

## Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

### GT10: 10 – 14 September 1914 (September 3)

#### General Situation

The Central Powers had precipitated a conflict in which their overall strategic position could not be described as advantageous. Moltke had been thrown into a commitment to a plan for an invasion of France which he had inherited from predecessors and which he did not completely believe in. His own previous wargaming experience suggested it would not succeed. Ironically, at the point where he was compelled to resign on 12 September, that plan was starting to show promise. Falkenhayn took over a situation where the Entente Powers in the West were starting to panic as the German 1<sup>st</sup> Army made repeated hammer blows on the small BEF. In the East, the German 8<sup>th</sup> Army was advancing into Poland and might with luck bring Warsaw into sight. Even the underrated Austrians were announcing they would never give up Lemberg.

#### Serbia

The Austrian 5<sup>th</sup> Army consolidated its hold on the eastern side of the Drina in North West Serbia. Serbian intelligence was so concerned that a new Austrian offensive was in the offing that they warned Putnik that a new withdrawal to the Kolubara River might be necessary. In addition, Serbian sympathisers in the Banat had sent messages asserting that the Austrians were thinking of making a crossing of the Danube, east of Belgrade. The source of this was wine-fuelled talk by Austrian engineers in a tavern in Padina(6-5.1705). Although Putnik thought this fevered speculation was unlikely to presage any serious action, he did feel compelled to take some preliminary countermeasures.



Figure 1: Serbian Intelligence Map, dated 12 September 1914, used to assess plans of an Austro-Hungarian attack across the Danube (Serbian National Army Archive, Document 21,008/14).

#### The Eastern Front

The right wing of the German 8<sup>th</sup> Army completed its victory over the Russians in the marshes of the Orolew River. Near Baranowo (4-5.1914), on 11 September, they broke up the Russian 4th Division and suffered only light losses. The Russian 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, was by then in full retreat and did not stop until it was safely within the cover of the fortifications of the Narew River running North East from Novo Georgievsk. At the same time, the Russian 1<sup>st</sup> Army had suspended its attacks on the German line at Allenburg (4-5.1907), which had defied all Russian efforts to break through. Although, the Russians

still held a lot of German territory in North East Prussia, it appeared that Hindenburg and Ludendorff had stabilised the situation.

On 10 September, Conrad had issued a “No Retreat” order specifically addressed to Brudermann’s 3<sup>rd</sup> Army that defended Lemberg. However, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army could only stand firm if the Armies on each flank held their positions too. Although there were a few tactical Austrian retreats, it was clear that the Russians would not be allowed to reach their objectives without a serious fight.

The good spirit in the Austrian forces was demonstrated on 10 – 11 September when the Kovess Army stopped retreating in the Prut Valley and launched a cavalry led operation scattering the Russian Cossacks who had been plundering Kolumba (5-5.4214).

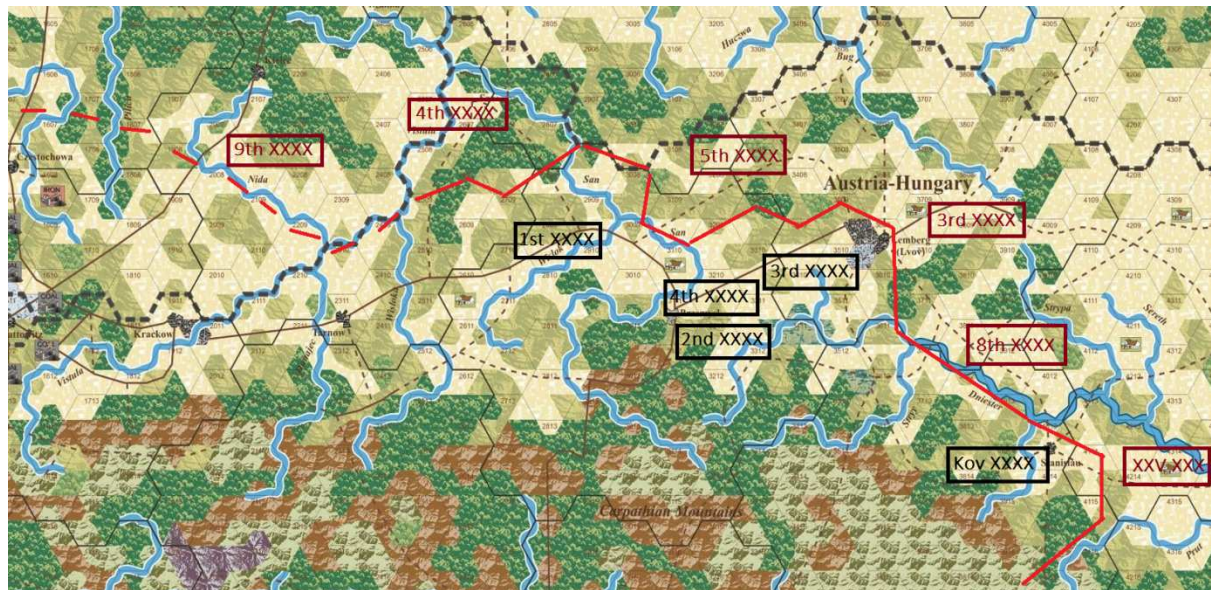


Figure 2: The Austrian Front in Galicia about 12 September, the line in the western section was lightly held.

