

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT36: 1 – 5 January 1915 (January 1)

General Situation

The winter was a good time for the statisticians and the accountants to make their contribution to the war effort. Economic science had advanced far enough to reduce industry to numbers and given enough information it was possible to do a calculation that might predict when the enemy powers might run out of men and be forced to give up the struggle.

For the Central Powers' there was some satisfaction in knowing they had been better prepared for the production of war material and in the supplies directly required to keep the guns firing. This was chiefly because of Germany's armaments industry. By the end of the year, the Austrians were improving their capabilities but the Entente was also starting to catch up and the German advantage would inevitably erode further in time.

On other measures, the outlook was much more favourable to the Entente. Most of the European powers had already dug deep into their manpower with their large standing armies and the reserves that had already been called to the colours. Germany had a large population but could not match Russia in this respect despite the inefficiencies of conscription under the Tsar. Austria could raise barely half the manpower of Germany despite having fewer industrial demands, the agricultural sector in Hungary, especially, being protected from excessive conscription. France facing a national emergency was digging deep but the efficient mobilisation in August 1914 had reduced the manpower pool remaining. Britain had large untapped manpower reserves but needed these to grow its army from the small size it had begun with. France and Britain also added Colonial manpower into their resources. The first Canadian Division was being trained for deployment to the Western Front in early 1915.

It was not enough to be able to find new recruits. They had to be supported by a whole infrastructure needed to get them to the field of battle fully equipped. Here again, the Entente had major advantages and, by early 1915, they already out produced the Central Powers by more than two to one.

These advantages would take some time to come into play, at least six months, but it was a further pressure on the Central Powers and would encourage them to continue to seek a quick decision in the war and favour other short term measures to try and preserve their early advantages. Already in January, Falkenhayn had sketched out an expansion of the German Army in his Memorandum 46 – 1 which was to be implemented as soon as possible. This expansion was also a reorganisation that would in due course see a reduction in the front line strengths of German units.

Both sides also hoped to gain more allies in 1915. None was more wooed than Italy. However, Austria could do nothing right in the eyes of those Italian politicians who were trying to move events towards an Italian intervention for the Entente. In fairness, Conrad's repeated calls for a pre-emptive invasion during the previous decade would justify a certain amount of Italian wariness. The Italians had a good spy network led by a onetime playboy and bankrupt minor aristocrat of Trieste who styled himself "Count Vassali". He periodically sent to Rome annotated maps indicating which railways were being used by the Austrians. On 3 January 1915, he sent a map still to be found in the

Most parts of the Eastern Front were also inactive in the New Year. This was mainly due to the need for the Germans and Austrians to resupply. Significant reinforcements were also heading to this front and the German 8th Army in Prussia was assigned four fresh Divisions which were expected to upset the balance of forces in a region which had been quiet since September.

The 8th Army was already committed to its campaign on the Narew but on 1 – 2 January, the 37th Landwehr Division turned north and pushed forward to Biella (4-5.2211) as Russian cavalry gave up ground in the face of a show of determination.

Sometimes in warfare a small event can cause unexpected and wider consequences. The Russian forces in Masuria were suffering from poor discipline. Many of the infantry units there were Finnish and their relationship with the Russian cavalry was not good. New Year celebrations had been allowed to get out of hand. They were still going strong four days later. It was not even New Year on the Russian calendar, but the Finnish soldiers didn't worry about such details. This would not have mattered but the greatest supplies of vodka were held by the headquarters staff of the 3rd Finnish Brigade.

The Brigadier, suffered from depression to the point where he was a celebrated case in Finland. He was among the most incapacitated. One can only imagine the confusion of his mind when he heard that Biella had fallen. The 3rd Finnish were at Johannesburg (4-5.2111) with Biella in their rear. The obvious military reaction was to retreat north east, but the Brigadier declared that such a minimal move was impossible for his force. Sober historians have demonstrated this would have been quite easy to do. It involved one river crossing and a march through a forest. Surrender was discussed, but rejected. Instead orders were given requiring the whole brigade to attack the German fortified positions at Schimonken. And so, on 5 January, the 3rd Finnish Brigade made one of the most hopeless and incompetent attacks of the war. When it was over, the Germans found very few survivors that could be taken prisoner.

Serbia

There were no developments of note in the Balkans.

The Near East

The Tigris Corps remained stalled outside of Kut. It was clear that the Turks were reinforcing their defences there and there were indications that further units were on their way from Baghdad. As the Tigris Corps was also advised that it would be reinforced¹, a clash around Kut was expected sooner or later.

The retreats by the Turkish 3rd Army in the Caucasus continued. The Turks had fallen back to the junction of the Aras and Elskirt Valleys. The Van Corps had also pulled back and the Russians were moving forward from North West Persia. These actions, according to some historians, were driven by a power play of the command of the 3rd Army which did not share the priorities of Enver Pasha and the government in Istanbul. To the higher officers of the 3rd Army it made no sense to keep their forces on Russian soil without adequate supplies to sustain an offensive. They preferred to shorten their lines of communication and force the Russians to come after them.

¹ It wasn't, the theatre commander, Nixon promised more than was logistically possible.

