

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT12: 19 – 22 September 1914 (September 5)

General Situation

From the perspective of Berlin, the general situation looked increasingly favourable. There were opportunities to inflict punishing blows on the Anglo-French forces in Northern France and Ludendorff was about to initiate a new offensive in Prussia. This rosy prospect was spoiled by the increasingly pessimistic reports emerging from the liaison officers at the Austrian Headquarters in Teschen. German reinforcements were arriving in Silesia, but there was nothing much they could do to help the Austrians on their long front.

The Western Front



Figure 1: The Capitulation of Laon and the Advance to the Aisne, 19 - 22 September 1914.

The Allied situation continued to deteriorate. The superiority of the German artillery was evident in attacks at Verdun and elsewhere. The German heavy guns kept up the bombardment of Laon rapidly dismantling its remaining caissons and the Commandant of the fortress surrendered it on 20 September. At the same time, the German 3rd Army pushed back the French to the River Aisne where they abandoned their last foothold on the northern bank at Château Porcien (5-3.1513).

Increasingly the French gave up ground in the face of still strong German assaults. The German 2nd Army was still advancing on a broad front. On 20 September, its left wing took Noyon and its right wing was on the outskirts of Albert.

Against this dispiriting background, the 20 September was afterwards known as “Le Jour Noir”. It was also a Black Day for the BEF. Von Kluck’s 1st Army struck at the British line covering Bethune. The British 1st Division was caught badly prepared and it swiftly lost many of its important positions. The Corps commander General Haig rode up to the line on his horse but the poor beast was swiftly killed and Haig was lucky to be able to rise to his feet. The right of the BEF fell back to Aire and Hazebrouck (5-3.0807). Surviving wits, and there were only a few, said their flank was “hanging in the Aire”.



Figure 2: The Battle of Bethune, 20 - 21 September 1914.

The Germans did not realise how successful they had been. For several hours a single German Division (28th) with a few Landwehr milled around in Bethune as other supporting units held back and failed to get the message that the way forward was clear. Sir John French and Lanzerac were determined to make a counter attack and use the fresh French reserves which had arrived. The commander of the French 6th Army had his two best Divisions stolen for this purpose.

The attack should have been made at dawn on 21 September but it was delayed as the final arrangements were prepared. Then reports came in that the Germans were now in Bethune in strength. The opportunity had passed and the attack was cancelled. Once this caution took hold the French and British realised that Ypres and Loos were also indefensible and orders were given to pull back from these places during 22 September.

With the Entente Allies being driven back, the King of the Belgians attempted another negotiation to salvage something of Belgian sovereignty. The Germans were not willing to enter into talks. The Belgian government wondered how long they would be permitted to hold out defiant in Antwerp. Eventually the implacable Huns would turn on them and then who could help them?

The Eastern Front

In the early hours of 19 September, the forest tracks of Masuria filled with advancing German infantry. Ludendorff had ordered four Divisions into action. At Arys (4-5.2110) the German 2nd and 18th Reserve Divisions pushed aside a brigade of Finnish infantry that had been screening the German positions at Lötzen and Nikaulaken. Further south, the German 37th Division drove back Russian cavalry at Bialla (4-5.2211) while the 17th Reserve followed in its rear.

The Germans, therefore, at first encountered only light forces as they probed further into the junction of the areas of operation of the Russian 1st and 2nd Armies. The German 8th Army also attempted to deflect attention from their move by staging an attack at Damerau (4-5.1805) at the extreme left of the German line. The Russian 1st Army pulled back but a skilful retreat caused the

German reservists involved, mostly Landwehr and Königsberg recruits, to suffer disproportionate losses, often in encounters with Russian cavalry.

The Russians were not so easily persuaded to ignore the threat of the German advance and both the 1st and 2nd Army detached units to reinforce and block the exits of the woods and marshes of Masuria. The 2nd Army also debouched from the fortress line on the Lower Narew and headed towards the Prussian border again. The Germans had been obliged to thin their defences in the south of their province and the Russians thought there might now be a better opportunity for invasion from this direction.

