

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT45: 9 – 12 February 1915 (February 3)

General Situation

In early February, Joffre was extremely anxious that the secret of the impending French attack would not leak out. Since, it was intended that the British would also play a role in the offensive there was a danger that some English officer would blurt out the truth in his London club and then word would reach Berlin thanks to the corruption of a Dutch waiter. For this very reason, discrete unofficial words had led to the unfair dismissal of many European servants working in London regardless of the neutrality of their nationality.

This was a sign of the tension of the period. The imminent French offensive was expected to be a turning point in the war. It would be the moment when the Allies assumed the burden of attack and began to drive the Germans out of France.

The Western Front



Figure 1: The French Offensive begins, 11 February 1915.

Despite all the worries about security, the German front north of the Somme was quiet at the beginning of the second week in February. Neither, the 29th or 1st Bavarian Division had been warned that a major attack was expected. The German 1st Army Intelligence circular on 7 February had focussed on reports from aviators that the French efforts to double-track the Abbeville-Dieppe railway had recently resumed but were not expected to be finished before late-February. There was also discussion of the expectation that the French would re-occupy Meaux. This in fact happened on 11 February as the French 7th and 9th Armies consolidated their front on the Marne, but Joffre in fact saw these operations as diversions and, in any event, the Germans were not contesting Meaux which they had voluntarily abandoned.

Foch was ready to commence his attack on schedule at 0800 11 February. The weight of the French attack was to the south where the French 5th Army was to secure crossing points of the Somme as the French 8th Army attacked across the Bernaville-Amiens road. The French committed four infantry Divisions to the initial assault with XV Corps in reserve to follow up. The German defences were known to be solidly constructed in the chalk, but the French 5th Army had an artillery concentration which was considered sufficient to help the infantry overcome these obstacles.

The British 2nd Army was also ordered to support these first French attacks, but mainly this consisted of providing fire support with their field artillery. The Indian 29th Brigade was ordered to probe forward on 12 February but it found the German defences intact and General Smith-Dorrien held back his main force waiting for news of a French breakthrough. During the first two days of this battle, the performance of the British was not very inspiring.

The French attacks on 12 February were concentrated against a small hill, known by its map reference as Hill 08 10. Since the Germans had hidden machine guns able to cover most of its forward slope all French attempts to drive the German 29th Division back from here failed and the French 9th and 29th Divisions (8th Army) suffered heavy casualties there. A German counterattack also pushed the French 42nd Division (5th Army) back to the Somme crossing. Thirty six hours after the start of the offensive, Foch was worried he had little to show for it and he urged the British to make their move as soon as possible and attack what he imagined was the vulnerable northern flank of the German position.

The Eastern Front

There was little activity on the whole Eastern Front. Both sides concentrated on resupply and reorganisation.

There was one brief opportunity for the 8th Army in Masuria where the snow now lay rather thickly. On 9 February, some patrols from the 78th Reserve and 35th Divisions had crossed the frozen Benkenheimsee (4-5.2208/4-5.2308) without actually realising they had walked over water. They found themselves in an area which the Russians had left unguarded. Thinking they would be commended for this, messages went back to their units who were urged to follow. It may be thought that initiative was always welcomed in the German Army, but not always if it involved breaking the rules.

In the 35th Division, the situation came to the attention of an Oberst who had grown up in the area and lost his brother and sister in a tragic boating accident when young. He crossed the lake and finding the patrol leader showed him all the signs at the edge of the lake forbidding swimming, fishing, and ice skating and several that indicated the shoreline was private property. Although the Oberst had clearly lost his head, and was retired after this incident, he did succeed in dragging the wayward German patrols back to the western shore while muttering continuously "Verboten, Verboten, alles ist Verboten..."

Serbia

The build-up of supplies and reserves on this front by the Austro-Hungarians was now very pronounced. The beneficiary was principally the 5th Army which concentrated its fresh strength in the Sava Valley. As yet no Germans had been spotted on this front. Conrad had withdrawn units

from Poland and Galicia to give 5th Army this boost and it is evident from his surviving papers that he was planning one last effort to achieve a victory on this front without assistance from outside the Empire.



Figure 2: The Austro-Hungarian 5th Army build-up on the Sava River, mid-February 1915.

