

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT44: 5 – 8 February 1915 (February 2)

General Situation

As the winter passed the shape of the likely campaigns of 1915 were achieving greater definition.

The Western Allies were committed to an offensive policy in France even if they had yet to properly commence it. Equally, the Germans were more definitely orientated to defence. They had proved this by giving up ground south of the Marne in order to retire to stronger positions.

That there would be great offensive actions by the Central Powers in the East was also now a certainty. Since there had been already been four months in which the Germans and Austrians had hardly desisted from attacks every few days this was not really new. However, the build-up of the German and Austro-Hungarians on the Eastern Front was growing all the time and there were now sizeable concentrations in Prussia and Central and Southern Poland any of which were capable of powerful attacks.

Whether, the Austrians had the capability of making a successful offensive on their own was in some doubt as their attacks in January had hardly scratched the Russian defences which opposed them. Conrad had some promise of German support in southern Poland and Galicia, but the German Sud Armees which was designated for this was still being formed in early February.

Conrad also had two other fronts to worry about. The diplomatic traffic between Italy and the Austrian Empire had become so chilled with unspoken menace that there was no mistaking the threat of an Italian declaration of war. The Austrians also could not afford to leave Serbia unpunished for ever. In February, the Austrian 5th and 6th Armies in the Balkans did receive an allotment of fresh drafts and this confirmed that sooner or later they would make a new attempt to move forwards.

The Eastern Front



Figure 1: The Northwest Front reinforced by the Russian 12th Army while the German 8th Army fights at Buddern – Benkenheim, 5 – 8 February 1915.

The next phase of the Masurian Battle was an attempt by the German 8th Army to deliver a right hook to the Russian forces which had fallen back from covering Lötzen to a line between the Angerapp River and the Benkenheimsee. The German aim was to advance behind the flank of the Germans at Angerburg (4-5.2007). For this, four newly formed Reserve Divisions were thrown into battle on 5 February against Russians who hastily took up positions on the line Buddern – Benkenheim (4-5.2108). This action coincided with an increase of Russian strength in this sector as their 12th Army relieved the left flank of what had been an overstretched Russian 1st Army.

It was expected at 8th Army Headquarters that the Russians would continue retreating and the Reserve Infantry were not warned to expect any resolute enemy. They had also expected the regular Divisions on their right would also press forward but heavy snow on the morning of 5 February meant that their advance was delayed. The result was that the courageous reservists made poorly prepared frontal assaults on the Russian line with little or no support from artillery and suffered grievous losses in consequence. The Russians also fought back with unusual vigour once they realised they had an advantage. Tough Caucasian Grenadiers and the 2nd Russian Guards Cavalry Division counterattacked on 6 February to very good effect and the German 8th Army was forced to rest and suspend its operations that night.

Serbia

The opposing front lines in Serbia remained inactive. The difference between the two sides was that the Serbians had only a couple of regiments and the Cavalry Division in reserve, whereas the Austro-Hungarians had at least four Divisions uncommitted to front line duties. These Austrians reserves would grow as the 5th and 6th Armies integrated replacement infantry.

The Near East



Figure 2: The Mesopotamian Corps retreating back to Ali Gharbi, 5 - 8 February 1915.

The British retreat towards Ali Gharbi continued during the first week of February. The Turkish Corps which had defended Kut was being reinforced but did not immediately pursue the British for any significant distance and the two sides were over 50 kilometres apart by 8 February.

The Caucasian front was stalemated and neither side expected the other to try and change this before the snow started to melt.

The Western Front



Figure 3: The Marne Front as the French reoccupied Jouarre, 7 - 8 February 1915.

The French plan for their “Spring Offensive” was complete. Joffre had appointed Foch to command it and this would require the coordination of two French Armies, the 5th and 8th fighting on either side of the Somme River. The British (2nd Army) were also assigned a part and would attack simultaneously to the French from the direction of Doullens (5-3.0809). The start date would be 11 February and the object was to clear the open chalk country north of Amiens and around Naours (5-3.0810). This was a significant strategic objective because the German lines here approached to within 60 kilometres of the coast.

The German lines in Picardy had been entrenched since late October and natural caves had been used to store equipment near the front. The Bavarian 1st Division and the German 29th Division had been recognised in this sector and Foch knew that the defences would be solid. The French and British preparations had been concealed as much as possible so that the Germans were not induced to reinforce at the last minute. The deceptions went so far as to visibly pull units out of this sector while keeping new units intended to participate the offensive away from the front until the last few days.

In addition, the French 9th Army moved into undefended Jouarre (5-3.1117) rather noisily on 7 February (the re-occupation of Meaux was postponed), with the hope that movement forward on the Marne would attract most German attention during the following days.

February 1915 DM Summary

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total	Morale
Germany	2	5						15	22	620	Good
Austria-Hungary	-	-						-	-	236	Good
Ottoman	-	-						NA	-	11	Good
Central Powers	2	5						15	22	867	
France	-	-						-	-	552	Good
Great Britain	-	-						-	-	64	Good
Russia	2	2						-	4	304	Good
Belgium	-	-						NA	-	(95)	NA
Serbia	-	-						NA	-	(12)	NA
Entente	2	2						-	4	920	

Player Notes

CP:

- *East: Another attack around the Masurian Lakes whilst the rest of the front absorbs supplies and replacements. I also dismantle most of the border forts to free up additional replacements for the fighting formations.*
- *Galicja: No attacks and nothing of any significance.*
- *Serbia: Quiet.*
- *West: Quiet.*
- *Caucasus: Quiet.*
- *Mesopotamia: He has withdrawn over 40km from Kut, but I opt not to follow up at this stage.*
- *Palestine: Quiet.*

AP: This is a good start to the month for me as the German campaign in Masuria is going through a difficult patch and I have been able to reinforce there. The failure of this turn's German attack followed a 1/6 die split and could be quite significant as he was getting close to turning my entrenched line in Prussia and this is now likely to be delayed. Although the dice were horrible to the Germans, the lack of supply was also a reason for the failure. However, the Germans have to conserve supply too and risks like this need to be taken now and then.

I am playing cat and mouse on the Western Front. I want to reduce the distance between the front line and the sea. It is currently only three hexes. My plan is to attack next turn north of Amiens. The question is whether Ivor will see this and reinforce the threatened hex. I fear I may have been too cute in my moves in this area, which include some withdrawals from the front line where I intend to attack. I also made a big fuss of moving forward to the Marne this turn which I hope will keep his

attention. I am aiming to attack with 80 – 90 SP. This is not the maximum I could have achieved, but any greater concentration would perhaps make my objective too obvious.