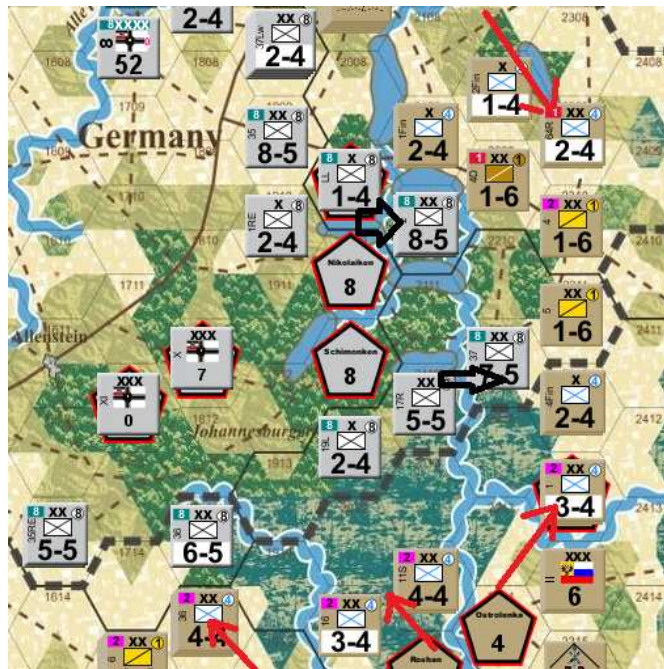


Figure 3: The German 8th Army attack in Masuria, 19 - 20 September 1914.

The German action in Prussia was also intended to provide some distant support to their Austrian allies in Galicia. In addition, the 5th Bavarian Division and the Bavarian Cavalry Division arrived in Silesia as the Germans responded to the threat of a Russian incursion. The whole German border was now screened by Landwehr units stretched thinly over a wide area.

For the moment, the Russians made no move on Silesia though they secured their own side of the border. The Russian 9th Army also advanced up to the environs of Krakow and observers in that city's tallest steeples could, they claimed, make out the Cossacks on the surrounding hills. The 9th Army also effected a crossing of the Vistula, on 21 September, with the 70th Reserve Division. The Russian Guards Rifle Brigade then crossed the railway at Bochnia (5-5.2111) on the following day.

Further to the East, the Russian 1st Guard Division captured Tarnow on 21 September. The Russians were rapidly penetrating the Wisloka and Dunajec Valleys. There was also a move south across the Wislok River, west of Przemysl. The Austrians were no longer holding their ground here and a disorganised horde of Hapsburg troops from several mixed up Armies was finding their way into the Carpathian range. The Russian 5th Army was ordered to invest Przemysl as soon as possible.

Brudermann's 3rd Army (mixed with bits of the 2nd Army) was slower to withdraw than most. Brudermann perhaps never really accepted that he had lost the Battle of Lemberg. He claimed that he was also slowed by the need to protect Polish refugees on the roads. Whatever the reason, on 21 September, he still had more than five Divisions, north of the Dniester at Mikolajow (5-5.3511). The problem with this was that the Russian 8th Army had crossed the Stry River and was advancing rapidly into the Austrian rear. On 22 September, the Austro-Hungarian 11th Division was forced to retreat allowing the Russians to appear on the south side of the Dniester opposite Mikolajow.

Brudermann's force had only one escape route left, and that through difficult country for the Upper Dniester divides there into a mass of tributaries and marshland. The Austro-Hungarian 27th Division covered the only road available to Brudermann through Medenyecz (5-5.3411). Fortunately the difficult terrain was as much an impediment to the Russians. The Russian 3rd Army tried to get through it on 22 September but their casualties were very numerous and they could not reach solid ground. Brudermann, was still in a difficult position but his command had a temporary reprieve.



Figure 4: Russian Advances in Galicia and the Battle of Mikolajow, 20 - 22 September 1914.

The Austrians also had quite a strong force in the Eastern Capathians still commanded by General Kövess. To conform to the retreats of the Armies further west, Kövess had pulled back into the mountains. Stanislau was the last major town held on the Dniester but it had also had to be abandoned on 19 September. The Austrians had lost the whole province of Bukovina and had no means to threaten its recovery.

Serbia

The only Austrian success to encourage Vienna at this time had been the successful repulse of the Serbian attack on Obrenovac (6-5.1408) on 18 September. After this, the Austrians had consolidated their gains in North West Serbia. The Serbians made no further effort to challenge them in this region and kept to the East and South of the Kolubara River.

