

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT8: 1 – 5 September 1914

General Situation

Three weeks of fighting had accustomed Europe to the new reality it would now have to endure. What was unclear was whether it would be a short war or a long one. Every few days there was some rumour of a decisive battle. Would it be at Lemberg? Was Serbia about to crack? Were the Germans advancing or retreating? Few people knew. Yet French and German infantry were increasingly looking at their entrenching tools and wondering if they could help them survive the carnage that had been unleashed.

German diplomats had fanned across the Balkans looking for Allies. They already had a secure treaty with Turkey, but the Sublime Porte was unwilling to show its hand until the Army had sufficient time to prepare for another bigger Balkan War. Somewhere in the Indian Ocean, soldiers of the Meerut Division learned they were on the way to France. The French already had several North African Divisions in action. If the resources and manpower of the whole world might be sucked into this struggle, it could last a long time.

Serbia

The Austrians had not given up on their intent to punish Serbia and their 6th Army started fresh offensive operations. On 1 September, the Hungarian 40th Division, supported by Croatian Alpine Brigades, commenced an attack on the Drina. They crossed the river successfully near Proboj (6-5.1212). The Serbians fell back deeper into difficult country but the 2nd Shumadia Division reported heavy losses.

The Eastern Front

The forward movement of the Austrians in Serbia was small compensation for the rapid retreat their forces were then making in Galicia. A general retreat had been ordered at the beginning of September as the pressure from the Russians became too great. It was also recognised that the 1st, 4th and 3rd Armies had been fighting on a very wide front and needed to bring their forces into closer cooperation before further offensive action could be considered. The withdrawal was executed in a remarkably well organised fashion and only one brigade of Polish Landwehr (93rd) were left behind to be trapped and mopped up by the Russians streaming across the Bug River. The retreat caused great protest from Denkl of 1st Army who maintained, without clear proof, that he was on the eve of capturing Lublin when ordered to retire.

The most difficult situation for the Austrians was on the right flank of the 3rd Army where the Russian 3rd and 8th Armies were driving directly towards Lemberg. On 4-5 September a major action was fought at Bobrka (5-5.3710) about 30 kilometres southeast of the city. Once again the KuK Army proved that it could not be underestimated. In forested country, the Russians advance was slowed and the Austrians demonstrated great firmness in defence.

Contrary to Denkl's protestation that he was the winner of the Battle of Lublin, the Russian 4th Army pursued the Austrians swiftly to the San River and attempted an opposed crossing on 5 September

(5-5.2707). Among the defenders on the south bank were the Polish Legion, but the front was too long for the Austrians to guard every vulnerable point. By noon, the Russian 80th Reserve Division had a bridgehead and later in the day two other Russian Divisions had sent men to join them.



Figure 1: Russian crossings of the San and the Itzanka Rivers, 5 September 1914

Central Poland remained a region of fluid fronts and little action to compare with the great battles unfolding further to the east and north. The Russians were forming a new 9th Army at Ivangorod and in early September the Russians began reinforcing a front on the Itzanka River where German Landwehr attached to the Austrian 1st Army were operating.

The Russian 2nd Army remained on the alert covering the distant approaches to Warsaw between the Wkra and Narew Rivers. The Germans had cautiously followed the retreat of the Russians but had yet to demonstrate their own intentions.



Figure 2: The Russian 1st Army attacks at Allenburg, 3-5 September 1914

Rennenkampf had finally run out of reasons to delay his attack on the Germans facing his 1st Army. The Russians now had their Reserve Divisions in the line and attacked with elements of 14 Divisions on 3 September. This was a full scale attack intended to challenge the ability of the Germans to hold on in East Prussia. The focus of this very costly action was in the vicinity of Allenburg (4-5.1907) where the German 8th Army had the 1st, 1st Reserve and 1st Cavalry Divisions concentrated. After three days of attack and counterattack, the Prussians could claim to have stalled the whole Russian effort. None of the Russian units committed had been able to advance very far in front of their start lines without coming against deadly return fire. Even so, the Germans lost almost as much as a result of their own efforts and the Russians did not lack military skill. Success was dearly won.

The Western Front

Some of Joffre's officers urged him to continue the attacks of the 9th and 4th Army in order to break through to the Belgian frontier. They argued the German front was still very thin in the centre and would collapse if the pressure was sustained. Many historians have supported these contentions.

However, Joffre realised the German centre of gravity was moving west. Belgian intelligence reported that German troops were now using the railways in greater numbers and it appeared there were movements in train between Lorraine and Belgium. Railways had been destroyed in the Entente retreats but it was known that German engineers were working round the clock to restore them.