It took some time for the news of this to filter back to Istanbul. When it arrived, Enver Pasha feared a coup was being plotted. He could find no justification for abandoning so much defensible terrain. If Sarikamis had been a prestige objective for the Turks then it could have been the same for the Russians. How much blood would they have been prepared to give up to get it back? Now they did not need to.



Figure 3: Russian advances towards Lake Van, 1 - 5 January 1915.

January 1915 DM Situation

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total	Morale
Germany	-							9	9	583	Good
Austria-Hungary	-							5	5	234	Good
Ottoman	-							NA	-	10	Good
Central Powers	-							14	14	827	
France	-							-	-	552	Good
Great Britain	-							-	-	62	Good
Russia	2							NA	2	275	Good
Belgium	-							NA	-	(95)	NA
Serbia	-							NA	-	(12)	NA
Entente	2							-	2	889	

Players Notes

CP: *The start of a new year. I have racked my brains trying to come up with a simple table for managing the production phase. I have attached my final result which gives all the necessary info. I lack the necessary skills to be able to set up a workable Excel spreadsheet which can do some of the maths just by inputting fresh data – sadly, as I'm sure there is a simpler way. However, if anybody wishes to read into the workings, my table is attached.² It should make the calculations simpler. Most notably the German army has commenced a reorganisation.*

- *East: I send a large proportion of RPLs and all of the reinforcements eastwards, along with nearly 50% of the supply. It will take a while to get there. I also launch a single attack against a weak cavalry screen along the Pregel river SE of the Schimonken forts. I expect him to withdraw here and allow me to seize a cheap bridgehead which will threaten his entrenched positions SE of the Nikolaken forts with encirclement.*
- *Galicia: Nothing significant. I spend the turn moving supplies and RPLs to the front, with some elements heading for the borders with Italy.*
- *Serbia: Nothing of note.*
- *West: All quiet on the Western Front. A turn of moving supplies and RPLs forward and shoring up trenches. My trench lines have penetrated deeply into France, but I'm not sure they are sustainable. My length of frontage is immense. I may look to shorten my lines.*
- *Caucasus: Turks continue to fall back towards Van (commenced with at the end of Dec 14); opting not to fight deep inside the mountains of Russia to no apparent benefit but significant disadvantage. Sarikamis was a prestige target which the Turks have proved they could capture; there was no detriment to Russia and no gain to Turkey other than pushing deeper into inhospitable terrain. Now they fall back to better defensible and sustainable positions.*
- *Mesopotamia: No change.*
- *Palestine: Nothing of note.*

AP: *I have not much to say about this turn. It looks as if the Germans are again shifting their point of attack and this time will focus on the northern part of the Eastern Front. I have some weakness there including especially in the light forces covering the Masurian forts. By use of railway movement, the Germans have already established the conditions to make a break through there if they wish.*

I have compounded the problem by throwing away the 3rd Finnish Brigade in an attack that was based on a mistake. Under time pressure I misinterpreted the situation and wrongly thought I could not do a minimum move to withdraw. To avoid a surrender, I made a suicidal attack. How gamey is that? I am not sure, the Germans were obliged to counterattack though so this may not be an abuse everyone can use.

I am not sure I agree with Ivor's thinking on the Caucasus. It is true the Turks had little capability of going further forwards, but I do not see the need for pre-emptive retreats. I would like to capture

² On a separate document.

Ezurum, if I can, and start inflicting some DM on the Turks and force the Germans to send more aid. The Turks cannot avoid fighting the Russians if the Russians want to but I do not see the problem with staying as far forward as possible. Each hex is potentially a costly gain.

Production Totals

Supply

Date	Ge	AH	Ot	Bul	CP	Fr	Br	Rus	Be	Se	It	Rom	Gr	US	Ent
Oct 14	77	18	-	-	95	20	18	10	-	-	-	-	-	10	58
Nov 14	77	18	-	-	95	20	18	10	-	-	-	-	-	10	58
Dec 14	77	18	2	-	97	20	18	10	-	-	-	-	-	10	58
Jan 15	77	26	2	-	105	30	18	20	-	-	-	-	-	10	78

Weapon Production (+drawdown on pre-war stockpiles)

Date	Ge	AH	Ot	Bul	CP	Fr	Br	Rus	Be	Se	It	Rom	Gr	US	Ent
Oct 14	42 +43	23	-	-	108	27 +70	50 +20	50	-	-	-	-	-	-	217
Nov 14	42 +26	23	-	-	91	27 +70	50 +20	50	-	1	-	-	-	-	218
Dec 14	42 +7	23	2	-	74	28 +30	50 +20	50	-	-	-	-	-	-	178
Jan 15	42	23	2	-	67	27	50 +20	50	-	1	-	-	-	-	148

Manpower (Colonial)

Date	Ge	AH	Ot	Bul	CP	Fr	Br	Rus	Be	Se	It	Rom	Gr	US	Ent
Oct 14	69	36	NA	-	105	41 (+8)	59 (+13)	80	2	6	-	-	-	-	209
Nov 14	70	37	NA	-	107	39 (+8)	59 (+13)	80	1	6	-	-	-	-	206
Dec 14	70	37	NA	-	107	39 (+8)	59 (+13)	80	1	6	-	-	-	-	206
Jan 15	70	37	NA	-	107	39 (+8)	59 (+13)	80	1	6	-	-	-	-	206