The Serbs did move forward again in Bosnia as the Austrian 6th Army, which had been weakened by transfers to the 5th Army, fell back from the Drina. These remote events did not capture the attention of Europe.

DM Situation – September 1914

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Month	Total	Morale
Germany	24	29	14	16	13			96	243	Good
Austria-Hungary	8	6	6	33*	34**			87	156	Good – *Lemberg captured ** Stanislaw and Tarnow captured.
Central Powers	32	35	20	49	47			183	399	
France	23	15	17	55*	22			77	303	Good – *Lille (C) captured.
Great Britain	3	9	6	-	8			26	33	Good
Russia	14	27	10	7	9			67	123	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	39			224	459	

Player Notes

It is worth noting that Germany used every bit of available rail capacity this turn.

- *East: Along the Silesian border I have been able to deploy sufficient units to now block his access. Should he, with his sparse units in this area, attempt to penetrate the block, he will be risking units being isolated and picked off. With the approaches to Silesia reasonable protected, I begin to seek opportunity to deal with the Russian 1st Army through a series of forces crossings of the Pregel E of Schimonken and Nikolaiken. This will force him into open country and risk having the S flank of 1st Army and its LsOC being threatened. The attack E of Konigsberg risks 50% loss of up to 3 brigades, but I cannot remain idle in this area. I also manage to reach Kattowitz with sufficient reserves to hopefully annul the immediate threat to it.*
- *Galicia: I still hold a rather porous line Kattowitz-Krakow-Tarnow-Przemysl but have had to abandon Stanislaw and also my last tenuous hold on southern Lemberg. This will cost me in DMs but hopefully preserve the bulk of my armies to try and rebuild. I am now starting to defend in the Carpathians and very grateful for this mountain backstop I am too. Tarnow I can only hold with a single brigade – it will fall (and does). I realise after he declares his attack that I have an entire army in peril of*

becoming surrounded S of Lemberg; fortunately his enveloping attack only succeeds on the one flank so this army can escape without a breakout battle. A close, very close, escape.

- *Serbia: I secretly amuse myself that the Serbian forces try to deceive me by designating their armies 5th through 8th. I will continue to allow them to believe I am fooled as to the whereabouts of a 1st-4th group of armies as I concentrate around Belgrade whilst ensuring I protect Sarajevo.*
- *West: Excellent opportunities present themselves in the W. He has left Verdun very weakly garrisoned so I move artillery to commence reducing its defences and must use a large amount of rail capacity to shift the Siege HQ to be in range to support both this activity and the final reduction of Laon. I also start the slow traffic of some artillery eastwards. My attacks in the W all focus in the areas of 1st to 3rd armies with a dual intention of writing down BEF and FR strength and pushing towards the Somme and Aisne rivers. The attack on the BEF will finally enclose Lille in a set of dangerous pincers and hopefully compel him to abandon it entirely so that my forces to N and S of it might link up more effectively. It works; he is compelled to withdraw from Loos and Ypres. I am eating up large amounts of supply though and am being forced to shift at least 30 factors of supply from the 3rd to 6th armies westwards by rail to provision Strnz and 1st to 2nd armies. It is an endless juggling act getting sufficient supply in place; although the great strength of 3rd Army's offensive towards the Aisne 20km E of Laon means I can throw the bulk of these forces at the FR with limited supply.*

AP: If this game gets much more exciting it will be a danger to my health. I had forgotten how dicey the situation gets in late September 1914 on several fronts.

I am forced to abandon Loos and Ypres as a result of the German success at Bethune. I will not fully comment on this, as I do not want to reveal my plans yet, but I am sparing little effort in bolstering the line between Flanders and Picardy and this is why places like Verdun are weakly defended.

Although I am on the ropes in the West, the shoe is on the other foot in Galicia. I had about a 10% chance to encircle 14 strength points of the Austrian 3rd Army which was worth making a disadvantageous attack for. The Austrians will likely make it to the Carpathians, but they will not be in good shape. I was a bit more cautious in South West Poland and did not press into Silesia. I forgot that the defenders would have been unsupplied which might have encouraged me a little more.

The German move in Prussia was well timed and looks very like the start of the historical Masurian Lakes offensive. This has provoked me to advance the 2nd Army towards southern Prussia again as the Germans are stretching their line and this may give me an opportunity.