achieve more. I opted not to attack with 2nd Army this period as he was too strong. The positioning of 2nd Army is enough to force him to withdraw to prevent encirclement.

AP: I was more uncertain what to do this turn than any so far.

In the East, there was a need to attack in Prussia to increase the pressure on Germany and balance the losses being suffered by France. The chance of a Tannenberg has hopefully passed. I think this will only happen in the campaign game if the Germans offer the Russians a sufficiently tempting sugared pill laced with poison. A small chance to capture Allenstein might have done it, but I face a uniformly strong defence in Prussia.

It is too early to say how the Austrian offensive may end. My greatest concern is that I have spread the Russians very evenly between Lublin and Czernowitz whereas I will need to concentrate a strong mass somewhere to drive the Austrians back. There will have to be some lateral movement soon.

The West is still the key. My opponent has done little to reinforce the German right wing*, but the fall of Sedan was rightly prioritised and may help with this. I must not underestimate the German Army which has not yet suffered very heavy losses and still has the capability of launching large and effective attacks which made short work of my line on the Meuse. I am still retreating my left wing but this will only continue as long as I want to limit combat in this sector. The clear terrain makes it the best place to attack and my actions have been designed to minimise the ability of the German 1st and 2nd Armies to help each other directly. I am moving reinforcing divisions to this flank so that when there is an attrition battle I will be prepared.

*Ivor has suggested this is not easy without railroads operating. This is correct, but I am thinking more of keeping the German 3rd Army closer to the 2nd Army (which means avoiding the fighting in the Ardennes) and generally sliding more force west of Verdun. This is not easy either and it depends on priorities and opportunities.