

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT31: 10 – 14 December 1914 (December 3)

General Situation

The determination of the Germans to keep up the tempo of operations in the field despite the onset of winter was now very noteworthy. This is not to say that things did not quieten down considerably where they were outside the gaze of Falkenhayn, Hindenburg or Ludendorff, but even Conrad felt the need to keep up with his unrelenting German colleagues.

This was mainly hard on the infantry who were increasingly called on to fight without any artillery support due to the shortage of shells. On the eastern front, however, the Russians were making considerable use of their cavalry as mobile infantry and it may be argued that in the conditions prevailing there these were among the most effective forces at the Tsar's disposal.

The Western Front

On 11 December, the French Council of Ministers had prepared telegrams to Marshal Joffre and General Sarrail inviting (telling) the former to resign and the latter to take over as Commander-in-Chief. Dramatic news from the front prevented the dispatch of these messages, though the originals can still be seen in the French National Archives where they were discovered in 1954.

The previous day, Von Bülow commanding both the 2nd Army and detached elements of the 3rd Army attacked with 13 Divisions formed up in a great arc between Meaux – Jouarre (5-3.1117) – La Ferté-Gaucher (5-3.1118) and struck aiming to break the French forces covering Coulommiers (5-3.1017). The initial German advance was very strong. The French units involved were in the process of being transferred from the 10th to the 7th Army. The 7th Army was a new organisation which was intended to be commanded by General Gallieni who was supposed to take over on the 10 December. Unfortunately, he was badly injured the previous evening when he was run over by a taxi cab he had been trying to hail outside the Ministry of War. When Joffre heard the news he decided to take personal command of the 7th Army and rushed to its headquarters on the outskirts of Paris.

The Germans made good progress on 10 December and Coulommiers was won along with several other places. The next day the Germans were pressing on to Fontenay-Trésigny and Rozay-en-Brie thinking the French must be retreating. Joffre had used his 24 hours in command of the 7th Army well and he had insisted on a defence of strongpoints often based in the characteristic “maisons du fromage” which dotted the landscape and which also offered excellent fields of fire.¹ The French 66th Mountain Division played a prominent role breaking up the German attack which had become confused in the fading light. Joffre wasted no time and launched the most aggressive counterattacks he could muster and organised a steady stream of supplies to the troops on the front line including a generous consignment of red wine which helped ensure the fighting went on late into the night. Lacking shelter the Germans gave up the ground they had thought they had won, and, by 13 December, they were more or less back on their start lines and the French were back in

¹ Anyone who knows anything about military history and in particular this famous episode of the Great War in which giant wheels of cheese were used as improvised protection against small arms fire would know how insulting it is to mention capitulation and cheese in the same breath in any reference to France. The authors hope they will never hear such disrespectful things spoken in ignorance ever again.

Coulommiers celebrating. Since this had been an incredibly costly battle to both sides, but especially the Germans, the survivors had cause to be thankful.



Figure 1: The Battle of Coulommiers, 10 - 12 December 1914. The Germans advanced to the red line before being driven back.

After this Battle of Coulommiers, Joffre was left to anxiously wait for the Germans next move. There had been many crises for France since the summer and the Germans had already been closer to Paris once, but this late effort in 1914 was an especially intense period of danger. As he completed his dispositions on 14 December, ignorant that three days previously the Government had resolved to sack him, Joffre wrote that the next 48 hours would decide the war. Intelligence had told the French that two fresh German Divisions were heading for the Marne. Everything pointed to Falkenhayn having one more go at overcoming the French defences east of Paris.

The Eastern Front

The Battle of Kielce which had been raging now since late November was approaching its end. General Woyrsch ordered strong attacks to the west of the city on 11 December and the Bavarian 5th Division breached the Russian lines at Miniów (5-5.2005). A desperate counterattack by the Caspian Cossack Division was swept away by machine gun fire and this was a small disaster for the Russians, though with much else was forgotten by the disinterest of later years.

