

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT33: 19 – 22 December 1914 (December 5)

General Situation

The passing of the winter solstice reduced the opportunities for daylight action to a minimum. The chances for achieving further victories in 1914 were now equally diminished. The 2nd Battle of the Marne had no clear winner. The Serbians and Austrians in the Balkans were starting to get comfortable with a “live and let live” mentality.

The fighting on the Eastern Front continued regardless. Hindenburg and Ludendorff considered that the German forces there were close to valuable objectives and repeatedly asked for one more effort from their tired troops. Some Russian commanders, particularly the Grand Duke, considered that winter was their season and there was some speculation that a Russian winter offensive was in preparation. Such ideas were supported by the Grand Duke demanding a greater level of initiative from the Armies defending Warsaw but with the resources available to the Russian Army these demands were hard to meet. Most Russian soldiers now had no greater ambition than to build a more comfortable dug out.

In Iraq, the Indian soldiers of the King-Emperor were on the march but there was no true winter season in that country and the conditions were, if anything, ideal for campaigning. The hot season had passed and the flood season had not started.

The Western Front

During the night of 19 – 20 December, taking advantage of a cloudy sky, Von Bülow pulled back the Saxon Corps and the 6th Bavarian Division from their exposed positions. This seemed to presage the end of the 2nd Battle of the Marne. The French followed up the German withdrawal reaching La Ferté-Gaucher (5-3.1118) on the evening of 21 December.

As if to make a point to his colleague, von Hausen reinforced the German 3rd Army's most advanced post at Montmiral (5-3.1317).

Despite these movements, and the fact that the whole region immediately south of the Marne, was still a vast armed camp, there were no major clashes between the French and Germans. The British having been stung in their last attack against La Bassée (5-3.1008), made no further attempt to stir from their trenches.

Having come so close to losing his command, Joffre allowed the press to spread the story that Paris was saved and the Germans had been beaten. That was half a truth at best. With greater realism, Joffre did recognise that Foch was a talent that the French Army could not afford to waste and they were reconciled by Joffre appointing Foch to command an Army Group consisting of the 6th and 9th Armies. These had orders to report on the prospects of recovering Montmiral in the near future.

The Eastern Front



Figure 1: The Campaign in Central Poland as the Russian 10th Army intervened, 19 - 22 December 1914.

The capture of Kielce had energised the combined German and Austrian forces operating in south west Poland and the Russian 9th Army remained embattled on several sections of its front. North east of Kielce, between 19 – 20 December, the Austrians found determined Russian defenders between Bodzentyn and Suchedniów (5-5.2205). In contrast, on 20 December, the German 15th Division broke through at Mniszek (5-5.2104) less than 20 kilometres from Radom.

The Grand Duke had finally got the Russian 10th and 2nd Armies in a state where their commanders had agreed to offensive action. The 10th Army struck south west intending to support to the 9th Army. The Russian aim was to push back along the Pilica River, but, on 21 December, they were blocked by the German 45th Reserve Division at Wyśmierzyce (5-5.1902). Neither side wanted to take risks. The Russian advance never really got started.

The Russian 2nd Army had no better fortune as it attempted to drive the Germans back from the vicinity of Ostralenka. The Germans in the North West had been quiet for a few days, but this was only a pause during which time they were bringing forward heavy Artillery. On 22 December, another German Reserve Division (50th) frustrated a Russian attack through the frozen swamps of the Narew River margins having an objective of the small town of Nowy Wies (4-5.2114). Little can

be told about the details of this action as the war diary of the German unit has long since disappeared.



Figure 2: The Russians counterattack at Nowy Wies, 22 December 1914.

Serbia

The stalemate on this front was unbroken. The Austrians pulled some units out of the line. Serbian intelligence debated whether this was preparation for a new attack or whether the Austrians wanted to rest some key units or redeploy them to other theatres.

The Near East

The Mesopotamian Corps began moving up the Tigris again between Ali Gharbi and Kut. On 22 December, the 22 and 28th Indian Brigades had covered half the distance reaching Wadi and Sheik Sa'ad (7-9.3921-22). The Turks were expected to reinforce Kut and the British commanders urged the Rajputs, Punjabis and Gurkhas to go forward at the fastest possible pace.



Figure 3: Russian mountain infantry seize control of the Aras Gorges, 21 – 22 December 1914

The Russian Caucasus Army staff had now taken stock of the situation following the fall of Sarikamis. They perceived a strengthening of the Turkish forces in the area of the Aras Gorges. The snows on the high peaks prevented the Turks advancing through the Gorges (6-8.2814). The Russian II Turkestan Corps did well to get Kuban mountain troops and a frozen Cossack Brigade into this region. To do this they had to use the highest of the mountains as a shield against Turkish patrols or else their line of march would have been horribly exposed.

December 1914 DM Situation

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total	Morale
Germany	5	4	16	20	3			10	48	563	Good
Austria-Hungary	4	-	-	1	2			6	13	223	Good
Ottoman	1*	-	-	-	-			NA	1	10	Good – *An-Nasariyah lost.
Central Powers	10	4	16	21	5			16	72	796	
France	-	7	8	15	-			-	30	550	Good
Great Britain	-	-	-	9	-			-	9	57	Good
Russia	8	1	6	4*	5			NA	24	260	Good - *Kielce lost
Belgium	-	-	-	-	-			NA	-	(95)	NA
Serbia	(1)	-	-	-	-			NA	(1)	(12)	NA
Entente	8	8	14	28	5			-	63	867	

Player Notes

CP:

- *East: Not much happens this turn. The German 9th Army occupies Kielce and continues to attack from this sector.*
- *Galicia: AH attacks again SE of Kielce and is also collaborative with the Germans once again; some German brigades participating.*
- *Serbia: No attacks in Serbia.*
- *West: My attempt to turn his salient into a bloodbath for the French has backfired and I feel compelled to straighten my lines and withdraw.*
- *Caucasus: Nothing of note.*
- *Mesopotamia: No change.*
- *Palestine: Nothing of note.*

AP: *Both my attacks in the East failed. I could have used more supply for the 10th Army, but the overall expenditure of 4 supply points is generous enough in my situation.*

I would be surprised if there was very much action left in this month. The Germans are down to 1 supply point in the West and they have 10 left in the East. I would like to begin next month with at least some supply retained and with near parity to the Germans. I have 20 American supply points now arriving in Russia and France so that is my main reserve.

One aspect of my play which I am not especially proud of is that I am placing a lot of value in completing trenches. The Western Front still has 6 un-entrenched front line hexes; the Eastern Front has 18 un-entrenched hexes. I give a quiet cheer as I complete every one. The Germans have ruthlessly given me no peace in the still vulnerable sectors. The good thing about the trenches, when completed, is that they allow me to economise strength in defence and concentrate reserves in the still mobile zones. The bad thing is it is contributing to my relative passivity and lack of initiative. I am optimistic that this is nearly solved in the West, but I will not have a solid front in the East for a little while yet.