

## Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT29: 1 – 5 December 1914 (1 December 1914)

### General Situation

There was a distinct drop in temperature across most of Europe in the first week of December. The northern Baltic Sea froze early that year according to the records of the Scandinavian Shipping Clubs. This allowed the British to follow up on their plan to acquire the surplus of the northern iron fields of Sweden without competition from German buyers, though the undeveloped facilities at Narvik placed limits on what they could export through that port. In contrast, the White Sea was ice free and Archangelsk was alive to the activity of vessels unloading war material bought in America.

The land war continued with the combatants now thrown together in cold fogs and other miseries. On the Western Front there was an early snowfall during the night of 30 November in Northern France. It would soon melt, but it had an important impact because it gave rise to the famous “wireless intercepts” episode.

There was an important diplomatic development when, on 1 December, the Central Powers signed the Convention of Budapest by which Germany and Austria agreed to provide weapons to the Ottoman Empire. Before the ink was dry on this agreement (which also required the secret partnership of Romania and Bulgaria) the first trains were being loaded in Chemnitz and Budapest to deliver consignments of war material to Istanbul.

### The Western Front

Falkenhayn was still intent on one last push in the West. He knew the French had heavily reinforced their front covering Paris and the British had heavily committed to their attack at La Bassée (5-3.1008). It followed therefore that other parts of the Allied line would be weaker and ripe for attack if the Germans changed the axis of their operations.



Figure 1: The 1st Army Offensive Postponed, and the Allied Response, 1 - 5 December 1914.

The German General Staff thought they had found their weak spot at the boundary of the British and French Armies near Frévent (5-3.0809) to the west of Arras. It was indeed weak. The French 8<sup>th</sup> Army had the understrength 29<sup>th</sup> Division and a Moroccan Brigade holding a long exposed sector with no natural advantages of terrain. The defence of the area was in fact dependent on the British 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division which had been in very little action to date and might not have provided the best assistance to the French infantry. Falkenhayn realised that if he struck suddenly here he would drive the French and British apart. Then, by threatening to advance to the sea, the Germans would create such a danger to the British lines of communication that they might have to withdraw from the Continent.

Unfortunately the opportunity was fleeting. Falkenhayn planned to attack with von Kluck's 1<sup>st</sup> Army on 2 December. Meanwhile, Falkenhayn was ordered to keep the British contained west of Lille. For the moment, the British advance there suited German purposes because they were out of position and would be unable to respond quickly once the attack began.

Von Kluck was allowed to make his own dispositions. The German 1<sup>st</sup> Army had not been in action much recently and the key to the attack was the use of nine regular Divisions and two Reserve Divisions all of which had been brought back to near regulation strength. Then the snow fell. It was particularly thick on the roads west of Arras. By the afternoon of 1 December, some of von Kluck's subordinates were getting frustrated. His quartermaster had informed him that only half the supplies expected had actually been unloaded due to bottlenecks at the railheads. Von Kluck, only had to look out of the window of his headquarters in Arras to see a mass of trains lined up to the horizon and unable to obtain the labour, equipment or horses needed to unload and distribute their loads. The field artillery on the German front south west of Arras, which was intended to give as much as a quarter of the intended firepower of the attack, reported that its shells were still struggling through on country roads that were blocked with snow and that most batteries would be unable to support the attack.

Von Kluck consulted Falkenhayn, who was located in his chateau headquarters in the Ardennes, and in the confused and urgent situation several messages were broadcast *en clair*. Inevitably, Marshal Joffre and Sir John French had copies of them in their papers late in the evening of 1<sup>st</sup> December, including one in which Von Kluck said he would postpone the attack. In complete breach of all military security, a British intelligence officer (who was dismissed for it) sent a wireless message to Von Kluck's Headquarters asking which attack was to be postponed?

