

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

**GT89: 19 – 22 August 1915 (August 5)**

### **General Situation**

It was becoming hard to clearly see how this war would ever come to an end. In August 1914, on the eve of titanic battles it was not difficult to believe in victory. Now, a year later, the great strategic cards had all been played and still all the players were in the game, even those who had been knocked over once or twice in the brawl. Governments were starting to ask some hard questions of their military leaders. What actually could they promise which might lead to a result this year or next?

Falkenhayn's promise (in which Conrad was forced to acquiesce) was that if they held on to the territory they had gained, the Allies would sooner or later give up after incurring massive losses trying to break the defences of the Central Powers. Joffre agreed he would attack but claimed he would do it with discretion and with the support of powerful Allies. If they all attacked together, he reasoned, Germany would be overwhelmed perhaps not this year but certainly next.

This French strategy was not fully accepted in the Entente camp. The British were supposed to be signed up to it but only conditionally. One of the conditions was that the British Army in France would only unleash its full strength when it reached a satisfactory size. It was making progress in this direction but it would still be much weaker than the French Army for the rest of the year. The other problem was that a coordinated blow on Germany gave the Italians no real role and the Russians were wary of keeping up the fight with Germany and were subject to temptations to turn their guns on the weaker members of the enemy coalition.

### **The Western Front**

The French were now aware of the manner in which the Germans were holding their front between the Oise and the Marne. Joffre was finding it difficult to restrain his subordinates who did not understand why the French 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Armies were not ordered forward *en masse* to liberate parts of sacred France which the Germans evidently had no intention of retaining. Joffre's objection that he didn't want the Germans choosing where the next major battle took place was not persuasive.

In order to play for time and try and throw his critics of the scent, Joffre had ordered a cavalry reconnaissance of the German front. He had even suggested that if there were, as suggested, gaps in the enemy front the cavalry would be able to ride through and return with valuable intelligence which would allow the French artillery to devastate the German front line. This idea collapsed in confrontation with reality on 21 August when a joint report of the commanders of the French 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Divisions advised that their units were entirely unsuitable for this operation. While they confidently proclaimed their ability to get in among the German positions they were equally sure they would not be able to hold them against the slightest counterattack and a rapid withdrawal was also unlikely given the obstacles which were presented by the entrenched terrain and the probability that the Germans would also be able to deploy cavalry to oppose them. The French cavalry therefore admitted they could only spearhead an attack if the infantry was in close support.

## The Italian Front

On 22 August, there was a significant Italian attack on the Plöcken Pass (6-4.3014). The Italians used the Tagliamento Valley to achieve a quick concentration of force here under cover of apparent intentions to prepare for an attack on the Isonzo. The Italian 2<sup>nd</sup> Army had advocated an attempt to get into the Gail Valley as a means to force the Austrians to defend a longer front. The Austrian defence of the Plöcken Pass was in the hands of a single brigade, poorly supplied, so it was barely defended at all when six Italian Divisions started advancing up the slopes.

