

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT18: 15 – 18 October 1914 (October 4)

General Situation

In Germany there was no victory fever but there was growing confidence that the great gamble in the West had paid off. The assumption that the war could be won in 1914 was dead in Britain and France, but it still had some currency in Germany. For several days the reports from France and Belgium had been very positive. The announcement of the surrender of Antwerp on 15 October was thought to mean Belgium had capitulated which was far from true. Equally the passage of the Marne was celebrated in the German press as a sure indication that the French Army was beaten and that the encirclement of Paris was just a matter of time. It was not so different from 1870.

The situation on the East looked equally promising from the perspective of Berlin if the occupation of parts of East Prussia could be overlooked. The Russians were said to be retreating and there were rumours of the Austrians preparing a counterblow that would reverse their earlier defeats. There was at least some truth in this.

It was also widely expected that the Ottoman Empire would soon throw in its lot with the Central Powers. This was also recognised in London and Delhi and troops were already departing from Bombay with the intention of providing security for Imperial interests in the Persian Gulf. There was also a conflict taking place in several parts of Africa (and the Pacific) as German colonies were to be suppressed by the Allies. However, these campaigns are out of the scope of this study.

Serbia

It was nearly three weeks since the two sides had disengaged on this front. Both sides seemed to agree that, if the war was to be won in 1914, it was not going to happen here.

The Eastern Front

The Tsarist Army was now in a fragile condition but the Central Powers lacked the overwhelming force that would be needed to break it. Russian replacements were starting to arrive at the front, but many units remained seriously understrength. With such a long front there were inevitably weak points.

In contrast to the Russians, the Austro-Hungarian Armies which had been driven back to the Carpathians had benefitted from two weeks of rest and refitting. Conrad had recovered the offensive spirit that had motivated the doomed Austrian offensive in August. The Austrian Chief of Staff knew the Russian ring around Przemysl was not at all thick. Barely 20 kilometres separated the city from the Austrian lines in the hills above. Nevertheless, it was equally clear that the Russians were thickest on the ground there. Accordingly, Conrad ordered preliminary attacks to test the Russian defences further away from the desired prize. There were two notable successes. On 15–16 October, Kovess' Army punched through a Russian Reserve Division (65th) at Dolina (5-5.3714) and advanced more than 15 kilometres. This took place over 100 kilometres east of Przemysl. The other Austrian attack, on 16 October, was a combined effort of the 1st and 2nd Armies which

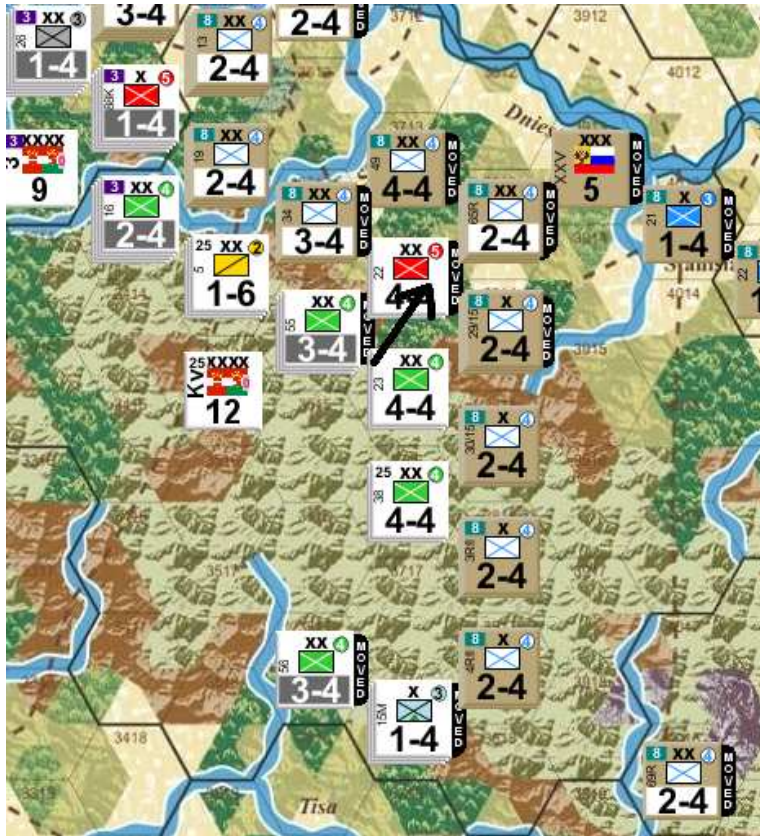


Figure 1: Kovess Army Advances at Dolina, Carpathian Front, 15-16 October 1914.

recovered Jaslo (5-5.2611) on the Wisloka River. This undermined any purpose of the Russians to use the Wisloka as a barrier to any relief of Przemysl coming from the west.

The German 9th Army was still moving forward on a broad front in Western Poland. By 17 October, they were less than 40 kilometres from Lodz and the 45th Reserve Division had fought a sharp action against the 1st Turkmen Brigade in the forests around Belchatow (5-5.1505) during the previous day.

The fronts in Prussia were mostly quiet except the Germans used the Schimonken forts as a base for artillery which supported a surprise attack on an unfortunate Russian Opolchenie Brigade (19th) which held a sector of the front covering Johannisburg (4-5.2112) until it was overrun on 16 October.

The Western Front

The German Army had woken up to the implications of ammunition shortage. A public campaign had resulted in the scouring of the whole of Western Germany for any overlooked stockpiles as if it was thought a significant part of the population might have a souvenir 120 mm shell on their mantelpiece or under their bed. This did not yield much, but the German Navy had its coastal defence supplies taken from forgotten sheds near Hamburg.

