

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT97: 23 – 26 September 1915 (September 6)

General Situation

Heavy rain across Northern Europe was a further signal that the summer was over and the belligerents faced the depressing prospect of having their armies in the field for another autumn and presumably another winter. No sudden victory of either side seemed anywhere in prospect.

The rain meant that aircraft could not fly and for a few days Allied commanders could get no information on enemy movements. Similarly, the surviving files of the German Air Service show that the operation logs of all squadrons on the Western Front were left blank between 23 and 26 September due to high winds and incessant rain.

The Western Front

The end of the British offensive at Loos (5-3.1007) was not thought to mark the end of operations on the western front and this expectation had been reinforced by the German punch at Bucquoy (5-3.0910). The British were certainly anticipating that the French would increase the intensity of their actions. A letter of Sir John French to Lord Kitchener dated 25 September had questioned what was going on. Sir John noted that the French were taking an inordinately long time to get through German defences which on some reckonings hardly deserved the name.

Had the British been privy to the communications between GQG and the French Armies they might have understood that the difficulties of the French would not be overcome very easily. The French 5th, 10th, 7th and 9th Armies which held the arc around the furthest advanced German positions all complained that they were short of strength and could not sustain for long any actions similar to that which had taken place at Bucquoy. All the French Armies required a process of slow consolidation of the positions they captured before they would move on to consider a new objective. Remarkably GQG seemed satisfied, for the moment, with this dilatory campaign and actually described it to the government and the public as the "Autumn Offensive". Joffre was even quoted saying that the new methods were saving lives. That was only true, it was said, because the French were not challenging the Germans to give up any positions they did not want to give up.

The Italian Front

The struggle for the Passo Monte Croce di Comélico (6-4.2814) continued as the Austrian 6th Army resumed its attacks on 23 September. Neither side had much ordinance that they could bring to bear on the situation and there was a lot of long range sniping across the heights. The outnumbered Italian Alpinists were slowly being worn down and neither of the regular Italian Infantry Divisions (2nd and 24th) to the west and east were able to send any significant assistance to the defenders of the pass since they had poor lateral mobility along the front which was divided by high peaks impossible for regular infantry to cross *en masse* absent specialist mountain training.

By 26 September, the Alpinists had lost half their strength in less than four days. Although both the Italian 2nd and 3rd Armies had become concerned about the growing threat to their rear flank they had sent no help to this remote sector and a retreat became inevitable. That night, the Alpinists pulled back under the temporary, consolidated command of the 8th Alpine Brigade which covered the retreat. The commanding brigade leader maintained that his

troops had held on two days longer than was militarily prudent and as far as anyone has subsequently been able to comment there is no reason to dispute this claim.

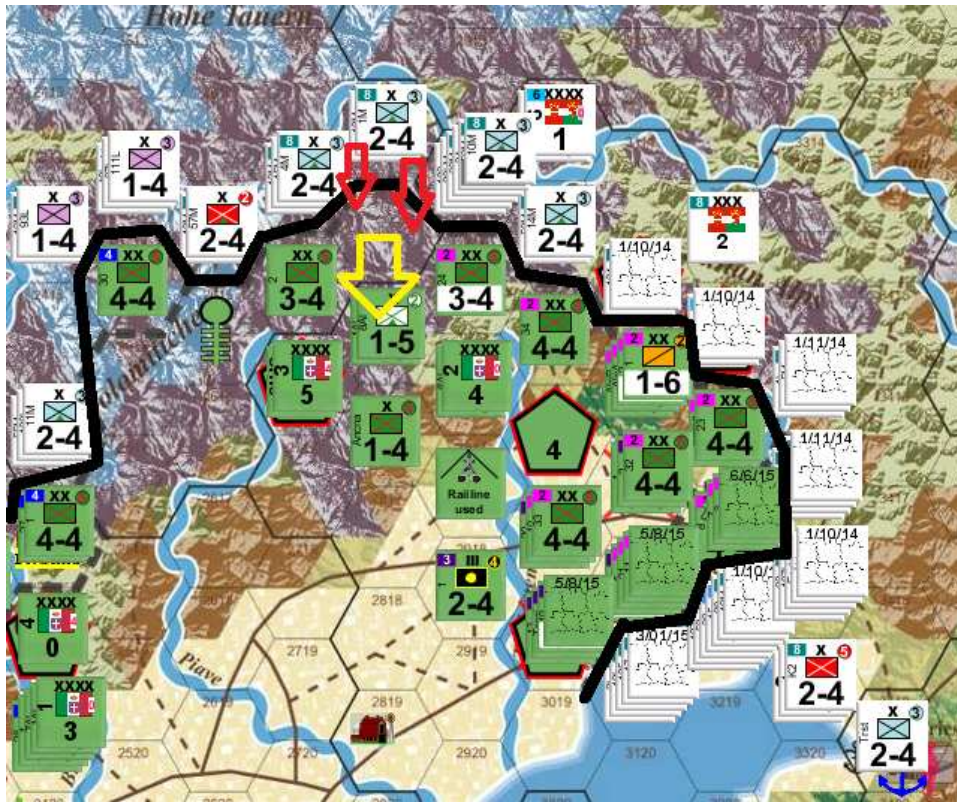


Figure 1: Under pressure from the Austro-Hungarian 6th Army, the Italians withdraw from the Passo Monte Croce di Comélico, 23 – 26 September 1915.¹

The Eastern Front

The Russian Armies were recovering some of their old confidence and between 25 and 26 September they moved forwards in two areas. In neither case were they immediately opposed.

