

The Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT27: 23 – 26 November 1914 (November 6)

General Situation

The attack at Montmiral (5-3.1317) had demonstrated that Falkenhayn had not yet given up on the campaign in the West, and in doing so he had disproved the best estimates of French intelligence. Falkenhayn had given Hindenburg, Ludendorff and Conrad just enough support to persuade them he was backing their ambitions for the Eastern Front, but he had always retained the main German offensive capability in the West.

Joffre had reacted to the loss of Montmiral with an attempt to diminish its significance, commenting to a worried delegation of French Deputies that it was “The Kaiser’s last card”. When Lord Kitchener was asked about it by Asquith he said “We have to hope it is not an Ace”. Since the German offensive was not over and escalated further on 23 November into what was later dubbed the 2nd Battle of the Marne, the quality of the German hand became a matter of intense concern in Paris and therefore also in London.

The Western Front



Figure 1: The Second Battle of the Marne, 23 - 26 November 1914.

Falkenhayn now revealed that the German offensive was much more than a local effort by the 3rd Army. Having battered the French 9th Army with Von Hausen, Falkenhayn ordered von Bülow’s 2nd Army to move forward against the French 4th Army. For this von Bülow was supported by some of the Saxon units (32nd and 40th Divisions) which had helped win Montmiral. These moved rapidly from one area of operations to another.

The German attack began before dawn on 23 November. The German infantry were encouraged to believe they were participating in a war winning blow and once again they had the advantage of attacking French positions which were poorly sited and benefitted from no consistent scheme of entrenchment. The fighting was bitter around Jouarre and La Ferté-sous-Jouarre (5-3.1118) where the French 8th and 17th Divisions allowed themselves to be destroyed in an ultimately futile attempt to stop the Germans from advancing.

The desperate sacrifices of the defending Frenchmen at least extracted a heavy cost on the Germans who were obliged to pause in their attacks on 25 November due to shortages of ammunition. This was one difficulty which Falkenhayn had no power to solve.

In the French camp, the importance of the situation was fully recognised. Joffre knew that Langle de Cary's 4th Army needed time to regroup and for reinforcements to gather. However, something had to be done to try and knock the Germans off balance. The solution was offered by General Foch, on the evening of 24 November, who assured Joffre he would attack with the 9th Army next day and try and recover Montmiral (5-3.1317). Foch, however, demanded that every resource that was available within the next forty eight hours should march to his front. Joffre agreed and Foch began an attack the following morning which over the next two days employed not just the 9th Army but supplies from the 3rd and 6th Army and units from the 4th and 6th Armies as well. It was a major effort. Foch even got some of the heavy guns in action. The French attack was nevertheless confused and too improvised to really threaten the Germans who avoided being drawn into costly fights while outnumbered and still very short of ammunition. The French effort stopped in a heavy rainstorm three kilometres short of Montmiral.

Meanwhile, Joffre took some risks with the German 2nd Army which could be expected to resume its advance from Jouarre at any time. Behind a cavalry screen, Joffre accumulated every spare unit he could rush to this sector. They came from the 5th Army in Picardy and the 1st Army in Alsace and others were reformed units built on the shattered remnants of units which had recently been in action. This effort of concentration depended on the French railroads and in this battle crucially the line between Paris and Nogent-sur-Seine (5-3.1218). Joffre feared that if the Germans reached this arterial route he might have difficulty maintaining the mobility of the French Army.

The French did not face this crisis entirely alone. Joffre later expressed genuine gratitude that the British, with the support of the Belgian 5th Division, made a strong attack on German trenches at La Bassée (5-3.1007) on 26 November. This was the first time that the British (or anyone on the Entente side) had attacked such well-prepared positions. Of course, the trenches of November 1914 were rudimentary compared to what was done even a few months later. However, the tactics employed in attacking them were also rudimentary. The German 1st and 5th Reserve Divisions which held this section of front were at full strength, but the Reserve Division had not positioned its machine guns very well and the British 8th Division got into the first two lines of trenches which they held for six hours. Only a costly counterattack by the 1st Division restored the German line and the 5th Reserve Division had to be sent away afterwards for an extended rest.



