

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT39: 15 – 18 January 1915 (January 4)

General Situation

There was no location more miserable during the winter of 1914 – 15 than the fortress of Przemyśl. Thoughts of a break out had long since been forgotten. The garrison commander's stock returns in mid-January suggested that the means to sustain the defence would not last much more than a month. All the pigeons roosting in the city had been captured to provide an alternative to horse flesh.¹ A few birds escaped this fate by being enrolled in the Royal and Imperial Army and thereby trained to carry the latest news of the plight of the city to the Austrian headquarters.

At the recent Pless conference, Conrad had tried and failed to gain the interest of the Germans in the saving of Przemyśl. Since Falkenhayn had authorised the local commanders in the East to continue offensive operations after they had resupplied, there was an opportunity for Conrad to influence Hindenburg and Ludendorff in a combined offensive in the South of Poland. Try as he might, Conrad could not deflect them. Oberost had other priorities, but Conrad considered he must do something to give Przemyśl some hope.

The Eastern Front



Figure 1: Battle of Frysztak, 15 – 16 January 1915.

Conrad's means to make an independent offensive was General Böhm-Ermolli's 2nd Army, which had been concentrating east of Tarnow and had ten divisions ready for action supported by three batteries of heavy siege artillery. Böhm-Ermolli proposed to break the Russian front near Frysztak (5-

¹ No real animal was eaten in the making of this AAR.

5.2610), which was covered by two Russian Divisions. Neither was thought to be at full strength, but they included the tough 2nd Guards Division, which had already beaten back one previous attack further east at Vygodna (5-5.2811) several weeks previously. Böhm Ermolli's plan depended on a quick success. If the violence of the initial attack destroyed the whole defence then the Russians would struggle to control the situation and, it was just possible, the whole front would collapse and Przemysl would be relieved. If the Russian defence held out for more than a day or two, then it was probable the Russians would bring fresh troops to reinforce this sector and the opportunity would be lost.

The 2nd Army made its attack on 15 January. The appearance of the heavy guns was impressive. It was the first time in the war they were used on non-fortress targets. They added to Russian losses but they could not make a breakthrough all on their own. When the Austrian infantry began to move forward they did so with no great speed or determination. A vigorous Russian counterattack would have done great damage to the exposed attackers, but the Russians were too concerned about the Austrian artillery to take advantage. They rigidly kept to their trenches, where the Russian Guards actually suffered most of their casualties. The result of the Austrian attack was therefore very disappointing. Apart from the artillery shelling nothing much had been done. The low casualties suffered by the attacking units were almost an embarrassment and proved they had done nothing more than capture a few foxholes. They had not even reached the main Russian line which had been concealed further back. By the time, Böhm-Ermolli was aware the attack had failed, the Russians were reinforcing.



Figure 2: The Germans capture Jedlinsk in the Radomska Valley, 16 January 1915.

The only German help offered in the Battle of Frysztak was a single Landwehr Brigade. Hindenburg had instead concentrated his own attention on a new attack along the Radomska River where the German 9th Army punched forward against the Russian 9th Army on 16 January at Jedlińsk (5-5.2103). The German attack was well prepared and the Russians might be said to have been routed from Jedlińsk. This was a rich farming area and Hindenburg was not unaware of this as he had been

warned of the importance of securing German access to agricultural resources at the Pless Conference.

Although, Jedlińsk was only a small place in a very large Empire, Hindenburg was satisfied that the German 9th Army was getting close to the Vistula River. In addition, the Russians were obliged to hold off more than one offensive at the same time. The most costly action at this time was the continuing fighting in Masuria. The Russian 1st Army was putting up a spirited resistance on its left flank. A German thrust towards Widminnen (4-5.2209) in East Prussia had been repulsed with heavy losses on 16 January proving that German superiority over the Russians could not be taken for granted.