The Allies did not need to be told. They knew where their weak points were. There was an anxious 24 hours as the British mobilised to respond to the danger on their right flank. The French 8<sup>th</sup> Army admitted that there was not much it could do. Joffre would not release any extra troops from Paris, and so it fell to the British to respond to the situation. First, the Indian Divisions were sent to Frévert and it was fortunate that they were in the process of being reinforced by fresh troops from India. Next, on 4 December, Sir John French ordered the BEF to abandon their recent gains on the outskirts of Lille. This was indeed a bitter blow as the Army had persuaded itself that it had won a great victory and was now denied the chance to liberate the French city. Sir John French was more realistic than that and knew that any further movement east would actually lead his command into a trap from which it would never emerge.

## The Eastern Front

Despite the onset of a chilling Siberian wind, the activity of the Central Powers on the Eastern Front had scarcely declined. The pressure on the Russian defensive fronts around Warsaw was maintained for Hindenburg and Ludendorff still held out a hope of encircling the city before winter set in. The German 8<sup>th</sup> Army was in action at Zarzecze and Pietraki (4-5.1914) as it fought its way through the wetlands down the Omulew River aiming to reach the Narew River. The German 9<sup>th</sup> Army, under Hindenburg's direct command, was similarly engaged on the banks of the Pilica River at Nowe Maisto nad Pilica (5-5.1902) where the ultimate aim was to reach the Vistula. If the Germans reached both the Narew and the Vistula above and below Warsaw, then the Russians would perhaps have to evacuate the city or risk encirclement.

There had also been fighting for over a week around Kielce. Woynsch's Army supported by the Austrian 1<sup>st</sup> Army had been forced to recognise that Kielce would be defended determinedly by the Russian 9<sup>th</sup> Army. On 2 – 3 December, the Central Powers tried a new move and pushed two Landwehr Brigades south east of the city and captured Daleszyce (5-5.2206). This threatened to disrupt not only the Russian position in Kielce but the whole Russian defensive line which was based on a series of long wooded ridges. The Russian 9<sup>th</sup> Army, commanded by the popular General Leczicki, reacted quickly and infantry counterattacks were ordered on 4 December. When the commander of the 79<sup>th</sup> Reserve Division announced that he had no shells for his guns, Leczicki firmly replied that that if he had wanted the artillery to fire he would have mentioned it in the orders. This was all very bold but, in reality, the Russians were not going to recover their ground with unsupported infantry attacks and so it proved.

