

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT24: 10 – 14 November 1914 (November 3)

General Situation

The Entente successes in their counter strokes of 8 November in France and Poland only seemed to stimulate the Central Powers to ever greater exertions in a further bid to secure a favourable decision before the end of the year.

By mid-November, the Central Powers had intensified their assaults against the Russians in Western Poland just as the move by the 8th Army from the north had encountered a check. The Austrians were as active as the Germans and the Turks were adding to Russian concerns in the Caucasus. The Tsar's government woke up to the fact that Russia was now beset by three great powers and there seemed to be no action that the Western Allies could take that would help much at all. A note was circulated to the French and British ambassadors in St Petersburg revealing the truth of the shortfalls in Russian production. The Russians had no difficulty in procuring men, but they had little to give them with which to fight and reserves of equipment were now running dangerously low. Samsonov's recent attack had made the situation worse. The Russians asked for assistance in buying American supplies which the French wanted equally badly. The Russians also had to know what else the Allies could do to help Russia? The answer was not likely to be very positive since, the Germans were simultaneously recommencing attacks in the West as well.

Western Front

After a short period of rest and resupply, Falkenhayn ordered a new round of attacks on the Western Front, expecting to find the Allies in such a state of exhaustion that they might now give up. Soldiers who had hoped for a dry billet were formed up in the driving rain and thrown into frontal attacks which were costly for both attacker and defender alike.

In the southern Vosges, the town of Thann (5-3.2822) was now a desolate ruin as the German 7th Army made its fifth or sixth attempt to break past the city. By 12 November, the French 66th Reserve Division, assigned to defend this foothold of Alsace, was reduced to no more than a quarter of its regulation strength. Nevertheless, the French fought tenaciously enough and the arrival of the completely fresh 62nd Reserve Division on 14 November stabilized this part of the French line.

The German 3rd Army commander, von Hausen, had not been pleased when he had been ordered to pull back from his furthest advances at the end of October. He was enraged to be given instructions on 10 November to recover some of the ground he had voluntarily given up less than two weeks before. Falkenhayn was reviving the hopes of encircling Verdun by a thrust from the northwest. Von Hausen had eight Divisions which were available for such an effort but as he reported to the General Staff there were several badly understrength and as it proved their motivation was not too good either. Falkenhayn ordered 4th Army to provide von Hausen with support on its left flank thinking this would compensate for the 3rd Armies deficiencies.

The German attack began late on 12 November. The initial advance was confused and broken up by the fierce resistance of the French Marine Brigade holding positions near La Cense des Prés (5-3.1717). Although the Marine Brigade was almost wiped out they provided sufficient time through

this sacrifice to allow two regular Divisions (10th and 27th) to block the German thrust forward by nightfall and then during the next couple of days the French brought more reserves to this area and the German effort petered out.



Figure 1: The Yser Battle, 10 - 13 November 1914.

Falkenhayn's main hope had been in Flanders where Falkenhayn's Army had been brought up to strength and was instructed to make an attempt to break through the lowlands around the flooded Yser valley. This sector was held by the Belgian 1st (weak) and 3rd (strong) Divisions. The 3rd was known as the "Liege" Division and had witnessed the outbreak of the war three months previously. It was the last Belgian Division untouched by significant casualties and having given up the eastern frontier of Belgium was not willing to be accused of being driven back over the western border as well.

Falkenhayn's attack began on 10 November. The Belgian defence was compromised by the fact that a proper line of entrenchments had not yet been completed. The river was the main impediment to German movement and the water barrier saved the Belgians during the next three days. Falkenhayn's objective was Poperinge (4-3.0906). To begin with the Germans were confident but the infantry simply failed to press home their attacks when they met resistance and once it became clear the Belgians were going to stand. Being pinned down in flooded ditches and fields sapped the willingness of the tired German infantry to go on. It must also be noted that the German Divisions which participated in this attack were not the same as had marched out from the barracks in August 1914. Much of their strength had now been made up by the replacements scoured from the fortress garrisons. By 13 November, the German attack had been exhausted and the Belgians had not been driven away from the Yser any distance.

To make this attack, Falkenhayn had also pulled in the troops which had been assigned to garrison Lille, thinking that an arrangement had been made with the 1st Army to replace them. This was not so and for a few days the citizens of the city wondered where the Germans had gone. They began to speculate that they were retreating and liberation was confidently expected. On 13 November the opportunity for pilfering German equipment and supplies was too great to resist and a riot erupted

in the parts of the city as patriotic and criminal theft started to get confused. By this time the Germans were alert to the problem and order would be restored within two days.

