

## Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT23: 6 – 9 November 1914

### General Situation

As winter approached the populations of the Entente countries were sorely in need of good news. It was not expected that they would be impressed by news of the securing of Basra which even in that era of sound geographical education would have hardly been recognised.

Some of the lessons of the war in Europe were also filtering back. In France and Britain, an explanation was needed why the Germans had succeeded in overrunning such a rich slice of France despite the awful sacrifices of the defenders. The favoured reason was the superiority of the German artillery. This was because it was also the primary excuse offered by the military commanders for their relative failures. Hence everyone could share in the idea that the key to the war was the suppression of the German guns which had broken the defences of Liege; Namur; Maubeuge; Antwerp and many smaller places. All France knew that Verdun was then facing the same threat of destruction by shell.

Ironically, this weapon was not what it was in the first weeks of the war and its power was lessening. The German siege guns had run out of ammunition and were beginning to be moved to the Eastern Front. Russia was perhaps their next target. Trenches were also increasingly providing protection from gunfire. Nevertheless, these developments were known only to a few and therefore any General who could find some answer to the German heavy howitzers and mortars was going to be a hero.

### The Western Front

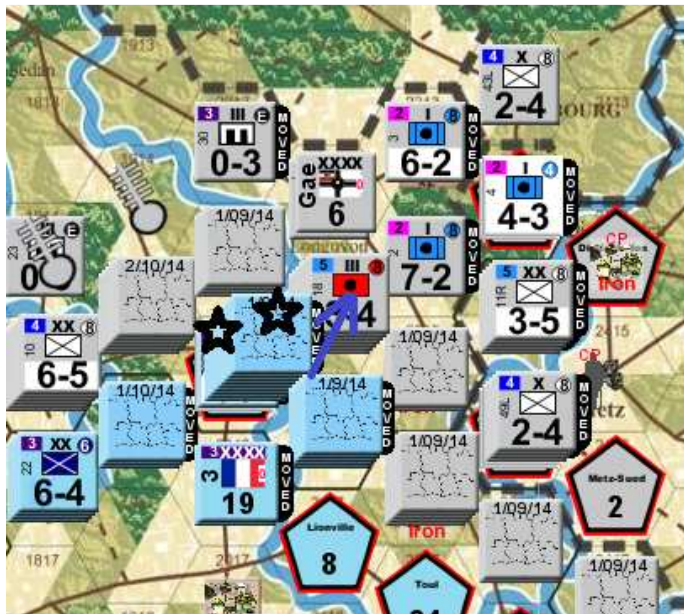


Figure 1: The French attack to save Verdun, 6 - 9 November 1914.

The Germans also recognised that their artillery arm had been a considerable success during the initial operations in the West. On 6 November, General Gaede, who had commanded the guns which

had cleared the Côtes de Meuse and were then degrading the defences of Verdun, was invested in the Order of the Red Eagle by Crown Prince Wilhelm. During the ceremony, the steady fusillade against Verdun could be heard in the distance. This was the main active German operation on the Western Front, though in addition the 7<sup>th</sup> Army made a fresh attempt to capture the French position at Thann (5-3.2822), in Alsace, on 7 November without success.

General Sarrail of the French 3<sup>rd</sup> Army was, however, planning a move. During the past few days the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army's left flank had stabilized. The situation at Verdun was still of concern and many of Sarrail's officers were urging him to abandon the fortifications for a more flexible defence. Sarrail, nevertheless, observed the Germans were very interested in the forts and it was best that they held the attention of the enemy for a little longer.