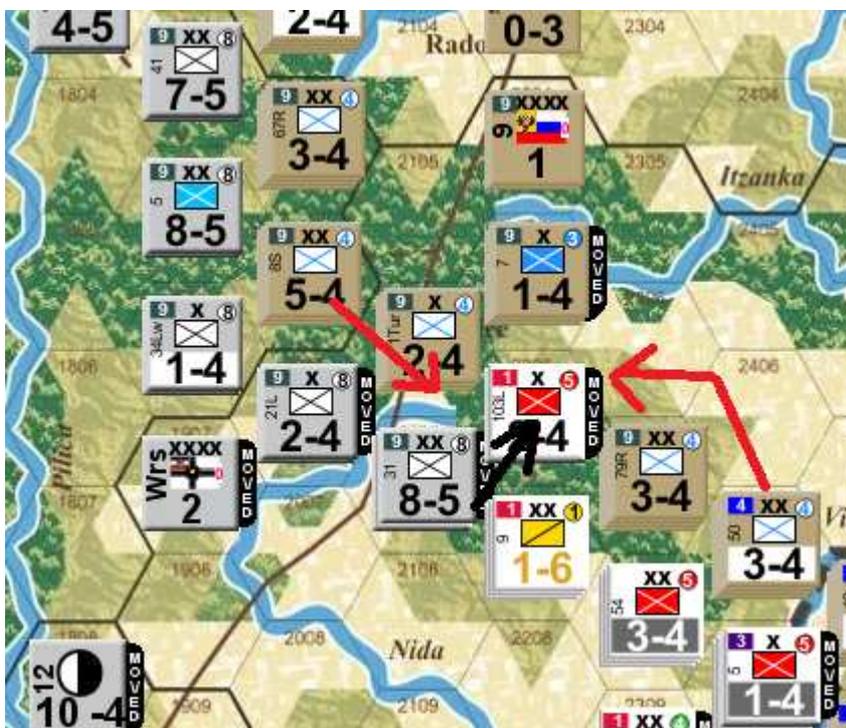


Figure 2: The Battle of Kielce, 2 - 5 December 1914.

The ever-active General Kovess was still looking for a means to break out of the Carpathian valleys which so constrained his freedom of manoeuvre. There was another sharp action on 3 December as

the Austrians tried to get past Russian positions on the main road between Nadvornaya and Stanislau where a Russian Rifle Brigade (3<sup>rd</sup>) was busily entrenching (5-5.3915). The Russians had the 1<sup>st</sup> Kuban Cossack Division and Ural Cossack Brigade in the vicinity and these helped drive the Austrians back when their attack faltered.

## Serbia

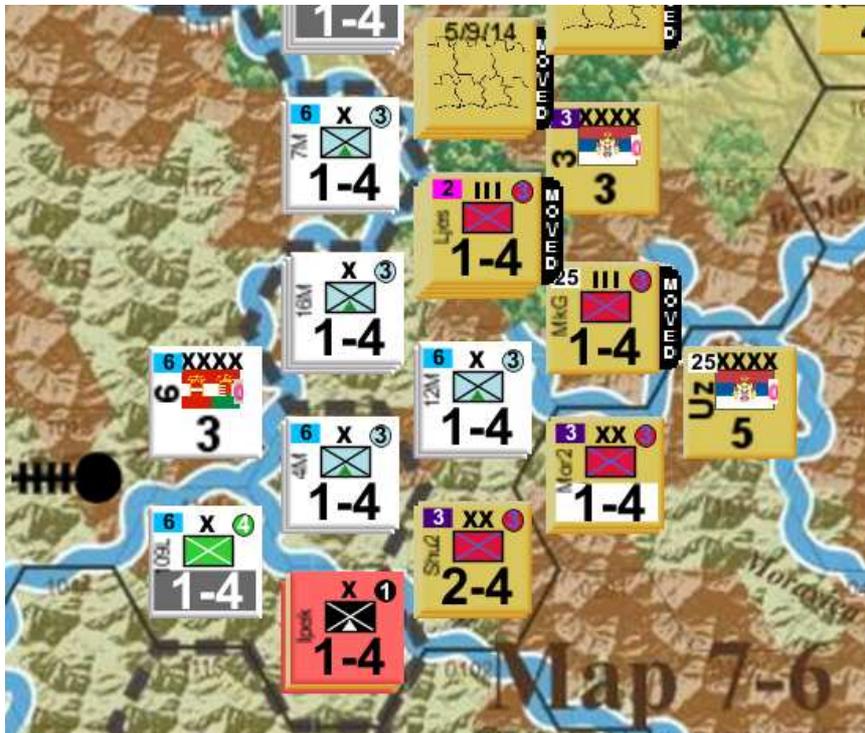


Figure 3: The Advance through the Razor Back Hills of Zlatibor, 1-3 December 1914.

The Austrian 6<sup>th</sup> Army now took responsibility for the trans-Drina operations. It was perceived in the 6<sup>th</sup> Army Headquarters that the opposing Uzice Front would be vulnerable to a new attack and a new Austro-Hungarian thrust began across the Zlatibor watershed to the head of the Morava Valley. Between 1-3 December, the Austrians advanced across the razor back hills that dominated the landscape. This was a very slow movement carried out in the teeth of fierce opposition from a Serbian enemy which was hidden by both the terrain and the clouds which shrouded all the high ground. The spearhead of the attack was several Croat and Tyrolese mountain brigades which nevertheless had taken severe casualties before they limped in to Cajetina and Bioska (6-5.1313) after dark on the 3 December. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Moravan Division which had tried to oppose this advance had considerable losses as well, including, it was noted, a couple of cases of frostbite.

