

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT9: 6 – 9 September 1914 (September 2)

General Situation

News was filtering back from the Eastern Front that the Austrians had suffered a defeat in their first battles with the Russians. Although not officially confirmed, it was widely known that the Austrians were falling back. In London, rumours that the BEF had been heavily engaged were circulating, though the press had published nothing of consequence. Equally secret were intensive negotiations between the Germans and the King of Belgium. Antwerp was under bombardment, but did the Germans really want to fight the Belgians and had the honour of Belgium not already been satisfied? Both sides inched towards an accord and then, when they thought they had one, the negotiation returned to where it had begun.

The Western Front

Over most of the Western Front, there was a pause in the action as neither side could see advantage in persisting to attack the still formidable enemy forces which stretched continuously all the way from Mulhouse to Lille. Only in the north was there still a major battle continuing around the salient which the Germans had pushed almost to the Somme.

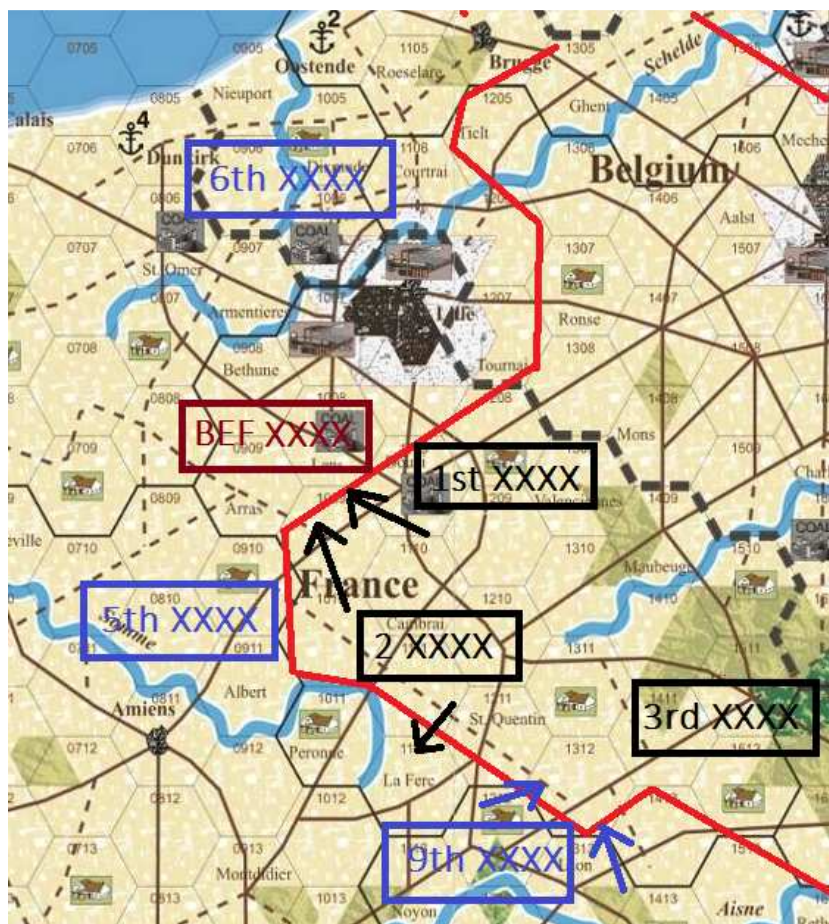


Figure 1: The German Right Wing, 6-9 September 1914

By 6 September, the Germans had stopped the British attempt to re-take Bapaume (4-3.1010) and instead were pushing them back north. The British 19th Brigade was sacrificed to try and delay the German advance at Bucquoy (4-3.1009), but the German 1st Army was nearby in large numbers. On 7 September, the Germans attacked in strength and the right wing of the BEF was forced back nearly 20 kilometres in 24 hours with tragic losses. The arrival of the British 6th Division from Dunkirk on 8 September helped stabilise the front but the BEF remained concerned about the superiority of the enemy forces on their front.

The action against the British was simultaneous with German bombardments on the French positions at La Fère. On 7 September, a French regiment of artillery (10th) lost all of its equipment to precision firing of heavy calibre German weapons. The French feared an assault but none came. Instead, the 9th Army, now commanded by Foch, was ordered to attack the base of the German salient at Crécy-sur-Serre (4-3.1312) on 9 September and there engaged the left wing of the German 3rd Army.

None of these actions threatened to deliver the decisive result both sides were hoping for. Having reports of the Germans doing the same, Joffre had started to pull some units from the 1st and 2nd Armies in Alsace-Lorraine and these were on their way to join the western concentration of Armies.

