

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT96: 19 – 22 September 1915 (September 5)

General Situation

The fighting on the Western Front was now escalating again. At his headquarters in Spa, Falkenhayn could not help but be bridled by the talk emanating from the Kaiser's court saying that he was presiding over a *Sitzenkrieg*. It is not possible to know if jibes such as this provoked attacks such as that in Picardy. It has always seemed possible that such a sensitive general might be open to suggestion consequential on any perceived complaint coming from the Kaiser's circle. On the other hand, others have pointed out that Falkenhayn was perfectly reasonable in matching the British blow with one of his own and that this type of attack ought to be expected no matter how firmly the Germans were settled into a strategic defence.

The Western Front



Figure 1: The German attack at Bucquoy, 19 - 20 September 1915.

As the British attack at Loos (5-3.1007) came to an end, the Germans prepared their counter-stroke in Picardy. On 19 September they began a two day attack at the junction of the British and French lines which was near Bucquoy (5-3.0910). The German 1st and 13th Armies fought mainly against the French 5th Army which was supported by a British and a Canadian Brigade from the new British 4th Army.

The German attack was not very successful. The Allied forces had hardly established more than the most rudimentary fieldworks since they had occupied Bucquoy at the beginning of September. There really hadn't been time for more elaborate defences. Despite this, the German attacks were disjointed and reminded observers of the style of actions in 1914. The Allied force somehow held firm and the French were able to use their field guns and machine guns to good effect on German

The Eastern Front

The German 15th Army occupied Pinsk for the first time on 20 September as the two sides continued jockeying for position. The Russians had their eye on objectives of their own in Belorussia. Perhaps the one with the most importance to them at that moment was the railway junction town, Baranovichi (4-5E.0217), which was still outside their control in mid-September but close to their front and evidently not held by the Germans. Control of this place would ease the problems of keeping the Russian forces operating in the Pripet Marshes in supply.

Further south, the fighting in Volhynia had died down again with the Russians still in possession of Shumsk (5-5.4405). The Russian 5th Army was now receiving more support from a reinforced Russian 3rd Army and the Russians were therefore more firmly secured in this region.



Figure 3: The Belorussian Front at the time of the capture of Pinsk, 19 - 22 September 1915.

The Balkans

With the Italian 14th Division securely ensconced in Kolonje (7-6.0515), the Austro-Hungarian 5th Army was forced to give up ground in southern Albania and fell back toward the Shkumbin River.

The Italians and the Serbian (Montenegrin) 4th Corps then consolidated their positions satisfied that they had given notice that Albania was contested.

Such developments were of course hardly noticed in Vienna far less Berlin. Those reports which were sent from the Balkans at this time concentrated on the intelligence that the Allied positions around Salonika appeared to be complete.

The Near East

Hamilton handed over command to Munro on 22 September but not before presiding over a last disaster. The long awaited attack on the Triple V ("VVV") position (7-6.3812) by the 2nd Australian Division took place in the morning of 21 September after being postponed for more than a week. Afterwards everyone (save those actually responsible) claimed to have known it would be a horrible failure. Certainly everyone who watched the Australians muster to enter Chicken Valley remembered it with great poignancy. However, it would be more accurate to say that the common perception was that the Turkish position was very strong but if anyone could take it then it would be the Aussies.

The Australians had a plan. There was a gully on the right of the last V and it appeared to be out of the line of fire if the maps were to be trusted. If a sufficient number of men could push through this weak point while the Turks were sheltering from the naval bombardment then the position could be taken from the rear and a frontal assault avoided. Even so it was a dangerous mission. Several areas of open ground had to be crossed just to get to the jumping off positions.

The plan did not work out as expected though it was only in the final stages that the flaw was discovered. The Australians did at great cost get into the gully and their leading troops did manage to move forward under cover and prepare for a final assault on the Triple V. Except they could not see that their maps were wrong and it was not a Triple V at all. Liman von Sanders had been active here and an additional entrenchment on the reverse slope had turned the Turkish position into a WW or Double W. Until the Australians jumped out of the gully they could not see they were entirely overlooked by a completely undetected Turkish redoubt that rained fire onto their backs.



Figure 4: The Australians attack, 21 September 1915.

The attack on the Double W has been a mainstay of films about Gallipoli and the poor planning which turned it into a symbol of tragic futility.¹ These are of course exaggerated in some respects and the idea that there were “no survivors” from the 2nd Australian Division is nonsense. Nevertheless, it has not been unfair to depreciate the British commanders at this stage of the campaign. The hopes which had attended the initial invasion had evaporated and no senior officer really believed a breakout was now possible. Attacks such as this one were now made simply to save face and to avoid admitting that the campaign was already lost. They were also attended with some cynicism including that displayed by the British staff officer who sent a note to Hamilton stating that the Triple V attack could take place on 21 September because by then there would be sufficient replacements for the Australian Division even if they suffered heavy losses.

There was little going on in Egypt and Iraq. Sinai was blessed with a cool wind coming off the sea which was the first sign that summer was past its peak.