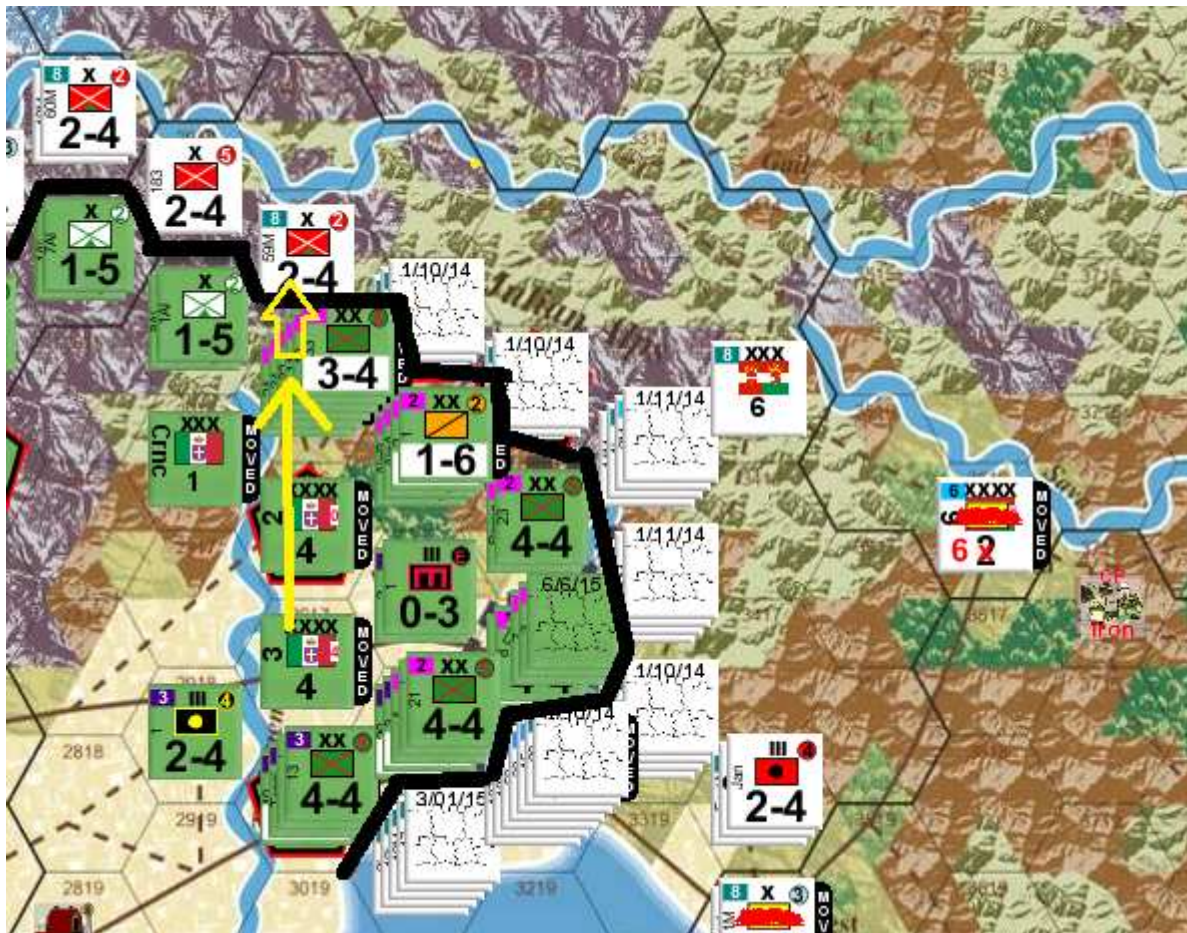


Figure 1: Italian movement in the Tagliamento Valley and the attack on the Plöcken Pass, 19 – 22 August 1915.

Unfortunately for the Italians the promising situation did not translate into a very satisfactory result. Out of the six Divisions supposed to participate, only one delivered a proper attack thanks to the congestion and disorganisation on the way up to the pass. The Austrians kept their nerve and by nightfall the commander of the 59<sup>th</sup> Mountain Brigade was able to claim that the enemy had been repelled.

## The Eastern Front

The very fluid positions on the Eastern Front persisted. The development of the situation was particularly uncertain in the southern half of the front. The Germans had pulled back from the centre of the Pripet Marshes and had never actually occupied Pinsk but they were still probing the southern margins of this region. The Germans still had a bridgehead over the Goryn River north of Kostopilsk (5-5.4301).



The Russians were still finding it difficult to establish more advanced positions. In the far south, they had managed to return to the east bank of the Zbrucz River as the German Sud Army had retired to the other side. The main Russian effort was made further north on 21 – 22 August at Shumsk (5-5.4405) where the Russian 5<sup>th</sup> Army thrust south of the Goryn and hammered the Austro-Hungarian 24<sup>th</sup> Division and other outlying units of their 2<sup>nd</sup> Army. The commander of the Austrian 24<sup>th</sup> was in Vienna where he was being briefed on a transfer to Berlin. The units he left behind lacked guidance and when the Russians attacked resistance was comparatively weak and suffered from an indecision as to whether to retreat or not. In the end the outcome was hardly voluntary. Two Landwehr brigades sent to support the 24<sup>th</sup> Division (36<sup>th</sup> and 108<sup>th</sup>) were almost wiped out. Most of the defenders were casualties or captured and the few survivors fled south west more than 20 kilometres. Russian losses were comparatively slight and Austrian weaknesses had been exposed again.



Figure 2: The Russian 5<sup>th</sup> Army strikes at Shumsk, 21 - 22 August 1915.

### The Balkans

The Serbian Army was thinning its lines in the so called National Redoubt around Lake Ohrid. Although any small portion of Serbian soil still held was precious to the Serbians it was recognised that prestige apart there was little military value in this piece of home territory. If the Serbian Army was to become an offensive force, which its situation demanded, it would have to reduce the resources it devoted to defensive positions.