By 13 December, the Russian 9th Army had realised that Kielce was a lost cause and had left the town in the hands of a small rear guard of the 2nd Turkmen Brigade. Even the arrival of two fresh Divisions on this front as reinforcements did not alter the retrograde movements in progress. The Russians had other worries in the south west. The Austrians had been quiet for week, but there were signs that the Austrian 1st Army was preparing something. The Russian 4th Army was in a state of alert from 13 December onwards.

The activity of the Germans around Warsaw had also diminished. The Grand Duke was fairly satisfied that a direct thrust against the Polish capital was now unlikely to succeed according to a letter he wrote to the Tsar on 12 December.

The Germans were, however, still working their way through the marshes toward the Narew River. On the same day that the Grand Duke's letter was sent, the German 2nd Division reached the Narew near Nowy Wies (4-5.2114) and directly opposite the Russian fortress of Ostrolenka. The difficulty of this situation for the Russians was that the threat occurred in a region where neither their 1st or 2nd Army exercised clear control. Fortunately, Rennenkampf of the 1st Army recognised a threat to divide him from the rest of the Russian Armies and elected on his own initiative to send his Cavalry Corps south towards Ostrolenka in order to aid the situation there. For this unusual act of selflessness among Russian Army commanders, Rennenkampf was nominated to the Order of St George into which he was initiated the following year.



Figure 2: The Germans on the Narew near Ostrolenka and the approach of the Russian 1st Cavalry Corps, 10 - 14 December 1914.

Serbia

Both sides were content to keep to their trenches and engage in minor acts of reorganisation.

The Near East

None of the Near Eastern fronts were seeing any significant combat activity.

Two Indian Brigades were slowly moving up the Tigris aiming to reinforce the Imperial Brigade at Ali Gharbi. Further reinforcements from India were unloading at Basra.

In the Caucasus, the Turks had belatedly recognised the presence of the Russian Frontier Guards on the shores of Lake Van. The Kurdish Cavalry Corps moved right around the eastern side of the lake to move to Bitlis in case this was the Russian objective. The Kurdish horses were in a terrible state on arrival.



Figure 3: Movements around Lake Van, 10 - 14 December 1914.

December 1914 DM Situation

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total	Morale
Germany	5	4	16					10	35	540	Good
Austria-Hungary	4	-	-					6	10	220	Good
Ottoman	1	-	-					NA	1	10	Good – *An-Nasariyah lost.
Central Powers	10	4	16					16	46	770	
France	-	7	8					-	7	535	Good
Great Britain	-	-	-					-	-	48	Good
Russia	8	1	6					NA	9	251	Good
Belgium	-	-	-					NA	-	(95)	NA
Serbia	(1)	-	-					NA	(1)	(12)	NA
Entente	8	8	14					-	16	834	

Player Notes:

- *CP: East: I am sending reinforcements eastwards in a trickle at the moment. I need to keep attacking the Russians in Poland to prevent them developing a solid line of entrenchments. This turn I launch two concentrated, supply intensive assaults NW of Kielce (which will almost see Kielce encircled) and out of the Masurian Lakes to drive the Russians out of this defensive terrain.*
- *Galicia: No attacks on this front.*
- *Serbia: No attacks in Serbia, but I do assimilate Hungarian replacements into a new 15XX.*
- *West: I continue to move divisions and supply around – making handy use of rail movements – to concentrate against un-entrenched French concentrations. If I keep hitting him wherever he assembles without entrenchments then I can hopefully keep writing him down. At the moment, he repositions himself to counter each successive breakthrough of his line between the Marne and the Seine. He does this in strength but lack of trenches still makes him vulnerable to massed attacks. If I can keep him wrong-footed like this I should be able to prevent him from being able to mass for his own offensive option in a place of his choosing. At the moment, the point of battle is at my discretion and I need to keep it this way as much as possible to prevent losing the initiative.*
- *Caucasus: Nothing of note.*
- *Mesopotamia: No change.*
- *Palestine: 4th Army HQ in Amman dispatches XX Corps HQ southwards with some supply to enable options in Sinai should they present themselves.*

