

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT101: 10 – 14 October 1915 (October 3)

General Situation

In mid-October, the war was once again at full pace. The commencement of the 2nd Isonzo Offensive attracted the interest of the world. The Italians were still relatively new to the war and had not yet had such an exposure to the inevitable catalogues of mistakes and disasters the other nations had suffered. It was still just about possible to believe that the King of Italy would ride a white horse into Trieste before the year was out. Every intellectual who could get a hearing was saying that the Hapsburg Empire wouldn't last through 1916. A French socialist journalist who added that neither would Russia or France survive until 1917 was arrested but escaped to Switzerland before he could be charged with any concrete crime.

There was one other positive but distant benefit of the Isonzo attack. The Italian influence in the American shipyard unions was enough to break the strikes there and get supplies moving if they were destined for Genoa.

The Italian Front

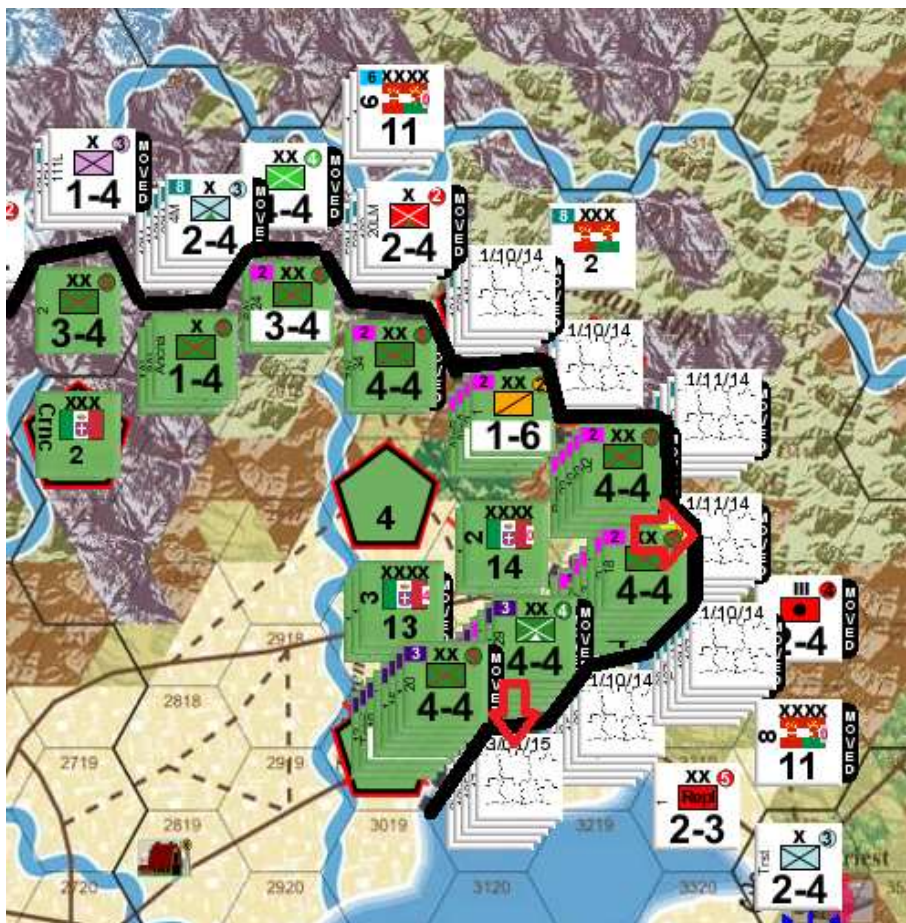


Figure 1: The 2nd Battle of the Isonzo, 12 - 14 October 1915.

Cadorna finally set the date for the second Isonzo Offensive to begin on 12 October and both the Italian 2nd and 3rd Armies were required to attack in different directions. In confirming his orders, the Italian Chief-of-Staff was obliged to ignore warnings from the commander of the Carnatic Corps that the Austrians were still building up their forces in his sector and a further attack in the mountains could not be precluded.

The Italians had so far no more than small footholds on the eastern bank of the Isonzo and the defences of the Austro-Hungarian 8th Army were skilfully placed. Italian heavy guns were in fairly short supply but there were just enough, in Cardorna's estimation, to crack some of the most solid targets.

The Italian 3rd Army was committed to attack the coastal flank of the Hapsburg positions and its objective was Ronchi (6-4.3119). There were eight Italian Divisions thrown in to the action over the space of three days. The defenders had all possible river crossings covered and despite the great daring of the Italian infantry one assault after another was stopped in its tracks mostly by machine gun fire.

The Italian 2nd Army was simultaneously pushed forward across the same river between Plave and Canali (6-4.3317). The country rose steeply around the river valley and the Austro-Hungarians took every advantage they could take from the high ground which allowed them to overlook all Italian movements which were always subject to casualties. Progress on the ground was minimal as every effort to advance quickly came up against insuperable barriers.

