

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT108: 10 – 14 November 1915 (November 3)

General Situation

In Paris crowds gathered to celebrate the news from the front. Although the army bulletins emphasised that German resistance must be expected to strengthen again there was a new mood of hope. The slogan of the time was “à Metz, à Metz Sarrail”.

The fact that Sarrail’s 3rd Army had advanced on the anniversary of its success on the Côtes de Meuse in 1914 added to his reputation as one of the best French Army commanders. Joffre regarded him as a serious rival and began to take more seriously the idea of sending an expeditionary force to Greece – with Sarrail in command.

The Western Front



Figure 1: Lorraine the final French advance, 10 - 14 November 1915.

The Germans started to solidify their front in Lorraine as the Crown Prince began to exert direct leadership refusing to withdraw his headquarters away from front line around Port-à-Moussin (5-3.2317). However, the German 5th Army was still short of troops and the defence had to concentrate on holding the line of the Moselle River. The French cleared the whole area to the north of Nancy as

far as Pompey (5-3.2318). However, a river crossing was beyond them and by 14 November the fighting was over.

The British offensive in Artois was renewed on 12 November after a two day pause. Sir John French put a lot of hope into a rotation of troops in which shattered units were replaced by fresh ones and indeed this was quite well organised. What was not so well organised was the re-supply of the artillery that was to support the main attack at Wancourt and Guemappe (5-3.1009). The allotment of shells was inadequate everywhere and it was no secret that the infantry would have to go in after a short barrage that could not have more than minimal impact on the defenders. Some attempt was made to make a merit out of this weakness and the “plan” was to use surprise and morale to make up this deficiency. The Germans, however, were as alert as they could be and knew exactly what was coming and they even guessed where correctly.

The attack on Wancourt –Guemappe was a large factor responsible for ending Sir John French’s command of the British Army. It was a blatant attempt to salvage something from the already bad result of the fighting around Croisilles (5-3.1009) a few days previously. The units committed had too little time to understand and plan the details of their mission and they walked into a firestorm as they crossed no-man’s land early on 12 November. The Germans had a reinforced brigade of heavy artillery ranged to fire and two excellent Württemberg Divisions (26th and 27th) supported by the 1st Bavarian Division all concentrated close to the assault zone. In a few places the British infantry got into hand to hand fighting with the defenders but more often they were pinned down and any conspicuous bravery just led to higher casualties. The British 3rd Army report on 12 November simply said “*It is a mess*” and no elaboration of the details would have helped anything. Local attacks by the Canadian Divisions on the following day were little more than raids and just ensured that they had a proper share of the casualties. Hardly any ground was gained and most of what was gained was given up to effective German counter-attacks.

The Italian Front

Cadorna had a last attack before winter planned and this required moving reserves from the 1st Army sector opposite Trent to the 4th Army sector immediately to the east. This took longer than expected and the organisation of these movements was somewhat sluggish. Cadorna was forced to accept that no action could be taken before 17 November.

Meanwhile on 10 November, the Austro-Hungarian 6th Army had made an attack in the Julian Alps against the extreme left wing of the Italian 2nd Army. They made a thrust across the Nassfeld Pass and savaged an Italian Alpine Brigade holding the road down to Pontebba (6-4.3116). Two Italian Cavalry Divisions (1st and 2nd) in Pontebba rushed up into the mountains to help stabilise the situation and then helped the Alpinists drive the enemy back up to the pass. In the following days, the Italians strengthened their positions above Pontebba to deter any attempt to repeat this raid.

The Eastern Front

The most distinctive action on the Eastern Front was a new attack on 12 November by the German 10th Army against the Russian lines covering Riga. The sector in which they attacked was held by the Russian 41st Division whose headquarters were splendidly furnished in the old Ducal Palace of Pilsrundale (4-5N.1307). The Russian line was too thinly spread and had no hope of holding the

concentrated and well-coordinated German infantry for very long. By 13 November, the Russian 1st Army had ordered a general retreat behind the Aa River and meanwhile the Russian 12th Army was falling back towards Riga from the east. Since Riga was still considered an important city, which the Tsar could not countenance losing, two additional Divisions were sent by rail from the 2nd Army front around Daugavpils to further aid in the defence.



Figure 2: Riga is threatened again, 10 - 14 November 1915.

The remainder of the Eastern Front might best be described as confused. There were places where it appeared both sides were retreating at the same time! Generally, the Central Powers were making withdrawals in the Pripet Marshes and to the north. Mackensen's 11th Army had pulled back from its move towards the Dvina which now had to be regarded as a feint. On the Russian side there was considerable reluctance to be drawn forward though there were mixed opinions on this. Some officers pointed out that Rovno and Pinsk could easily be liberated but for the moment these did not prevail.

The Balkans

There was very little going on in the Balkans. The Bulgarian and Austro-Hungarians were digging in and now seemed content with their withdrawn lines.

The Serbians and Allied forces pointedly made little effort to build trenches and signalled thereby their intention to resume the advance at the next opportunity. The shift of Serbian forces out of Albania was now complete. That country was to be left to the Montenegrins and Italians.