The Eastern Front

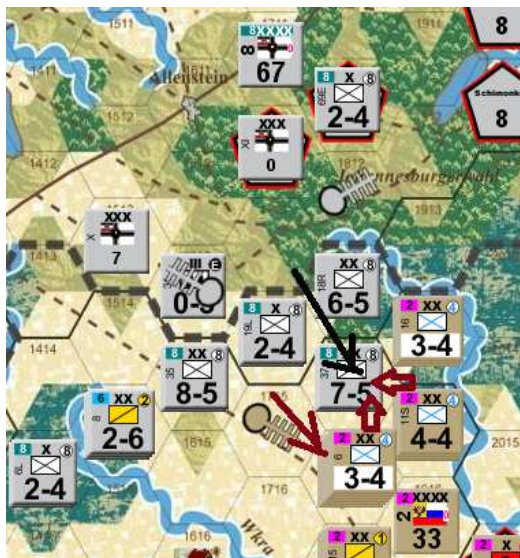


Figure 2: German 8th Army versus the Russian 2nd Army, 6 – 9 September 1914.

The German 8th Army had a new commander after von Prittwitz had been forced to resign due to the sceptic reaction to an insect bite. Paul von Hindenburg had been pulled out of retirement and was assigned Erich von Ludendorff as his Chief of Staff. Ludendorff had attracted criticism as a result of the delays which had occurred around Liege at the start of the conflict, but this new appointment gave him a further chance to prove himself.

The new plan of Ludendorff was to strike hard at the Russian 2nd Army and push over the Narew River behind Warsaw. At least, this was how he had explained it in his post-war writing. The operation was bold and the German XI Corps thrust two divisions (37th and 41st) into Russian positions at Przasnysz (4-5.1814) on 7 September. Samsonov inspired his troops into spirited

counterattacks over the next two days, but these proved increasingly costly to the Russians. Writing long after the war (he died in 1951), Samsonov recollected the good liaison among the North West Front Armies and asserted that he never would have ordered these attacks without the knowledge that the 1st Army was continuing its own efforts to drive the Germans from Allenburg (4-3.1907). Rennenkampf did not give up on this endeavour until the evening of 9 September. Unfortunately, neither Russian Army could make much progress against the very capable German 8th Army. If the Russian losses had become widely known, they would have been shocking but they demonstrated the great self-sacrifice of the Russian infantry and their dutiful adherence to orders that threw them against a deadly opponent.

The South West Front meanwhile believed itself to be on the verge of a major victory. However, this success was being delayed by the continuing grim resistance of the Austro-Hungarians whose retreat was punctuated by stubborn defensive actions.

On the left wing of the Russian Front, the XXV Corps of the 8th Army continued to advance along the Dniester and Prut Rivers and had reached to within 35 kilometres of Stanislaw. The main strength of the 8th Army was committed in support of the 3rd Army which was seeking to break the Austrian positions which had fallen back to low forested hills (5-5.3610) south of Lemberg and which both sides regarded as the key to the city. A significant battle was fought there on 8 September, but the Russians were frustrated by the narrow front on which they had to make the attack, poor execution, and accurate fire coming from the Austrian lines. The South West Front commander, Ivanov, was reputed to have knocked an aide off his horse when he was told the Austrians still held Lemberg on 9 September and sullied his reputation by blaming bad luck.

A reason why Lemberg was not quickly taken was perhaps that Ivanov had allowed Pleve's 5th Army to move rapidly west and it did not come down to Lemberg from the north as might have been expected. Pleve was attempting to restore contact with the 4th Army which had been lost in the first days of the fighting. Pleve's march was towards the Middle San River, west of Tarnograd (5-5.3008). The last march to the river was blocked on 9 September by three Austro-Hungarian Infantry Divisions and the 3rd Cavalry Division which protected the left wing of the Austrian 4th Army. Once again the Russians suffered a stinging reverse as they attempted to attack strong enemy positions with little preparation. One of Pleve's objectives was to cut the Lemberg – Krackow railway, but for the moment this was beyond him.

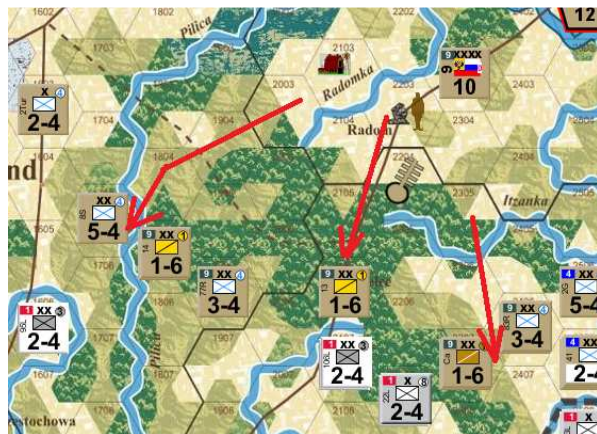


Figure 3: The Advance of the Russian 9th Army, 6 - 9 September 1914

The real Russian successes were taking place further west. The Russian 4th Army exploited its crossing of the San and drove more deeply into the left of the Austrian 1st Army through heavily wooded country (5-5.2708). By 9 September, the Russian 43rd Division had advanced nearly 40 kilometres south of the river and the main body of the Austrians was cut off from the German Landwehr Brigades which were controlling the right bank of the Vistula and supposed to provide the flank guard.