Sarrail's command had been relatively well supplied and had received replacements intended to help maintain the defence. However, an opportunity to attack had presented itself. Sarrail had noted that the German artillery was concentrated on the Côtes de Meuse (5-3.2115) but this part of the German line had not yet been fully entrenched. The Germans had Landwehr busy improving their positions but few resources had been devoted to defence and only one German Reserve Division (9<sup>th</sup>) was present. Sarrail's attack took place at dawn on 8 November. A key part of the attack was led by the 73<sup>rd</sup> Reserve and 40<sup>th</sup> Divisions which were already on the eastern side of the Meuse and took the German defenders in the flank. The infantry attack was also well supported by French artillery and this was the first time since the disasters of September that the French had used heavy weapons aggressively.

By nightfall, the French had won a famous victory. The Landwehr and German Reservists had been completely surprised and there were many unauthorised retreats. In the confusion, the German artillery batteries suffered badly. Some were destroyed by counter battery fire. Some were abandoned and destroyed by their own gunners who feared they would be captured. Some were too close to the front and were overrun by the French. Sarrail had no intention of retaining the positions given up by the Germans as he could not afford to extend his own lines. On 9 November, the French fell back in turn. This was a well-executed operation from start to finish and Joffre now had a serious rival among the senior tier of French commanders.

### **The Eastern Front**

Remarkably an almost identical battle took place on the Eastern Front at the same time. Here the German 8<sup>th</sup> Army had begun copying the tactics used on the Western Front and its heavy guns had already been credited with the destruction of the Russian fortress at Rozan (4-5.2115). The German 17<sup>th</sup> Reserve Division advanced past the ruins of this strong point on 6 November after forcing the Russian 1<sup>st</sup> Division to pull back across the Narew River.

The next German targets were the forts at Pultusk, closer to Warsaw. The Russians showed more determination here and their 2<sup>nd</sup> Artillery Brigade attempted counter battery operations against the German guns on 7 November without success. However, this Russian artillery operation was just a distraction tactic. Samsonov was planning a counter attack and he was concentrating as much of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army as possible between Pultusk and the Wkra River. In addition, the Russians planned to use a month's supply of artillery shells and all the reserves which had been concentrated at Warsaw for an effort to reverse the progress of the Germans. Samsonov attacked at Strzegocin (4-5.1916) on 8

November. The German 2<sup>nd</sup> Division was completely surprised by this sudden reversal of initiative and was heavily outnumbered with no prospect of help for 48 hours. The Russians swept through the thin German defences and captured and destroyed many of the guns of the 9<sup>th</sup> Artillery Regiment. Some were hitched up to be dragged to Warsaw for a parade designed to confirm the Russian determination to hold on to the Polish capital. As with Sarrail, Samsonov was not interested in rushing forwards too far. Instead, he satisfied himself with minor gains and a moral victory which would teach the Germans that their run of victories should not lead them to hold the Russians in contempt.



Figure 2: The Russian Counter Attack at Strzegocin, 8 November 1914.

Strzegocin was not the only Russian counter attack in this period. The Austrian 1<sup>st</sup> Army had advanced past Busko-Zdroj (5-5.2308) by 7 November as it kept pressing into the junction of the Russian 9<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Armies in the corner of the Nida and Vistula Rivers. The Russian 9<sup>th</sup> Army urgently requested more assistance from its neighbour, which then attacked south of the Vistula and captured Zgorsko (5-5.2409) from a mixed force of German and Austrian Landwehr that was too small to hold off the efforts of the six Russian Divisions which were committed to this operation between 8 – 9 November.

Finally, the Russians enjoyed a defensive success at Skole (5-5.3613) in the Carpathian foothills where the Russian 34<sup>th</sup> Division managed, almost for the first time, to frustrate an attack by Kovess' Army on 6 November.

### Serbia

Historians have sometimes suggested there must have been some kind of coordination between the Entente Powers who all made significant attacks on 8 November. It has long been shown that only coincidence was involved, but perhaps all were motivated by the same need to make some display of offensive spirit after being kept on the defensive for a protracted period.