## The Near East

Hamilton awaited with growing trepidation the arrival of Lord Kitchener while his own intelligence reported that the Turkish defences on the Dardanelles peninsula were still getting stronger.

The British command in Egypt was also getting a bit windy. Friendly Bedouin had reported that the Turks had crossed the frontier on 20 August. Another raid on the Suez Canal seemed improbable but the attack in March had been a greater threat than expected and a repetition could not be excluded.

Townsend had been given a second chance to lead his force up the Tigris and he was not going to be accused of lack of aggression. Although some advisers had suggested it would be better to await the end of the summer, he ordered an immediate attack on the Turkish defences covering Kut.

The Turkish 6<sup>th</sup> Army was preparing a defence line based on Es Simm (7-9.3821-22). Townsend deployed the two Indian Divisions one on each side of the river and delivered the main attack on 22 August with the Indian 2<sup>nd</sup> Division on the eastern side of the river. The intense heat caused nearly a sixth of the strength of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Indian to drop out of the ranks during a long approach march. The Turkish 27<sup>th</sup> Division was in the way of the Indian attack and the Indian infantry found that the marshes were still wet enough to impede their movement. By evening, casualties were mounting fast and the attack was suspended with the Turkish positions still intact.



Figure 3: The attack on the Es Simm line, 22 August 1915.

There was limited activity in the Caucasus. Yudenitch was extending his line into the mountains north of the Aras Valley. This was a job for Kuban Mountain troops who were mainly likely to encounter patrols of Kurdish cavalry as they sought to dominate the high elevations.

## DM Summary – August 1915

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total	Morale
Germany	-	-	-	2	-			11	13	871	Good
Austria-Hungary	-	-	-	-	6			1	7	411	Good
Ottoman	-	1	-	-	1			-	2	41	Good
Bulgaria	-	-	-	-	-			-	-	12	Good
Central Powers	-	1	-	2	7			12	22	1315	
France	-	-	-	-	-			-	-	637	Good
Great Britain	-	-	-	-	4			-	4	128	Good
Russia	-	1	-	3	1			-	5	607	Shaken
Italy	-	-	-	-	1			-	1	18	Good
Belgium	-	-	-	-	-			-	-	(96)	NA
Serbia	-	-	-	-	-			-	-	(28)	NA
Entente	-	1	-	3	6			-	10	1387	

### Player Notes

- CP: *East: Content with the outcome of my last spoiling attack, I use this turn to start digging in along the line that is now forming. There is not much more to add. My new positions are making use of good natural defensive terrain, are situated along the extent of my railheads – for the most part – and still allow me the opportunity to rapidly manoeuvre to any threatened sector if necessary. It will force the Russians to draw westwards again would should be to my advantage.*
- Serbia: *No change.*
- West: *Nothing of note.*
- Caucasus: *I now have a reasonable stock of supply but no real good opportunity to conduct offensives.*
- Mesopotamia: *Quiet.*
- Palestine: *Quiet.*
- Gallipoli: *Quiet.*
- Italy: *Quiet.*

AP: *I was not expecting much action this turn so I surprised myself by making three attacks. I write this before I know the results.*

*On the Italian frontier, I attack one of the last remaining weakly defended sectors. I do it because I must take opportunities to attack Austria at advantage. This costs me 5 supply points which will delay my next big offensive but I prefer this mountain fighting to a major assault on the Isonzo which the Austrians have made impregnable. I expect to be forced the attack again on the Isonzo eventually but I will not until there are no better alternatives.*

*In Iraq, I risk a very one sided result by lunging towards Kut. This attack even accepts an extra loss because of the summer conditions though I expect this may also deter any responsive Turkish attack next turn. There is a chance I will prevent him completing his trench line, though the marsh approach negates that. I have reinforcements/ replacements on the way to Iraq in the next month or so and I am just trying to shake things up so that Turkey is not immune to loss.*

*My attack in Volhynia is another effort to get at the Austrians before they are too well established in their defensive positions. I am a bit uncertain about the intensity of combat I wish to provoke on the Eastern Front as I would like the Russian Army to repair its losses in the next few months. At the same time I do not think I can let the CP off the hook entirely. This attack cost 7 supply so my endurance is not going to be great.*

*As it happens, I was extremely satisfied with a 6/1 die split in the Volhynian attack. That translated into a 5:1 loss ratio in favour of the attacker. The Austrians could neither reduce their losses because of retreat nor prevent a retreat due to their national specific rules, SR 40-4 and 40-6. It will be interesting to see if the CP escalates this or lets it go.*