

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT22: 1- 5 November 1914 (November 1)

General Situation

“The appearance of Turkey as a new apostle in the cause of German “culture” must indefinitely extend the area of the war. So far she has confined herself to bombarding various open and defenceless Russian towns in the Black Sea...” Thus did The Times in London announce Ottoman belligerency on 31 October 1914.¹ Within three days, the Entente powers had all confirmed that a state of war existed between them and the Turkish Empire.

This development occurred during a comparative lull in the action on the Western Front. The Times editorial immediately recognised the significance of the Turkish appeal to “Mahomedan” opinion in India, while expressing confidence that this could not be credibly mobilized to support German military goals and war aims. At the same time, there was increased sympathy for Russia in the West for the Turkish attack was seen to be a treacherous blow against the vulnerable southern flank of an ally already beset by two powerful enemies. Overall, the Entente’s initial reaction to the extension of the war was to express confidence that they could manage the crisis and that very soon Turkey would learn it had made a gross strategic error.

The Near East

Whatever, fine strategic assessments were made by politicians and writers, the situation on the ground in the Near East was much messier and a new rule book would be needed to cope with the demands of warfare in different climates to those experienced on the European battlefields.

When war broke out the preparations of Turkey could hardly be said to have been completed. Enver Pasha’s prime aim had been to seize the opportunity to recover lost Turkish lands in the Caucasus. The strongest Turkish concentration (excluding the defensive deployments around the Straights) had been focussed around Erzerum and in the first few days of November 1914 these troops moved up to the Russian frontier. However, this concentration was by no means complete and the route into Russian territory was blocked by the Russian 1st Caucasian Corps which covered Sarikamis and Kars.

In the confusing state of the fronts in the first week of hostilities, both sides envisaged opportunistic raids to secure early advantage. Even before the official declarations of war, the Russian 1st Frontier Guards Regiment had been engaged against Kurdish sheep rustlers who had been innocently following an annual tradition of taxing vulnerable Armenian villages on both sides of the border. By hot pursuit of a large force of Kurdish irregulars, the Russian Frontier Guards found themselves in Bayezit on 1 November. They had a clear view of Mount Ararat on a crisp autumn morning, but not far away the Kurds were forming themselves into a “division” as rumours of war intensified. The Turks were equally disrespectful of frontiers and had organised a flying column of the Van Jandarma which crossed the Persian border on 2 November intending to rally Turkic tribes in Northern Persia to the pan-nationalistic cause.

¹ The Times is currently featuring a daily report from its archive which I am quoting. I have been struck that these reports often mirror events in the game (or is it supposed to be the other way round?). Examples have included the landing of Indian troops at Marseilles; the sad situation of the animals in Antwerp Zoo just prior to the capitulation; and some British cavalry actions that could have been from 1814 rather than 1914.



Figure 1: Deployments on the Russo-Turkish Border between Kars and Erzerum, 1-5 November 1914.

In Iraq, the Turkish armed forces had no clear mission and were mainly devoted to internal security and the guarding of the Persian frontier. The danger was, however, to the south. The Indian government had already sent an expeditionary force to the Persian Gulf and the 16th Brigade of the Indian Army had landed at Al Faw on 1 November in anticipation of hostilities. The local Turkish commander of the 113th Regiment had been bribed. He was also worried about the loyalty of his mainly Arab troops and he sent them home at the first invitation of the British commander who declared that his force had only come to protect the local population from any consequences of the conflict.

The British mainly had protection of the oil facilities at Abadan in mind. Within 24 hours of landing, the Indian infantry began making their way up the Shatt Al Arab passing on the opposite side to Abadan (in Persia) on 5 November. Meanwhile, British warships reconnoitred the river as far as Basra where they found the first signs of a properly organised Turkish force (112th Regiment). Their maps had suggested the city could be bombarded from the river, but on arrival they found it out of range. The marines accompanying this force were ordered to dismount some of the ships guns so that the city could be threatened with attack. Meanwhile, a message was sent to the Turkish commander. This proposed that he abandon the city of his own volition and so spare it from attack before a British ultimatum expired on 7 November.

