

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game.

GT14: 27 – 30 September 1914

General Situation

The European States were waking up to the incredible losses they had suffered in the first two months of this conflict. Everywhere fresh drafts of reserves and volunteers were being sent for training. Already these were being organised into units for transfer to the fighting fronts. However, these units would not fight. The men would simply be distributed to existing formations to replace those who had fallen. Several of the pre-war Divisions had suffered such extreme losses that the replacements would effectively constitute a new Division. These replacements were now starting to be absorbed into the killing machine. Nowhere were they more needed than in France.

The Western Front



Figure 1: The General Situation on the Western Front, end of September 1914.

The French now suffered a true disaster on the Côtes de Meuse (5-3.2115). Joffre only professionally survived it by promptly sacking the commander of the 3rd Army and the Superintendent of Artillery. The 3rd Army had possession of most of the French heavy artillery reserve. The German bombardment of Fort Douaumont had been a trial and it had been decided to reinforce the positions around the fortification with four precious Divisions backed up with three Artillery

Regiments. It was mistakenly thought the German bombardment was subsiding and the time to engage in counter battery operations had arrived.

Within two days, the French had lost most of their artillery pieces to well observed German fire. No account had been taken of the fact that the Germans had excellent maps of the French positions and it was fairly predictable where the artillery would go. In any event, the Germans swamped the area with their still sufficient stocks of shell. When Joffre realised what had happened he ordered the immediate abandonment of Fort Douaumont and insisted that the four Infantry Divisions be returned to the reserves and not be allowed to sit uselessly as targets for German guns. Verdun, itself, was now under increasing German threat.

This was not the only difficulty the French faced. The German 2nd and 3rd Armies were steadily moving forward. They were closing in on Amiens, capturing Villiers Bretonneux (5-3.0912) on 28 September. They were marching down the Oise directly towards Paris reaching Ribécourt (5-3.1-1013). The 3rd Army was also now over the Aisne in strength and Reims was looking vulnerable.

The Germans were now considering their opportunities to deliver a crushing blow to the weakening Armies of France. As the focus of operations shifted, Stranze's Army was pulled back from Ostend and the Germans gave up ground in Belgian Flanders.

The French still had some attacking spirit and the German spearheads which occupied Soissons were subject to a counterattack by the French 9th and 4th Armies on 29 September. A bigger battle was fought north of Amiens at Canaples (5-3.0810) as the full strength of the French 5th Army was thrown at three German Divisions (29th, 30th, and 33rd). French losses were once more terrible and the Germans stood their ground.

On 30 September, an emergency French cabinet chaired by the President debated whether Joffre should keep his command and whether the government should move to Bordeaux.

The Eastern Front

The most significant event on the Eastern Front was the closing of the pincers with which the Russians cut off the Austrian fortress of Przemysl. This involved the combined efforts of the Russian 3rd, 4th and 5th Armies, including the Grenadier Corps. Przemysl's last lifeline was lost on 30 September when the railway through Chyrow (5-5.3112) was taken by the Russian 3rd Army.

The German 9th Army continued to engage the Russian 9th Army around Czestochowa and recaptured that town on 28 September. The Russians did not accept this without complaint and the fighting near the city continued for two more days with the German 38th Landwehr Brigade under such pressure that it was decided to pull them back at the end of the month.

The German attacks in Masuria had now ceased without the breakthrough that Hindenburg and Ludendorff had hoped for. Instead the German 8th Army was still under attack itself. The Russian 2nd Army had continued its offensive in southern Prussia. The German 36th Division was forced to stand against strong attacks in the Johannesburgerwald (4-5.1812) between 29 – 30 September. On the last day of the month the Russian 6th Cavalry Division reported to Samsanov that Allenstein was undefended only 15 kilometres north of the Russian positions. The Russian 1st Army was also

counterattacking against the Germans operating east of the Masurian Lakes. They succeeded in provoking a withdrawal of the 16th Reserve Division to Lötzen.



Figure 2: The General Situation on the Eastern Front after the isolation of Przemysl, 30 September 1914.

Serbia

Having given up the bend of the Kolubara River, the Austrian 5th Army began digging in on the line Obrenovac – Ub – Slovac (6-5.1408/9). For the moment, the Serbians left them there in peace. The resources of Serbia could not sustain more continuous attacks. The ardour of the Serbian soldiers to liberate the entirety of their country had to be restrained.



Figure 3: Serbian Front, End of September 1914.

DM Situation – September 1914

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Month	Total [SM%]	Morale
Germany	24	29	14	16	13	14	20	130	277 [17.3]	Good
Austria-Hungary	8	6	6	33*	34**	10	4	101	170 [30.9]	Good – *Lemberg captured ** Stanislaw and Tarnow captured.
Central Powers	32	35	20	49	47	24	24	231	457	
France	23	15	17	55*	22	45*	35	212	383 [42.5]	Good – *Lille (C) captured. **Lille/Loos captured.
Great Britain	3	9	6	-	8	2	-	28	35 [2.7]	Good
Russia	14	27	10	7	9	16	8	89	147 [24.5]	Good – Czestochowa reoccupied and then* lost again.
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	63	43	329	565	

The percentage of losses for Shaken Morale has been noted. Austria exceeds 30%, but the French figure is a very grave 42%.

Player Notes

CP

- *East: I lack the strength to penetrate any deeper in East Prussia so hold along the E bank of the Pregel and draw back about 40km in Poland. The Silesian block is fit for purpose and there is a very limited opportunity for a small attack, with AH flank support, NE of Kattowitz.*
- *Galicja: I start the process of consolidating the AH defence from Krakow, along the N edge of the Carpathians and into the Przemysl salient.*
- *Serbia: No change here, less a slight repositioning after being hurled out of the Kolubaru River bend SW of Belgrade.*
- *West: Supply shortages constrain me in my options. There is a lot of weakness in the French line in the centre between Reims and Compiègne, but I now lack the supply to attack decisively. With sufficient supply, I believe I could smash a hole through his centre. Instead, I have to cherry pick my attacking options and I choose to strike at the S of his western flank in the area around Montdidier. I am able to cross the Aisne in strength and also continue to smash at the fortress of Verdun; although he has now garrisoned it substantially. My furthest advance is into Soissons, placing my 2nd Army just over 60km from Paris. He remains strong along his line from the Channel coast down W of Lille and to the Somme, though, and his retaking of Ypres induces me to draw the N end of my line to curl back along the N bank of the Scheldt. I will be looking to reinforce along this flank in Oct.*

AP: I found it hard to believe I had made such a mistake as I did with my Artillery near Verdun. Putting Artillery in the front line like that can deter a weak threat but I totally underestimated his capability to my detriment.

Arguably this is my worst turn yet. My 5th Army attack was an example of a combat where the dice split 1:6. That is not the first time this has happened (to both sides) but this one was particularly ill timed from my point of view.

I can take some comfort from the fact that I have completed the isolation of Przemysl which I was worried I would not achieve a few turns ago. There have been a few carefully calculated attacks during the last two turns on this front. It is not really true that there is no factor counting in DWK. It is often very important to know what is the number of combat strength points needed to guarantee a retreat? My attacks around Przemysl did not have a single factor to spare so I only just made it.

Compared with other Eastern Front openings I have played this was a good start for the Russians against Austria, assuming I keep Przemysl isolated. Against the Germans, I found the Russians often do better. Next time I play the French (if they ever let me), I will retreat to the Marne in early September. It is a mistake to think you can fight the Germans near the frontier for very long. Even if they have a slow start they will win this attrition battle in the end. Now I am retreating at the time my Army needs rebuilding. Not easy.

