

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT98: 27 – 30 September 1915 (September 7).

General Situation

On 27 September, the Military Commandant of Emperor Franz-Josef's Household announced that the Austrian and Hungarian Royal Palace guards would be released for action at the front. It turned out that the guards constituted two whole regular Divisions (20th and 44th) which had been timetabled to be released to Conrad in August 1914, but because of the confusions of mobilisation had been left to continue their ceremonial duties.

The same discovery also revealed two Landwehr Brigades which had also continued guarding minor palaces and other sites of historic value in Bohemia and Western Hungary. Although these units had enjoyed a decorative function for decades, which had contributed greatly to the picturesque qualities of the Hapsburg realm, it was past time for the ancient and honourable Kosice Footguards (103rd Landwehr Brigade) to continue perambulating in dress uniform along the banks of the Hornad River ignoring the fact that the Russians had been forced several hundred kilometres to the east. They too would have to don the field blue and head towards the new industrial battlefield.

On the surface, the governments of Austria and Hungary kept up a confident façade which was bolstered by the recovery on the Eastern Front and the overrun of Serbia. Judging from the map, the Empire seemed to have weathered the initial storm and achieved some stability in the military situation.

Under the surface the outlook was not so great. For Austria-Hungary, this was now a three front war and the armed forces were at full stretch. The Italian Front had become a priority and the balance of force, in which the Austrians had three reinforced Armies, had recently allowed an encroachment of Italian territory. Inevitably the force deployed against Italy detracted from what could be spared against Russia. There the Austro-Hungarians had five Armies covering a front of 460 kilometres. Along this front, between Czernowitz and Zaricne (4-5N.0424) there were only five German Divisions providing support. Several recent actions on the Eastern Front had pointed to the vulnerability the Austrians might have dealing with a resurgent Russia and made the neutrality of Romania more important than ever. With these other two great burdens it was not surprising that the remaining Austro-Hungarian Army in the Balkans (5th) was good only for defensive operations and had lost ground in Albania in September 1915.

The Italian Front

Following the Italian withdrawal from the Passo Monte Croce di Comélico, the Austro-Hungarian 6th Army was able by 28 September to move forward as far as Auronzo di Cadore (6-4.2814). This was of course still deep within the mountainous zone and the Austrian advance quickly stopped as it encountered freshly deployed Italian forces which prevented further exploitation.

This invasion of the northernmost extremity of Italian territory was quickly known to the public authorities and the public in Italy and immediately prompted a passionate debate on the conduct of the war. Cadorna refused to allow himself to be drawn into any substantial comment and in his private communications with Ministers and the King simply maintained his demands for faster recruitment and greater supplies in which case he was confident all would end well.



Figure 1: The Italian Front showing the advance of the Austrian 6th Army, 27 - 30 September 1915.

The Eastern Front

The Russian 6th and 10th Armies completed their moves up to the Shchara River as far as they could. The German 9th Army nevertheless kept a substantial series of bridgeheads on the eastern side of this river.

The most significant fighting at the end of September occurred when the German 8th Army made an attack on the Russian 7th Army at Krevo (4-5.3604). On 27 September, the German 87th and 38th Reserve Divisions struck the Russian 58th Division from the south causing the Russians to fall back covered by cavalry. This show of aggression coincided with a conference at Stavka in which the manner in which the North West and West Fronts might approach Vilna was being discussed. The successful German action suggested that this goal might have to be delayed.