The Near East

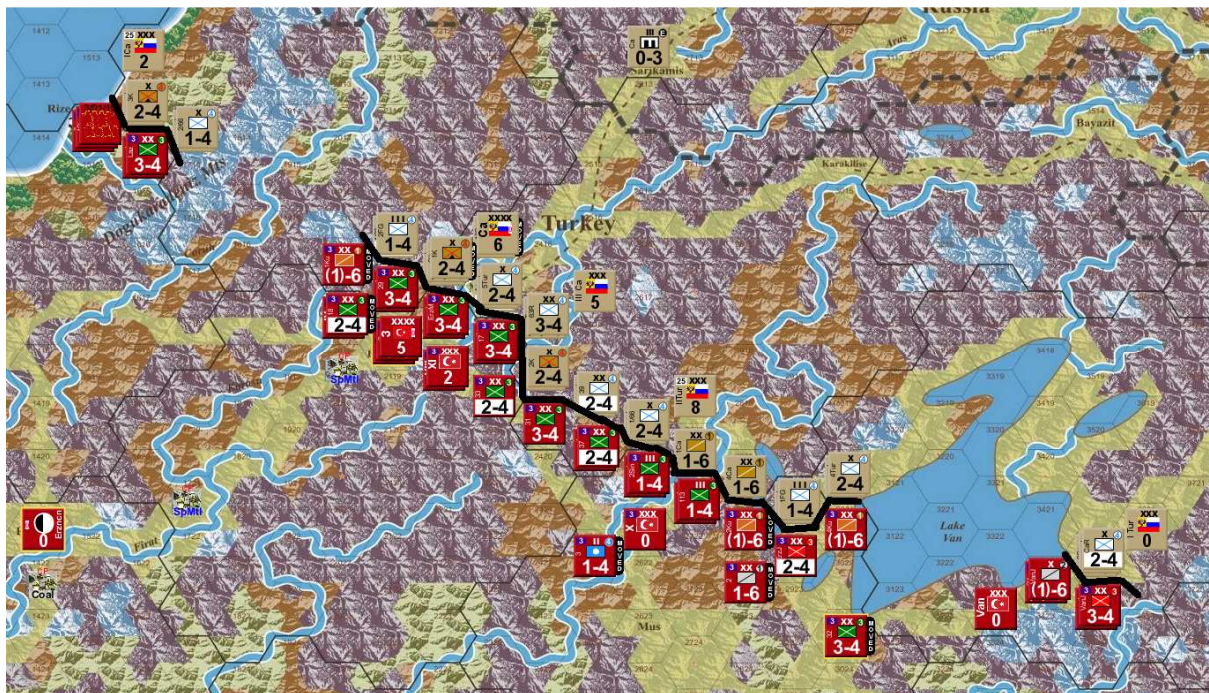


Figure 3: The Caucasian Front, mid-February 1915.

The New Zealand and Australian Division landed at Lemnos on 11 – 12 February.

The Near Eastern Fronts were all still mostly very quiet. In the Caucasus, the main cause of casualties was frostbite and snow blindness.

In Iraq, a sceptic reaction to a flea bite was a cause of not a few casualties as the Mesopotamian Corps fell back to Ali Gharbi. The Turks cautiously probed forward from Kut, but the two sides were now separated by 75 kilometres of mostly unoccupied country.

Between the British forces on the Suez Canal and the Turks guarding southern Palestine there was a desert 220 kilometres wide. The two sides there had not yet caught sight of each other.

February 1915 DM Summary

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total	Morale
Germany	2	5	5					15	27	625	Good
Austria-Hungary	-	-	-					-	-	236	Good
Ottoman	-	-	-					NA	-	11	Good
Central Powers	2	5	5					15	27	872	
France	-	-	9					-	9	561	Good
Great Britain	-	-	-					-	-	64	Good
Russia	2	2	-					-	4	304	Good
Belgium	-	-	-					NA	-	(95)	NA
Serbia	-	-	-					NA	-	(12)	NA
Entente	2	2	9					-	13	929	

Player Notes

CP:

- *East: No attacks at all this time. I have to learn to be more patient and am spending time building up and reinforcing. I am holding a reserve of corps strength down in Krakow under command of the Sud HQ.*
- *Galicia: Quiet. There is nothing practical I can do here to relieve Przemysl. I have left it too late.*
- *Serbia: I have started to reinforce the Serbian armies with supply and force elements.*
- *West: Quiet.*
- *Caucasus: Quiet; although my supply has finally started to arrive. Getting it to the Caucasus is tortuous. It is not a feasible front to conduct prolonged and aggressive operations on. Were I another 100km NE and still in Sarikamis, it would take at least another 3 weeks whilst the Russians would be operating on very short, rail facilitated, lines of communication.*
- *Mesopotamia: Quiet.*
- *Palestine: Quiet.*

AP: *I might have delayed my attack in France a little longer but there was too large a chance that I would lose the opportunity to attack a relatively weakly defended hex. This time the 1/6 die split went against me. At least these are evenly shared. At the moment, my intention is to continue the attack a second turn and even up the luck a little. Also, I had to blow off some French casualties before the British start to take losses because all the British units are at reduced strength and the loss priority rules complicate this.*

The Eastern Front is starting to get more solid. With the French demonstrating what they can do, I hope it will be harder for the Germans to gear up to do what is necessary to crack the Russian front.

Something is brewing on the Balkan Front. I have stripped the southern section of the front so that I have some reserve strength if the Austrians attack in the north. I will be disappointed if I do not force the Germans to intervene here.