In addition to this crisis, the far left wing of the Austrian Armies in Galicia faced a new threat from the Russian 9th Army which had moved rapidly forward. In the space of two or three days, the Russians marched up to 75 kilometres. The Russian 13th Cavalry Division entered Kielce unopposed on 8 September. Further north, a new 10th Army was forming and it had sent a thin screen of units forward which covered the retaking of Lodz also without resistance on the same day. With these movements, the Russians were threatening a wide region of the borders of Austria and Germany.

Serbia

The front around Belgrade remained very quiet. However, in the Drina Valley it never could be still as the two sides continued to spar with one another. The Austrian's reconsidered their earlier crossing at Proboj (6-5.1212) and abandoned their bridgehead on 6 September. This was connected to Austrian movements further north where they sought to increase their presence on the east bank of the river.

The Serbians resolved to interfere with this and on 9 September, the Serbian 2nd and 3rd Armies cooperated to send assault columns from four Divisions in a raid against the 11th Croat Mountain Brigade then occupying a lonely hilltop position at Gračanica (6-5.1110). Before any help could arrive, the Croats had half their positions overrun and the victorious Serbians soon pulled back to the safety of their own lines. Hit and run was typical of the conflict on this front and it had to be admitted that only half the Croats had their heart in the struggle.

DM Situation – September 1914

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Month	Total	Morale
Germany	24	29						53	200	Good
Austria-Hungary	8	6						14	83	Good
Central Powers	32	35						67	283	
France	23	15						38	209	Good
Great Britain	3	9						12	19	Good
Russia	14	27						41	97	Good – recaptured Lodz and Kielce
Belgium	-	(4)						(4)	(74)	N/A
Serbia	(1)	-						(1)	(4)	N/A
Entente	39	51						90	325	

Player Notes

CP

- *East: East of Konigsberg I continue to hold a line of strong positions to deny Russian opportunity to bypass and to guarantee a slim likelihood of forcing me to retreat. I thought it best to consolidate on the S sector and launch my 1st attack there using the 2 x corps. My supply calculation is slightly off, so the attack has limited chance of success. I feel I have to start to threaten the Russian 2nd Army.*
- *Galicia: The fall back to a solid line anchored on good defensive terrain continues. I extract from Lodz and Kielce – they would be foolish to hold onto at this stage. I need a solid first line of defence running from the forests SE of Kielce-Przemysl-Lemberg-Stanislau (for now; it will likely have to adapt itself under Russian pressure). Cavalry is being used for LoC protection should I be forced to retreat anywhere. Alarming, Russian strength is growing week by week.*
- *Serbia: I start to stretch my line on the Drina northwards.*
- *West: There is much debate between Robert and I on how best to approach Belgium. If I am too constrained N of the Scheldt, then damaging any effort by the Belgians to bolt for France becomes almost impossible, as does threatening encirclement of Lille. I have built up a strong reserve on the N wing now and focus this turn on strengthening my penetration and trying to drive a wedge between the FR and BR armies at the Lille juncture. Railways prove particularly useful for this rebalancing and movement NW. I plan to use artillery and siege artillery to smash some of the forts and protecting artillery whilst maintaining pressure on Antwerp. This backfired and I took more arty casualties than I caused.*

AP: I am somewhat embarrassed how my “house rule” on Antwerp seems to have failed at the first test. I will report later how that turned out but for the moment my opponent wants to trap the Belgians in Antwerp, so I will let that happen.

The more critical issue on the Western Front is the fighting south of Lille. The British are getting a beating which I can tolerate for a bit, and the French have attacked to balance things out. The Germans are using artillery a lot including at La Fere. I should have abandoned the fortification as it is just allowing him to use siege artillery which would otherwise be useless.

September 1914 should be good times for the Entente, especially in the East. The Austrian defences around Lemberg are quite robust, but I reap the benefit further west, which is where I have shifted my strength, as the 4th and 9th Armies are moving forward swiftly and threaten to turn the whole Austrian left. Meanwhile, I am happy to keep the Germans busy in Prussia even though it is accelerating Russian losses.