

## Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT100: 6 – 9 October 1915 (October 2)

### General Situation

Who in Europe could get away from this war that now had the Continent entrapped in an apparently endless conflict?

It was possible for civilians and even some military persons to have a week or so away from it should they divorce themselves from all society and perhaps rent a remote cottage for a few days of peace. Even so every piece of mail or newspaper which you might dare open or pick up would bring some reminder of the reality. Many scoured publications hoping to discern the pattern of events and even find the key to how it would all end. Equally every communication might contain awful life-changing news. For some families it was necessary to steel themselves each time the postman called or there was a telegram to be collected.

### The Near East



Figure 1: The Turkish Camel Regiment turns the position at Romani, 7 – 8 October 1915.

In Egypt, the Indian 18<sup>th</sup> Brigade held the trenches which the British had constructed covering Romani (8-8.1138). This was the advanced position covering the approach to Port Said. On 7 September, the Turkish column which had crossed Sinai began appearing in front of the Romani trenches. By then the Indian troops were packing their bags as they had been alerted to the flanking movement of a Turkish camel regiment in the desert to the south. The retreat began the following morning as the 18<sup>th</sup> Brigade headed toward the Suez Canal and safety. The Turkish advance was at least as threatening as that of March 1915 but the British had arranged for the 10<sup>th</sup> (“Irish”) Division to be despatched to Egypt from the Dardanelles. By 9 October, the first troop ships were approaching Port Said.

The stalemate around Ali Gharbi persisted. The British were, however, envisaging a new push towards Baghdad toward the end of the year. A new Division (4<sup>th</sup> Indian) was on the passage to the Persian Gulf and reserves were already being organised in southern Iraq. The Turks in contrast could not look forward to any reinforcement in the near future. The Dardanelles and the Caucasus fronts were the Turkish strategic priorities judged from the numbers of Divisions committed.

Little was happening in the Caucasus. The Turks had stabilised the front but additional Russian units were being transported south from Rostov and these would arrive on this front in the coming days and weeks.

### **The Western Front**

The French continued to grind forward in tiny steps in Picardy and in the Champagne. At each point the men were ordered to dig in, but it took time to build an effective line of trenches and each day brought heightened fears of another German counter-attack.

The Germans were also busy and their efforts also seemed dominated by the needs of defence. The trench lines which they had now on the Western Front particularly in Northern France were extremely formidable. Allied officers who had had a good look at them were challenged if they held a belief that these could be taken in any ordinary attack.

### **The Italian Front**

Cadorna's build up in the Isonzo was unmistakable. The Austro-Hungarian air force was not the most impressive of the era but the concentration of Italian Divisions along the line Campoformido – Udine – Cividale del Friuli (6-4.3017 and 6-4.3117) could not have escaped their attention for long. Naturally, the Austrian command on the Italian Front could not know where the Italians would strike next or when but they had a good idea that the next major push was overdue and the infantry in the trenches were warned to be on the alert.

### **The Eastern Front**

The fighting east of Vilna continued. On 6 October, the German 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Armies began moving forward on a wide front. This would bring Vilna itself once again within the proper protective zone of the German Army. In the end, Hindenburg had been unable to resist the pressure to retain this significant Polish city (as it was then perceived) even though the German commanders on the Eastern Front found it hard to discern any military value in it.

The German advance meant that the two sides were moving into closer contact though the Russian 2<sup>nd</sup> Army had its main positions some distance to the north beyond the River Neris. On the German right flank, however, there was a clash between the German 8<sup>th</sup> and Russian 7<sup>th</sup> Armies at Zhuprany (4-5.3603) in Belorussia. The Germans made an attack along the single-track railway led by the veteran 41<sup>st</sup> Division which badly mauled the Russian 5<sup>th</sup> Grenadier Division on 7 October. The Russians then withdrew further east and their retreat was covered by a swarm of cavalry.



Figure 2: The German 8th and 11th Armies move to cover Vilna, 6 - 9 October 1915.

