

## **Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game**

**GT35: 28 – 31 December 1914**

### **General Situation**

One of the strategic problems which the Entente had was the isolation of the Russians and Serbians from each other and from the Western Allies. No substantial aid had reached Serbia or was likely to. The Russians were mostly fighting their own war and, having been facing sustained German and Austrian attacks for nearly three months, were starting to wonder if they were getting sufficient help from their Allies.

The Tsar, his ministers, and even the higher military commanders had little appreciation of just how intense the fighting had been on the Western Front. They partly misunderstood because even if the Russian soldiers had suffered equal losses and perhaps more compared to the casualties in France, then the Russian state took less notice and you might say put a lesser value on the tragic facts. There were reasons for this no doubt, but stubborn endurance had long been a supposed characteristic of Russia under attack and the situation seemed to bear out the old stereotype.

When Allied statesmen were challenged to find a theatre in which the Coalition might come together more, they looked to the Near East and started making each other mutual promises to encourage commitment. At the end of 1914, the Allies seemed to be on the march against the Ottoman Empire as the Russians moved forwards in the Caucasus and the campaign on the Tigris became more serious. The Allied naval presence in the Aegean added another threat to Turkey and was also intended to signify help to Serbia by the indirect means of encouraging Italy and Greece to come off the fence.

### **The Eastern Front**

The campaign in the Eastern Carpathians had secured the good reputation of General Kovess who made a serious nuisance to the Russian 11<sup>th</sup> Army on a sector of the front which the Russian Stavka would rather have not existed. Despite the mountain snows, Kovess was able to maintain enough mobility to organise a thrust into the Upper Prut region driving the Russians back from Kutuy (5-5.4116) on 29 December.

The Austrians and Germans had less fortune in Central Poland where the Russian 9<sup>th</sup> Army managed to stall further efforts to advance beyond Bodzentyn (5-5.2205) and Raków (5-5.2307). Both these places remained in Russian hands thanks to reserves arriving from neighbouring Russian Armies. The Russian 9<sup>th</sup> Army made some significant counterattacks which were poorly supplied with guns and ammunition but made up for it with human and animal flesh hurled at the enemy lines.

The biggest Russian counterattack was an attempt on 30 – 31 December to recover Mniszek (5-5.2104) and so gain some space west of Radom. Five Russian Cavalry Divisions were thrown into this attack and the German 19<sup>th</sup> Reserve Division was outnumbered more than seven to one. It did not succeed. The massed Russian horsemen did not shake the morale of the steady German reservists.

