

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT38: 10 – 14 January 1915 (January 3)

General Situation

The Turkish retreats in the Caucasus and in Iraq were becoming more widely known in higher military circles in the Entente. This suggested that the Ottoman Empire was indeed the “Sick Man of Europe” and this tempted those who feared the consequences of the grinding and costly land war to speculate that a traditional decisive victory was most likely to be gained in the conflict against Turkey. This analysis did not seem to take note of the fact that the Turkish retreats had been voluntary strategic withdrawals and might have been part of a plan to draw the Allies in so as to better defeat them.

Studies were being progressed nonetheless to report back to London and Paris on the possibility of a landing in Turkey. The secret “Dossier 58” was being put together and pulled apart. The Russians were supportive as they had been promised Constantinople. No firm decisions had yet been made but the engineering work on Mudros demonstrated that there were concrete preparations being made even if only for the contingency. And, there was little real secrecy in play. Istanbul was well aware it was threatened and the completion of the defences of the Straights was a priority for the Turks and kept a significant part of their army immobilised by the necessary labour.

The Eastern Front



Figure 1: The Germans recapture Arys, 11 January 1915.

The only active sector on the Eastern Front was that in Masuria. It had become clear to Rennenkampf, commanding the Russian 1st Army, that the Germans were making a major effort to turn his left flank and break his contact with the rest of the Russian Army. Fortunately for the Russians the German advances were rather slow and the German reservists had a reluctance to tussle with the Russian cavalry which was performing rather well in delaying actions. The Germans had committed the newly formed 75 – 77th Reserve Divisions to this front. Their inexperience showed, on 11 January, when they suffered heavy losses clearing the 1st Finnish Brigade out of Arys (4-5.2210).

Serbia

The Austro-Hungarian 6th Army increased its activity pushing four brigades of mountain troops into the salient they held on the Zlatibor Ridges (6-5.1313). While the Serbians detected growing strength in this sector and began shifting reserves to respond to it, the poor weather continued and it was hoped this would deter an attack.

The Near East

In Egypt, the British command was subject to a reorganisation on 12 January. The defence of the Suez Canal was designated to the XVI Corps. This did not then appear to be an especially arduous mission as the Turks were keeping very much to themselves on the opposite side of the Sinai Desert. A new headquarters was formed which was now named the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force. It was ordered to consider, in conjunction with the Royal Navy and the French, plans for an amphibious attack on Turkey. The 1st Australian Division was assigned to it. Additional supplies to support such an operation were on their way to the Eastern Mediterranean from Great Britain.



Figure 2: The Mesopotamian Corps attacks, 14 January 1915¹.

The Mesopotamian Corps relying on misleading communications from General Nixon at Basra, expected to be soon reinforced with the arrival of two more brigades. The British commander,

¹ The above version of the map taken from the Official History was drawn by Townsend's staff who mistakenly believed reinforcement by the 31st Brigade was imminent. In fact this unit was still in the vicinity of Qurna, held up by logistical difficulties.

Townsend deemed this a good moment to attack but he did not envisage a direct frontal attack on Kut. Instead he left one solitary brigade (the Imperial) on the right bank of the river and concentrated the rest of his force on the opposite side. The 16th and 28th Indian Brigades were sent on a wide flanking move some distance into the desert as far as the dykes and waterways that led to the region known as the Hai. The Turks had a regiment raised from the Baghdad Jandarma which was at the southern extreme of their line (7-9.3823). On 14 January, the Indians attacked out of the desert and having had nothing but marching to do for weeks, the assault was made with enthusiasm. This led to losses among the attackers but the Baghdad regiment was completely broken up.

The Turkish retreat in the Caucasus continued as did the Russian pursuit. Both armies concentrated on marching through the difficult terrain in winter and avoided unnecessary fights. The commander of the Caucasus Army reported to the Grand Duke that he was only 50 kilometres from Erzurum on 14 January.

The Western Front

The Germans began withdrawing from the Montmiral Salient (4-3.1317) on 10 January. Three days later most of the Germans had left. The French became aware of this movement and patrols reported that Montmiral could be reoccupied without difficulty. However, caution prevailed. Joffre recalled how the German had withdrawn from the vicinity of Paris at the end of October 1914. This had led the French forward but, before their positions had been properly entrenched, the Germans had launched the 2nd Battle of the Marne driving them back again. As a result, the French 6th and 9th Armies put Montmiral under observation and, as if to explain their reticence, it was widely reported that the town had been left with a devilish mine which would explode as soon as the French set foot there.



Figure 3: The German withdrawal from the Montmiral Salient, 10 - 13 January 1915.

January 1915 DM Situation

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total	Morale
Germany	-	1	2					9	12	586	Good
Austria-Hungary	-	-	-					5	5	234	Good
Ottoman	-	-	1					NA	1	11	Good
Central Powers	-	1	3					14	18	831	
France	-	-	-					-	-	552	Good
Great Britain	-	-	1					-	1	63	Good
Russia	2	1	1					NA	3	277	Good
Belgium	-	-	-					NA	-	(95)	NA
Serbia	-	-	-					NA	-	(12)	NA
Entente	2	1	2					-	5	892	

Player Notes

CP:

- *East: I continue to push out from the Masurian Lakes to drive the Russians away from my borders and the defence of the river line there. This attack is expensive in using 6 supply, but it guarantees he will have to withdraw before he can reinforce this position and will render some of his other entrenched positions untenable. For the rest, I continue to move HQs and RPLs around to start a reorganisation of my eastern forces.*
- *Galiccia: Nothing significant. Much reorganisation as RPLs are absorbed.*
- *Serbia: Nothing of note.*
- *West: No attacks, but I relinquish my positions SW of Epernay (Montmiral) and start to concentrate reserves to the north of the Marne – entraining several divisions to be ready to shift rapidly to any locations of opportunity. Hopefully this reserve capability causes some concern amongst the TE general staffs. I also start the construction of a depth line of trenches along the north bank of the Marne.*
- *Caucasus: Turks have now reached Erzerum and start to consolidate their line. I'm sure this backwards movement, after taking Sarikamis, has shocked the Russians. I hope I am not making a massive error with this.*
- *Mesopotamia: No change, although I have been gradually building up at Kut.*
- *Palestine: Nothing of note.*

AP: This was another quiet turn. There are a few potential attack opportunities for me at the moment but I want to keep my powder dry for a bit longer. In particular I would like to know whether the Central Powers are indeed in the process of a major shift to the East or whether the movements seen so far are a feint which might cause me to drop my guard in the West.

I wouldn't advance into Montmiral because the Germans retain the capability of striking the hex with 80 SP. I would like to see some of those Divisions rail away before I expose myself to defending another hex with no defensive modifiers. This could be a trap.

I think my attack in Iraq may be my first in the Near East. I seem to have done OK without actually attacking. I am still puzzled by the Turkish retreat in the Caucasus.