The movement of the Russians in the Coruh Valley was continuing as the Kuban mountain infantry pressed on unopposed. The Turkish 3rd Army had become aware of the threat and had detached the 1st Kurdish Cavalry to find out what was going on. The Turkish Frontier Guard screen on the Black Sea coast at Rize had also realised that this might have consequences for their communications and was detaching units to ensure these were protected.

DM Summary – September 1915

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total	Morale
Germany	-	-	10	12	13			12	47	919	Good
Austria-Hungary	-	-	1	5	1			-	7	420	Good
Ottoman	2	3	-	-	1			-	6	49	Good
Bulgaria	-	-	-	-	-			-	-	12	Good
Central Powers	2	3	11	17	15			12	60	1380	
France	1	-	-	-	6			-	7	644	Good
Great Britain	4	1	15	10	7			-	37	165	Good
Russia	-	1	-	3	-*			-	4	615	Shaken *Pinsk lost
Italy	-	-	-	1	1			-	2	21	Good
Belgium	-	-	-	-	-			-	-	(96)	NA
Serbia	-	-	(1)	-	-			-	(1)	(29)	NA
Entente	5	2	15	14	14			-	50	1442	

¹ I am thinking about “Hell’s Bridge” (1958) especially which featured a purely imaginary scenario where the Australians were committed to the hopeless task of building a bridge across a ravine to get into the Turkish positions supposedly inspired by some British officer’s classical education which included a fixation on the bridge Xerxes, the Persian King, built across the Hellespont nearby.

Player Notes

CP:

- *East: A quiet round.*
- *Serbia: Quiet; although his last attack has forced me back in Albania and I have RPL en route, along with some supply, to enhance my force elements arrayed against the Serbs.*
- *West: Another bruising attack on me by the British. This turn I mass force to launch an attack against the mixed British-French force along their army boundaries.*
- *Caucasus: He is prising his way through my westernmost forces in the Caucasus and those holding the west of the Erzerum line, which is forcing me to spread my line there laterally to the west.*
- *Mesopotamia: Quiet.*
- *Palestine: Quiet.*
- *Gallipoli: Quiet.*
- *Italy: My first AH attack on the Italians occurs in the NE corner. I will destroy one of his Mt brigades although I know I will also take losses. He is beyond supply here, though, and I need to use some AH supply on offensive activity.*

AP: I have questioned some CP attacks lately, but there was nothing wrong with the German attack on Bucquoy. Any attack with a very high combat strength is almost always a good thing. This one was testing my resolve to hold the ground which the Germans abandoned at the end of August and which is the key to me developing further attacks on the new German line to the east. The die split 1/6 against was poor reward for the German concentration and meant I effectively won the battle. It deserved better.

Ivor mentioned territorial objectives recently probably referring to the Eastern Front where the GTL and some other rules reduce the importance of holding particular ground. DWK is a game which ultimately is determined by defeating the enemy forces and territorial objectives can seem secondary. Nevertheless there are territorial objectives everywhere, some tactical and some more strategic. I will disclose mine on the Eastern Front:

Hexes next to the CP front – At the moment I am hardly in contact as I dare not just walk up to strong CP positions. I have to work towards that as I otherwise cannot attack and if I cannot attack I cannot win.

Hexes captured that force other retreats – This is often a consequence of combat in the right place as recently demonstrated in Albania.

My trenches – They took 7 turns to build so I do not want to give them up. Equally a captured enemy trench is worth more than most hexes.

River crossings/bridgeheads – The CP has a lot of trenches and other strong positions behind rivers. These will have a -4 drm penalty to attack so I need bridgeheads to ameliorate this.

Baranovich and Proskurow – And other rail junctions that I would better control to ease movement of supply and replacements.

Riga – It is 25 DM against Russia if the Germans take it and if they do that when my morale is seriously reduced then it will have a bigger impact. For now I want to keep the CP away from this city so this job remains outstanding for as long as possible.

Romanian border – The position of the front here will be important when Romania joins the war. I would prefer that I was still in the Carpathians. There are also food hexes in eastern Galicia/Bukhovina which can be interdicted or not with small changes in the front line.

Bending the line – The Eastern Front is long. Engineering salients or shortening the line may be to either side's advantage depending on the relative ability of the two sides to cover the front. Movements east and west also have a similar effect of lengthening or shortening the line.

Lemberg, Czernowitz and Stanislau – Although these no longer have DM consequences when I capture them, they still reduce Austrian manpower which will be in short supply once I get them to Shaken Morale and Economic Collapse.

Konigsberg, Posen, Breslau, Krackow – The CP can retreat so far before giving up any DM towns so long as I do not get south of the Carpathians. Just as with the Russian Retreat in 1915 this will probably buy nearly two months of reduced intensity or no combat depending on the speed of withdrawal. If I am allowed such an advance then it is likely the CP will be on the ropes. I also gain retreat room the further west the front goes.

Istanbul – Only in my dreams.