## The Balkans

Newly formed Serbian units were moving towards the border from Salonika. At the front no operations were attempted beyond the routine activities of improvement of positions and reconnaissance. The last major action had been the movement forward of the Italians and Montenegrins in Albania after the Battle of Kolonje (7-6.1515). This had left a small salient in the Austrian position in the isolated Valley of Devoll (7-6.0715). Very few regular troops of either side operated in this space and patrols of both sides circulated there with trepidation. The bridges across the fast flowing rivers were down and the only way in was via upland paths that only locals knew.

To say the Devoll Valley was controlled by the Austrians at all was contestable and was based on the fact that the most effective authority in the area was a renegade Croatian Major-General who had the dubious reputation of being the only known deserter of general officer rank yet known of in the war. He ruled the valley with a mob of fellow deserters of every Balkan nationality who substituted the war of nations with the rough fellowship of thieves. His main stronghold was the gothic ruin of the Castle of Valamare towering on a high rock looming over the cowering town of Kolkë. Under the "General's" ungentle regime the whole area was devastated and even young children went about armed to the teeth.



Figure 3: The Front in Albania and South West Serbia showing the Devoll Valley salient , early October 1915.

## DM Summary – October 1915

| Nation                 | 1  | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Food Deficit | Month | Total [%SM] | Morale |
|------------------------|----|---|---|---|---|---|---|--------------|-------|-------------|--------|
| <b>Germany</b>         | 11 | 1 |   |   |   |   |   | 11           | 23    | 943         | Good   |
| <b>Austria-Hungary</b> | 3  | - |   |   |   |   |   | -            | 3     | 423         | Good   |
| <b>Ottoman</b>         | -  | - |   |   |   |   |   | -            | -     | 49          | Good   |
| <b>Bulgaria</b>        | -  | - |   |   |   |   |   | -            | -     | 12          | Good   |
| <b>Central Powers</b>  | 14 | 1 |   |   |   |   |   | 11           | 26    | 1407        |        |
| <b>France</b>          | 12 | - |   |   |   |   |   | -            | 12    | 656         | Good   |
| <b>Great Britain</b>   | -  | - |   |   |   |   |   | -            | -     | 165         | Good   |
| <b>Russia</b>          | 6  | 2 |   |   |   |   |   | -            | 8     | 624         | Shaken |
| <b>Italy</b>           | -  | - |   |   |   |   |   | -            | -     | 22          | Good   |
| <b>Belgium</b>         | -  | - |   |   |   |   |   | -            | -     | (96)        | NA     |
| <b>Serbia</b>          | -  | - |   |   |   |   |   | -            | -     | (29)        | NA     |
| <b>Entente</b>         | 18 | 2 |   |   |   |   |   | -            | 20    | 1464        |        |

Player Notes:

CP: *Not this time.*

AP: *Reaching GT100 is an opportunity to calculate how the two sides are progressing towards some kind of outcome. The table below shows a straight line extrapolation of DM since the beginning of the game.*

*If the game continues at the same pace as the first 100 turns, it will end in July 1916 with an Entente Marginal Victory. This is when Austria will surrender. Before that France will suffer an Economic Collapse in June 1916 which will deny the Entente a Decisive Victory. The situation is not so unbalanced either because on this projection France will also surrender in October 1916 and a relatively modest change of Austrian and French loss rates could give the Central Powers a Substantial Victory. The Austrians also only just beat the Russians to surrender by a few turns.*

*This is not realistic. Loss rates have declined dramatically since 1914 and if the extrapolation is based on more recent action in the last 50 turns the outcome would be different. However, the Austrians are still vulnerable to surrender just that they will keep this from happening until December 1917.*

*At current loss rates none of the other major powers are going to surrender, though Russia will still do so in October 1916 and Bulgaria in January 1919. The Germans also face Economic Collapse in November 1918 and they only just scrape through 1919 without surrendering.*