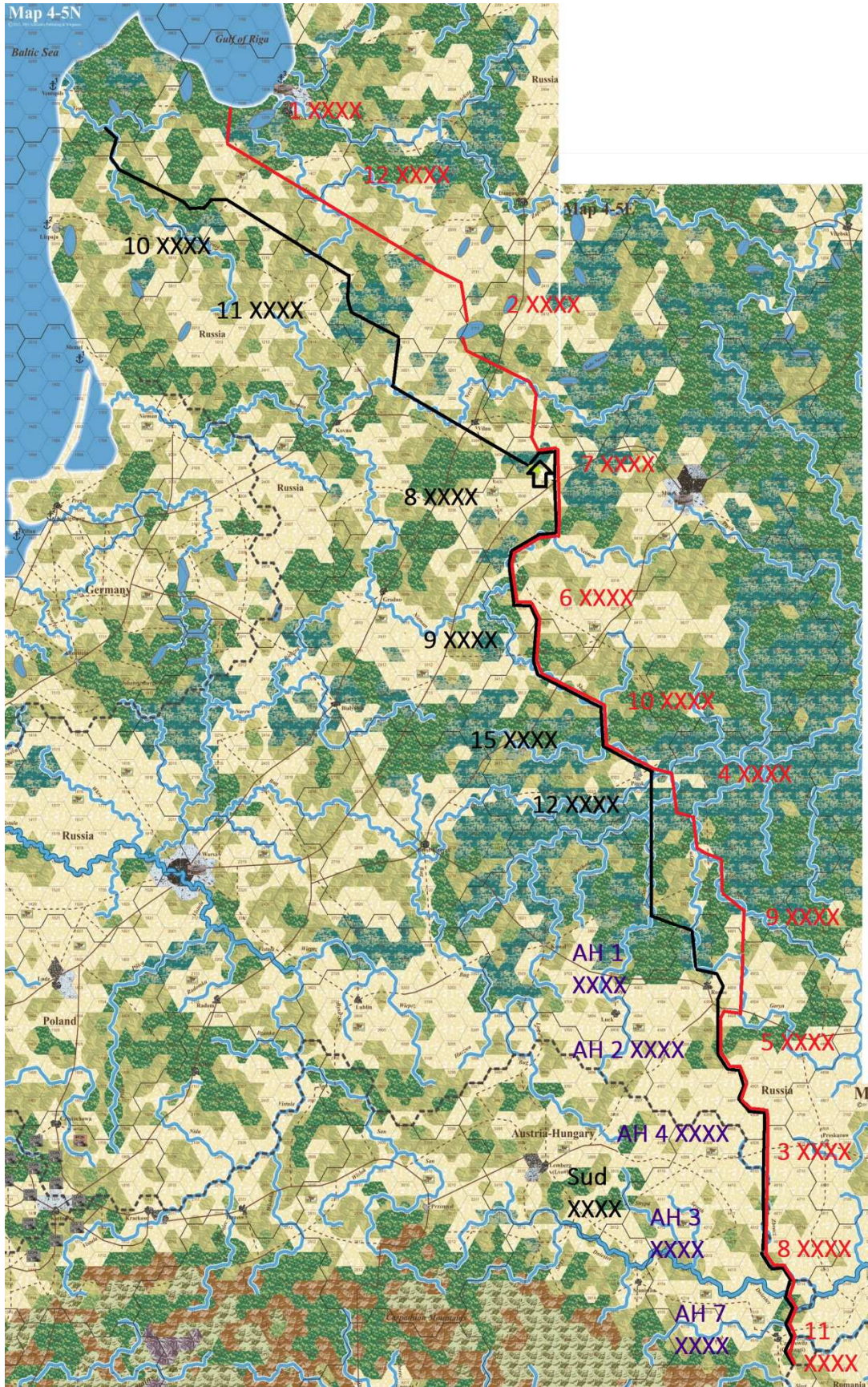


Figure 2: The Eastern Front showing the sometimes separated positions of the Central Powers (Black) and the Russians (Red).

The Balkans

In late September, Salonika docks were alive with unloading ships as the human and material elements needed to begin the refitting of the Serbian Army debarked.

For the Greek population this was a sign that the war was likely to become a bigger factor in their lives. The digging of trenches across the countryside was one thing. Several thousand hard-bitten Balkan soldier-refugees not yet incorporated into regular units and searching out the overcrowded tavernas of Salonika was a more immediate disturbance. The Greek Army had some regular units in Salonika which were mostly confined to barracks. This added to the frustration of their officers who, having led the liberation of the city from the Turks scarcely two years before, now wondered whether they would soon need to free it from the Serbians. The Greeks looked to the British for reassurance, but most of the staff of the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force was out of town seeking intelligence of what the Austrians and Bulgarians might be up to beyond the Greek border.

The Near East

On 28 September, Liman von Sanders reported to the government in Istanbul that in his opinion the invasion at the Dardanelles could be declared a failure. He praised the Turkish 5th Army fulsomely while not concealing his own part in its success. Von Sanders ascribed the victory to the failure of the Allied fleet to breach the Straights which he declared was impossible against the defences then in place. He praised the Turkish infantry for their absolute refusal to give up ground and for their economy in the use of artillery ammunition. Since May there had he declared been little risk of any substantial defeat.

Von Sanders praised the wisdom of the government in committing eleven Divisions to the defence of the peninsula and suggested that Germany would value an ally which did not call for help at the first appearance of the enemy. He numbered the Allied assaults which had been repelled by rifle, machine gun and bayonet. He reflected that the Allied attacks were getting weaker and concluded that if this continued the initiative might turn and it might be possible to drive the enemy into the sea.