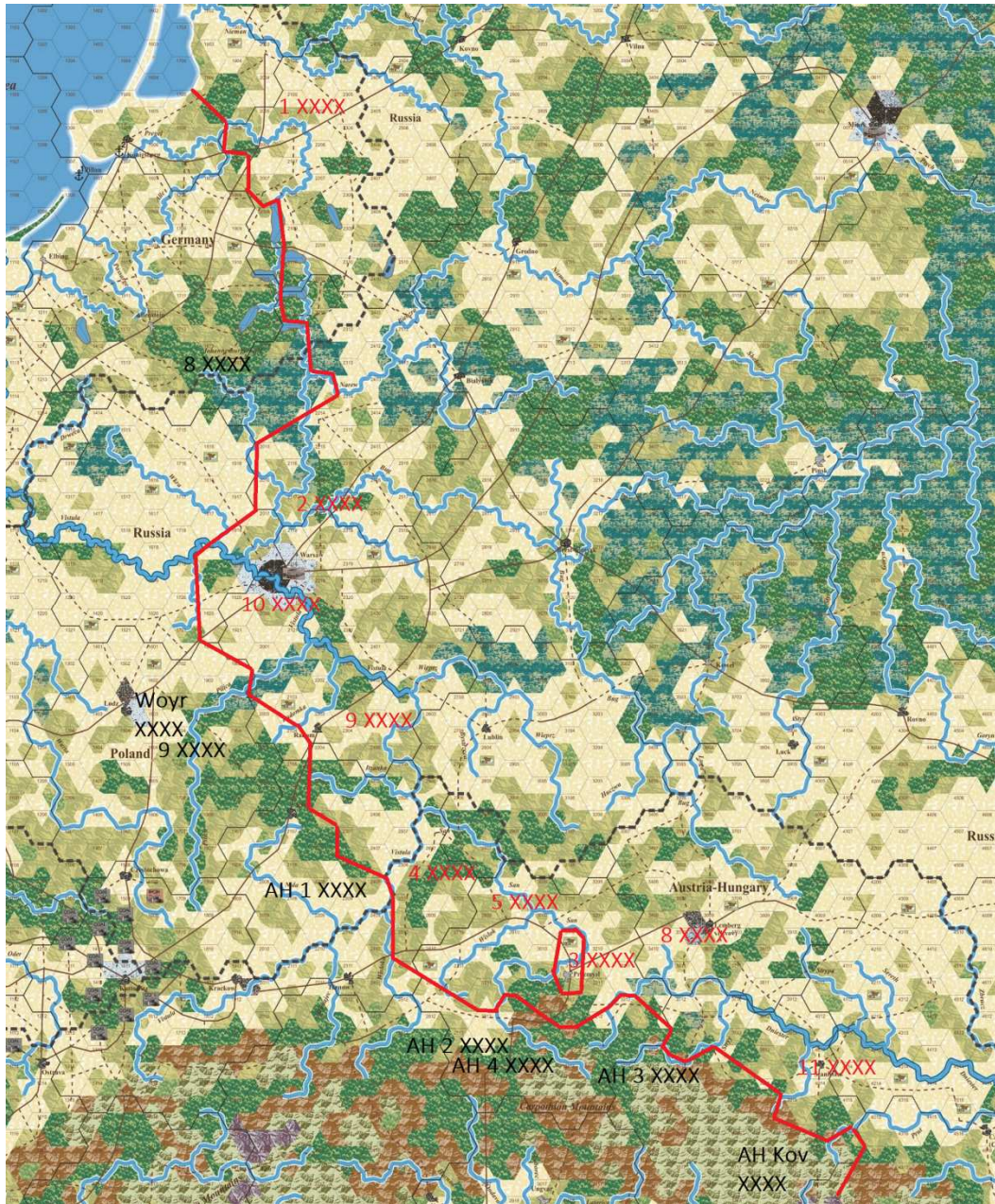


Figure 1: Russian Front, end of 1914.

## Serbia

The expected attack on Belgrade never materialised. The year ended quietly and somberly in the capital where the café culture was starting to endure a shortage of good aribica coffee.

The Serbian command was plagued by false alarms. Putnik knew just how limited his resources were. Every reported movement of an Austro-Hungarian Division threatened some sector of the Serbian line. So far all the challenges had been met, but it was hard to know how long this might continue.



Figure 2: The Balkan Front, end of 1914.

### The Near East

The Caucasus Front burst into activity on 28 December. The Turkish 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, having given no warning of their intentions, abruptly departed from Sarikamis and withdrew back to Turkish territory. This happened so swiftly that Russian patrols had no chance to observe or impede the movement. This was not the only retreat either. The Van Corps pulled back from the Persian border and the Turks also fell back 20 kilometres on the Black Sea coast.

It took a day or two for the Russians to realise what had happened, but their officers managed to get the men out of their trenches and billets and on the road (or often over the freezing peaks) to pursue their vanishing enemy. By the end of the year, the Russians had moved forwards up to 40 kilometres. They had not followed the Turks too aggressively, fearing some kind of trap was being laid. However, the secrets of the Turkish command were not discerned and the motives of the Turkish retreat were a matter of debate and question into the New Year.



**Figure 3: The Turkish 3rd Army falls back from Sarikamis, 28 - 31 December 1914**

In Iraq, the Indian Brigades leading the advance of the Mesopotamian Corps were reconnoitring the Turkish defences at Kut. It was evident that the Turks intended to defend this place and there were signs of trenches being prepared. The Turks (at least those in Iraq) were fairly inexperienced with field works and many of these trenches were unlikely to be of much assistance to the defence as they quickly became waterlogged in the marshy back country around Kut.

