

## Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT25: 15 – 18 November 1914 (November 4)

### General Situation

By mid-November 1914, it was beyond doubt that the Germans could no longer expect a decisive victory in the West that year. Falkenhayn's staff became more susceptible to the growing influence of Hindenburg and Ludendorff who argued that the Russians could still be beaten before the end of the year. Ludendorff, was convinced Warsaw was within the Germans grasp.

It is doubtful whether Falkenhayn fully accepted any these arguments but the pressure to continue some offensive action against a major enemy was irresistible. In addition, it must be acknowledged that though the Tsarist Government defiantly maintained its determination to "protect" Poland, historians later discovered in the Russian archives a much less confident picture.

### The Eastern Front



Figure 1: The Russians prepare to defend Warsaw, 15 - 18 November 1914.

The Central Powers' offensive in Central and Southern Poland continued with actions taking place over a broad front between the great bend of the Vistula. The most successful attacks were those of the German 9<sup>th</sup> Army against the Russian 10<sup>th</sup> Army. The attacks at Gąbin and Sanniki (4-5.1619) which had been frustrated a few days previously were repeated and the lessons that had been learned and applied were sufficient to force the Russians to give up their positions.

The Russian 10<sup>th</sup> Army had no choice but to give up the rather tenuous contact it had maintained with the outskirts of Lodz for the Germans, led by the 43<sup>rd</sup> Reserve Division had cut the line of the Lodz-Kielce railway at Januszewice (5-5.1804) and breaking therefore links between the Russian 10<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Armies.

Faced with a deteriorating situation on both flanks, the Russian 10<sup>th</sup> Army ordered a retreat to the Bzura River on 17 November. This was considered the last good defence line west of Warsaw. As the Stavka also had reports of a strong concentration north of Warsaw with the German 8<sup>th</sup> Army, it was decided that the Grand Duke should take direct command of both the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Armies as the coming battle for Warsaw was otherwise going to transgress the boundaries of the West and North West Fronts.

The Austro-Hungarians continued to give the Germans a fair measure of support by keeping up their own aggressive operations along the length of their front. On the whole, the Russians were able to keep the Austrians at bay in some cases thanks to the trench lines which were quite prevalent in the Carpathians where the fronts had been subject to little movement since September. There the Russian 14<sup>th</sup> Division held an exposed salient in the Skole Hills (5-5.3513) which was subjected to a combined effort of the Austro-Hungarian 3<sup>rd</sup> and Kovess Armies on 15 – 16 November. Similarly, at the same time, the Russian 2<sup>nd</sup> Guards suffered 60 percent losses in its infantry strength holding a front covering Vygoda (5-5.2811). The defence was supported by the guns of the Russian 4<sup>th</sup> Artillery Brigade firing over open sights and two Polish Divisions which had led the attack of the Austrian 2<sup>nd</sup> Army lost many men also. Finally, the Austrian 1<sup>st</sup> Army was stopped by the Russian 9<sup>th</sup> Army as it attempted to make a further advance along the north bank of the Vistula. An attack on Osiek (5-5.2407) failed on 16 November.

In addition to trenches, the Russian defensive operations were frequently supported by cavalry which, it was noted, were often more capable than the weary infantrymen.

### **The Western Front**

The trench lines which became characteristic of the Western Front were not yet entirely complete. There were still a few gaps but these were becoming smaller and much the exception rather than the rule. Some generals were becoming worried that the troops would lose their offensive spirit once comfortably dug in. Such generals probably had a poor understanding of comfort.



Figure 2: The German attack near Altkirch, 15 November 1914.

The German attacks in Eastern Champagne and on the Yser were not resumed. In Alsace, the German 7<sup>th</sup> Army shifted its line of attack away from Thann (5-3.2822) and tried a move on Altkirch (5-3.2823) further south. There was a fight in the woods above Altkirch on 15 November but the French 66<sup>th</sup> Reserve Division gave as good as they got and the 7<sup>th</sup> Army had to stop and rest its tired men.

Joffre was under some pressure to resume the offensive, much of the pressure coming from Russia which now considered itself threatened by the great Central Powers offensive in the East. Joffre resisted these calls for action for the moment on the pretext that the French Army needed to absorb and train fresh drafts of infantry. In addition, Joffre wanted reports from the Army commanders on the strength of the German defences opposite them. Generally the initial intelligence showed that most parts of the German line west of Verdun were strongly held and it was clear than any attacks would have to be well prepared if they were to succeed.

### Serbia

Everything was quiet on this front. The Austrians and Serbians had roughly equal shares in the yearly pig slaughter. The Serbians found the Austrians willing buyers of their pork even in wartime.

