

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT20: 23 – 27 October 1914 (October 6)

General Situation

Battles were becoming more extended in time. The Germans had been attacking at Valmy (5-3.1816) for over ten days. The British and Belgian operations against Bethune had also lasted nine days.

The Entente was slowly picking itself up after the dark days of early October. The French government was encouraged by the offensive spirit which had activated the British and Belgian Armies in Flanders. The Russian government was also sending optimistic cables. Although the Germans were celebrating the fall of Lodz, the Tsar's Ministers assured their Western counterparts that with new units rapidly reinforcing their fronts they would soon sweep the enemy out of Poland.

The Western Front

The German shell crisis had now reached an acute stage. Every German Army on the Western Front reported exhaustion of ammunition stocks for all types of field artillery. Infantry were now expected to fight with the weapons they carried with them or that might be in a carefully managed regimental stock but there was nothing else.

Falkenhayn now demonstrated prudence by considering some rationalisation of the line to which the Germans had advanced. Notably the occupation of Beauvais was ended. The Germans there were in danger of being attacked from several sides and there was no longer any advantage in retaining such an advanced position.



Figure 1: Final Phase of Battle of Bethune, 27 October 1914, note the relative stockpiles of ammunition, the results of research in an unfinished and unpublished PhD dissertation, Lloyd (private communication).

The German 3rd and 4th Armies had not given up on trying to close the ring around Verdun. They had little choice but to make another attempt to break the French at Valmy (5-3.1816). For three more days, between 23-25 October, the German infantry closed with the French but to no avail. The French defences were getting stronger as the French 3rd Army was reinforced. Each German attack was a small tragedy played out in wet fields strewn with fallen leaves and fallen men. All the French who fought here were later told they were saviours of the Republic.

The British were also determined to make one further effort at Bethune. Sir John French was prepared to fire off nearly every artillery round he had. King Albert was asked for another Division to lend support. In view of what had happened to the strong 5th Division a few days before, the King offered the understrength Belgian 1st Division this time. The Germans on this 1st Army front were fighting now with very depleted ammunition stocks. The German 48th Reserve Division was smashed on 27 October when the British advanced again. The German counter attacks were unusually feeble and by evening the British had retaken Bethune and the Germans were falling back towards Lens. Although they advanced only about 15 kilometres, this was the first time during the war that the British had taken an objective which the Germans had been determined to deny them.

The Eastern Front

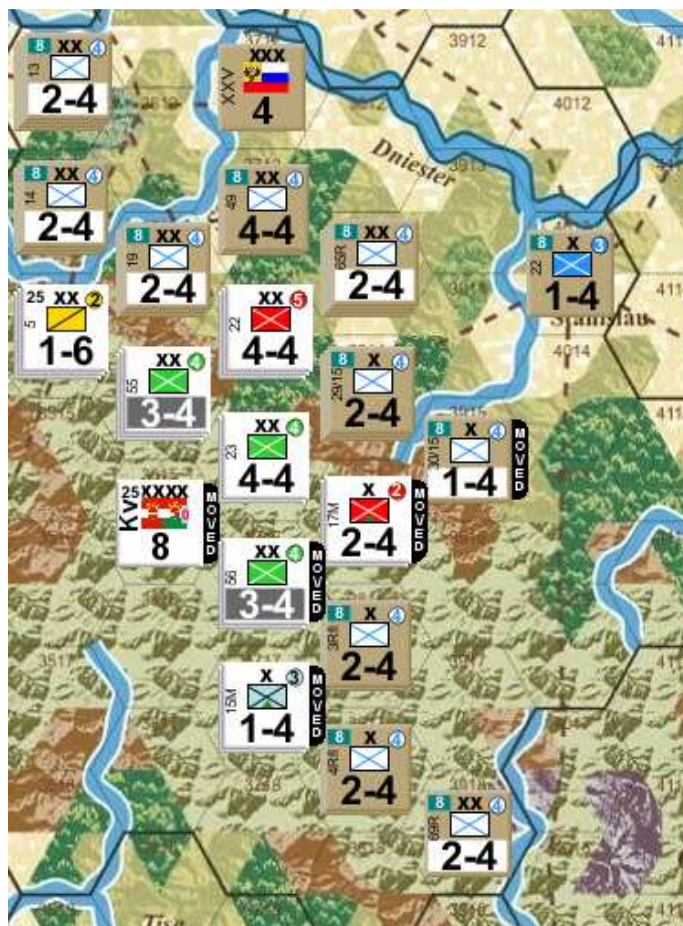


Figure 2: The Kovess Army in the Carpathians following the Yodel Offensive, 23-24 October 1914.

In the Carpathian Mountains, the Austrian Kovess Army searched for the vulnerable left flank of the Russian 8th Army. This hunt was well conceived for the Russian XXV Corps was strung out over hill

and dale and many units were isolated and poorly supplied. On 24 October, the Hungarian 38th Division supported by the Austrian mountaineers of 17th Brigade ruptured the Russian line in the wooded and rough terrain surrounding the Ruthenian town of Nadvornaya/Nadvornitz (5-5.3815). The news of this success immediately reached Kovess' Headquarters, 40 kilometres away, thanks to a chain of seven Tyrolean yodellers. Even today, the Nadvornitz Yodel is one of the most prized in the entire canon of this Alpine craft.