This effort produced just enough munitions to allow for a resumption of shelling around Verdun. The last of the French forts on the Côtes de Meuse (5-3.2116) were demolished by German fire on 15-16 October. This was part of the vice applied by the German 3rd and 4th Armies to the whole Verdun sector, the Artillery now being under a special command of General Gaede. The infantry component of these attacks were made on the western side of the large French salient which now had Verdun at

its tip. The French 3rd Army fought determinedly to hold their line and inflicted heavy casualties on the Germans in an action on 15-16 October which was inspired by the nearby historic battlefield of Valmy (5-3.1816).



Figure 2: The Vice applied around Verdun, 15-18 October 1914.

In Alsace, the German 7th Army made one further attempt to break the French positions around Thann (5-3.2822). This battle had been going on since the start of the month and the French VII Corps was weakening. On 17 October, the French ordered preparations to begin for the evacuation of Mulhouse. The arrival of the French 13th Division in southern Germany was too late to help. The German plan had worked.



Figure 3: Battle of Thann, 2-17 October 1914.

The imminent loss of part of the French foothold in Germany was little compared to the German threat on the doorstep of Paris. Between 15-18 October, the French lost control of the Lower Marne. The German 2nd Army inflicted a bad defeat on the French 44th Mountain Division in level fields around Marly (5-3.1117). The French were bringing reinforcements into this sector but they still had not got the situation under control.

Joffre, still clinging on to his command, appealed to Sir John French to attack and relieve some of the pressure on the French. The British Expeditionary force now held a line from Armentières to Houdain (5-3.0808) between the Belgian Army on its left and the French 5th on its right. The French 6th Army was in the process of moving away from Flanders. Having just taken over part of their line from the French, the British had little time to prepare for their attack on 18 October which had an objective to capture Bethune. This was the first time Indian troops were committed to an attack and the Royal Marines were also involved. The German defenders also included their own Marine Division and everyone could agree the sea was not very far away. The British attack failed to gain much ground and certainly did not reach Bethune. The Germans did withdraw their Marines afterwards for, as in every battle, the casualties were far worse than decimation.

October 1914 DM Situation

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total	Morale
Germany	54*	20**	9	14				12	109	386	Good – *Lost Allenstein and **recovered.
Austria-Hungary	1	-	-*	2				1	4	172	Good - *Tarnow recaptured.
Central Powers	-	20	9	16				13	113	560	
France	42*	32**	2	10				-	87	469	Good – *Amiens captured, **Reims captured
Great Britain	-	5	-	4				-	9	44	Good
Russia	9*	3	4**	5				NA	21	168	Good – *Czestochowa recaptured and **finally lost.
Belgium	(1)*	(6)	(5)	-**				NA	(12)	(86)	N/A - *Brugge recaptured.**Antwerp and Brugge lost.
Serbia	-	-	-	-				NA	-	(8)	N/A
Entente	49	40	6	19					117	679	

Player Notes

CP:

- *East: I despatch another 2 freshly mobilized reserve divs to the 8th Army to shore up the position on the Baltic coast which is once again under threat. The 8th Army also*

makes an attack out of the Johannesburgerwald and begins to concentrate against the Russian 2nd Army between the Wkra R and the Masurian Lakes. I want to start to push his forces back towards Moscow. The 9th Army also makes a limited attack 40km south of Lodz to start convergence on the forces screening the city. I have also been sending RPL to Czestochowa and am force generating in that area using a corps HQ to allow the army HQ to oversee the offensives towards Lodz. Covering the length of frontage between the 8th and 9th armies, using corps HQs is essential. I don't see anything in the rules which disallows this.

- *Galicja: I opt to start making small scale attacks along the Galician front on the extreme flanks. There is a concentrated mass of Russians converging around Przemysl and then thinly strung out flanks. Przemysl will hold for a long time and he appears to have becoming fixed around this fortress.*
- *Serbia: Nothing of significance.*
- *West: I reposition forces laterally to make one more attempt at attacking in the Vosges. This only requires a single supply expenditure, so I think is worth it. This is a battle of attrition in this area and I have the advantage there. Antwerp is surrendered and I move to occupy it. The movement of Belgian and French forces to the west of the Yser allows me to shorten my line by 60km and re-direct some of the Antwerp containment force to the south of the front. I have an opportunity to completely demolish the fortification SE of Verdun so believe it worthwhile to expend some resources on this. It will leave Verdun as a diminished and largely isolated fortification - an island fort. I launch only two other attacks in France; the one to turn the flank of his defences along the south bank of the Marne and the other to clear the approaches to St Dizier. The French have no real reserves along the fortification line running from Verdun through Nancy and into Lorraine now. Most of his strength is positioned from Dunkirk down towards Beauvais with very limited space to manoeuvre to his rear and very constrained rail links. With more supply I could deliver more decisive blows. I will regret sending 20 supply to the east at the beginning of the month. I have been expecting a large British offensive and it came crashing down on Bethune. It cost me the remainder of a Mar Div, but I managed to hold my ground, even though the counterattack – which burned up a large proportion of supply – was a disappointment.*

AP: I welcome an opportunity to have my Russians fighting the Austrians again, but for the moment the Austro-Hungarians are able to pick their targets to attack with advantage. I am hopeful this will not last long and I will not lose anything of great importance. There are a lot of valueless hexes on the Eastern Front so I am happy to give up a slice of Western Poland. On the other hand, the single hex which separates the Austrians from Przemysl is currently worth 79 DM if I hold it until Przemysl surrenders sometime in February or March. This is going to be my top priority.

I am trying to keep the tempo of activity on the Western Front lower than it has been. Each turn I am getting more replacements and trenches. I want German losses and French losses to be approximately equal from now on and will use French Allies to help achieve this such as my British attack this turn. I am also trying to conserve supply as I currently have a bit more than my opponent in the West.