## The Near East

Frostbite was no immediate danger to the men of the 1<sup>st</sup> Australian Division which landed at Suez on 5 December. For the moment, Lord Kitchener thought this unit should be allowed to recover from its long sea journey. Winston Churchill also advocated that it should remain in the Near East for the moment. It would be well placed there, he argued, if the Dervishes revived their hostility to the British Empire. Lord Kitchener was very willing to acquiesce in this point of view.

An-Nasariyah was occupied by the 16<sup>th</sup> Indian Brigade on 4 December. On the same day, the Tigris Corps was renamed the Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force in view of the fact that the advance up the Euphrates was just as important as that on the Tigris.

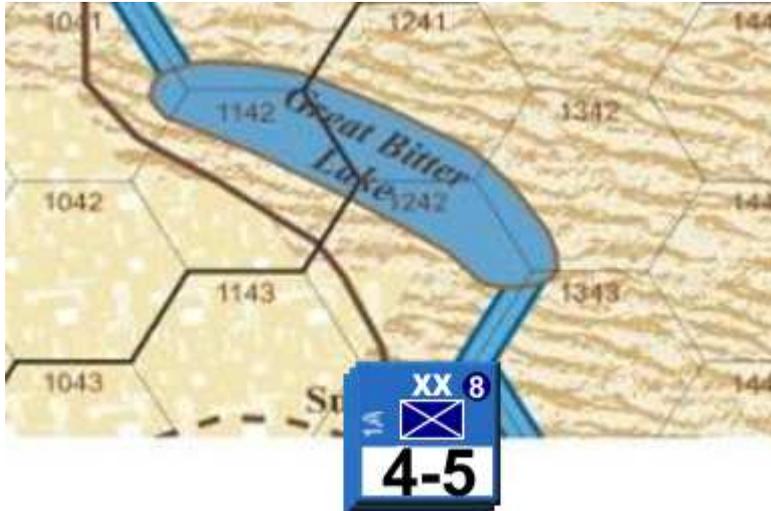


Figure 4: The 1st Australian Division debarked at Suez, 5 December 1914.

The Russians had hoped that the Turks would stop their attacks and the Upper Kars Valley would remain in their hands as the 10<sup>th</sup> Siberian Division was arriving on this front and ought to guarantee the defence of this sector. However, if the Russians were safe in the valley, this was not so for the Armenian irregulars who were left out on the mountains as the weather started to deteriorate.

The Turkish 3<sup>rd</sup> Army was nevertheless concerned about these Armenians who were hanging on their right flank and sniping at the road which served as the line of communication for the Turkish forces in Sarikamis. Therefore the XIII and X Corps were detailed to clear the flanks of the valley of hostile troops. The Turks made some progress on 2 – 3 December aiming for the villages of Hamamli and Alisofu (6-8.2713). However, a blizzard late on 3 December stopped the advance and the Turks would have been in great danger if the Armenians could have mustered any kind of counterattack. Fortunately for the Turks, this did not materialise except as the feeblest of probes. The Armenian commander, the self-styled Brigadier Yerevan, who later became one of Stalin's most disreputable henchmen, had been told that the 1<sup>st</sup> Caucasian Cavalry Division was coming to support him. It did not arrive for two days, by which time the chance to hurt the Turks was gone.