First, the Russian 6th Army advanced about 40 kilometres between the Nieman and Shchara Rivers which enabled it to finally occupy the rail junction of Baranovichi (4-5N.0217) and move back into contact with the German 9th Army.

Second, the Russian 3rd Army closed the gap between the Russians in Volhynia (5th Army) and Podolia (8th and 11th Armies). This movement also brought the Russians into closer contact with the Austrian forces covering the eastern borders of the Hapsburg Empire.

¹ The publishers of this Centenary edition apologise for showing the Italian retreat as a big yellow arrow. No offense is intended. Unfortunately the proofs of the 1st edition, from which this illustration comes, cannot be altered. It is believed the colour was selected for its contrast only.



Figure 2: The Russian 6th and German 9th Armies move into contact with each other between the Nieman and Shchara Rivers in Belorussia, 23 - 26 September 1915.

The Balkans

The situation in the Balkans stabilised again after the recent operations in Albania.

The priority of the Central Powers was to resupply before the winter. This was a particular concern of the Austro-Hungarian 5th Army which was very ill-served by the terrible communications which supported its units in Albania and which depended on the inadequate roads across the Dinaric Mountains. This weakness had been a prime cause of the loss of Kolonje (7-6.0515).

The Serbians were still concerned about rebuilding their Army. Equipment was beginning to arrive at Salonika which would help rebuild units which had lost all their field guns and carriages during the retreats earlier in the year. The Serbians also had numbers of men who had escaped from their country but who had not yet been brought properly into the Army. Many of these were in the ships approaching Salonika.

The Near East

Munro taking command of the Allied forces at the Dardanelles had to deal straight away with the sickening consequences of the failure of the Australian's last attack on the Triple V position (as it was still erroneously called) (7-6.3812). The 2nd Australian Division was reconstituted with replacements within a few days but it would have been a foolhardy commander who even considered committing it to action again soon. If further sacrifices were needed then there were other choices that could be made.

There were no significant changes in the situation on the Egyptian or Mesopotamian fronts. Townsend remained in position covering Ali Gharbi as he awaited fresh supplies.

The Turks still faced a small crisis in the Caucasus due to the Russian penetration of the Coruh Valley. In reality, the Russians had only got a small force into this area. The Turkish cavalry succeeded in preventing the 1st Kuban Mountain Brigade reaching the road between Trabzon and Ezerum. Another impressive Turkish action was the march of the Turkish 1st Sinir (Frontier) Regiment which, between 23 – 24 September, forced marched across the untracked western spurs of the Dogukaradeniz Mountains. It arrived in time to block the movement of the Siberian Cossack Brigade which was trying to get forward and outflank the Turkish forces on the coast.



Figure 3: The Turks move to block the Russian advance in the Coruh Valley, 23 - 26 September 1915.

Player Notes

CP:

- *East: Another quiet period of impasse. My trenches are largely complete and there is no real desire for me to now be drawn out of position, and Robert is clearly not going to advance forward into a potential lion's jaws.*
- *Serbia: Quiet.*
- *West: My attack was a debacle (a 1/6 result in rolls!); so feeling chastened, my Germans sit tight.*
- *Caucasus: Quiet, with a small amount of manoeuvre to block his penetration.*

- *Mesopotamia: Quiet.*
- *Palestine: Quiet.*
- *Gallipoli: I am uncertain as to why he sacrificed an Australian division in his last attack, but he did. I cannot see the benefit of the Gallipoli foray anymore; other than to tie down some Turkish divisions.*
- *Italy: After destroying one of his Mt brigades I attack again in the same place. It is not easy for the Italians to replace losses amongst these elite Bersaglieri troops and, by attacking him, I hope it limits his opportunity to attack me.*

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	-*	-		-	3	615	Shaken *Pinsk lost
Italy	-	-	-	1	1	1		-	3	22	Good
Belgium	-	-	-	-	-	-		-	-	(96)	NA
Serbia	-	-	(1)	-	-	-		-	(1)	(29)	NA
Entente	5	2	15	14	14	1		-	51	1443	

AP: *The fact I am forced to give up a hex in Italy is proof that defending with 1 or 2 SP is not enough. If you want to hold, terrain and the temporary ability to stand without retreating is not sufficient if there are no replacements or reinforcements nearby and the enemy is persistent. The configuration of the front in Eastern Italy is potentially awkward to me now. The line bends back horribly on both sides.*

I am pleased by my movement in the Caucasus. If I can hold on in the advanced positions I have taken in the Coruh Valley, I will complicate his lines of communications and delay the arrival of supplies from the coast and I have a flanking position which may later develop into a threat to Erzerum.

Although a quiet turn on the surface there is continuous preparation for future offensives. Some of this is getting into position, some entrenching, and some waiting for supply or replacements to build up.