The fighting in Lorraine was becoming less intense. German and French artillery exchanged shells on the fronts covering Nancy. In Alsace, the German 7th Army recovered Ensisheim (4-3.2922) from the French VI Corps on 2 September. These were, however, relatively small actions compared with a concentrated attack of the German 3rd and 4th Armies which came forward strongly from Mezières and Sedan forcing the French 4th Army back to the Upper Aisne River with a particularly sharp combat fought at La Chesne (4-3.1713). Since the 4th Army was protecting the flank of the French advance, Joffre considered that he had to order the 9th to pull back. This is according to a rather lengthy passage in his Memoirs.

The reality was that the Germans had not been defeated and were recovering rapidly. Molke allowed himself to be led by Von Kluck and von Below. The German 1st and 2nd Armies were still advancing and on 2-3 September they moved south and west of Cambrai. Between Bapaume and Le Catelet (4-3.1010 and 1111) they encountered three French North African Divisions in open countryside and drove them all back towards Péronne and Albert.

This German thrust seemed to threaten Amiens and if continued south the road to Paris might open. The French 5th Army was ordered to counterattack and this required the fight to be carried out with the remains of the North Africans supported by Reserve and Territorial Divisions. Significantly, Lanzerac had secured the cooperation of Sir John French and, on 5 September, the BEF committed three Divisions to an attack north of Bapaume (4-3.1010).

The Germans were assailed from three directions, but they coolly deployed a division to meet each threat. The 4th Division took on the British 1st and 2nd Divisions and the 18th Division held off the Moroccans and the Algerians. This was enough to prevent the Allies driving the Germans back, but the 2nd Guards Reserve Division was ground down in a wearing fight with the French Reservists.

Afterwards the survivors were pulled out and there was suggestion the Division would have to be disbanded. The Kaiser, however, would not hear the idea and the question was shelved and forgotten until the campaign was over.



Figure 3: The German Spearhead engaged at Bapaume, 3 - 5 September 1914.

DM Situation – September 1914

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Month	Total	Morale
Germany	24							24	171	Good
Austria-Hungary	8							8	77	Good
Central Powers	32							32	248	
France	23							23	194	Good
Great Britain	3							3	10	Good
Russia	14							14	70	Good
Belgium	-							-	(70)	N/A
Serbia	(1)							(1)	(4)	N/A
Entente	39							39	273	

Player Notes

- CP: East: East of Konigsberg sits the greatest Russian threat to me. The most sensible option for me is to establish several strong positions which stand a strong chance of repulsing any concentrated attack and which cannot be bypassed. S of Allenstein, I push into Russian Poland to remove the threat to German soil from Samsonov's 2nd Army but I must remain cautious of overextending or making any opportunist attacks which could lead to a detrimental force imbalance. I have kept*

him out of Germany there, but there has been no Tannenberg (which I believe would be very difficult to replicate without a reckless opponent). Any ill-considered German attack in this area which leads to serious casualties on my side would insure I hand the Russians a significant advantage. So, nothing dramatic occurs except a 1st Army attack which results in fairly even spread of casualties.

- Galicia: This is now about longer term AH survival. I start to fall back to better positions and must sacrifice a Bde to encirclement in the process. I wanted to hold him at the San River for longer, but was too weak and he managed to force a crossing to the S of Lublin. He left Lublin weakly defended and I could have taken it, but it was clear this was deliberate to try and entice me which likely would have resulted in the destruction of my 1st Army. Falling back is the only option.
- Serbia: I launch an opportunist attack across the Drina E of Sarajevo which succeeds at no loss to me. I suspect I'm playing it too safe down here and should be threatening Belgrade more. I can see-saw along the Drina in perpetuity to his advantage, even if it whittles him down.
- West: An inconclusive round. I make attacks against his FR colonial divs which succeed but also squeeze me into a dangerous salient. I start the process of railing reserves to the right wing.

AP: My attack last turn in France did not turn the initiative my way and I have now concentrated on turning back the maximum point of German penetration (without success yet). The commitment of the British was significant. As the Germans want to focus on the French, I am trying to place the British in a position where they will not be ignored. When the French are taking only limited action I am also more inclined to force the Russians forward. The Russian 1st Army is well positioned for this but the 2nd Army had to remain in a defensive position as the Germans have a significant concentration against them.

The pursuit of the Austrians was mostly cautious as they are falling back on a narrower front and I am likely to be punished if my attacks are not selective. However, I considered a 50:50 chance to cross the San River with the 4th Army was worth suffering a -4 drm and happily this worked out.

Afterwards, I realised that if I had used a column attack (doubling my supply expenditure) I could have guaranteed a crossing as 20 strength points would inflict one hit reducing the Austrian defence from 4 to 3 strength points and then the follow up attack would have been certain to cross the river. This would have been more costly, so my failure to spot this possibility actually worked out for me.