

## Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT7: 28 – 31 August 1914 (Aug 7)

### General Situation

The Battle for Belgium was largely over except for the unfinished situation at Antwerp. The French now faced the reality that their own country was being invaded as reports came in of the frontier districts being abandoned to the enemy. In Britain there was little news of the BEF and nobody outside top government and army circles knew what it was doing. In the West there was enough to think about and hardly anyone was more than dimly aware that a great campaign was reaching a climax in southern Poland.

### The Western Front



Figure 1: The German Advance, 29 - 30 August 1914.

In the early hours of 28 August, the Germans unleashed a furious bombardment against the French fortress at Maubeuge. Having honed their skills at Liege and Namur, the German gunners precisely identified the weaknesses in the French defences. By next day it was all over. The German 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Armies passed north and south of the shattered remains of Maubeuge heading further west. On 29 August, the small fort at Condé gave up in the face of a German assault.

The same afternoon, the German spearheads encountered a new untested enemy as they ran into the outposts of the British Expeditionary Force. Both the German Armies committed fresh strong infantry units including the Prussian Guards to an attack that lasted throughout the evening. Three British Divisions (3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup>) were committed to the defence of Douai and successfully held their lines until nightfall.

The story of this first British battle has been repeatedly analysed and the subsequent withdrawal to Lens has been the subject of disproportionate controversy which rather misses the fact that this was a very typical action of this period in the war. Other similar actions raged from Flanders to Alsace as the Germans attempted to drive home their advantage. However, the French were recovering their balance and on 29 August, Joffre had encouraging reports of stubborn French defences at Grandpré in the Argonne (5-3.1814). Nancy had also been bombarded with artillery and the Germans had made a serious effort to break through to Lunéville, but by 30 August there was a pause in these attacks and there was increasing confidence that the period of greatest danger had passed in Lorraine.

In this more favourable situation, Joffre considered that he could return to the offensive. Two new French Armies had been forming. The 6<sup>th</sup> Army was detailed to operate in the Pas de Calais and was an accumulation of the forces located in Belgian Flanders and Lille. This Army was ordered to cooperate closely with the BEF.

The 9<sup>th</sup> Army formed between the French 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Armies on the River Aisne by reassigning existing units. On 30 August, it was ordered to attack northwards as Joffre's Staff had realised a gap was opening up between the German Armies fighting on the Meuse and those which had moved west of Maubeuge. The French 4<sup>th</sup> Army was also ordered to advance again and give the 9<sup>th</sup> strong support on its right flank. The 4<sup>th</sup> Army was swiftest in its advance and reached Signy-l'Abbay (5-3.1612) by the morning of 31 August. The German Guards Cavalry Division was a little distance to the north but drew away and the French paused while they considered whether it would be possible to advance to the Belgian border. Meanwhile, the 9<sup>th</sup> Army was in a fight with the Saxon 24<sup>th</sup> Reserve Division and the German 5<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Division at Rozoy (5-3.1512). The 24<sup>th</sup> Reserve was the only German infantry Division in an 80 kilometre gap between the German 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Armies. The Saxon Reservists were pushed back, having been prematurely abandoned by their cavalry support, but they did retain sufficient cohesion to slow the French advance.

### **The Eastern Front**

The Russian attack in Prussia had lost most of its momentum in late August. Rennenkampf's 1<sup>st</sup> Army was absorbing its Reserve Divisions and it was still feeling its way forward as the Germans fell back in slow stages. At the end of the month, it had moved through an undefended Insterberg (4-3.2006), but it was still more than 60 kilometres from Königsberg.

The Russian 2<sup>nd</sup> Army had been bloodied in its attack on Orłau (4-3.1612), but it had no intention of repeating the experience. Samsonov was sensitive to growing German strength on his left flank and considered it essential to refuse it. This precaution became a general retreat as the Russians abandoned southern Prussia and fell back into Poland.



The Great Battle of Galicia reached its climax as the Austrian 1<sup>st</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Armies simultaneously grappled with their Russian opponents between Lublin and the River Strypa, east of Lemberg. The Austrian commanders following Conrad's directives had little restraint in committing their men to battles in which they barely had any superiority of position or numbers. Many of these attacks produced results which could only be regarded as disastrous and none were worse affairs than the 3<sup>rd</sup> Armies' attack on the Russian 3<sup>rd</sup> Army by which the Austrians hoped to forestall the Russians crossing the River Bug at Busk (5-5.3807).



**Figure 2: The Great Battle of Galicia, 28 - 31 August 1914**

Despite their great losses, the Austrian offensive was not without its successes or near successes. The Russian 4<sup>th</sup> Army was driven back to the outskirts of Lublin and, pinned by the necessity of this defence, lost contact with the Russian 5<sup>th</sup> Army to its left.

After nine days of continuous fighting, the Russians were also very tired, none more than the 5<sup>th</sup> Army. On 30 August, the South West Front issued a Directive to all its Army Commanders and required that they manoeuvre to the flanks of the Hapsburg forces facing them. The intention was to avoid wasteful attacks on the main body of the enemy.

