

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game.

GT 17: 10 – 14 October 1914 (October 3)

General Situation

The days were now appreciably shorter and when it rained it took longer to dry out wet kit. At a large scale, the weather conditions did not constrain the actions of the vast armies engaged as in previous wars. One reason was that any single bad weather event could not affect more than a small portion of those involved. What really slowed the action down was the growing shortages of munitions. The Russian Army felt this especially and the exhaustion of its initial offensives was due to this factor. The French were also able to breathe a sigh of relief as it became apparent that the Germans had run out of shells for their heaviest guns.

Despite this the campaigns were not over. In Belgian Flanders, the progress of the escape of the Belgian Army from Antwerp was watched by all sides with fascination and admiration. I should say, watched by everyone except the French because they could hardly focus on any fact except that the Germans were at the gates of Paris.

The Western Front

The German and French Armies now confronted each other along a long stretch of the River Marne from Paris as far east as Vitry-le-Francois. Only at the western end of this line had the Germans got across the river. This was achieved by the 2nd Army on 11 – 12 October when they obtained a bridgehead at Meaux. These operations were conducted quite deliberately for the Germans were suffering shortages of ammunition which limited what they were prepared to attempt.



Figure 1: The Marne Line after the loss of Meaux, 12 - 14 October 1914

The new French 10th Army was responsible for the defence of Paris. As it became clearer that the Germans were not strong enough to make a frontal attack some of the infantry divisions which were being reformed in the capital were released to strengthen the front south of Meaux.

The Entente also enjoyed a welcome reinforcement when the Belgian Army successfully withdrew from Ghent. This was in doubt for several days. The German commander in Flanders, Stranz had intelligence which suggested that the Belgian positions at Tielt were weakened. On 11 October, Stranz attacked after reinforcement by five fresh Reserve Divisions. If Tielt fell, he planned to cut the road through Brugge and so isolate the three Belgian Divisions still in Ghent. Unfortunately for the Germans, the intelligence was wrong and the Belgian defence of Tielt stalled the German attack, which was poorly executed, for 48 hours. This gave the Belgians enough time to withdraw their whole Army. By 14 October, it was taking up new positions around Nieuport on the Yser.

Joffre was particularly grateful for the Belgian withdrawal because it allowed him to disengage the whole 6th Army, consisting of five battered Divisions which would give the French Army a new reserve. This also allowed the BEF to shorten its front a little. The British were also moving the first Indian units into their front line at this time.



Figure 2: The Retreat to the Yser, after the Battle of Tielt, 12 - 14 October 1914.

The Belgians were therefore much lionised in the Allied press at this time and thoroughly patronised as only a small nation can be. This back slapping was not disturbed by news of the start of final negotiations for the surrender of Antwerp on 13 October. It was enough that the Belgian Army had joined the Allied ranks. It mattered less that practically the whole country was lost.

The Eastern Front

The Russian retreats on their West Front became more pronounced. The Germans committed two fresh Reserve Divisions (XII Corps) to the front in Central Poland. These helped to turn the Russian defences on the Warta on 12 October. It did not seem improbable that the Germans would soon be able to reach Lodz as the Russian 10th Army was falling back everywhere.

Czestochowa had already changed hands four times in the war. It was re-occupied by the German 9th Army on 10 October. In the next few days, there was a cautious advance east by the Central Powers following the Russian 9th Army which was intending to hold the line of the Nida River, but nothing further west. This retreat also pulled back the Russian 4th Army to conform to its neighbour. The

Russians also gave up Tarnow on 10 October and were apparently concentrating to defend the Wisloka River.



Figure 3: The German XII Corps forces the Russians back from the Warta Line, 10 – 12 October 1914.

In Prussia, the fighting between the German 8th Army and the Russian 2nd Army had begun again as the German 2nd Division cleared the Russians out of Willenburg (4-5.1713), the last town the Russians held in this region. Meanwhile, the Russian 1st Army kept the Masurian fortresses under close observation and cautiously probed the Baltic Sea flank.

Serbia

The wartime café culture in Belgrade was particularly lively that autumn. Reports of Austrian troop movements caused especial amusement, on 11 October, when it was learned that they had once more crossed to the south of the Sava. Could they not make up their minds which side of the river they preferred? The Duke of York had nothing on Potiorek, was the joke. However, more cautious minds in the Serbian High Command realised that the constant marching of the Austrians was testing their defences. Serbia could not defend everywhere and had to match every move the enemy made.