The other potential front in the new conflict was in Egypt and Palestine. The British were for now only concerned with defence. The British commander in Egypt had orders to guard the Suez Canal and was given the comfort that additional forces would soon arrive from India to reinforce the garrison. Since the political situation in Egypt was not entirely calm, these measures were not purely for military ends. There was, nevertheless, little immediate danger from the Turks on the far side of the Sinai Desert. They were also preoccupied with political concerns and only a small proportion of the Turkish forces in the Levant were free to watch the frontier at Gaza. Most were detailed to the policing of internal security.

Serbia

The Austrian 5th Army did not keep up the attacks it had made on the Serbian lines in late October. Both sides reverted to watching each other and conducting long range sniping and occasional shelling. None of these actions was going to disturb the equilibrium on this front.

Serbia was on the agenda of a strategic conference hosted by Conrad in Vienna between 31 October and 1 November. Potiorek was present, as were representatives of the German General Staff. The commander of the 5th Army was pressed to justify the rather unimpressive gains made by the Austrians in Serbia. Potiorek showed that he had insufficient strength to overcome the Serbian defences. A difficult debate then ensued in which the question was asked, how much additional force did the Austrians need to defeat the Serbians once and for all? Potiorek proposed an unfeasibly large reinforcement which took no account of the critical situation on the Eastern Front and no account of the dangers of an Italian intervention. The senior German officer present prefaced his remarks by stating that he respected the Austrian sphere of influence but he continued undiplomatically asserting four German Divisions would make short work of the Serbians. Conrad shut this discussion down as he thought he had enough German "assistance" in Southern Poland and a German victory in Serbia wasn't what he wanted. However, the idea of a German intervention in the Balkans was in the air and it would return if the Austrians proved incapable of concluding that campaign themselves.

The Eastern Front

Although the Serbians seemed secure in their defences, the Russians could not make the same claim. They remained under pressure at three widely separated points.

The German 8th Army had pinned the Russian 2nd Army back close to the outer defences of Warsaw and the line of obsolete forts guarding crossing points on the Narew River. On 1 November, two German artillery regiments opened fire on the fortress of Rozan (or Roshan) about 80 kilometres north east of Warsaw. The German shells only made a few hits on the structures of the fort but they collapsed with little encouragement thanks to the long forgotten fraud of a Polish contractor who had used improperly mixed cement in the original construction. When the magazine flooded due to a blocked drain on 3 November, the Russian commander of the 1st Division ordered the fort to be abandoned and dynamited so that nobody else would be tempted to rely on its rather feeble protections.



Figure 2: German bombardments against the Russian Forts at Rozan, 1 - 3 November 1914

The Russians were also having difficulties in the South West. The Austrian 1st Army continued its offensive operations against the Russian 9th Army at the confluence of the Nida and Vistula Rivers. On 2 November, the Russian 50th Division, recently arrived on this front, lost the key position of Nowy Korczyn (5-5.2309).

The chief Austrian hero at this time was General Kovess who was the toast of Vienna. His exceptional command had originated as an under resourced covering force guarding the Dniester. After retreating to the Carpathians Kovess, had rallied his men and they were now giving the Russians endless trouble at the eastern extremities of the front. On 3 November, the Tyrolean 17 Mountain Brigade captured Kalush (5-5.3813) barely 20 kilometres from the Dniester.

The Western Front

The Germans began shelling the Verdun forts again on 2 November as they had accumulated more stocks of ammunition. At first General Sarrail, the commander of the French 3rd Army, was rather dismissive of these efforts and announced that the forts would be defended for ever. However, a survey conducted late on the evening of 5 November found that the Germans had caused almost twice as much damage as had been first thought. The sense of defending these fixed positions had to come under greater scrutiny.

The French Army was still in some kind of state of shock after the violence of the initial campaigns. Voices were being raised that the time had come to return to offensive warfare and drive the Germans out of the country before winter. Joffre was however more cautious and, although apparently open to the idea of a new attack on the Germans, was insisting that preparations be more advanced before any move was made. Meanwhile, alternative plans began to be considered for when the moment was more ripe.

Both sides perceived that they suffered from a shortage of manpower due to the immense casualties they had suffered. The fortress garrisons were an obvious source of extra men and both Germans and French had begun the process of transferring these to fighting formations.



Figure 3: German Artillery resume bombardments against the French forts around Verdun, 1 - 5 November 1914.

