

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT40: 19 – 22 January 1915 (January 5)

General Situation

The reality of widespread trench warfare was now visible to all sides. All the European Fronts were now largely entrenched and it was perhaps no longer sufficient to think of finding a gap in the trench line and going through it or around it. In future, there would have to be a proper attempt to defeat these extensive engineered defences. The recent failure of Böhm-Ermolli's Austro-Hungarian 2nd Army to break the line of the Russian 4th Army was a case on point.

There were differences in the quality of the defences on different fronts. This was mainly a consequence of how much manpower was available to labour on digging in relative to the area which had to be defended. A Serbian or Croat trench on the limestone escarpments of the Balkans afforded hardly more protection than the terrain itself. A Russian trench was likely to be superior to this, but with a bit more luck Böhm-Ermolli might have broken through as the Russians had a long front to defend and it was not untypical for one or two understrength Russian Divisions to have to cover a front of more than 20 kilometres. In contrast, on the Western Front, the trenches were already more formidable and had reached a level of solidity that would make it a real challenge to break through in a single assault. It was no wonder that Joffre appeared to be hesitating before the obstacles the Germans had built in France to secure their hold on the gains of 1914.¹

The Eastern Front

German attacks in Masuria and around Radom were suspended for a period allowing both sides to take stock. The German Armies in the East were steadily increasing in strength and until now they had taken every opportunity to press the Russians backwards and had been successful for the most part where they had done so. Nevertheless, the Russians had suffered no great defeats and a continuation of these methods would perhaps require several more months before even Warsaw was taken. Significant tracts of East Prussia, including Memel, were still under Russian occupation.

The Austrians were also experiencing frustration. On 19 January, Conrad had ordered Böhm-Ermolli to close up his 2nd Army with the 1st Army to its right and continue the attacks on the Russian trench lines on their front. This order could not be executed as Conrad required. The siege guns simply could not be repositioned that quickly and a bridge over the Wisloka River (dividing the 1st and 2nd Army) had collapsed which caused confusion and the cancellation of operations.

Despite this, the Russian assessments of their own situation spoke of fragility. When, on 22 January 1915, the commander of the Russian 9th Army, General Leczicki, warned that the Germans might soon resume their attacks on Radom and that he would lose the city unless reinforced, he was curtly advised by the Grand Duke that there was nothing to spare until the Austrians surrendered Przemysl. With no other recourse Leczicki ordered the evacuation of the salient at Potoworów (5-5.2002) in order to shorten his lines. Since the units in that position were answerable to 10th Army

¹ Trenches have the same characteristics everywhere but their actual impact depends on the other terrain; how well manned they are; and whether they qualify for a solid defence.

there was a fearful demarcation argument as Leczicki demanded full control over everything south of the Pilica.

It was highly unlikely that any units from Przemyśl might reach Radom because the Army commanders on the South West Front were all pleading for the same thing. The commander of the Russian 11th Army was particularly panicky because General Kovess was rumoured to be on the move and the Austrian forces in the Eastern Carpathians had acquired a reputation for daring actions which unsettled their opponents who knew their grip on the country was rather weak.



Figure 1: The Russian Front covering Warsaw, 19 - 22 January 1915.

Serbia

Soldiers' diaries from the Balkan front typically report how silent the countryside was during mid-January 1915. The ground was frozen. The Serbian and Austro-Hungarian Armies were frozen in

position and nothing stirred. Commerce and farming had stopped near the front lines and even the wildlife kept to their nests and burrows.

The Near East



Figure 2: Turkish reinforcements moving through Northern Iraq, 19 - 22 January 1915.

Townsend had realised that the Turkish forces defending Kut were now probably superior to those he had available to him. Turkish prisoners were also confident that substantial fresh forces were being dispatched from Mosul to reinforce the Turkish Army south of Baghdad. For the moment Townsend did not act on these facts but they certainly called into question any possibility of continuing the advance further north even if, which was doubted, Kut could be taken. The season of floods was also approaching and that was another complication.

The Turks still had some retrograde movements in the Caucasus to complete as they straightened their lines in front of Erzerum. The leading Russian columns pursuing the Turks passed through KöprükÖy (6-8.2317) on 21 January and the main Turkish line was then thought to run between Aci (6-8.2117) and Otulkkapi (6-8.2217).

The Russians also moved into Van on 22 January. The commander of the II Turkmen Corps won a decoration for his humanitarian efforts there in bringing supplies to the remaining inhabitants though his force was hardly well endowed itself.