October 1914 DM Situation

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total	Morale
Germany	54*	20	9					12	95	372	Good – *Lost Allenstein
Austria-Hungary	1	-	-*					1	2	172	Good - *Tarnow recaptured.
Central Powers	-	20	9					13	97	544	
France	42*	32**	2					-	77	459	Good – *Amiens captured, **Reims captured
Great Britain	-	5	-					-	5	40	Good
Russia	9*	3	4**					NA	16	163	Good – *Czestochowa recaptured and **finally lost.
Belgium	(1)*	(6)	(5)					NA	(12)	(86)	N/A - *Brugge recaptured.
Serbia	-	-	-					NA	-	(8)	N/A
Entente	49	40	6						98	660	

Player Notes

CP: East: The eastern front is becoming quite interesting. I believe I made a mistake in sending 20 supply to the 8th and 9th armies as I seem to have run out in the west already, having produced 77 supply in production and received 45 as part of my reinforcements. It is remarkable how rapidly it is consumed. Anyway, bot armies are very well provisioned and two newly mobilised reserve divs have just arrived and I assigned them to 9th Army to drive into central Poland. I launched them straight into an attack along the Warta R. In E Prussia, I look form opportunity to start driving the Russian 2nd Army back out of German territory whilst maintaining a blocking line along the Pregel and Alle rivers. Russian withdrawals allow me to push away from Kattowitz and Krakow and Czestochowa is retaken – again. There is close cooperation with the AH 1st Army on 9th Army's right flank.

- *Galicia: This front remains static with a gradual recuperation by my AH forces as replacements and reinforcements are railed in. I opt to strongly reinforce the Kovess Group to prevent any further incursions in the eastern Carpathians.*
- *Serbia: I had hoped to draw Serb forces out of their entrenchments. This failed, so I pushed out forces into NW Serbia to secure food resources there.*

- *West: The trenches in the Vosges have made me realise that expending supply and effort in this area is a waste of time, so I railed the new Gae HQ westwards with its supply allotment. I took heavy losses in the TE attacks – British, French and Belgian – over the 5-8th October, but still managed to hold on to Ypres. I now use some of my precious resources to attack Belgian forces and to cut off routes to Antwerp. This will cause the rearguard in Antwerp to surrender the fortresses and remove this thorn from my side. The Belgians have effected a very successful breakout, though, and King Albert has made his getaway with his general staff. For the rest, I limit myself to shoring up my positions along the Marne and make a single attack to establish another bridgehead 40km east of Meaux. I have a reasonably strong line from Lille to Criel then along the outskirts of Paris and eastwards along the Marne on both sides of the river. As the western front starts to stagnate, I suspect the east is becoming more fluid. (I made an error in the attack on the Belgians as I had inadvertently taken off too many strength points from them after the last combat. I still had a chance of evicting them from Tielt so made the attack and failed. My attack along the Marne also failed. The German effort is definitely culminating in the west.)*

AP: The successful defence of Tielt by the Belgians was a big success for me. It meant the whole Belgian Army and the French 6th Army could withdraw from the Scheldt and I could form a short line behind the Yser. Although we abandoned the house rule for Belgian withdrawal I said that I would surrender Antwerp when I lost contact with it in recognition that earlier the Germans had expended some supply against the city. This game has reminded me that it is the situation in early October that is most critical to whether the Belgians can escape. It is a mistake perhaps to look at the situation in August and September and conclude the Belgian situation is hopeless. In October, the Germans are very busy in several directions, supply is running low and dealing with the Belgians against who they always lose DM wise may not be the top priority. This gives the Belgians their chance and if instead they are still trapped then they can make a nuisance of themselves until the Germans make an assault. Next time I think I will stick closer to the rules as written.

In France I am attempting in stages to reform a continuous line. The Germans are now very low on supply and will find it harder breaking through even relatively weak defences. I am starting to feed my replacements into the line so that is helping too.

The Russians are being out fought by the Germans and I cannot hold positions too far to the west, so I have made some significant withdrawals. Here too the arrival of replacements is starting to help stabilise the situation. I have some significant reinforcements which are due to arrive in the near future and this should stop the CP recovering too much ground before winter.

In Serbia, it seems neither side has the strength to commence an effective offensive. We may have to continue dancing around each other for a time.

It is notable that I made no attacks this turn for the first time since the completion of mobilisation. It saves supply and strength points to play like this and it is faster.