The Eastern Front

The combats on the Eastern Front now reached a new height of intensity. Up to now the main efforts of the Central Powers had been towards the extremities of the long front. After the check at Strzegocin (4-5.1916), the German 8th Army paused in its operations to regroup. At the southern end of the line, the Kovess Army captured Skole (5-5.3613) from the Russian 34th Division at the second attempt on 11 November.

Around Przemysl, the great siege was now into its second month but the Austrians were well aware that the Russians had some formidable defences, admittedly with little depth, barring the relief of the fortress. Instead of attempting to save Przemysl by direct action, Conrad hoped that the defeat of the Russians elsewhere might cause a retreat that would enable the relief from a different direction. For this reason, the Austrian 1st and now the 2nd Army were committed to the developing campaign in Western Poland.

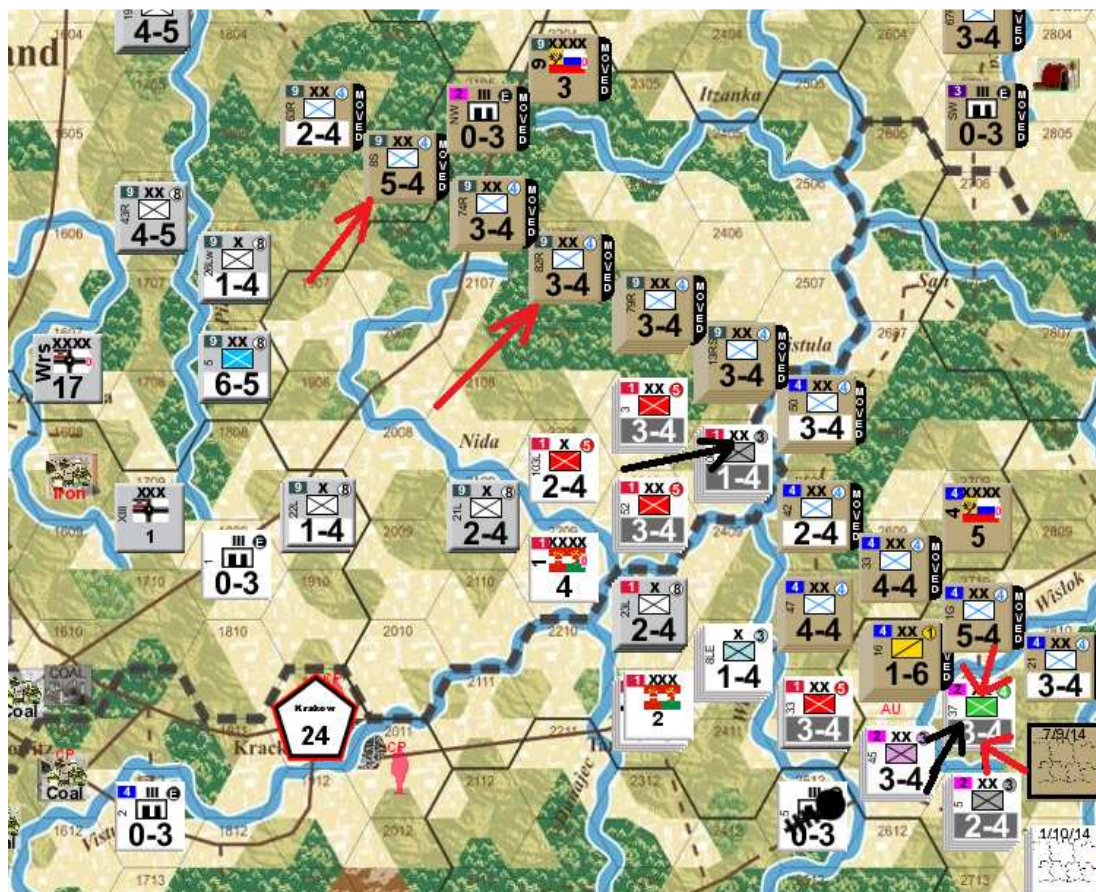


Figure 2: The Russian 4th and 9th Armies attacked and retreating, 10 - 14 November 1914.

In addition, to the two Austrian Armies, the Germans had now two Armies committed south of the Lower Vistula, the 9th Army and a new Army command under General Woersch operating east of Czestochowa. The Russians had their 4th, 9th and 10th Armies operating on the same fronts.