The Western Front

It was increasingly apparent to the French that the Germans were adopting a defensive posture on the Western Front. Aerial photographs indicated that the Germans were creating some deep defences. There was also a concern about just how great were the German reserves behind the front. Spies brought in a certain amount of information which suggested that there were indeed many troops held back from the front line but it was difficult to know what reliance should be put on this as it was recognised that the situation could easily change.

Joffre was under a degree of pressure to announce new offensive plans. He assured all that the French Army would indeed soon commence major attacks but of course his precise intentions were top secret.



Figure 3: Allied estimates of German Reserves identified on a section of the Western Front, 19 - 22 January 1915.

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: A disappointing attack from me by 8th Army in the previous week. I remain quiet on this front this time around.*

- *Galicia: Quiet. I had originally manoeuvred the AH 1st Army, again supported by German brigades, for a 2nd massive assault, incorporating siege artillery, against Russian 4th Army's trenches. However, I made some illegal moves using siege artillery moving ZOC to ZOC and also moved some infantry (non-mountain) from trench ZOC to trench ZOC and across a river which they cannot do. It is clear to me that there is no possibility of relieving Przemysl now. I had hoped I could open the flank and approach it open ground from the west, but I have lacked the supply and it has taken too long to build up the necessary strength. I had contemplated attacking (from the south) some months ago), where a single breakthrough would have enabled a link-up. However, this would have been across rivers and into rough and forested terrain against entrenched opposition. It held the likelihood of terrible losses and enormous supply demand with no real hope of success. This would have bled me badly and I still would suffer the DM effect of losing Przemysl. My great error, early on, was insufficiently concentrating to the south of the fortress to prevent eviction. I should have sent a German brigade there to bolster the defences at the outset.*
- *Serbia: Nothing of note.*
- *West: No attacks. I send 2 x full strength divisions eastwards.*
- *Caucasus: The Turks consolidate their defensive line. Robert has queried the wisdom of my withdrawal deep into Turkish territory, and he may well be right. However, it was plain to me that, so deep into Russia, it would take forever for supply and RPL to reach me (whereas he can do so by rail far more readily) and I had the continuous threat of my flanks being turned. Forming a defence on Erzerum provides a fortified location and better lateral routes and internal lines of communication. Reinforcements can much more rapidly reach my front line. It does mean he is far more threatening to my resource centres, but actually his own LoC is now significantly lengthened. There was no benefit to me holding Sarikamis and no real reason for him to retake it. I think there should be a rule to give the Turks some sort of incentive to take and hold Sarikamis (perhaps a DM bonus?) and also a DM penalty to Russia for losing it.*
- *Mesopotamia: I received two fresh, but weak, divisions at Mosul, which move towards Kut.*
- *Palestine: Nothing of note.*

AP: It is a frustrating season for both sides probably. Ivor cancelled his only attack after it was noticed that it involved units shifting in trenches within ZOC. Artillery can never do this and ordinary infantry can only do it if the terrain does not have any complications – like a river. This was a sign that there are few good options for the Austrians at the moment. It is not so easy to improvise attacks when trenches are everywhere and it will take more than one or two attacks to seriously discomfort me.

For the AP I am struggling to find any opportunity to seriously hurt the CP at the moment. On the Western Front that is because I cannot allow myself to be hurried and the situation will be better for an attack in the near future. That is at least what I think, but it isn't necessarily so.

In the East (and Serbia) I am at the mercy of the initiatives of the CP. The siege of Przemysl cannot be over soon enough for me. It has me pinned down to a much greater degree than I would like as it is a problem to have a locale where I cannot afford to retreat an inch. The unfavourable rate of attrition

on the Eastern Front at the moment is a sign that one day it will be best to cut and run so that I can fight on more favourable lines and rest my troops (stop the DM going up). However, doing this would relieve the CP from a lot of pressure too. Ideally I want to hang on long enough so that later in the year Austria still has to deal with Russians, Serbians and Italians all at the same time.

My problems in the Near East are due to slow build up and logistical limits. It is going to be hard to achieve much in Iraq before summer and the new Turkish forces there will probably force me to give up my most advanced positions. In the Caucasus I need a stronger Army but so far I have released only a few units which could have otherwise gone to the Eastern Front.

Logfile quote of the month: "You have about 350 turns to move the front three hexes west [past Paris] and then I am toast."