Figure 2: The British attack at La Bassée, 26 November 1914.

The Eastern Front

There was a loss in momentum in the Central Powers' offensive operations in late November. Much of the responsibility of this lay with the German 8th Army. Its move into the Narew marshes had not been successful as it became apparent that it was nearly impossible to get sufficient supplies forwards to support further attacks.

In Central Poland there was still some forward movement as General Woysch's command enjoyed a local success when the German 41st Division routed the Russian 63rd Reserve Division at Opoczno (5-5.1904) on 24 November. The Austro-Hungarians also made a major attack on 23-24 November as their 2nd Army tried to pierce an entrenched front held by the Russian 2nd Guards Division (5-5.2811) between Brzozow and the San River. Nevertheless, the Russian Guards were not to be shifted from their ground regardless of the casualties they suffered.

There was therefore little progress. Conrad had seen the front opposite the Austrian Armies solidify and the chances of a successful Austrian offensive to relieve Przemysl were widely thought to be diminishing given the rapid approach of winter. Conrad, whatever his private views, would never admit such a concession to the situation. Any efforts now made at reorganisation were often interpreted as the start of a move on Przemysl. An example of this was when the Kovess Army started to release some units to reserves. It appeared the advance to the Dniester would not happen and Kovess had already abandoned some of the most advanced positions gained previously.

Serbia

Vienna and Budapest did have news to celebrate arriving from Serbia. There the Austrian 5th Army had continued its offensive in the middle Drina region and on 23 November, the Hungarian 40th Division had led a daring crossing of the fast flowing river. Although the water was difficult to safely traverse the gorges of the river provided many concealed crossing points which engineers could bridge after small groups crossed by boat. The Serbian defenders could not cover all the potential

bridgeheads and the Ljubovija Regiment came off worse in a bitter fight with the Hungarians at Kremna (6-5.1212). While this was going on, the Serbian 3rd Army decided that it could not sustain its remaining positions in Bosnia and further withdrawals performed between 25 – 26 November terminated this Serbian occupation of Austrian territory.



Figure 3: Austrian Advances and Serbian Withdrawals, the Middle Drina, 20 - 24 November 1914.

The Near East

Having secured Qurna, the Tigris Corps wasted little time in pushing up the lower reaches of both the Tigris and the Euphrates. By 26 November, it had been established that there were no Turks to be contacted for more than 50 kilometres in either direction. In fact, there were no Turkish forces of regimental size anywhere south of Kut and An-Nasariyah.

The Turkish 3rd Army offensive was still pressing the Russians back towards Sarikamis. The strength of the Turks' attack was on their left in the high mountains. The Russians were not fighting with very much skill. The aristocratic commanders of the Russian Army showed no inclination for late season hiking in order to visit the units they were responsible for. On 24 November, the commander of the Russian 1st Caucasian Corps received an alarming report that the Turks had penetrated as far as Boyali (6-8.2512). Any further advance by the Turks from this direction could lead them into the rear of the main Russian positions at Sarikamis.

Player Notes

CP:

- *East: 8th Army attacks out of the swamps to try and drive a further wedge between 1st and 2nd Russian armies and continue with moves to threaten the defensive area around Warsaw. Further south, I attack the south bank of the Pilica to continue to try and separate the Russian 9th and 10th armies. These are small nibbles I am taking, but they chip away at the Russian line causing gradual build-up of casualties and*

burning up their supply. It also serves to deny the Russians an opportunity to dig in and stabilise a solid line with occasional disproportionate effects; such as driving Russian forces back by over 40km (as happened outside Lodz). Needless to say, though, my own supply is also being used up.