By 10 November, the Austrian 1st Army had done excellent work pushing the Russians back from the Nida line that they had previously hoped to hold. The Russian 4th Army had extended over the Vistula River in an effort to help its neighbour, the 9th Army. On 11 November, the Austrian 54th Division, supported by Landwehr took Polaniec (5-5.2408) and by this persuaded the Russian 4th Army to abandon all positions on the northern side of the Vistula.

The 4th Army was therefore in difficulty on its right flank. Between 11 – 14 November, it was forced to defend its left wing when the Austrian 2nd Army was committed. Two Hungarian Divisions (37th and 51st) got a deep lodgement into the Russian front around Korczyna (5-5.2711). This was considered a serious threat to the whole Russian line west of Przemysl and on 13 November, the 4th Army ordered vigorous counter attacks and did not spare the Russian 1st Guards Division which was designated to perform the most vital and dangerous assaults. In fact these excellent soldiers performed as required and the Austrians suffered a confused and costly retreat as they fell back towards their original lines.

The actions of the Austrian 1st Army did not only threaten the Russian 4th Army but they also forced the Russian 9th Army to retreat as it could no longer confront the Germans on the Nida and the Pilica while its left wing was being forced back. The Russians moved back between 12 – 14 November and secured new positions in a straight line trending from the north west to the south east covering Kielce which was only a few kilometres behind this front. In some places, the Russians had retreated nearly 40 kilometres.

The Russian 10th Army was a rather more solid barrier to the hoped for advances of the Central Powers during this period. The Russian line was still practically in sight of the outskirts of Lodz and the Germans attempted without success to make them withdraw further in an action led by the German 41st and 19th Reserve Divisions at Budziszewice (5-5.1703). This seemed to show (falsely) that the southern wing of the 10th Army was firm.

Next day, the German 9th Army undertook a more ambitious operation between Gąbin and Sanniki (4.5.1619) close to the Vistula. Something must have gone wrong in the planning of this attack for it was perhaps not intended that it would be led by two Cavalry Divisions. The German 1st Cavalry crossed the Vistula from Plock (4-5.1618) and found itself squeezed between the river and the Russian defenders. At the same time the German 8th Cavalry Division was engaged in only slightly less dangerous attacks harassing the Russian infantry as a diversionary operation that was pressed too hard and resulted in severe casualties. The German XII Corps and the 3rd Reserve Division was afterwards criticised for leaving the cavalry to face Russian counter attacks unsupported. By the end of the action on 12 November, the 1st Cavalry had to be reduced to a cadre and this bad day for the German cavalry inevitably led to new claims that this arm had had its day and would be of no further use in future.

Serbia

The Serbian attack at Koceljevo (6-5.1309) had no follow up. The Serbian 3rd Army started pulling back to the Kolubara line on 13 November and the front returned to the same stasis as had existed before.

The Near East

The Turkish advance across the Sinai desert came to an abrupt end on 11 November when the long column, reported to extend 60 kilometres in length, came to a halt and reversed direction heading back to Gaza. They got no closer than 100 kilometres from the Canal. The British garrison, to whom this was reported by aviators, breathed a collective sigh of relief. This had been nothing more than a reconnaissance in force which admittedly helped accustom the Turkish infantry to desert conditions. A convoy of transport ships in the Eastern Mediterranean, carrying two Indian Brigades to Europe, received a signal on 12 November confirming that they should continue on their way. Before this, the ships' masters had been warned that they might have to return urgently to Egypt to help stop a Turkish attack.

The Turks also left the British alone in Southern Iraq. The Tigris Corps was consolidating its hold on the whole Shatt al Arab area. Three infantry brigades and a cavalry brigade had been unloaded at Basra and Abadan by 14 November. The 16th Indian Brigade was marching up river towards Qurna where the Tigris and Euphrates merged. Its progress was assisted by the support of the naval squadron on the water. In reality, there was no opposition if one discounted the odd random shots of Marsh Arabs disgruntled by the unusual traffic across their fields and embankments.