In Central Poland, the German 45th Reserve Division moved into an undefended Lodz on 23 October. The Russian 10th Army had not retreated far and, on 25 October, two strong Siberian Divisions, participated in an attack at Zgierz (5-5.1502) just north of the city. They roughly handled the 34th Landwehr Brigade but advanced no further and showed no interest in trying to challenge the Germans in the city centre. Despite this caution, the commitment of the Siberians demonstrated that this part of the Russian front was getting stronger.

The German 8th Army was also still in action with the Russian 2nd Army. The focus of the fighting was now in the Wkra Valley where, on 24 October, German infantry and cavalry crossed the river at Sochonin (5-5.1717). This cut into the rear of two Russian Divisions that had been drawn further west in an earlier phase of the battle. Now the Russians had to turn round and make a fighting withdrawal to safety. In this they were successful over the next three days as they shouldered aside the Germans who had not great numbers in their bridgehead and could not stand in the way of such a large Russian force. This was because they also had to hold off much of the rest of the left wing of the 2nd Army that had been thrown in to the effort to rescue their comrades.

Serbia

An Allied military commission toured Serbia as Entente leaders had little information on how the war was being conducted in the Balkans. The Serbians had advertised the recently completed "Great Wall of Serbia". This was a line of entrenchments running from Belgrade to Bosnia, beyond the Drina, and then south almost to the sea near the Austrian port of Cattaro. The French head of the commission was unimpressed. These defences had not been tested by enemy attacks, he reported, and the trenches were not in fact complete for there was still a gap between Stepojevac and Lazarevac (6-5.1509).

Player Notes

CP: East: Lodz is deserted by the Russians so I occupy it with elements of the 9th Army. Along most of the frontline I push my German forces deeper into Russian Poland. Only along the coast does the front remain static.

Galicja: The Kovess Group continues to conduct opportunist attacks on the far right of the AH front.

Serbia: Still nothing of significance.

West: The situation here is starting to gradually turn. My supply state makes any meaningful attack impossible and the front is too thinly spread for a sufficiently strong concentration at any significant point. The expected attack in the Bethune area is, this time, overwhelming and forces me to pull back after heavy losses. I have some thoughts on what next but fear I

am already disclosing too much in my ramblings within these AAR submissions, so will hold onto those thoughts until later.



Figure 3: The Great Wall of Serbia, 27 October 1914.

AP: This turn I really thought I had turned a corner. I have not really disclosed yet my full thoughts during the terrible period between September 4 and October 2. Every turn French DM went up on average well over 30 points – so every 3 turns was +100 DM. That is completely unsustainable and if I had not been able to staunch the French losses in the last few turns I would have been very likely forced to resign before the end of the year.

I have a high degree of respect for the German Army in 1914 in DWK but I had been lulled into overconfidence in the first phase of the game as the full German threat took a long time to develop. My opponent deserves credit for excellent use of artillery and a careful husbanding of strength such that German infantry losses were not excessive up to mid-September. I then allowed this pressure to get to me, which was displayed in some premature counter attacks and some out and out mistakes. I completely wrecked the French Artillery arm during that period.

By late September, I was fully aware of the great danger, but considered myself forced to hang on in Northern France for the sake of the Belgians and out of realisation that a rapid redeployment of the whole front north of the Somme would be slow (I only have two single track railways across the Somme). This would allow the Germans to clear the Channel Ports and form a short easily defensible front from Amiens to the sea which I would break against hopelessly in 1915 and after. Worse a redeployment would allow the Germans to move much faster than me to the Marne and be in an excellent position to break my last defences.

That these dangers are now largely over is due to some luck in key combats at Tielt during the Belgian escape and lately at Valmy (5-3.1816) where the first two German attacks rolled 1. However, it has also required disciplined play over the last 6 turns in which Ivor has forced the best out of me. Lack of supply has also been a factor for the Germans but they have the men to make still dangerous unsupplied attacks.

Notice that the game does not allow passive defences. In order to permit the French to rebuild I have had to make the British and Belgians fight and the Russians too have engaged Germans in preference to the Austrians (against their natural inclinations). Each turn this month I have counted 8 replacement strength points arriving (taking three turns to get to the front so the first were not counting defensively until the German September 4 turn) and then hoping my losses would not rise over this amount because otherwise my front would be getting progressively weaker. That I have succeeded in this is a great relief. The Germans remain ahead but I am still very much in this game.

October 1914 DM Situation

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total	Morale
Germany	54*	20**	9	14	12#	13		12	134	411	Good – *Lost Allenstein and **recovered. #Mulhouse recaptured
Austria-Hungary	1	-	-*	2	1	1		1	6	174	Good - *Tarnow recaptured.
Central Powers	-	20	9	16	13	14		13	140	587	
France	42*	32**	2	10	5	3		-	95	474	Good – *Amiens captured, **Reims captured
Great Britain	-	5	-	4	-	1		-	10	44	Good
Russia	9*	3	4**	5	5	4#		NA	30	173	Good –*Czestochowa recaptured and **finally lost. #Lodz lost.
Belgium	(1)*	(6)	(5)	-**	(4)	-		NA	(16)	(90)	N/A - *Brugge recaptured.**Antwerp and Brugge lost.
Serbia	-	-	-	-	-	-		NA	-	(8)	N/A
Entente	49	40	6	19	10	8			135	697	