The Near East

On 11 November, the Turks came into contact with the entrenchments at Romani (8-8.1138) once again. The British garrison in Egypt was always anxious about such direct threats to the Suez Canal and it had been agreed that the 3rd Division would be sent to Egypt from the Dardanelles from where it embarked between 13 – 14 November.

The Indian 2nd Division marched into Kut on the Tigris on 12 November. By this time it was clear that the Turkish 6th Army had retired about 30 kilometres upstream. The Indian 3rd Division found the Turkish forces on the southern bank of the river just beyond the cultivated zone. Another advance into arid country would be difficult for the British force.

The Caucasus front was now quiet as the two sides rested after the recent Russian advance.



Figure 3: Kut falls to the British, 12 November 1915.

DM Summary – November 1915

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total	Morale
Germany	6	15	7					11	39	998	Good
Austria-Hungary	1	-	1					1	3	436	Good
Ottoman	1	-	-					-	1	53	Good
Bulgaria	-	-	-					-	-	14	Good
Central Powers	8	15	8					12	43	1481	
France	4	2	-					-	6	671	Good
Great Britain	-	14	15					-	29	198	Good
Russia	3	1	2					-	6	649	Shaken
Italy	2	-	1					-	2	41	Good
Belgium	-	-	-					-	-	(96)	NA
Serbia	-	-	-					-	-	(31)	NA
Entente	9	17	18					-	44	1556	

Player Notes

CP.

- *East: The northern Russian armies have indeed scuttled behind their sanctuary line – less the 1st Army screening Riga. I have been gradually shifting the 12th Army – probably my strongest in Russia – from the central region to the NW of the front and they are now in contact with the Russians and linking up with the 10th Army. This creates a powerful threat to Riga. I am attacking with elements of 10th Army against a trench occupied by 41XX of 1st Army plus an Engr Regt. He will lose at least half of the 41XX unless he retreats; in which case he will lose the Engrs. Rock and a hard place. Along most of the rest of the front I fall back to prepare winter positions.*
- *Balkans: I have started preparing a new defence line in the Balkans which is just close enough to my rail LOC to be tenable.*
- *West: His follow-on offensive against my positions SW of Metz annihilated the entire defensive force and allowed him to occupy the position and threaten Metz itself. This places me in a difficult position and I am forced to also withdraw from the adjacent trenches to the SE, back into the Metz fortifications. I am obliged to rail and laterally shift forces to provide enough defence to Metz. His British attack was less successful and resulted in terrible casualties for the British. They, however, can afford it and absorb the losses. The French executed a fantastic attack with minimal loss.*
- *Caucasus: Quiet.*
- *Mesopotamia: Quiet.*
- *Palestine: The raiding force penetrates deeper across Sinai.*

- *Gallipoli: Quiet.*
- *Italy: I attack him from out of my fortifications abutting the Italian Alps in the NE. He has no offensive supply left so it is my opportunity to take some nibbles out of his forces – although his cavalry here make it less of a concern for his supply chain.*

AP: I have to be pleased with the outcome of my French offensive – two hexes given up and only one of those voluntarily. The British on the other hand are only interested in bashing the Hun and since they have almost run out of supply I must accept a poor loss ratio.

Here are some guidelines for attacking in DWK when Morale starts to become a concern:

- i) Make use of defence if possible. Counterattacks are best for inflicting losses and since you are not trying to win anything and have the decision on retreat (sometimes) and supply (if you have any) it is possible to control the outcome to some degree;*
- ii) Try and avoid having GCR 22 control your attacks. To avoid this use supply on counterattacks and be wasteful of supply when you do attack;*
- iii) Allow Morale to control attacks. Attack where there is a Morale advantage and moderate the frequency of attacks according to the losses you can afford;*
- iv) Limit the number and size of counterattacks. Choose one big attack over two small attacks and search for weakness;*
- v) Guideline iv) becomes more and more important as Morale declines. If there are no weaknesses then the attacks must be made as big as possible and Artillery is a big help. Don't attack unsupplied and use up the supply on Artillery.*

Most of the time, I am trying to keep to these guidelines. Russia is making use of defence at the moment and even Italy. I will get better loss ratios in defensive battles than in most attacks on these fronts.

My British and French attacks this month were required by GCR 22 and the French have been subject to a requirement to use some supply each month since the summer. A big offensive has used up enough supply to allow me some flexibility in the next few of months as public opinion has now been satisfied.

Morale is rather complex. Obviously British Morale is better than German Morale at the moment in the sense that the British can still contemplate suicidal frontal attacks. Whether French Morale is better than German Morale is more difficult. It depends not just on how much Morale is left but also on the way in which it is envisaged using up the remaining Morale and when. I have to be very careful how I play the French and this has been true since October 1914.

The last two rules are also basic requirements to control loss ratios. The French offensive this month was not the biggest possible attack but was the biggest attack that could be made without alerting the defence in advance so that it would be reinforced. Once it began, I piled as many SP (infantry and Artillery) and supply into it as could possibly reach the battle.

