

## Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT11: 15 – 18 September 1914 (September 4)

### General Situation

The French government perceived that the point of maximum danger was approaching as the loss of Lille was confirmed. GHQ maintained that more important than the fate of any one city was the outcome of the struggle of the opposing Armies which was being fought out on a long front from the Oise north all the way to the sea. Something similar was happening in Galicia where the Austrians had to submit to the loss of Lemberg in order to save their 3<sup>rd</sup> Army. The Austrians perceived that the Serbians would not be so capable of accepting the loss of Belgrade and a new offensive against their Balkan foe had now begun.

### The Western Front

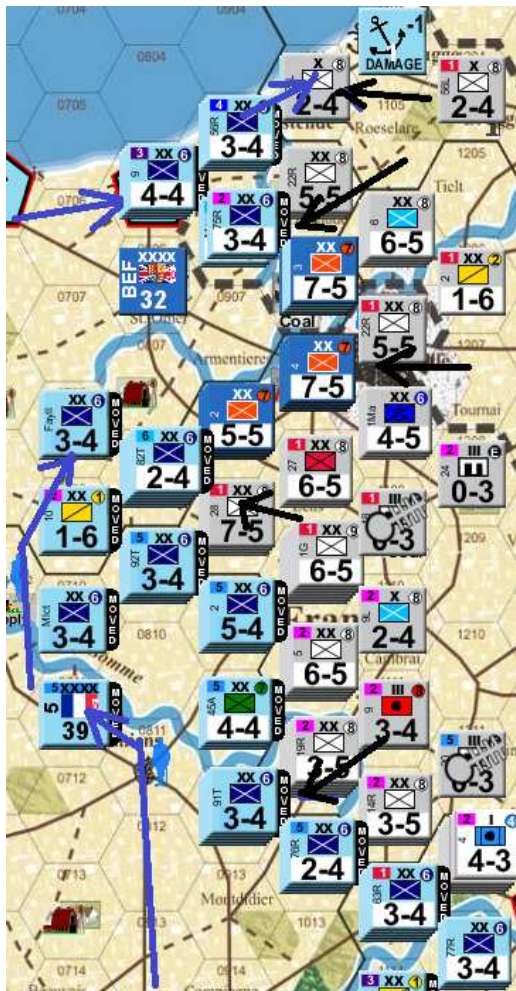


Figure 1: German Advances and the Arrival of French reinforcements, Northern France, 15 - 18 September 1914.

The news of the fall of Lille travelled fast. It was known in Berlin more than a day before the first German troops entered the city on 15<sup>th</sup> September. Berlin was for some days treated to despatches claiming important victories. Von Kluck announced the capture of Arras on 16 September and Von Bülow's 2<sup>nd</sup> Army was quick to match this with successes at Peronne and La Fère. These places had all been defended by the over stretched French 5<sup>th</sup> Army which could not but give ground in the face

of the continuous pressure applied by the German Armies. The German 2<sup>nd</sup> Army was also in action at Laon where the German heavy guns were reproducing the terrible barrage that had previously ruined La Fère. At Laon, the German shells completely broke up the French 51<sup>st</sup> Reserve Division and the 11<sup>th</sup> Artillery Regiment. By 17 September, the French had given up any attempt to fix a defence on the fortress at Laon and the commandant of the garrison was ordered to hold out as long as he could on his own.

The Germans now had a new Army in action in Belgian Flanders, commanded by Stranz. German Landwehr (27<sup>th</sup> Brigade) moved swiftly along the coast occupying Zeebrugge and Ostend. At Ostend, they faced a French counterattack on 18 September. This forced the Germans to abandon the port but not before doing considerable damage to the infrastructure. Stranz's main force had been busy further inland. On 16 September, they had captured Dixmunde from the French 6<sup>th</sup> Army. Both the French and Germans had sent Marines into the battles of Artois and Flanders and the French Marines had been among those driven from Dixmunde.

The misfortunes which oppressed the French in mid-September galvanised Joffre and the French staff into desperate efforts of reorganisation. Four newly formed divisions created from a scouring of the rear areas and the Paris garrison were sent to Picardy to give Lanzarac's 5<sup>th</sup> Army a reserve. Everywhere the railways were run at full capacity delivering troops to the most threatened fronts. To do this the French culled every unit deemed unnecessary to the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Armies and loaded them on trains destined for Flanders, Picardy and the Aisne. Much depended on whether these transferred units would be enough to stem the German tide before it reached the coast.