- *Galicia: I had, in the last turn, been contemplating a battle to relieve Przemyśl. I had insufficient strength to make this viable and Russian intelligence picked up the movement of garrison troops within the city. His concentrated artillery attack has now reduced the garrison. A breakout battle is not feasible. I do have some aggressive spirit remaining, however, and the AH 2nd and 4th armies collaborate for the largest AH attack since Aug into the valley between the Wisłok and San rivers.*
- *Serbia: Having broken the Serbian trench line on the west bank of the Drina in AH territory, I now launch a limited attack to seize a bridgehead on the Serbian side.*
- *West: Reorganising divisions along the front and absorbing replacements in the rear areas will be an enduring feature of operations on all fronts now. My artillery attack did cause some limited damage to Verdun and reminded my opponent that I am still able to employ my artillery on such tasks even after the horrendous losses at the beginning of the month. I still have to exercise more caution, however, and now opt to withdraw the guns from the front as my intelligence picked up a concentration of French artillery in Verdun; no doubt endeavouring to conduct bombardment of my own gunners. After the success enjoyed by 3^d Army in the previous week, I again conduct one major offensive with combined 2nd and 3^d Army forces to attack the French 4th Army SE of Meaux. The French expected me to continue to attack out of my previous point of penetration SW of Epernay, but I have sufficient freedom of manoeuvre to shift westwards and attack a concentration in open ground with an overwhelming accretion of forces. This is expensive, but if it causes large French casualties and deters him from any further offensive action for the rest of this year then it will have been worth it. I do expect at least one French attempt at a counterstroke this month, though. (And boy, did it come in spades. He attacked with the French in overwhelming strength SW of Epernay; where I held but with awful losses. The BEF also attacked my trenches on the outskirts of Lille and caused further devastating losses.)*
- *Palestine: No change.*
- *Caucasus: My Turks are continuing to apply pressure around Sarikamis and launch another attack to it's NW.*
- *Mesopotamia: The Turks continue to concentrate forces within Mesopotamia.*

AP: Another massive German attack (81 strength) on the French front forces me to wake up to the growing seriousness of the situation. The German attacks are focussed on the gaps in the French trench line and have been successful despite the strongest French defences I could muster. The latest attack inflicted 15 hits reduced to 10 by retreat.

I could see some positive in this which is that if the Germans went over to defence any attacks I make on them will likely be as costly, but in that case the timing would be down to me. The Germans are also running out of supply again and I doubt they can maintain the intensity of their actions on both the Western and Eastern fronts for much longer.

I could not allow these attacks to take place without taking some balancing actions. The Russians are too thinly spread and too unsupplied to be able to muster even one decent attack at the moment. It

was risky to attack with the French, not least because the difference between rolling a 1 and 6 is quite high for both the attack and counterattack in these large battles. Slightly mitigating this is that if I rolled low and the Germans did not retreat then their losses are not reduced. A 1:1 die split was therefore mildly disappointing, but was certainly not the worst outcome.

The British/Belgian attack also reduced my risk by giving me two chances at getting a good result and spread the losses among three nations while the Germans are involved in every battle. This attack was also aimed at draining the Germans of their supply. Whatever happens next turn, the German attack should be in difficulty because they cannot get supply close enough to the critical sectors on the Marne.

November 1914 DM Situation

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total	Morale
Germany	-	25	16	5	7	20		9	62	495	Good
Austria-Hungary	1	5	6	6	2	3		5	19	207	Good
Ottoman	-	2*	1	-	2	1		NA	5	6	Good – *Basra lost.
Central Powers	1	32	23	11	11	24		14	116	708	
France	3	8	4	1	10	12		-	38	515	Good
Great Britain	-	-	-	-	-	3		-	3	48	Good
Russia	4	10	10	11	6	4		NA	45	230	Good
Belgium	-	-	(3)	-	-	(1)		NA	(1)	(94)	Good
Serbia	-	-	-	-	(1)	(1)		NA	(2)	(10)	Good
Entente	7	18	14	12	16	19		-	67	793	