

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT13: 23 – 26 September 1914 (September 6).

General Situation

The intensity of the war in its first few weeks was one of its most notable features. Whenever the violence showed signs of slowing down it flared up again, often in different places. There were few truly quiet sectors at this time. Every front seemed ablaze with action at the same time. The casualties were unbelievable. Governments wondered if the morale of their publics could withstand the scale of the unfolding tragedy.

Serbia

The Serbians were not content to leave the Austrians at peace despite their failure at Obrenovac earlier in the month. Between 25 and 26 September, the Serbian 1st and 2nd Armies attacked the Czech 21st Division which held an exposed front along a long stretch of the middle Kolubara River. The Serbians were successful and slowly drove the Czechs out of Lajkovac (6-5.1509).

The Eastern Front

The Austrians were also continuing to lose ground on their main front. The primary objective of the Russian South West Front was now clearly Przemysl . The Russian 8th and 3rd Armies were still intent on attacking the weak flanks of the Austrian 3rd Army. The 8th was able to move up the Stry Valley to Stryj (5-5.3513) from where the road led up to the distant Beskid Pass into Hungary. Przemysl was subject to outflanking moves both on its eastern and western sides. To the east, the Russian 3rd Army cleared Sambor (5-5.3211) on 25 September. On the western side, the key Russian attack was at Kraiscyn (5-5.3011) on 26 September where the Russian 11th Cavalry Division helped secure an important crossing of the Upper San. By that evening, most of the Russian Cavalry were casualties but the two wings of the Russian Army were less than 25 kilometres apart. The chances of the Austrians preventing this trap shutting were diminishing.



Figure 1: Engagement of the German and Russian 9th Armies in South West Poland, 24 - 26 September 1914.

The Austrian 1st Army was now holding a long front between Krackow and the San River. The Russians did not challenge this cordon as they concentrated against Przemysl. There was still a number of isolated actions on this front as the Russians consolidated their hold on Tarnow. The threat to Krackow eased as the Russian 9th Army was forced to reinforce its right flank which now came under pressure of the newly formed German 9th Army operating out of Upper Silesia. The 5th Bavarian Division and the Bavarian Cavalry attacked the Russian 2nd Turkmen Brigade in Czestochowa on 24 September. There was fighting also at Zawiercie (5-5.1609) as the German Landwehr tussled with the Russian Reservists in the Upper Warta Valley. The Russians were cautious on this front and on 26 September, an order was given to evacuate Czestochowa.

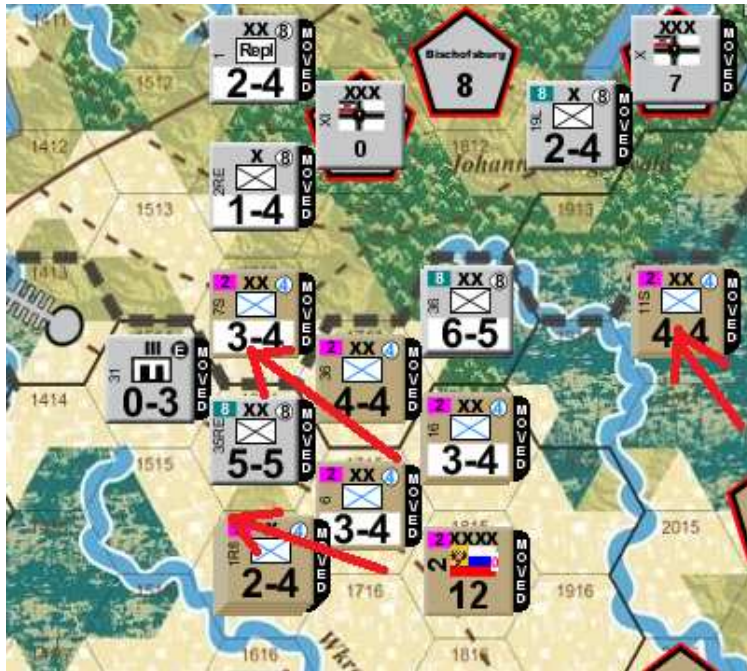


Figure 2: The Russian 2nd Army Drives Forward Across the Prussian Border, 25 - 26 September 1914.

The German offensive in Masuria continued though Russian cavalry were successful in several delaying actions. By 24 September, the German 2nd and 18th Reserve Divisions had advanced past Widminnen (4-5.2209) but they had not been able to pin the Russians who fell back before them. The 8th Army also continued operations on the sandy coast of the Kurische Haff where the German 4th Cavalry Division helped break the thin defences of the Russian 3rd Cavalry Division (4-5.1804).

With the Russian 1st Army under pressure, the Russian 2nd Army was ordered to act to relieve its neighbour. Fortunately, its commander, Samsonov, was one of the most vigorous general officers the Russians had during the World War. On 25 September, he struck at the German XI Corps which was in reality little more than the 35th Reserve Ersatz Division. It was supposed to be supported by the 41st Division but this was in reality a paper unit which was quickly disbanded when the Russians approached. Samsonov's main thrust was led by the 7th Siberian Division. This was aggressively led and defeated the 2nd Reserve Ersatz Brigade before occupying Niederburg (4-5.1613) inside Prussian territory. With the Russians threatening their lines of communication the 35th Reserve Ersatz was in a difficult situation.

The Western Front

This was a critical moment on the Western Front. Falkenhayn was under enormous pressure to resume the march on Paris but there were still many other opportunities and battles incomplete which competed for resources.