*The message of this number crunch is that the CP's vulnerable point remains Austria. Austrian loss rates have reduced but not by enough. At this stage of the game it is relatively difficult to protect Austria from losses because the Germans have limited access to the Austrian sphere of influence.*

| Threshold                                     | Effect on                                  | Rate T1 - T100<br>DM per turn | Date                         | Rate T51-T100<br>DM per turn | Date                           |
|---|--|-------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Germany<br>Economic<br>Collapse               | Prevents CP<br>Marginal<br>Victory         | 9.43                          | GT 191<br>November 2<br>1916 | 5.46                         | GT 358<br>November 1<br>1918   |
| German<br>Surrender                           | Entente<br>Victory                         | 9.43                          | GT 250<br>July 5 1917        | 5.46                         | GT 459<br>After 1919<br>(just) |
| Austria<br>Surrender                          | Entente<br>Victory                         | 4.23                          | GT 165<br>July 4 1916        | 2.10                         | GT 280<br>December 2<br>1917   |
| Ottoman<br>Surrender                          | CP resources<br>cut off                    | 0.49                          | After 1919                   | 0.76                         | After 1919                     |
| Bulgarian<br>Surrender<br>DM 125              | CP resources<br>cut off                    | 0.12                          | GT 1042<br>April 3 1927      | 0.24                         | GT 571<br>May 4 1920           |
| Bulgarian<br>Surrender<br>(German DM<br>2450) | CP resources<br>cut off                    | 9.43                          | GT 259<br>August 7 1917      | 5.46                         | GT 377<br>January 6<br>1919    |
| Britain<br>Economic<br>Collapse               | Prevents<br>Entente<br>Victory in<br>1919  | 1.65                          | After 1919                   | 1.90                         | After 1919                     |
| Britain<br>Surrender                          | CP Victory                                 | 1.65                          | After 1919                   | 1.90                         | After 1919                     |
| France<br>Economic<br>Collapse                | Prevents<br>Entente<br>Victory in<br>1919. | 6.56                          | GT 161<br>June 7 1916        | 1.60                         | After 1919                     |
| France<br>Surrender                           | CP Victory                                 | 6.56                          | GT 183<br>October 1<br>1916  | 1.60                         | After 1919                     |
| Italy<br>Surrender                            | None                                       | 0.22                          | After 1919                   | 0.44                         | After 1919                     |
| Russia<br>Surrender                           | None                                       | 6.24                          | GT 169<br>August 1 1916      | 5.68                         | GT 176<br>September 1<br>1916  |

*The defeat of Russia would help save Austria and even at current loss rates Russia will not last beyond 1916 and will have to disengage if it is to stay in the game longer. This should give Austria relief whether or not Russia actually collapses. Loss rates on the East Front will decline as Russia weakens so therefore the prognosis for Austria is perhaps excessively negative reflecting the fact that the East was the focus of a major campaign in 1915 that is unlikely to be replicated in future.*

*The Entente's weak point is France but in the last 50 turns the French loss rate has been dramatically reduced and this will have to change if the CP is to compete for victory. Should the French losses rise again closer to the higher rates of the first 100 turns then France will be in trouble again in 1917-18 and Germany and Austria may outlast her.*

*In this analysis we can see that Italy has hardly got going and in fact will be a wasted resource of the Entente unless they increase the tempo of their action.*

*The same is even true of Great Britain but this is the Entente's reserve strength as France and Russia weaken.*

*Bulgaria is also stable at present having not been engaged significantly since the Serbian retreat. The analysis shows that on current trends Bulgaria will collapse early in 1919 because of German demoralisation.*

*It may also look as if the Ottoman Empire is secure based on current performance. This is misleading as the rate of attrition could easily rise further. It is also the case that Ottoman morale is vulnerable to the loss of cities in Iraq, Palestine and Syria and if there is a collapse of the defence in any of these fronts then the situation will rapidly spiral towards surrender. This risk is not factored in to these projections.*

*It should be apparent that this analysis must be qualified by the fact that the players are always reacting to the developing situation and they do have quite significant capabilities to vary the intensity of action on different fronts up or down and the threat of defeat will promote efforts to negate that danger. For instance Germany can protect Austria by keeping up attacks on Russia and France can be protected by an aggressive Britain.*

*Another lesson from this is that victory in DWK is actually not a simple issue and several critical thresholds of DM need to be monitored at the same time. It should also be clear that although DWK is a very long game and it can seem victory is a long way off, the victory conditions have an impact even at this stage of the game. With the score as it is there will be a temptation for either side to go for victory in 1916 but this could prove a chimera if (as is likely) the rate of destruction cannot be maintained.*