#### Player Notes

*CP: Winter is arrived and after production I fail to feed my populations and take 9DM against Germany and 6 against AH. Germany commences training 30 RPL, AH 20 and weapons are loaned to the OE to allow them to start the process of arming and training 12 RPL of Anatolian peasants. Nationalistic rumblings continue to ripple out of Italy, so AH dispatches a HQ and some brigades to the Isonzo area.*

- East: My attack against Kielce failed so I opt for the more indirect approach by chipping away at its flanks. Attacking when not in trench lines now adds increased risk, but I accept those risks and continue to attack to the SE of Kielce in conjunction*

with the AH 1<sup>st</sup> Army. 9<sup>th</sup> Army also attacks against Russian forces on the approaches to Warsaw 40km to the SW. 8<sup>th</sup> Army adds to the pressure by attacking out of the marshes N of Warsaw.

- *Galicja: More consolidation and another attack by Kovess.*
- *Serbia: 6<sup>th</sup> Army attacks to drive deeper into Serbia.*
- *West: The BEF unhinged me somewhat with their devastating attack into the outskirts of Lille. I am forced to contain this but must do so without losing offensive spirit, so mass for an attack against the trenches SW of Arras. I may be bloodily repulsed but it might just force him to abandon these trenches and the guns in this area. There is no further offensive action as the winter starts to kick in.*
- *Palestine: No change, but Beirut is finally garrisoned after a long trek to get there.*
- *Caucasus: I have my winter quarters in Sarikamis and now attack to clear the high ground to the NE.*
- *Mesopotamia: The Turks continue to concentrate forces in key towns.*

**AP:** *I was looking forward to winter, which is not a sign of confidence. I certainly enjoyed the fact that all my counterattacks had a +1 modifier (this does not apply if all the attackers are in trenches). In the Caucasus, the Armenian brigade had no supply but counterattacked with 3 + 4 strength in the mountains on the 1917-19 CRT. I could have got three hits but, by rolling a 1, I only got one.*

*The new season really delivered for me on the Western Front. If the Germans had been able to make the attack they intended it could have been devastating. It was much more serious than the potential loss of a hex. I also had Artillery there asking to be destroyed and with the BEF stuck between trenches and ZOC near Lille I was not going to be able to react fast enough. The German attack came unstuck for two reasons. The 1<sup>st</sup> Army could not absorb supply sufficiently fast and other HQ could not move closer to the point of attack and absorb supply. In addition, five German Divisions were 6 movement points away from the nearest other HQ and in winter the basic supply line distance is just 3 MP. The Germans have an advantage of being able to make the first moves after getting a new month's resupply but this showed that it is still difficult to unleash a surprise attack in the space of a single turn. I was lucky that the Germans revealed their move in this way, but it shows the potential in this game for a surprise concentration.*

*My counterattack near Kielce was significant as it was entirely unsupplied. The Russians have to do this if they are going to preserve supply for counterattacks and avoid an entirely passive defence. The Russian supply situation may have passed its nadir. In January I will get an improved rate of supply production.*

*I was also gratified that the CP food deficit intensified this month. That is largely a consequence of moves and advances I made at the end of November in France; Poland and Serbia in which I interdicted use of a food resources by the enemy. I have achieved my self-set objective of getting German DM as high as French DM by the end of the year. This is bound to happen as the deficit bites and the Germans get more involved in the East, but it is a comfort to me.*

*Finally, the situation in Iraq is interesting. I had not expected such an unopposed advance. The Turks have avoided any losses and my far flung probes will have difficulty dealing with any real opposition. I will have to garrison An-Nasariyah which will not help me project force further north (I think it is too gamey to bypass cities and say I do not have to garrison them).*

### December 1914 DM Situation

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total	Morale
Germany	5							10	15	520	Good
Austria-Hungary	4							6	10	220	Good
Ottoman	1							NA	1	10	Good – *An-Nasariyah lost.
Central Powers	10							16	26	750	
France	-							-	-	520	Good
Great Britain	-							TBC	-	48	Good
Russia	8							NA	8	244	Good
Belgium	-							NA	-	(95)	Good
Serbia	(1)							NA	(1)	(12)	Good
Entente	8								8	812	