There was therefore a revival of confidence in the Ottoman Empire. Djemal Pasha had also written to Istanbul and announced that he was planning another move forward in the Sinai Peninsula. This had begun on 27 – 28 September when Djemal led in person the Turkish XX Corps' marching 40 kilometres along the coastal road. The movement then paused for two days as Djemal was forced to address commissary problems in his line of communication. Regardless of this, a more forward Turkish policy now seemed to be in the offing.

The British campaign in Mesopotamia remained stalled. The Turkish 6th Army was in the process of being reinforced by a cavalry brigade which might be expected to range more freely as the summer subsided in the Tigris Valley.

The Russian thrust up the Coruh Valley was also stymied as the Turks deployed units threatening to envelop the Russian units which had advanced furthest. On 29 September, these Russians began to fall back abandoning therefore their goal of interdicting the critical Turkish communications between Trabzon and Erzerum. When Yudenitch heard this he instantly fired the commander of the III Caucasian Corps who he deemed had been dilatory in bringing up the supporting forces which might have prevented this opportunity being wasted.

The Western Front

The French continued the pattern of their recent operations. On 29 September, the French 7th Army made another move forward in the direction of Soissons. Everything suggested that Soissons was very strongly defended but the Germans only intended to make a fight of it in the area within 10 kilometres of the town and the French made no effort to penetrate this vital zone. Instead they contented themselves to occupying Villers-Cotterêts and Longpont (5-3.1115) and just beyond these places they found well dug in German forces in great numbers.

The Canadian contribution to the Allied effort on the Western Front was growing. The 2nd Canadian Division had arrived in France during September and had now moved up to the rear areas of the British front in order to be familiarised with the conditions there.



Figure 3: The Western Front showing German and Allied major attacks and Allied territorial gains in September 1915 (black line is positions at the end of the month)

DM Summary – September 1915 [showing % age of Shaken Morale]

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total [%SM]	Morale
Germany	-	-	10	12	13	-	1	12	48	920 [57.5]	Good
Austria-Hungary	-	-	1	5	1	-	-	-	7	420 [76.4]	Good
Ottoman	2	3	-	-	1	-	-	-	6	49 [14.0]	Good
Bulgaria	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	12	Good
Central Powers	2	3	11	17	15	-	1	12	61	1381	
France	1	-	-	-	6	-	-	-	7	644 [71.6]	Good
Great Britain	4	1	15	10	7	-	-	-	37	165 [12.9]	Good
Russia	-	1	-	3	-*	-	1	-	4	616 [102.7]	Shaken *Pinsk lost
Italy	-	-	-	1	1	1	-	-	3	22 [7.3]	Good
Belgium	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	(96)	NA
Serbia	-	-	(1)	-	-	-	-	-	(1)	(29)	NA
Entente	5	2	15	14	14	1	1	-	52	1444	

Player Notes:

CP:

- *East: Having said I was content to sit in my trenches, I still need to be flexible enough to seize offensive opportunity. This 8th Army does by pushing a salient forward south of Vilna and west of Minsk with a small attack into the open ground south of the marshes. I pushed some cavalry into the salient to ensure I could not be encircled. Unlikely, but Robert is a canny opponent who seizes the slightest opportunity and salient are dangerous.*
- *Serbia: Quiet.*
- *West: No offensive action.*
- *Caucasus: I have now manoeuvred to block his penetration.*
- *Mesopotamia: Quiet.*
- *Palestine: Quiet.*
- *Gallipoli: Quiet.*
- *Italy: I advance into Italian territory for the first time in the northernmost tip of Italy in the Dolomites.*

AP: As I closed the log file on this turn I started wondering if I was missing opportunities. I cannot claim to have made much progress in the last two turns notwithstanding my good reasons (as I see them) for keeping the tempo moderated at the moment.

I took another hex in France and it is also of course an invitation for the Germans to start a fight (saves me having to assault his trenches). That may be a small step forward but I was disappointed to have to pull back in the Caucasus. On balance it is not much to shout about.

I have not resolved the requirement to use supply for the Russians and French so the chances of another big fight in both the West and the East are rising and a final effort before winter makes sense. These two fronts are also where I still have decent opportunities at the moment. The next Italian effort is going to be quite tragic.

If we were playing Paths of Glory we would have now completed 6 Game Turns and the VP count would be 16 which is quite healthy for the CP I believe.