The Serbians made their 8 November effort through an attack of their 3<sup>rd</sup> Army (principally the Shumadia Divisions) which attacked the Croat 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Brigade in open country near Koceljevo (6-5.1309). The Serbians had to make a long approach march through a wide no mans' land, but the

Austrian 10<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Division failed to spot this move and the Croats were routed. The Serbians pushed their front forward up to 18 kilometres beyond their “Great Wall” of trenches. The soldiers at the front wondered whether the Austrians would attack in turn or accept the new situation.



Figure 3: The Serbian attack at Koceljivo, 8 November 1914.

### The Near East

The confusion of the outbreak of the war in the Near East was still only slowly resolving itself. Enver Pasha’s relationship with the commander of the Turkish 3<sup>rd</sup> Army (who uniquely was not his father-in-law) was reputed to be very bad. The mobilisation plans sent to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army were the wrong ones and it was with some surprise that the commander discovered that the X Corps had already reached the front on 6 November, when he had been told it would not leave Sivas before 1 November. It was, however, lost in the mountain massif between the Coruh and Id Valleys (6-8.2212-13). The 3<sup>rd</sup> Army also had little idea where its XIII Corps was (it was in the Murat Valley) and had imperfect information about events beyond Lake Van where a Van Corps had been created without any authority whatsoever.

In these circumstances, it should not have been surprising that the first major attack of the war in the Caucasus would not be a clear success. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Army at least had the IX and XI Corps under proper command and these were ready to attack on 6 November with the aim of forcing a passage into the Kars Valley, with Sarikamis at its head. The Turks soon ran into a brigade of the Russian 20<sup>th</sup> Division supported by cavalry (1<sup>st</sup> Caucasian Cavalry Division). The Russians had positions in mountainous terrain and controlled a line between Pamakdere and Camyazi (6-8.2513). After two days, the Turks had made limited progress and paused to rest and reconsider.

In Iraq, the threat of the British naval guns caused the Turkish 112<sup>th</sup> Regiment to start withdrawing from Basra on 7 November. Two days later, the British considered it secure. Abadan had also been occupied by an Indian Imperial Brigade and it was for a few days the headquarters of the Indian Tigris Corps. The British didn’t much care what was Turkish and what was Persian territory.

The British were also busy unloading reinforcements for the defence of the Suez Canal at Port Said. These troops from India were most welcome and arrived not a moment too soon. Aerial reconnaissance had revealed a large column of Turkish troops marching across Sinai led by a



regiment of camel mounted warriors. An invasion of Egypt had seemed unlikely to everyone who claimed to understand the logistical challenges of the desert, but there now seemed a real prospect that the Turks were, nevertheless, intending to do it regardless of the rulebook of desert warfare.



Figure 4: The Turks in Sinai, as Egypt is prepared for Defence, 6 - 9 November 1914.

#### November 1914 DM Situation

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total	Morale
Germany	-	25						9	34	447	Good
Austria-Hungary	1	5						5	11	190	Good
Ottoman	-	2*						NA	2	2	Good – *Basra lost.
Central Powers	1	32						14	47	639	
France	3#	8						-	11	488	Good
Great Britain	-	-						TBC	-	45	Good
Russia	4	10						NA	14	199	Good
Belgium	-	-						NA	-	(90)	Good
Serbia	-	-						NA	-	(9)	Good
Entente	7	18						-	25	732	

# Corrected (-2)

## Player Notes

*CP. A warning to anybody playing using Vassal – there are significant omissions from the Turkish ORBAT and errors in certain factors such as supply values and locations of certain transfer points and even some depots. Vassal is an indispensable tool to allow people like me to play this game, so no criticism of the tremendous effort that has gone into setting it up on Vassal. However, it does not mean that a check over of the units on board is not worthwhile. I was lazy initially and just ran with the existing Vassal setup whilst wondering why there seemed to be so few Turkish forces. Commencing Nov 14 turn 2, I checked through the booklets properly. When you play using Vassal, conduct a thorough manual check of the relevant Osmanli Harbi setups as per the scenario booklet.*