The next round of Russian attacks began on 12 September. As previously, the main effort was a coordinated attack involving both the Russian 3<sup>rd</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Armies south of Lemberg (5-5.3710). The Russians 3<sup>rd</sup> Army brought up its biggest heavy guns to support the assault. All the Russian units involved had already suffered heavy losses and Brusilov wrote in his orders that they would have to go forward even if they endured one hundred percent losses. This was not necessary. The weight of Russian numbers finally began to tell on the Austrians who were slowly pushed back westwards. Every little step backwards endangered more and more the forces still holding Lemberg.

Lemberg was not the only object of Brusilov’s attention. On 14 September, the Russian 49<sup>th</sup> Division climbed into boats which had been gathered for a crossing of the Dniester. The Russians hoped to gain Halicz (5-5.3913) on the south bank defended by the Austrian 103<sup>th</sup> Landwehr Brigade. It cannot be said that the Russian infantry were accomplished boatmen and the river currents ensured that few made it to the opposite bank. Disheartened by the confusion the attack was cancelled and the Landwehr hardly knew they had been in a battle.

The Russian 5<sup>th</sup> Army was also in action on 13 September. It had made contact with the San River at Sieniawa and turned South East towards Zapalow which was defended by the Austro-Hungarian 15<sup>th</sup> Division. Once more both sides were committing very tired troops but the 15<sup>th</sup> Division soon fell back

to the protection of the Przemysl fortifications and crossed the San at Radymno (5-5.3110). The Russians had reached positions which would prevent the Austrians using the main railway through Galicia and this further imperilled the Austrian 3<sup>rd</sup> Army at Lemberg.

Further to the west, German Landwehr were engaged for the first time on the Austrian 1<sup>st</sup> Army front. By 14 September, the Russian 9<sup>th</sup> Army was well established on the Nida River and there was small scale fighting with German Landwehr in the Upper Pilica Valley at Goleniow (5-5.1807).

### The Western Front

The critical battles on the Western Front were still focused in Northern France. The German 1<sup>st</sup> Army was proving to be a formidable opponent to the BEF. Within a few days of arriving in France, the British 6<sup>th</sup> Division reported casualties exceeding 60% of its infantry in a desperate and unsuccessful defence of Lens which was taken by five German Divisions on 11 September. The same day, the French 6<sup>th</sup> Army lost control of Courtrai to the German 25<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Reserve Divisions.

Sir John French was rightly concerned that his army was going to be driven back to the sea. The French promised reinforcements which they were sending north as fast as the railways could carry them. However, Sir John believed he had to pull back and effect a solid connection with the 6<sup>th</sup> Army on his left. This brought the British into a line along an arc Ypres-Loos-Bethune. In this situation, nobody took responsibility to defend Lille and by 14 September, the last French troops were pulling out.



Figure 3: The Crisis of the French 5<sup>th</sup> Army, as La Fère was abandoned, 10 - 13 September 1914.

The withdrawal of the British north forced the French 5<sup>th</sup> Army to extend its left to Arras. This coincided with a crisis on its right wing as a German bombardment of La Fère precipitated a retreat on 12 September which continued as far as Nesle (5-3.1012) and Noyon. German infantry also moved forwards to St Gobain (5-3.1212) as three French Reserve Divisions proved unequal to the task of standing against elements of both the German 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Army which now reached the Upper Oise River west of Laon.

With the situation deteriorating, Joffre demanded more initiative from his subordinates. Since he was simultaneously stripping them of every spare formation to send to the North, he was unable to stimulate much offensive action. An exception was the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army which made a major attack on 13 September along the Canal de L'Est (5-3.2014) which was hoped would reduce the pressure the Germans were still applying around Verdun. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Army committed their elite 3<sup>rd</sup> Colonial Division

to an attack on the German 16<sup>th</sup> Reserve Division. Joffre had requested this unit for his reserve but the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army insisted they get some use of it first. After two days, heavy fighting the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army suspended its attack. Both sides took a mauling a common result in those desperate days.