At Padua, Cadorna waited for two days in a vain hope that some useful report of the action would come back to him. An Austrian communication had been found in their trenches in which an officer had expressed his fears that *"...an attack [was] coming... [the Italians] have tremendous strength along the Isonzo..."* However, the Italian Armies were so caught up in their own struggle they neglected to keep their leader informed. He bitterly complained that he only could tell what was going on by adding up the casualty returns.

Despite all the difficulties of the Italians, they nevertheless commanded enormous firepower if only because of their great advantage in numbers. The Austrians never had more than a quarter of the men utilised by the Italians and they had the further disadvantage that their heavy artillery had been delayed getting to the Plave sector and was still at Želin (6-4.3417) on 14 October when the Italian attacks began to finally cease.

The Eastern Front

The German Army on the Eastern Front was increasingly active again. After the move to cover Vilna, the German 10th and 11th Armies extended the forward movement across the Baltic Provinces and reduced the gap between them and the main bodies of the Russian Armies in the North West Front (1st, 12th and 6th from west to east).

The German 8th Army was still in action in western Belorussia following up its success against the Russian Grenadiers. On 11 – 12 October there was a fierce fight at Kreva (4-5E.0111) and this time it was the turn of the Russian 107th Division to be battered as they tried to hold on to a small line of hills that broke up the otherwise low lying terrain.

Another significant German operation was the crossing of the Shchara River in remote country near the junction with the Yasel'da (4-5E.0219). Here the German 12th Army worked in conjunction with the 15th Army to get three Divisions (30th, 33rd and 1st Wurttemberg Reserve) across the river on 10 October. In doing so two Divisions of the Russian 10th Army were pushed aside and the whole Russian West Front was endangered where it had thrust forward recently toward the Shchara. The Russian 10th Army was forced to order retreats on 12 October and the Tsar received a telegram from the commander, Radkevitch, stating that he feared for the safety of Baranovich (4-5E.0217) and didn't think it could be saved.



Figure 2: The Shchara Crossing, 10 - 14 October 1915.

The Balkans

On 10 October, the Austro-Hungarian 1st and Bulgarian 1st Armies began a series of short coordinated retreats. The Austrians pulled back in Central Albania bringing their front back to Tirane and the Bulgarians gave up the southern extremities of Serbia generally falling back 20 kilometres from the border in three days.

This gave the Allies some opportunities to move forward which they began to take. The Serbian 2nd Corps was able to move into Monastir on 13 October. By sending the Macedonian Division to undertake this mission the Serbian Army was guaranteed a popular reception in a region where Serbians themselves were not so welcome.

At the same time, the Serbian 3rd Corps moved up the western side of Lake Ohrid which they found abandoned by the Bulgarians. Further west the Italians and Montenegrins reached the Shkumbin River. As part of these operations, the Serbian 1st Danube Division (actually no stronger than a weak brigade) moved into the Devoll Valley (6-4.0715) and ended there the short lived reign of the Croatian deserter “General”. The bandit he had replaced as the master of Castle Valamare was in the train of the Serbian unit and he got re-possession of his property with their help. The “General” disappeared into a dungeon under the castle until he was sensationally rescued in 1939 and sent to have a well-publicised lunch with Mussolini who was then trying to cultivate Croat separatism.

The Near East

During the night of 11 – 12 October, the British secretly moved the Royal Naval Division by boat from Sulva Bay (7-6.3711) down to Beach 3712 (7-6.3712). The plan was to make a surprise attack on the Turks still holding a narrow corridor between the British and French bridgeheads. The Naval Infantry were intended to scale some low cliffs adjacent to the beach and drive the enemy off the heights further inland (7-6.3812).

The plan was overcomplicated and the sailor-infantry were wet through when they went into action due to a combination of difficulties in getting the infantry unloaded from the sea flank and incessant rain throughout the day.¹ When the first attack was unable to get an adequate foothold on the heights on 12 October, the attempt was repeated twice more with mounting losses on the two following days. Just as the Australians had found, it proved entirely possible for persistent attacks against the Turkish positions to gut a British Division in the space of a few days. The mood in the Allied camp was growing very grim as it was openly questioned whether it was seriously intended to destroy one unit after another in futile efforts to scratch the defenders who seemed utterly immovable.



Figure 3: The Turks pull back from the Canal region, 10 - 14 October 1914.

¹ Sailors recalled this as a “soak-off” attack. It seems to have later entered military parlance as a sacrificial attack but in origin it may have just meant everyone involved was very wet which might more naturally occur in the Navy or Marines.

In Egypt, the Turkish force which had advanced to the outskirts of Romani (8-8.1138) turned around on 10 October and disappeared as fast as they had arrived. No significant attack had been made and the British 10th Division landed at Port Said in the next few days only to discover they were no longer needed.