Player Notes

CP. Another interesting production round, with food deficits building up against the CP. Both nationalities are able to make full production. AH produces 15 RPLs whilst Germany produces two 4-5 mountain brigades, two 8-5 inf divs, an Engr regiment and another cavalry division plus 15 RPL. Germany also starts to release numerous garrison troops from fortifications to feed into the line divisions. Turkey has entered the war but does so after resource and production phases, so does not participate in any production this turn. It does receive a supply point for a depot though, and is resourced to start rail construction in Palestine. The CP produces no gas shells yet.

- *East: This period is about consolidating and force generating as replacements arrive in some numbers. The new HQ generated from Breslau heads eastwards with 20 supply from new stocks. It heads for west-central Poland to start leading the effort there and training new divisions. I have manoeuvred artillery into position to start bombarding the lightly held fortification at Roshan. If I succeed in reducing this fort then the passage to encircling Warsaw becomes more attainable.*
- *Galicia: The Kovess Group makes another attack against a weak reserve division and one of the Opolchenie brigades west of Stanislau. The AH 1st Army continues with probing attacks against the Russian 9th Army as it tries to anchor its flank on the Vistula. The rest of this front continues to dig in and regroup.*

- *Serbia: No offensive activity; the Serb trench line is too strong to throw away lives for no gain.*
- *West: I have opted to go into a period of building up supply and regrouping with only a single artillery bombardment of Verdun. Numerous replacements, freed up from garrison duties at fortifications, are en route to the front to bolster understrength divisions and generate new ones.*
- *Palestine: I have some issues with the mandatory garrisons for the OE in Palestine. The Turks are giving starting locations which make it impossible to meet the required garrisons throughout Palestine. My assumption is there is no penalty but I must move available units as rapidly as feasible to meet the requirements. Turkish strength is thus considerably limited and all I can do is probe across Sinai for a look at British defences on the Suez Canal. West of Jerusalem I commence construction of the rail line towards Gaza.*
- *Caucasus: To attempt any offensive action against Russia at this point would be foolish posturing. I start a process of manoeuvring of Turkish forces along this front and make a 20km incursion into Persia along the east bank of the Katur River. There is a Russian brigade already in Bayazit – surely this territorial violation pre-war is justification for a Turkish riposte!*
- *Mesopotamia: The Turkish 112th Brigade remains in Basra whilst intelligence suggests British troopships are approaching the Al-Fawr Peninsula. This clearly indicates hostile British intent towards the OE, given its position even before war started. It is clear to the Ottomans that there was a conspiracy of aggression against the Grand Porte by the Triple Entente nations. Never again will they be trusted in this part of the world.*

November 1914 DM Situation

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total	Morale
Germany	-							9	9	422	Good
Austria-Hungary	1							5	6	185	Good
Ottoman	-							NA		-	Good
Central Powers	1							14	15	607	
France	5							-	5	482	Good
Great Britain	-							TBC	-	45	Good
Russia	4							NA	4	189	Good
Belgium	-							NA	-	(90)	Good
Serbia	-							NA	-	(9)	Good
Entente	9							-		707	

AP: This was not a good turn. The CP inflicted 9 hits and the Entente just 1 hit. That kind of loss ratio would lose me the game if it continued. Fortunately the outcome of one turn is not very consequential when there can be over 400 turns. It does show the active attacking player has real advantages in this game. Defence is formidable when it comes to a pitched fight for ground that the defender is determined to hold, but offense and initiative work too in the right time and place.

I have not yet got an answer to my opponent's artillery tactics. Fortunately these will become redundant in 1915 when the requirement to make a follow up attack is introduced. I have been a bit passive in the face of these tactics since I suffered excessive losses in artillery duels in September. I have tolerated this situation partly because artillery inflicts losses at a slower rate than infantry attacks and I have accepted hits to my forts if it spares my battered French infantry. However, I may have rationalised this too much. It is starting to hurt again.

My passivity is a more general problem as it is now infecting the Russians and Serbians as much as the French. I know I have to return to offensive operations but I am not going to be hurried and I do not want to make random attacks which have no real objective. I have not any longer got so much DM to burn that I can afford to be careless where I strike.

The new campaigns in the Near East will also take time to bear fruit. My first objective will be to secure the south eastern corner of Iraq which I do not think is in doubt thanks to the very useful naval unit I have on the river. I think I have fully justified the presence of the Russian frontier guards in Bayezit. It is beyond doubt who started this war.