#### DM Situation – September 1914

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Month	Total	Morale
Germany	24	29	14					67	214	Good
Austria-Hungary	8	6	6					20	89	Good
Central Powers	32	35	20					87	303	
France	23	15	17					55	226	Good
Great Britain	3	9	6					18	25	Good
Russia	14	27	10					51	107	Good
Belgium	-	(4)	-					(4)	(74)	N/A
Serbia	(1)	-	-					(1)	(4)	N/A
Entente	39	51	33					123	358	

#### Player Notes

CP:

- *East: There is opportunity for a more determined attack on 2<sup>nd</sup> Army now in the swamps along the S border of E Prussia. I cannot just sit here passively.*
- *Galicia: The fall back to a solid line anchored on good defensive terrain continues. There is only one viable opportunity to attack in the hope of eliminating some Russian cav. A pinprick, but good for my morale with slim chance of him inflicting loss on my own cav. The vast area of Poland along the German and AH borders is pretty much undefended with just a smattering of thinly spread bdes to delay any Russian advances into this territory.*
- *Serbia: Nothing of any note as I continue to creep northwards. Nothing decisive will be achieved in the mountains E of Sarajevo.*
- *West: I need to get a move on on the WF, so utilise some of the reserves railed in to attack the BEF again whilst at the same time attacking N of Lille. If these two attacks succeed, then advancing troops will push the N and S wings inwards towards each other and threaten to isolate the troops in Lille from supply. It is my intent that this threat is real enough to force him to abandon Lille without a fight thus exposing his formations to attack as they withdraw rather than leave them to wither on the vine. I would be content to bypass and encircle Lille, so we'll see what he does. I have begun to re-organise my armies and have established the Strnze HQ to conduct activities to the N of Lille, which currently splits my 1<sup>st</sup> Army in two. I also want to reduce the fort line between La Fere and Laon, so conduct an offensive to slice between these forts and threaten them with being isolated. I keep asking myself if I should be doing more on the WF. The French line is strong all along the front, though; strong enough to hold against attacks and thus inflict disproportionate*



casualties on me in counter-attacks; except in the area along the Somme. Here, the open ground lends itself towards attack with reasonable chance of forcing him to keep withdrawing. So, for now, I maintain this northwards push as my main effort and continue to send strong reserve divisions to the right wing armies. Everywhere else is in impasse. It is worth discussing the whole conundrum of pushing N of Lille vs a straight drive on Paris. We know from hindsight the Schlieffen Plan failed. There is, of course, an option to attempt to replicate it and drive on regardless for Paris. However, I believe such a drive will hit successive walls of defence and continue being attrited down as it does so whilst becoming ever more extended along a narrow front and extended salient. With Lille still garrisoned and a whole Belgian army on the right flank, I think this becomes very dangerous. I have more concern over this flanking threat and feel I must link up my northernmost wing and the rest of 1<sup>st</sup> Army W of Lille and also maintain a credible defence against any potential Belgian foray. Nothing in the rules says Belgium can't sortie after Oct 14. In short, drive at Paris at all costs, to me, results in culminating before getting there and being very exposed to a BEF or Belgian led flank attack from the N. In the longer run, those N ports are probably more important to him for BEF inloads of troops and resources, so an early race to the sea should stretch him more and enable better attack opportunities for me, even if widening my own frontage. As a point of interest, at my closest point to Paris I am still 120km away.

AP: Due to the shifting position of the BEF, I could not hold Lille and still comply with the Entente Front Line Sector Rule (GCR 31). This rule often places significant constraints on international cooperation on the Western Front and this is a good example. I claim to be a bit ambivalent about the value of holding Lille in any event. I lose a production factory, but the food deficit effects are more positive. In any event, the Germans are threatening to surround the city and it will be a liability to try and retain it now.

This is a good period for the Germans in the west. I had to use every rail capacity point I have which is a sign of the pressure.

In Galicia, I make a lot of attacks. I assumed I would get lucky somewhere and two or more good results will put the Austrians under a pressure again. In fact, I had success where it most counted near Lemberg and Przemysl. This greatly improves my confidence in the east as the Austrian 3<sup>rd</sup> Army is now in a tricky situation and will not be able to break contact easily. The relatively good performance of the Austrians so far may have contributed to this by encouraging them to stay longer than it was safe to do so.

The Russian 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Armies have not had a lot of success against the Germans and I was pleased to discover the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army could make use of the Russian forts along the Narew. The Germans do not have any artillery on this front yet so the fortresses are not as vulnerable as they might be.

The game is just 10 turns old. I notice that DM is already over 650 for both sides added together and that is not counting the Belgian losses.