- *East: I achieved better than expected results in the bombardment of Roshan, with that fortification now no longer existing. I now switch artillery focus on the fort at Pultusk. He will be able to counter-battery fire from this fort, but it is worth the risk if I can also reduce it further and thus continue to wear away the Russian fortification line along the Narew River. The 8<sup>th</sup> Army also makes an attack on the now exposed forces which had been protected by the Roshan defences. There is no further offensive action along this front, but the Germans have reorganized some strong divisions. Postscript – as also happened in the west, I did not protect my guns well enough. The Russians overran a battery with a superbly executed attack.*
- *Galicia: Kovess Group makes another attack, this time pushing inwards toward the NW and the Stry River. The Kovess Army has been the most active of the AH armies and will shortly be resupplied to carry on the good work. The AH 1<sup>st</sup> Army attacks north of the Nida River to deepen the expanding bridgehead. The rest the front remains static with extensive reorganization.*
- *Serbia: No offensive activity.*
- *West: Building up of supply and regrouping continues with another artillery bombardment of Verdun. The last one was fairly successful in reducing the fortification by another 5 hits, placing its strength in single figure numbers. Verdun is something of an increasingly brittle salient into the German line. I also opt to conduct a very limited attack in the Vosges again. Substantial reorganization occurs across the front. My opponent, however, lulled me into a trap in brilliant fashion. I failed to adequately protect my artillery with sufficient infantry. In a superbly planned attack out of Verdun, the French sent my infantry reeling and overran 3 batteries of artillery. This is a devastating blow. In warfare, it is often about who makes the greatest mistakes and how well the enemy capitalises on them. I made a terrible error (easily rectified with just another division having been present, but arrogance and complacency got the better of me). My opponent saw his opportunity and seized it! German morale has suffered a massive blow.*
- *Palestine: Nothing significant other than some strategic movement to continue to drive towards meeting garrison requirements. In the Sinai, an aggressive probe along the coast continues towards Suez.*
- *Caucasus: The Turks, realising they have more divisions on hand than they previously thought (bad staff procedures, surely), become slightly bullish in the Caucasus and attack a Russian cavalry division and infantry brigade covering the passes leading towards Sarikamis. This will enable me to advance some Turkish forces to start picketing the mountains overlooking the Kars valley.*

- *Mesopotamia: The Turkish 112<sup>th</sup> Brigade skedaddles out of Basra when it realises the Royal Navy is able to bombard the city from Um Qasr along the Shatt-al-Arab. The Marsh Arabs attending market in Basrah are furious and vow to never forget this British perfidy and various local imams call for jihad against the British as they see their local mosques threatened by this indiscriminate, unspotted, gunfire.*

*AP: Yes I am fairly pleased with those attacks on the German artillery which had been asking for some retribution. For over two months I have been suffering the consequences of their attacks and I have been looking for an opportunity like this. I was not expecting to get two in one turn. I wouldn't say I set a trap, but it was not an accident that the Russian 2<sup>nd</sup> Army and the French 3<sup>rd</sup> Armies had the forces needed to do this kind of operation.*

*I love the way this game enables players to develop their own styles and tactics to deal with a variety of evolving situations. The CP's artillery superiority encouraged an aggressive utilisation of this weapon after I threw away a lot of my guns in misplaced actions in September. I expect the German artillery will now be a bit more cautious approaching the front line, but in any event the increasing spread of entrenchments will demand a different employment of artillery than what we have seen to date.*

*These aggressive actions by the Entente on three fronts showed I could still attack with advantage and demonstrated that the CP is not totally secure in the gains they have made to date. Hopefully they will have difficult choices now between consolidating and continuing their offensives.*

*There is astonishing misinformation about the operations in Iraq. Basra was occupied without firing a shot, as the Official History clearly tells. Now I am accused of destruction of civilian and cultural property! I am going to raise a regiment of lawyers and I know where to send them.*