Among these were the artillery battles which raged on the Côtes de Meuse. Fort Douaumont was under a fearful bombardment by German guns (5-3.2115). Joffre was unwilling to allow this symbolic point of resistance to be abandoned and the French 3rd Army was sent an accumulation of France's heaviest weapons. On 25 September 1914, they succeeded in silencing a couple of Austrian heavy mortars but this hardly reduced the continuing danger.

The German forces in Northern France now concentrated in the Somme Valley and the 2nd Army succeeded in gaining further ground from the French 5th Army at Contay (5-3.0810) on 23 September. The French saw this as a dangerous thrust that might continue to the coast or turn south through Amiens. There was little they could do at this juncture other than to reinforce their front as much as possible with forces stripped from other areas.



Figure 3: The Germans Cross the Aisne, 23 - 24 September 1914.

Joffre reorganised his front with the 4th Army under Langle de Cary covering the direct road to Paris between Amiens and the Oise. Foch's 9th Army was supposed to hold the long front of the Aisne but this was decisively lost on 24 September after two days fighting when the German 3rd Army forced Foch's command back from Neufchâteau-sur-Aisne and started moving south towards Reims. Foch ordered the forts there to be dynamited on the following day and the right flank of the 9th Army was pulled back from Reims.

There was precious little to cheer the Entente commanders on the Western Front during these dark days but an Anglo-French attack which recovered Ypres on 26 September was an example. Both sides had weakened their front in Flanders following the fall of Lille but the French 6th Army determined that the German 25th Division defending Ypres was unsupported. The attack was led by the British 2nd Cavalry Division which allowed the French infantry to close with the Germans without suffering significant losses.

DM Situation – September 1914

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Month	Total	Morale
Germany	24	29	14	16	13	14		110	257	Good
Austria-Hungary	8	6	6	33*	34**	10		97	166	Good – *Lemberg captured ** Stanislau and Tarnow captured.
Central Powers	32	35	20	49	47	24		207	423	
France	23	15	17	55*	22	45*		122	348	Good – *Lille (C) captured. **Lille/Loos captured.
Great Britain	3	9	6	-	8	2		28	35	Good
Russia	14	27	10	7	9	12		77	135	Good – Czestochowa reoccupied.
Belgium	-	(4)	-	-	-	-		(4)	(74)	N/A – Brugge taken again by Germans.
Serbia	(1)	-	-	(3)	-	(1)		(5)	(8)	N/A
Entente	39	51	33	62	39	59		283	518	

Player Notes

CP:

- *East: A new army, 9th, is established in the south and the HQ rails to Kattowice to start to take command by launching an attack on Czestochowa. The Silesian border block is now well established and I am hoping attacks on the flank of Russia's 9th Army will relieve some of the pressure on AH. I also launch a series of pinpoint attacks against his 1st Army to start to force them away from my eastern border into open country.*
- *Galicia: Tarnow and Stanislau are lost but I am starting to be able to consolidate a line along the Carpathians which, though thin in places, might just hold as replacements come in to try and rebuild some of my divisions. In fact, I even have an opportunity for a limited attack near the source of the San River. This is purely to*

blunt him and remind him that AH can still try to bite. Russian supply is now starting to run low and I'm hoping the steam will start to come out of his broad front offensive.

- *Serbia: Nothing but jockeying for position here, but I hold positions to three sides of Belgrade. I also have a corps(-) with engineer support along the Danube, which will force the Serbs to be mindful of the threat of a crossing. I somewhat expected the attack he put in against my salient on the Kolubaru River south of Belgrade.*
- *West: Supply shortages now make opportunity very limited in the west. He has left Verdun very lightly garrisoned so I continue to pound the fortress with a combination of siege artillery and regular artillery. It is now much reduced already. For the rest, I make only two attacks to push the line further up against the Somme and to gain a bridgehead N of Rheims which risks driving a wedge between his 9th and 3rd armies. It will make his holding of a line along the Oise-Aisne very challenging. This attack does indeed compel him to draw back his line along the Aisne and to dismantle the fort of Rheims. His retaking of Ypres will probably force me to rethink my positions N of the Scheldt, which will please the Belgians no end, probably providing them with opportunity to breakout westwards to link up with their TE allies. I think there is real pressure on the French between the Aisne and the Marne now, with my nearest units to Paris 100km from the city. A canny enemy, though - he may be deliberately trying to draw me in!*

AP: Am I drawing him in. You bet I am. But it is like diverting a dagger at the jugular in order to accept it in the heart. I have a flood of French replacements which start to arrive next turn in the West. They cannot arrive soon enough as far as I am concerned. I have continued to strip down the French 1st and 2nd Armies so that the strength of the front east of Toul is rarely above 6 SP per hex and often no more than 4 SP. At this moment I wouldn't care much if I lost a few hexes in the Vosges or even let the Germans have Mulhouse back.

I have previously doubted my ability in this game to surround Przemysl which is an important Russian objective. However, it looks as if the Russians will now succeed at this just before their supplies run out. Once I have achieved this objective I will have to consider some of the longer term goals of the Russians. These are basically to keep attacking the Austrians and the Germans but I will have to decide which and the circumstances have to be right. The Austrians are not such an easy target once they are in the mountains.

I have been fighting a lot of cavalry actions. This is because I am running short of infantry. Near Przemysl, committing cavalry was the only way to guarantee the key advance west of the fortress. At Ypres, using the British cavalry meant that losses would be suffered by the British rather than the French, who cannot now afford to waste strength in peripheral actions.