### **The Eastern Front**

The North West Fronts were fairly quiet. The German 37<sup>th</sup> Division probed further into the wetlands of the border region and made contact with the Narew River. This was watched by Russian cavalry which retired further east. The Russian 2<sup>nd</sup> Army sheltered in the pre-war fortifications of the region and dared the Germans to come to them. Such was the defence of Warsaw during this period.

The Russian 10<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Armies, the West Front, were active pushing back towards the frontier. The 10<sup>th</sup> Army established itself on the Warta River. The 9<sup>th</sup> Army reoccupied Czestochowa on 17 September and the 2nd Turkmen Brigade supported by the 14<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Division moved up to the German border. Upper Silesia was therefore in daily danger of invasion.

The Austrians were stretched thin defending a front that extended 500 kilometres east of Kattowice as far as Stanislaw. Lemberg could no longer be defended and the 88<sup>th</sup> Kaiser Schutze Brigade was the last unit to leave on 15 September. After a day of uneasy waiting, Lemberg's nervous inhabitants watched Russian infantry (11<sup>th</sup> Division) march in with companies of undisciplined Caucasian horsemen riding alongside. This was a bad day for Polish nationalists who knew the Russians would favour the Orthodox in Eastern Galicia.

Although, the Austrians were hoping to stabilise their lines, it was not easy to find security as the Russians continued searching for weak points. To the west, the Russian 4<sup>th</sup> Army approached Tarnow. The Austrian 1<sup>st</sup> Landwehr Brigade was the only defending force but it succeeded in repulsing a first Russian attack launched on 18 September. The 5<sup>th</sup> Don Cossack Division was broken in futile assaults that included several attempts to charge into the city on horseback.

After Lemberg, the Russians' main objective was the fortress of Przemyśl. This was only a few kilometres beyond the spearheads of the Russian 5<sup>th</sup> Army. The Russians were running short of supplies, however, and they made heavy work of completing the clearance of the eastern bank of the San River of Austrian stragglers. This would give the Austrians more time to improve their defences.

The Russians enjoyed another clearer success on 18 September when the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Armies made new attempts to cross the Dniester. The Russian 49<sup>th</sup> Division had already tried to cross at Halicz (5-5.3913) four days previously. This time they got across safely as the Austrian defence crumbled. As Russian infantry losses had thinned their ranks, cavalry were more frequently thrust into the action. The Russian 10<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Division suffered awful losses in a bold effort to more rapidly expand the Halicz bridgehead.

The operation at Halicz was still secondary to the major attack at Zydaczow (5-5.3611). There the Russians had the heavy guns of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Artillery Brigade directly firing across the river. This covering fire helped ensure that the Russians got their first assault troops to the south side with minimal losses. In fact, the Austrian 15<sup>th</sup> Division was overwhelmed by superior numbers and by midnight on 19 September the Russian had men from five more Divisions south of the Dniester. That barrier was now completely compromised and next morning the Russians woke to see the hazy outline of the Carpathians rising in the distance.



Figure 2: The Fall of Lemberg and the Crossing of the Dniester, 17 - 18 September 1914.

## Serbia

Potiorek had been planning a new offensive against Serbia and, on 15 September, the Austro-Hungarian 5<sup>th</sup> Army advanced east from the Drina and also over the Sava. The front edge of the

invading force reached Obrenovac (6-5.1408) on the Lower Kolubara River within 48 hours. Belgrade was only a two days march further east from here but the Serbians held all the crossings of the river.

Next morning, the 36<sup>th</sup> and 42<sup>nd</sup> Divisions, both predominantly Croat formations in Obrenovac, were attacked by the Serbian 1<sup>st</sup> Army positioned on the opposite side of the river. The Serbians also committed units from their 2<sup>nd</sup> Army which moved up from the south. This force included a brigade made up of Obrenovac men who were determined to rescue their town from enemy occupation. This Serbian counterstroke was the biggest attack yet organised by the Serbian Army but it was beyond the capabilities of their staff for the attack was poorly executed. The Croats counterattacked fiercely breaking up the entire momentum of the Serbian operation which failed in every aim. The reputation of the Croats in the Hapsburg Army rose after this action. Some of the questions that had been asked of their loyalty in the actions along the Drina were dispelled by this courageous fight.



