

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT92: 1 – 5 September 1915 (September 1)

General Situation

The French President, Poincaré, held a military Council Session in August 1915 to get a better understanding of the war situation to which many senior French officers contributed including Joffre and Foch. After a short holiday¹, the President travelled to London on 3 September where he gave a speech to both Houses of Parliament which was notorious for the frankness of its message.

The President described the German defences on the Western Front as stronger than ever. Recent withdrawals by the Germans, including the abandonment of Arras, which the British fondly imagined they had captured by main force, were dismissed as tactical expedients which in no way reflected weakness and would in fact make the future challenges greater. Poincaré referred to the huge losses suffered by the French and speculated that those of the Russians might be even greater. Millions of men had been destroyed he said to a hushed audience which did not always add up the foreign losses.

The President reassured his listeners that France was not defeated and nor was Russia but he said that their sacrifices set the measure for what had to be done to defeat Germany. Certainly he conceded Germany had also suffered a full measure of the bitter fruit of the war and it must sooner or later be exhausted by the cost of fighting simultaneously on two fronts. The war had to go on until the numbers became intolerable to Germany and the French he said had no illusions any more that the numbers might have to rise very high indeed.

The war, he concluded, would not be won by tactical movements but only by the employment of a ruthless determination to inflict loss after loss on their enemies without mercy until the breaking point was reached and no matter how far off it was. The war he said was not glorious. It was brutal and it would have to get worse. Of victory, Poincaré signified no doubt. Sticking to his arithmetical inspiration he said the numbers could not add up for the Central Powers. Once Britain and Italy put their full weight into the struggle it would not be a two front war, it would be a three or four front war. Germany could not win, he declaimed, to thunderous applause.

The Near East

That the British were starting to appreciate the necessity of a cold-blooded attritional approach to the war was demonstrated soon enough on 4 September. Even before Munro arrived to take over command, a new style of attack was tested at the 3rd Battle of Krithia (7-6.2812). The plan was not dissimilar to earlier attempts to advance over the same terrain with a main British attack supported by a French diversion. Since it was recognised that the Turks would parry a large attack at great cost, it was reasoned that a smaller attack would risk less while the weight of naval shell would be relatively more important. This all turned out to be correct but progress was extremely slow and every attempt to advance resulted in heavy Allied casualties. By the end of the day, the British 10th

¹ The vacations of the French President are a state secret, but unkind critics have suggested they were not exactly short even though the exigencies of wartime required some moderation of customary habits.

Division and the French 22nd Division had hardly any infantry which could continue the struggle so depleted were their ranks.



Figure 1: 3rd Battle of Krithia, 4 September 1915.

In Egypt, the British had been trying to divine the intentions of the Turkish troops which had recently crossed the Palestinian frontier. By the beginning of September it had been concluded that they did not pose an immediate threat. Bedouin spies had reported that the “invasion” force was badly supplied and were showing no signs of further forward movement. Nevertheless the summer heat would not last much longer and the possibility of another thrust to the Suez Canal could not be completely ignored.

There was further fighting in Iraq even as the British were forced to pull back from the vicinity of Kut. On 2 September, the Turkish 35th Division supported by other units of the Turkish 6th Army found a point of weakness at Ab-Bazibab (7-9.4021) where the understrength Indian 17th Brigade held a long cordon line intended to help keep the two Indian Divisions in contact with each other. The combat was made exceptional unpleasant by swarms of insects which were thick enough to eclipse the sun. Both sides’ Official Histories independently named this the Battle of the Flies. The Turks broke the cordon but even the tough Turkish infantry suffered many losses to heat exhaustion.



Figure 2: Battle of the Flies, 2 September 1915.

There was little activity in the Caucasus that has ever been thought worthy of note during the first days of September 1915.

The Western Front



Figure 3: Allied advances Arras – Bucquoy, 31 August – 5 September 1915.

Despite President Poincaré's fighting talk the Allied forces in France were only cautiously driving towards the main German lines of defence. The new British 4th Army was assisted by the French 5th Army in extending the British line down to Bucquoy (5-3.0910) on 4 - 5 September. Again, as at Arras a few days previously, there was little by way of German resistance. Nevertheless where patrols did make contact with the German positions a little further east they observed strong concentrations of

German infantry and air photography seemed to demonstrate unprecedented stocks of munitions in German supply points.

The evidence of German preparedness was disconcerting to several French generals who burdened Joffre with a variety of warnings that some enemy initiative might soon be expected. Nobody was more jumpy than the commanders of the 1st and 2nd Armies in Alsace-Lorraine, where it might reasonably have been thought that a German attack was most unlikely. The reports of Alsatian deserters contained indications that some Alpine units had been assigned to the German 7th Army. The sector of the French 40th Division around La Bonhomme (5-3.2820) was thought to be most vulnerable and a brigade (195th) of the 66th Mountain Division was rushed to reinforce it on 5 September.



Figure 4: The Front in Alsace, early September 1915.

The Italian Front

As the pause in the Italian attacks lengthened the Austrians continued to strengthen their defences on the Alpine Fronts. Cadorna ordered that large reserves be stationed within short distances of the main Italian railway lines in this theatre so that he retained maximum flexibility as to the location of the next major offensive.

The Eastern Front

There was only limited activity on this front. The Central Powers continued to seek good defensive positions sometimes falling back to occupy them. The Russian Army mostly was rooted to the spot but there was more initiative by the Russian 3rd and 5th Armies which sought a dominant position in the flat country south of the Goryn River in Eastern Volhynia.

The Balkans

There were minor shifts in position on this front but nothing of great importance.

DM Summary – September 1915

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total	Morale
Germany	-							12	12	884	Good
Austria-Hungary	-							-	-	413	Good
Ottoman	2							-	2	45	Good
Bulgaria	-							-	-	12	Good
Central Powers	2							12	14	1334	
France	1							-	1	638	Good
Great Britain	4							-	4	132	Good
Russia	-							-	-	611	Shaken
Italy	-							-	-	19	Good
Belgium	-							-	-	(96)	NA
Serbia	-							-	-	(28)	NA
Entente	5							-	5	1397	

Player Notes

CP: *Not this time.*

AP: *The attack at the Dardanelles had 10 combat strength made up of 4 Infantry SP plus naval support. This is an example of an attack which limits exposure to counterattack losses by reducing the number of attacking units (a similar tactic can be used at Liege at the start of the game forcing the Belgians to retreat by sacrificing a German division). The result was a guaranteed result of one Turkish hit to four Allied hits. That is a pretty punishing loss ratio for the Allies and cannot be sustained long term. Nevertheless it is the only way to stop Allied losses spiralling too rapidly out of control while still achieving some measure of attrition on the defences.*

I had a similar tactic in defence in Iraq. My front had a weak 1 SP brigade exposed to attack but the Turks could not wipe it out without incurring at least one loss from summer combat attrition. I was therefore assured of at least an even exchange.