The new British commander in Iraq, General Nixon, realised that the force already up the Tigris was insufficient for any more ambitious operations even if (which was in some doubt) it could capture and pass Kut. On 30 December, two additional Indian Brigades (31<sup>st</sup> and 32<sup>nd</sup>) at Qurna were ordered to head north along with the 16<sup>th</sup> Brigade which had come across from An-Nasariya.

### **The Western Front**

Once the fighting around Épernay had died down there was no significant action between the French and the Germans for the rest of the year. The calm mood was reinforced by cold and clear weather conditions as an anti-cyclonic system settled over Western Europe.

Sir John French was preparing a final hurrah for the British Expeditionary Force. His intention was to take advantage of what was perceived to be a certain laxity in the German troops after the fraternisation of the Christmas period. The plan was to make a sudden strike towards Arras for which the fresh British 27<sup>th</sup> Division was to play a leading part. The British attacked on 31 December but if this effort captured a few trench positions they were all lost again when the Germans counterattacked. It was hard to fight the suggestion that this was just another futile attack that did nothing for the reputation of the BEF. Several units, especially the Indian Divisions operating at the southern extremity of the British line had cause to complain that they had been given insufficient time to plan and prepare for what was supposed to be a major attack.

When the New Year arrived, the Entente front line trenches still had a few gaps. The Germans had only a few more days' work to complete before they would be able to claim an uninterrupted trench

line running from the Swiss border to the coast. It was also notable that despite the last desperate phases of the fighting on the Marne the whole front was more or less in the same position as it had been at the end of November.



Figure 4: The Western Front at the end of 1914.

#### Player Notes

CP: *Not this time.*

AP: *Perhaps I was too pessimistic after last turn. Here are a few reasons for me to be cheerful.*

*Despite the Central Powers strenuous efforts on the Eastern Front, I am feeling more in control of the situation. The Austrians got a bad knock in one of their attacks. I have built up a modest supply reserve and the Russians now have more supply points on this front than the Central Powers. They will also take two or three turns to bring fresh supply forward which will give me time to bring replacements forward.*

*The situation is similar on the Western Front. I spent 10 supply points on my British attack to take advantage of the fact that the Germans only have one supply point in the West. Even after this, the*

*Entente has 22 supply points at the end of the month. I am hoping this prudence will now start to have a reward as I had been very concerned about the Central Powers' early supply advantage which had been telling in the last two months.*

*Even better, French and Russian supply production increases in January so I will not be in such difficulties again if I am reasonably careful.*

*I was not expecting the Turkish retreat in the Caucasus. At the time of writing, I do not know the reason for it. I was slowly enveloping his main concentration and maybe that spooked him. There is also a lot of Caucasus front where I have been given freedom to move and perhaps Ivor is responding to that.*

#### December 1914 DM Situation

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total [% Shaken Morale]	Morale
<b>Germany</b>	5	4	16	20	3	6	5	10	59	574 [35.9]	Good
<b>Austria-Hungary</b>	4	-	-	1	2	2	4	6	19	229 [41.6]	Good
<b>Ottoman</b>	1*	-	-	-	-	-**	-	NA	1	10 [2.9]	Good – *An-Nasariyah lost and ** recovered
<b>Central Powers</b>	10	4	16	21	5	8	9	16	80	813	
<b>France</b>	-	7	8	15	-	2	-	-	32	552 [61.3]	Good
<b>Great Britain</b>	-	-	-	9	-	-	5	-	14	62# [4.9]	Good
<b>Russia</b>	8	1	6	4*	5	8	5	NA	37	273 [45.5]	Good - *Kielce lost
<b>Belgium</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	NA	-	(95)	NA
<b>Serbia</b>	(1)	-	-	-	-	-	-	NA	(1)	(12)	NA
<b>Entente</b>	8	8	14	28	5	10	10	-	83	887	

# Corrected