Serbia

The Balkan winter is bitter. Both sides kept to the holes they had dug. The fog of war lay thick over this theatre. Serbian intelligence reported (in code) to the Serbian King that they had no idea when or where the Austrians might attack next.

The Near East

After the British attack south of Kut, the local commander, Townsend, ordered his forces to dig in. He had been expecting imminent reinforcement but it appeared that he had been completely misled by Nixon who had previously told him to expect the arrival of another Division in mid-January. On 18 January, Townsend received a message that logistical problems prevented the despatch of more than a single brigade up river and this would not arrive for another week. Since the Turks were believed to be increasing their forces at Kut, Townsend had little option other than to suspend his offensive operations around Kut for the present.

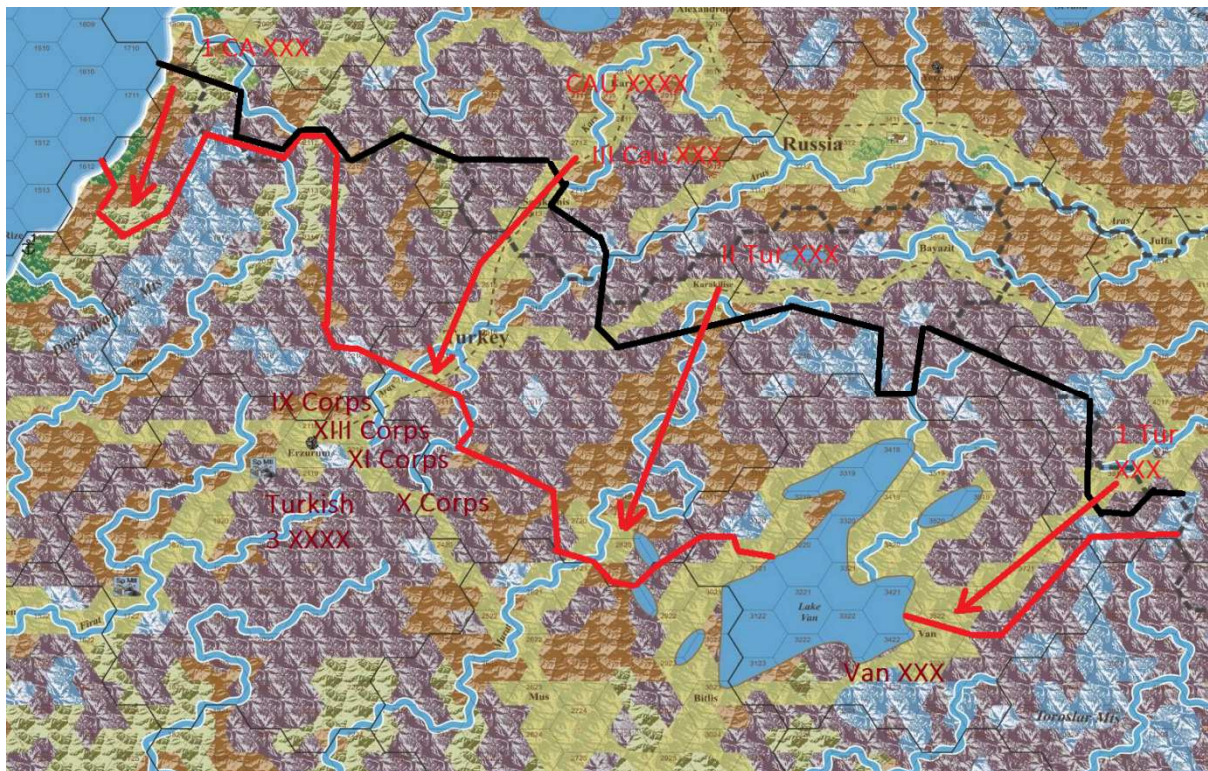


Figure 3: The Turkish Retreat in the Caucasus, 30 November 1914 - 15 January 1915.