Figure 3: Potiorek's Second Offensive and the Battle of Obrenovac, 15 - 18 September 1914

#### DM Situation – September 1914

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Month	Total	Morale
Germany	24	29	14	16				83	230	Good
Austria-Hungary	8	6	6	33*				53	122	Good – *Lemberg captured
Central Powers	32	35	20	49				136	352	
France	23	15	17	55*				55	281	Good – *Lille (C) captured
Great Britain	3	9	6	-				18	25	Good
Russia	14	27	10	7				58	114	Good – Czestochowa reoccupied.
Belgium	-	(4)	-	-				(4)	(74)	N/A – Brugge taken again by Germans
Serbia	(1)	-	-	(3)				(4)	(7)	N/A
Entente	39	51	33	62				185	420	

## Player Notes

CP:

- *East: My very limited attack south of the Masurian Lakes has had the effect of forcing the Russian 2<sup>nd</sup> Army back into its fortified border zone. This actually has the indirect result of forcing me to hold along a not overly strong line in NW Poland. I am going to try and push him out of the swamps altogether so make an unsupplied attack on his cav and drive them back into Lomsha. Breaking out of the swamps may provide me opportunity to threaten him with outflanking manoeuvres. To assist, I dispatch another cav div and an inf div from the WF. In the N, I maintain a holding action. The one concern I have is a virtually unopposed border along Silesia, which he has probes moving towards. I use both Austrian and German rail to move screening forces to deny access along this border.*
- *Galicia: Not a happy place to be. I need to hold on to Przemysl as I cannot abandon it. I use column movement to move some formations into depth and relinquish the bulk of Lemberg. To try and hold it would be to court disaster. I establish a line Kattowitz-Krakow-Tarnow-Przemysl-Stanislaw using river lines and forest as best I can. I feel the comfort of the Carpathians calling though, particularly after he forces a crossing on the one major river – the Dniester! I fear this will also force me to get out of Stanislaw.*
- *Serbia: It is time to apply pressure in this theatre so I push SE towards the Kolibaru River in a drive to split the Serb 7<sup>th</sup> Army from the 8th.*
- *West: A very interesting round on the WF. I carefully selected my objectives to keep trying to encircle Lille and also to break the La Fere-Laon line. I am able to deny the ports of Zeebrugge and Ostend to TE use and further threaten Belgian future intentions (I still don't know how we will play out the Belgian scenario). The TE is slowly being obliged to relinquish Lille. The fort of La Fere has already been eliminated and this time I manage to force him from Laon. It still holds, but with the weight of siege artillery I can bring to bear down on it it won't last long and will become nothing more than a charnel house if it is re-garrisoned by manoeuvre formations. He will either have to remove it of his own accord or have it obliterated. The BEF are too strongly concentrated at this point so I apply concentrated effort on the French and continue to penetrate into the area between Lille and Laon, which allows me to start to turn the defences along the Somme. It gets me no closer to Paris, though!*

*AP: One short term objective I have is to try and get German DM roughly equal to French DM by the end of the year. This turn saw that idea in difficulty though a large part was due to giving up Lille. There was a lot to worry about this turn and I am starting to wake up to the fact that the Entente is facing a very challenging situation on the two most active fronts. At least in France, I have a clear idea what I need to do. The fact I have used my full railway capacity during the last two turns is an indication of my need to respond to the German threat with no half measures.*

*The Russians were proving a disappointment to me and I was conscious that I am running down their supply (5<sup>th</sup> Army is down to zero supply points). I cannot quite understand why the Austrians are still so difficult to drive back. Part of the answer is that they have concentrated between Lemberg and Przemysl and there is very little on the front from Tarnow to Kattowice. I have finally got across the*

*Dniester south of Lemberg, but I am wondering whether I will be able to cut off Przemysl. If I do not I may be compensated by greater gains further west. I will not need much supply to get to Kattowice and Krackow if they are not defended.*

*I exposed two Cavalry Divisions to loss this turn because the infantry units are now below strength and I needed to maximise my chances of crossing the river at Halicz (worked) and capturing Tarnow (did not work).*

*If the Austrian intelligence service thinks I have 7 or 8 Serbian Armies they have misled themselves.*