These requirements were actually put into effect. The Russian 4<sup>th</sup> Army pulled troops out of Lublin and reinforced its right wing that was ordered to thrust aggressively towards the Vistula at Annapol (5-5.2605) which was held by Landwehr and the Polish Legion. The most ambitious Russian actions were by the Russian 3<sup>rd</sup> Army which continued the Battle of Busk – Krasne (5-5.3808) with a wide flanking movement on the Upper Bug. By 31 August, other units from the Russian 3<sup>rd</sup> Army were established at Mosty Wielke (5-5.3507) barely two days march north of Lemberg. The Austrian 3<sup>rd</sup> Army was threatened with a double envelopment as the 8<sup>th</sup> Army was also trying to turn its right flank at Przemyslany (5-5.3910). All these movements cost the Russians dear because the Austrians were by no means defeated. Przemyslany was lost, but elsewhere the Austrians mainly stood their ground and delivered effective counterattacks.

The Austrians were on the defensive in Bukovina. The capital of the province, Czernowitz, had to be abandoned and this city was occupied by Russian cavalry (12<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Division) on 31 August. Further west, the Dniester was still an effective barrier to the Russian advance. Some Cossacks attempted a crossing but they were forced to turn back when it became apparent their horses could not withstand the current.

### Serbia

The Serbian Uzice Army and the Montenegrins made some small gains in the Lim Valley in eastern Bosnia, but this front was mostly inactive in late August. Since the entire fuss had started because of nationalistic quarrels here, the lack of action was considered ironic by anyone who was paying attention.



Figure 3: The Serbian Front, 31 August 1914

## DM Situation – August 1914

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Month	Total (%SM)	Morale
Germany	-	30*	-	21	32	33	31	147	147 (9.19)	Good *Mulhouse Lost
Austria-Hungary	-	-	1	1	1	16	50*	69	69 (12.55)	Good *Czernowitz lost
Central Powers	-	30	1	22	33	49	81	216	216	
France	-	2	2	75	26	27	39	171	171 (19.00)	Good
Great Britain	-	-	-	-	-	-	7	7	7 (0.55)	Good
Russia	-	-	-	-	-	24	32	56	56 (9.33)	Good
Belgium	-	-	(10)	(20)	(19)	(18)	(3)	(70)	(70)	N/A
Serbia	-	-	(1)	(1)	(1)	-	-	(3)	(3)	N/A
Entente	-	2	2	75	26	51	78	234	234	

*This table also shows how far the major powers have progressed towards shaken morale. The most critical is that of France which is already at 19% of the demoralisation needed for this. However, none of the main combatants can keep this level of punishment up for long.*

### Player Comments

#### CP.

- *East: After an excellent defensive battle conducted by XII Corps near Allenstein, I concentrate a 2<sup>nd</sup> (X Corps, made up from fresh but understrength divs) in the area to provide a strong German assembly area on the S flank of E Prussia; now reinforced by the 4<sup>th</sup> Cav Div railed east from 1<sup>st</sup> Army. In the N I seek to establish a strong defensive line which should prove expensive to attack at any one point and which cannot be easily outflanked. I also push eastwards onto the Polish plains W of the R Wkra.*
- *Galicia: I conduct the mandatory attacks by 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Armies. 1<sup>st</sup> Army is not in too precarious a position, but I fear over the other attacks. His success N of Czernowitz also forces me to evacuate the city. 2<sup>nd</sup> Army starts to be reconstituted. In the W, a 1<sup>st</sup> Army div occupies Lodz. There is a very difficult balance of forces to be struck here. Mandatory attacks have to be made in accordance with national plans and orders, but it is imperative to maintain lines of communication, to secure withdrawal routes and to ensure flank protection is strong enough to not be susceptible to column attacks to push these protective barriers out of the way and risk encircling other formations. I know the Russians will counter-attack me strongly. When these attacks do come, the Austro-Hungarians put up an extremely fierce*

*resistance and actually hold most of their ground, causing just over double the numbers of Russian casualties.*

- *Serbia: I continue to re-balance here for defence to ensure I have no weak bdes left to defend a 20km front on their own again.*
- *West: I finally see an opportunity to overcome French speedbumps by consecutive 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Army column attack against a weak French bde holding SW of Maubege. The strength of the columns allows me to conduct each attack at no more than a single supply point and results in very low casualties for me but the elimination of the French bde, isolated by a Cav XX at the time of the 2<sup>nd</sup> attack. This also brings both 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Army vanguards into contact with the BEF for a mutually supportive attack on the BEF in open ground. I have started to spread myself more thinly along the front but still desire a bridgehead across the R Meurthe and to push him out of German territory in the Vosges. Along the R Schelde, I attack his 84T XX which played a part in the catastrophic reduction of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Cav XX. It was a mistake on my part to leave it in Bruges in a position setting it up for isolation. A single hit cost me 8 DM! On a positive note, I have been able to invest Maubege, which I will reduce without risk of casualties but at some discomfiting effect on French morale. The artillery only attacks prove strong and Maubege is eliminated as is Tournai. However, every one of the infantry assaults pretty much stonewalls with terrible losses, even given my overwhelming strengths. At this rate, my forces will culminate earlier than expected – very worrying.*

*AP: I benefitted from some truly bad CP attack die rolls this turn. This reduces the pressure on me to conduct offensive operations as there was no need for me to repair the consequences of unequal losses. Nevertheless there were two opportunities I needed to follow up. In the West, the German 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Armies are being drawn west towards Cambrai and Douai, but the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> are no further west than Sedan so I attacked the gap. The Germans will be forced to respond to this next turn even though the initial results of my attack were less than spectacular.*

*The other opportunity is in Galicia where the Russians can outlast the Austrians. I made as many attacks as I sensibly could to accelerate the attrition even though this exposed my forces to heavy losses.*