### The Near East

The Turkish campaign in the Caucasus was not proceeding very rapidly. The Turkish 3<sup>rd</sup> Army was concerned with consolidating the positions it had reached in the mountain massifs on either side of the Kars and Aras Valleys. The Russians were content to conform to the limits of the Turkish advance and they held a front which swung in a huge loop from the Aras Valley around Sarikamis at a distance of about 30 kilometres and then ran north to the headwaters of the Kura River.



Figure 3: The Turkish 3rd Army, 15 - 18 November 1914.

Although winter had not yet exerted its full impact on the Caucasus front, both sides were already experiencing some of the challenges of the harsh environment. In particular the Kurdish cavalry operating in the Eleskirt Valley west of Bayezit could find no forage and several Russian Cossack units were in an equally deprived state.

In Mesopotamia, the Tigris Corps was still marching up the Shatt al Arab. The Indian 16<sup>th</sup> Brigade reached the junction of the two great rivers on 18 November. Advanced river patrols reported that Qurna was undefended and its occupation was not expected to be long delayed.

## November 1914 DM Situation

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total	Morale
Germany	-	25	16	5				9	55	468	Good
Austria-Hungary	1	5	6	6				5	17	202	Good
Ottoman	-	2*	1	-				NA	3	3	Good – *Basra lost.
Central Powers	1	32	23	11				14	81	673	
France	3	8	4	1				-	16	493	Good
Great Britain	-	-	-	-				-	-	45	Good
Russia	4	10	10	11				NA	35	220	Good
Belgium	-	-	(3)	-				NA	-	(93)	Good
Serbia	-	-	-	-				NA	-	(9)	Good
Entente	7	18	14	12				-	51	758	

### Player Notes

**CP:** *I'm afraid I missed my last AAR comment. Time got ahead of me. The main focus was on regenerating some offensive spirit with 10 attacks across all fronts. It was not a great success.*

- *East: My intelligence sources assess that Russia is experiencing supply problems, so my aim is to wear him down where I can. I attack with two of the German armies, all against the Russian 10<sup>th</sup> Army, to attain 3 objectives:*
  - *9<sup>th</sup> Army to clear the south bank of the Vistula 60km N of Lodz to try and turn the Russian northern flank,*
  - *9<sup>th</sup> & Wrs Army combined to attack out of Lodz and clear the eastern approaches and push back the centre of the line,*
  - *Wrs Army to clear the Russian hold in the bend of the Pilica River bend SE of Lodz to try and turn the southern flank of 10<sup>th</sup> Army.*
- *Galicia: Multiple attacks this time, some of which are risky. Russian counter-attacks will burn up his limited supply resources though. Kovess Group attacks an entrenched 14XX on the River Stry. I expect no great success here, but it will cause some casualties and eat away his supply. Along the San River west of Lodz the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> armies collaborate to attack another entrenched position.*
- *Serbia: No offensive activity.*
- *West: Building up of supply and regrouping. Attacking without sufficient build-up of supplies and concentrating of strength is now wasteful. Offensive action needs to be very considered. There is one opportunity to attack in the Vosges before the French get to entrench SW of Mulhouse. Moving adjacent to the Belfort fortifications will also*

*deny these locations to the French to absorb and train replacements and maintains a threat against them. I have also started to move engineering and siege artillery assets eastwards.*

- *Palestine: Nothing significant; the desert raiders pull out of Sinai back into Turkish Palestine.*
- *Caucasus: The Turks considered another attack on the approaches to Sarikamis, but reconsidered. The mountain terrain is considerably constraining.*
- *Mesopotamia: The Turks continue to concentrate forces within Mesopotamia.*

**AP:** *I am starting to worry about Warsaw despite everything I said last turn. Although the Russian defence is having its successes I am losing one of the advantages of the Russians. I refer to their ability to retreat. As I am pinned back closer to Warsaw my freedom of manoeuvre is more restricted. I am also noting that the 8<sup>th</sup> Army has an impressive concentration of strength north of Warsaw and I expect this to return to the fray next turn probably.*

*I am fairly confident that the arrival of my replacements at the beginning of December and the onset of winter will prevent the Germans cutting off Warsaw in the near future, but I am going to be forced into a costly battle if the Germans press the attack. Hopefully their supplies will soon be exhausted and I doubt the Austrians will be able to continue the current level of support for the German effort. I have also concentrated 9 supply points around Warsaw. For the Russians that is riches at the moment.*

*In the defensive operations on the Eastern Front I am making more use of cavalry now. Their free supply capability is very important when supply points are hard to come by and a couple of cavalry divisions in threatened hexes make my counterattacks much more effective.*

*I made no attacks this turn. I was happy with the losses counted after the CP turn though I may have to be more active if this pressure on Russia does not abate. So far this month looks pretty favourable to me on the basis of DM points.*