The Turkish retreat in the Caucasus appeared to be coming to its end. Russian patrols reported the enemy was digging in covering Rize on the Black Sea coast and at Erzurum which was protected by four Turkish Corps. The Turks were still relatively weak in the Murat Valley and on the western shores of Lake Van all of which was protected by a cavalry screen. To the east of the lake, the old city of Van was in flames. Who burnt it is still disputed to this day, though the old claim that it was an earthquake that caused it was discredited long ago. In mid-January, the Turks had abandoned it. The Russians had kept their distance too. The inhabitants mostly fled as it looked as if the town might become a battlefield.

The Western Front

The lack of action on the Western Front had now entered its third week. Both sides had withdrawn some units from the front line to increase their mobile reserves.

However, on 17 January, Foch gave orders to the French 9th and 6th Armies to reoccupy Montmiral (5-3.1317). This they cautiously did over the next 48 hours. The Germans had kept patrolling the town up to that point but they gave no resistance to the French advance.

January 1915 DM Situation

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total	Morale
Germany	-	1	2	5				9	17	586	Good
Austria-Hungary	-	-	-	1				5	6	234	Good
Ottoman	-	-	1	-				NA	1	11	Good
Central Powers	-	1	3	6				14	24	831	
France	-	-	-	-				-	-	552	Good
Great Britain	-	-	1	-				-	1	63	Good
Russia	2	1	1	10				NA	14	287	Good
Belgium	-	-	-	-				NA	-	(95)	NA
Serbia	-	-	-	-				NA	-	(12)	NA
Entente	2	1	2	10				-	15	902	

Player Notes

CP:

- *East: I have completed some build up in the east and now launch 2 separate and widely dispersed attacks. I know he is waiting for attacks in these areas as he has concentrated supply to the rear. However, whilst risky, I feel they need to be made. The 9th Army's attack to the NW of Radom has a reasonable chance of success. 8th Army's attack is somewhat against good principles in that I am attacking his strength, but I believe it is necessary as part of a shaping operation to break clear from the lakes area.*

- *Galicia: The AH 1st Army, supported by the German 18th Landwehr Brigade, launches a massive assault, incorporating siege artillery, against Russian 4th Army's trenches in the farming district along the north bank of the Wislok river. I am hoping this might start to turn his flank, although it only has a 50% chance of succeeding in evicting him from the trenches.*
- *Serbia: Nothing of note.*
- *West: No attacks but I concentrate several full strength divisions around the central rail node of Laon. From here they can reach most parts of the front and have sufficient capacity to move into the trenches. I also start to manoeuvre artillery closer to Verdun.*
- *Caucasus: The Turks start to consolidate their defensive line running from Rize on the coast, then through some pretty inhospitable mountain terrain (which is not garrisoned), then concentrating around Erzerum with mostly cavalry screening further SE around Van. I have supply starting to flow in and it can now reach my various HQs far quicker than trying to forward load it to Sarikamis.*
- *Mesopotamia: I lost a regiment in the attack on Kut but also reduced one of the Indian brigades in the CA. I continue to move forces towards this town.*
- *Palestine: Nothing of note.*

AP: Another quiet turn from me. The outcomes of the CP attacks on the Eastern Front were not too bad for the Entente. The heavy attrition on the Russians and the unfavourable loss ratios were points of disadvantage. However, the CP can only do one more set of attacks at that intensity and then they will run out of supply again. Only in the centre, near Radom was I not able to reinforce the defence so that the CP would have a tougher job if they repeated their attacks.

It is hard for me to explain what I am up to, but I should say that I have an eye on the longer term. I need more insight into where the CP is going to commit most in 1915, and I will try and put myself into a position that I will start to hurt them in a month or two.

The supply stockpile rules are now in effect, but supply levels were so depleted in 1914 that I will not be obliged to commence a French or British offensive before spring assuming I am drawn into no other action in the west in the meantime.