AP: My actions this turn were very cautious. French supply is running low as I had used half the monthly French stock in counterattacking the main German attack. This really precludes me making any attacks. I am playing a waiting game here. The Germans are now challenged to repeat their attack. The most threatened hex (5-3.1017) has been reinforced so it is now stronger than last turn and the Germans will have to change their attack or take more risk. If they keep attacking they will have to deplete their supply almost totally to make an equivalent attack. I will now be tempted to save my own supply in order to deter further German attacks. Much will depend on what happens next. One of the more difficult situations will be if there is no further immediate attack as that will leave me under threat wondering where the next blow will fall.

Compared to the Western Front, the rest of the fronts are giving me fewer worries. Serbia should be secure until the Central Powers send some significant reinforcement. The Turks have done their worst in the Caucasus and while they have captured a few hexes around Sarikamis, I have gained the whole Eleskirt Valley.

The Eastern Front is a more complex situation. There are issues which I will not mention now in the interests of security, but the current German advances are in areas I am least sensitive to. Losing Kielce will just make the Central Powers' food deficit worse, while I hang on to territory in Prussia and Galicia which adds to these problems. Whatever else happens I will keep a very firm grip on the siege at Przemysl. Elsewhere, I hope the situation will brighten in the New Year when Russian supply production improves a little.

Production Totals

Supply

Date	Ge	AH	Ot	Bul	CP	Fr	Br	Rus	Be	Se	It	Rom	Gr	US	Ent
Oct 14	77	18	-	-	95	20	18	10	-	-	-	-	-	10	58
Nov 14	77	18	-	-	95	20	18	10	-	-	-	-	-	10	58
Dec 14	77	18	2	-	97	20	18	10	-	-	-	-	-	10	58

Weapon Production (+drawdown on pre-war stockpiles)

Date	Ge	AH	Ot	Bul	CP	Fr	Br	Rus	Be	Se	It	Rom	Gr	US	Ent
Oct 14	42 +43	23	-	-	108	27 +70	50 +20	50	-	-	-	-	-	-	217
Nov 14	42 +26	23	-	-	91	27 +70	50 +20	50	-	1	-	-	-	-	218
Dec 14	42 +7	23	2	-	74	28 +30	50 +20	50	-	-	-	-	-	-	178

Manpower (Colonial)

Date	Ge	AH	Ot	Bul	CP	Fr	Br	Rus	Be	Se	It	Rom	Gr	US	Ent
Oct 14	69	36	NA	-	105	41 (+8)	59 (+13)	80	2	6	-	-	-	-	209
Nov 14	70	37	NA	-	107	39 (+8)	59 (+13)	80	1	6	-	-	-	-	207
Dec 14	70	37	NA	-	107	39 (+8)	59 (+13)	80	1	6	-	-	-	-	207

Food Deficits

Date	Ge	AH	Ot	Bul	CP	Fr	Br	Rus	Be	Se	It	Rom	Gr	US	Ent
Oct 14	12	1	NA	-	13	-	-	NA	NA	NA	-	-	-	NA	-
Nov 14	9	5	NA	-	14			NA	NA	NA	-	-	-	NA	-
Dec 14	10	6	NA	-	16			NA	NA	NA	-	-	-	NA	

Calculation of Food Deficit – December 1914

Germany			Austria		
Needs	83	PCs	Needs	29	PCs
Less			Less	-4 = 25	Galician PCs
Food	67	Germany	Food	24	Austria
Less	-2 = 65	Prussia	Less	-7 = 17	Galicia
Plus	4	Romania	Plus	2	Hungary
Plus	1	Poland			
Plus	3	Hungary			
	73	Total Food		19	Total Food
Deficit	10			6	