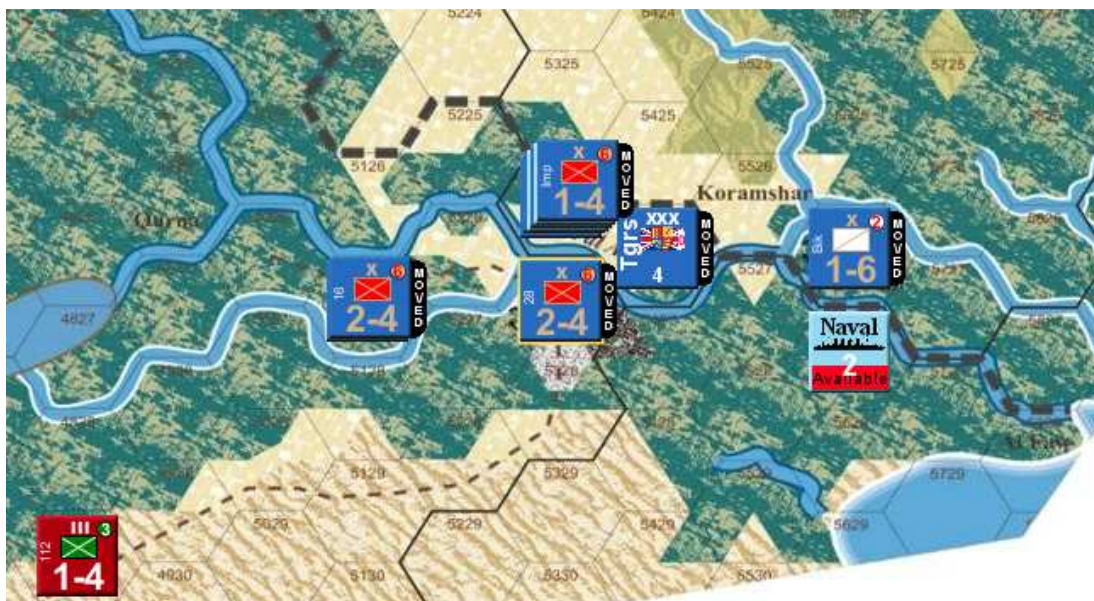


Figure 3; The Tigris Corps, Southern Iraq and South West Persia, 14 November 1914.

The Turkish offensive in the Caucasus began to develop in a manner which took the Russian command by surprise. The position of the Turkish X Corps had been subject to a great deal of uncertainty in the first days of hostilities but on 11 - 12 November the Turkish 30th and 32nd Divisions crossed the Russian frontier into the high Kura defiles (6-8.2411) and penetrated the strung out defences of the Russian 20th Division. The Russian commander of the 1/20th Brigade sent alarming messages to the 1st Caucasus Corps at Sarikamis which indicated that the right flank of the Russians was in grave danger. The whole Russian Caucasus Army was spread over more than 500 kilometres of rough terrain and, within the critical 80 kilometres, they only had a retreating infantry brigade and somewhere to the rear a poorly disciplined Siberian Cossack Brigade which was about to be told to hurry to the aid of the 1/20th.

November 1914 DM Situation

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total	Morale
Germany	-	25	16					9	50	463	Good
Austria-Hungary	1	5	6					5	17	196	Good
Ottoman	-	2*	1					NA	3	3	Good – *Basra lost.
Central Powers	1	32	23					14	70	662	
France	3	8	4					-	15	492	Good
Great Britain	-	-	-					-	-	45	Good
Russia	4	10	10					NA	24	209	Good
Belgium	-	-	(3)					NA	-	(93)	Good
Serbia	-	-	-					NA	-	(9)	Good
Entente	7	18	14					-	39	746	

Player Notes

CP: *Top Secret.*

AP: *I feared that the CP would come back at me fiercely after my successes last turn. Ten CP attacks in one turn is now rather a lot. I cannot say that the results were disappointing for me.*

The time for easy German successes on the Western Front is passing and after each attack I was able to strengthen my defence of the threatened position. I was also able to fill the last remaining gaps in the French front on either side of the 10th Army sector.

The situation on the Eastern Front is more fragile and the outcome of this turn was flattered by the German cavalry disaster. I also had to use up practically my last supplies in the central sectors in order to achieve that result.

The CP might continue to enjoy some short term successes on this front, but in the bigger picture I have to keep Przemysl surrounded and decide whether and when to abandon Warsaw. It is not going to be easy or even possible to break my ring around Przemysl and so far the Austrians have not tried it. This may be the right decision because a failed attempt at relief would be much the worst outcome for them. I am not ready to give up Warsaw, even though fighting in Western Poland is not the most advantageous place for me to engage the Germans. I have ample Russian replacements starting to

arrive next month. I want the Germans to expend time and a lot of resources before I give up this prize.

I have also begun to wonder if I do not need to reinforce the Caucasus front as the Russians there are having to cover large areas with little reserves should things start to go badly.