

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT95: 15 – 18 September 1915 (September 4)

General Situation

The Kaiser was beginning to chafe under the circumstances of the war. Although nominally a supreme warlord he was beginning to see more clearly that he no longer counted for much in strategic counsels. Falkenhayn followed protocol and appeared to consult but it never made much difference what observations the Kaiser made.

In frustration, some of the Kaiser's courtiers let it be known that he had described Falkenhayn's policy as a *Sitzenkrieg*. This was actually a serious criticism as it implied that the chief-of-staff was simply waiting in static positions hoping the Allies would give up. That was a misrepresentation of Falkenhayn's plans which calculated that the Entente would break on the defences the Central Powers were constructing on each front. Falkenhayn's assertion was that Germany could hold out indefinitely and never surrender and at least long before that her enemies would succumb to revolution and economic collapse.

In mid-September 1915, Falkenhayn's strategy was being tested in Flanders where the British were continuing their attack at Loos (5-3.1007). Attacks such as these needed to be repelled and the German Army could not easily give up more ground.

The Western Front



Figure 1: Allied gains on Western Front between 31 August and 18 September 1915.

The Germans were still giving up ground on the French front albeit slowly. Between 17 – 18 September, the French 10th Army moved forwards and the IV Corps recaptured Montdidier (5-3.0913) which had been in German hands since October 1914. This was a deliberate surrender by the Germans who were busy building stronger defences east of the town.

17 September also saw the resumption of fighting north of Loos (5-3.1007). Sir John French had supervised an orderly rotation of the front line units while Haig of the British 1st Army had waited impatiently for orders to strike the German front again. The weather improved and British aircraft provided valuable intelligence on where the German defences were strong and where weak. Crown-Prince Rupprecht had not been idle and two fresh Reserve Divisions had been fed into this sector (49th and 78th Reserve).

The new British attack was spearheaded by the III Corps under Haig and the British 2nd Army also provided significant support from the south.¹ Haig was certainly under an illusion that the German Army was on the point of further retreat and the III Corps attack was at least as costly as the battle a few days previously. The terrain had an industrial quality and the German trenches ran through small factories and across coal spoil tips which were locally important objectives. It also has to be admitted that the assaults that were made were exceptionally brave as the British heavy artillery which had been prominent in the earlier round of fighting was now much less of a factor owing to shortages of ammunition. Loos therefore was an infantry battle which saw a terrible close range struggle between the Tommies and the German Reservists who simply held every position to the last man. This lasted for 48 hours during which time the German front had been pushed back no more than a kilometre.

The Italian Front

The Alpine fronts were positively bristling with military positions. The Austrians were over-fond of the word impregnable when describing the fortifications, trenches and reinforced strongholds which had festooned the already impressive natural defences of the terrain. However, this was not really an exaggeration and the Italians repaid the compliment as they puzzled how they might be overcome.

Cadorna has often been accused of excessive aggression but in the early autumn of 1915 he was actually suspected of the opposite as the Italian public began to realise that the gains they had made since entering the war were not spectacular in any sense.

The Eastern Front

In the Pripet Marshes the two sides were inching towards contact along a length of the Yasel'da River north west of Pinsk. This was the first time in several weeks that short range patrols in this area had encountered each.

The only serious fighting was in Volhynia at Shumsk (5-5.4405) where the Austro-Hungarian 2nd and 4th Armies finally made an attack which had been planned for some time. Conrad had authorised this

¹ It has been recently suggested that it is only Haig's memoirs which have given us this picture of the battle. Some historians have now said that the 2nd Army provided the strongest push over these days and came closest to breaking through.

attack as a further demonstration of the continuing capability of the Hapsburg Armies to engage in offensive action. The target of the attack, which was supported by German guns, was the Russian 5th Army concentration south of the Goryn River which had, however, picked up some intelligence of the impending attack and reinforced before the blow fell on 15 September. The Austrians roughly handled one Russian Division (59th Reserve) but other Russian units concealed in woods and other terrain managed to stop the advance when the attackers losses mounted alarmingly. As with any action in the First World War, the defenders machine guns could turn a bold advance into a disaster in just a few minutes. The Croat 14th Brigade suffered such a fate while moving past undetected Russian positions in close order.



Figure 2: The Second Battle of Shumsk, 15 - 16 September 1915.

The Balkans

The Italian-Montenegrin attack in Albania had discomfited the Austro-Hungarian 5th Army which had no reserves or supplies which it was able to send to assist the defending force at Kolonje (7-6.0515). The situation had calmed down for two days and it was thought the Allied force might withdraw. Instead, the Italian 14th Division made a further attack on 17 September wearing down the beleaguered Austrian 8th Division which had no more ammunition for its ordnance.

At nightfall, the determined commander of the 8th Division refused to retreat despite a message from the Italian general who demanded a withdrawal to avoid the necessity of destroying the town. During the hours of darkness, Austrian units reported their losses to the Divisional headquarters and since these suggested a third of the defenders were casualties or missing it was necessary to admit that the defence of Kolonje could not be continued. By the morning of 18 September the Austrians were pulling out with the Italians and the Montenegrins moving in soon after.

British. Having said that, German losses are mounting heavily and the British can afford such trade-offs; although heavy losses diminish their capacity too attack in such fashion too often.

- *Caucasus: Quiet.*
- *Mesopotamia: I start to dig in.*
- *Palestine: Quiet.*
- *Gallipoli: Quiet.*
- *Italy: Quiet.*

DM Summary – September 1915

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total	Morale
Germany	-	-	10	12				12	34	906	Good
Austria-Hungary	-	-	1	5				-	6	419	Good
Ottoman	2	3	-	-				-	5	48	Good
Bulgaria	-	-	-	-				-	-	12	Good
Central Powers	2	3	11	17				12	45	1365	
France	1	-	-	-				-	1	638	Good
Great Britain	4	1	15	10				-	30	158	Good
Russia	-	1	-	3				-	4	615	Shaken
Italy	-	-	-	1				-	1	20	Good
Belgium	-	-	-	-				-	-	(96)	NA
Serbia	-	-	(1)	-				-	(1)	(29)	NA
Entente	5	2	15	14				-	36	1428	

AP: The outcome of my second attack at Loos is favourable with a 10:12 loss ratio in my favour. This is despite the fact that my combat strength fell by 15 to 84 and the defence combat strength remained 75 and is due to my air support and favourable dice split 4/3.

I have used up most of my British supply so I could only keep this up if I started unsupplied attacks which I probably will disdain at least on the western front. Inflicting 22 German losses in a month does not stop them replacing all their losses and building some more strength. By that measure I am not wearing down the German defences in relation to combat strength though the steady pressure on morale is an important objective too.

I was not surprised at the Austrian attack in Russia because I was warned by the cancelled attack last turn. I could only partially supply my counterattack but had enough strength to win the combat nevertheless. Inflicting 5 losses on the Austrians (including in Albania) this turn is the best thing for me. It would have cost me more supply and time to inflict such losses by my own attacks.

I do not think the Austrians had to attack just yet because of supply stockpile limits though it is reasonable to anticipate that requirement and push it further away in time. Other than that I am doubtful the Austrians have anything to gain by offensive activity right now. I understand the CP does

not want to lapse into complete passivity but I am relieved of the pressure to drive losses up through my own attacks (which cost a lot of supply) when the CP initiates combat.