The other Ottoman Fronts remained inactive. Terrain and logistics made all attacks in those regions difficult and periods of action had to be interspersed with long periods of preparation.

The Western Front



Figure 4: The German attack at Longpont, 10 - 12 October 1915.

The French knew that as they nibbled away at the German positions on the Western Front they would continue to provoke reactions as the enemy sought to prevent them gaining advantageous ground immediately in front of their main defences. One such spot was at Longpont (5-3.1215) to the south of Soissons. The French 9th Army was trying to consolidate its hold on this area with its XXVII Corps when, on 10 October, the German 2nd Army made a sudden powerful attack which forced the French to give up the small town.

The French then tried to rally during the next day with the Algerian 38th Division going into action along with other uncommitted units. However, the French soon discovered they were counterattacking into the teeth of a growing German concentration which now included elements of the German 3rd Army. Faced with such overwhelming firepower, the French had little alternative but to pull back to safer positions. The only thing to be thankful for was that the German pursuit was limited because in fact they were not interested in a deep advance but only in disrupting the French

efforts to establish themselves close to their front. There was a lot of intensive shelling in this action which continued even as the infantry fighting died down on 12 October.

DM Summary – October 1915

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total [%SM]	Morale
Germany	11	1	10					11	33	953	Good
Austria-Hungary	3	-	5					-	8	428	Good
Ottoman	-	-	1					-	1	50	Good
Bulgaria	-	-	-					-	-	12	Good
Central Powers	14	1	16					11	42	1423	
France	12	-	9					-	21	665	Good
Great Britain	-	-	4					-	4	169	Good
Russia	6	2	6					-	14	630	Shaken
Italy	-	-	13					-	13	35	Good
Belgium	-	-	-					-	-	(96)	NA
Serbia	-	-	-					-	-	(29)	NA
Entente	18	2	32					-	52	1496	

Player Notes

CP:

- *East: The more I look at the Russian dispositions and reinforcements, the more I realise how dangerous he is becoming again. He may be constrained by Shaken Morale, but all he needs is one devastating attack against the AH forces to knock them off kilter. If it were synchronised with efforts in the Balkans and Italy, it could over-face AH's ability to deal with the multiple demands. I must therefore continue to make the AH defences strong in the south whilst looking for opportunity to keep attriting away Russians and eating into their supply. As a consequence, I make two attacks this turn; against 10th Army along the Shehara River in his centre and where I hope to gain a bridgehead and thus threaten his whole line along the Shehara and Niemen rivers, and a little further north between Vilna and Minsk where he has a mixed cavalry and infantry force just on the edge of the marshes, but not protected by them.*
- *Balkans: I am too far forward, protecting nothing of real value and threatening nothing – all far from my rail LOCs. So, I start a gradual strategic withdrawal of all my forces – AH and Bulgarian – back into the interior where I can better sustain myself and draw him in.*
- *West: After three bad attacks, I try my luck with a 4th. My withdrawal had always intended to shorten my line but also hoped to draw his French forces into open ground where, without trenches, I could try and smash his divisions bit by bit. Push his DM up enough and he would have to be very cautious about offensive action, thus relying more on the British who have limited space to attack over. It hasn't happened – my loss ratio has been far too high. I still need to make this attack, however.*

- *Caucasus: Quiet.*
- *Mesopotamia: Quiet.*
- *Palestine: I had hoped to encircle and annihilate his brigade east of Suez, but that is now impossible after his withdrawal. So, to attack would cost me 2-3 supply and 1-3 brigades worth of troops to, at best, whittle down his brigade. Not worth it, so I commence moving back to Palestine through the Sinai.*
- *Gallipoli: Quiet.*
- *Italy: There is an attack coming –he is building up tremendous strength along the Isonzo.*

AP: War is terrible, but what I love about this game is...It is 1915 and a static period of the war but it is not dull at all. Action is flaring up everywhere. New situations abound. Even on the least mobile fronts the action shifts from one sector to another. Every big loss hurts. There is great uncertainty as to whether we are doing the right thing.

There are strong incentives to act historically. I have not exactly rushed to make a second attack on the Isonzo, but now it is my best shot of putting some quick pressure on the Austrians as the Russians are getting battered by the Germans. The advantage of Isonzo attacks is that they are the only ones on the Italian front which avoid mountain terrain and are therefore not at half strength. If I was very lucky I could inflict 6 losses with these attacks and “achieved” a 5:13 loss ratio in fact.

Overall this is one of the best turns for the CP recently with an overall loss ratio of 2:1 against the Allies. That is a result of my having to make disadvantageous attacks in Italy and the Dardanelles and due to the imbalance of German and Russian combat power. The attack in France was more costly for Germany, but it is almost always a good thing for them to be exchanging losses with the French. It is also good for me to take 5 losses of the Austrians but that Italian attack cannot be repeated very quickly.