

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT102: 15 – 18 October 1915 (October 4)

General Situation

In progressive circles, for many decades, you were nobody if you had missed a legendary party held in the flat above the Bloomsbury office of the Committee of the Friends of Serbia, just opposite the British Museum, on the 17 October 1915. The occasion was supposed to be to toast the recapture of Monastir. However, in the intervening days stories had arrived of the Hapsburg Armies dissolving and the Serbian Army was said to be advancing unopposed liberating towns and villages everywhere. There was a spontaneous uprising of the Balkan peoples taking place in which old enmities had been forgotten. The Bulgarian Army had mutinied and laid down its arms and revolutionary cells were preparing to announce national liberation across the whole of south-eastern Europe.

A few more days would show that little of this was true but these supposed facts were unquestioned during this gathering. Nevertheless, on the cusp of a revolutionary moment, the Committee and indeed everyone at the party split into two groups, the New (Romantic) (“N(R)”) Slavophiles and the Old (Revolutionary) (“O(R)”) Slavophiles. The O(R) Slavophiles were in the ascendant even before the last drinks were served and the expulsion of the N(R) faction was achieved in a small period of time even though the revolution never happened and because the O(R) would not tolerate being reminded of this.

The Eastern Front

German activity on the Eastern Front continued to discomfort the Russians whose recovery since the summer was now being thrown into doubt.



Figure 1: The German advance on the Baltic Coast, 15 - 18 October 1915.

There was a new locus of fighting on the Baltic coast where the 3rd Wurttemberg Reserve Division captured Jurmala (4-5N.1105) on 16 October causing the Russian 3rd Division to pull back from the Babite isthmus. The Russian 1st Army reacted to this development by concentrating two brigades of high calibre guns at Kalnciems (4-5.1106) which could bring the coast roads being used by the Germans under fire. However, no attack was authorised as the North West Front was under strict instructions to preserve artillery shells for some future offensive. Thus the initiative was completely surrendered to the Germans.

A worse situation was developing for the Russian West Front which was trying to fight off the advance of the German 15th Army which had struck across the Shchara River and was threatening the whole Russian position from there as far north as the Nieman. On 16 October, the German 30th and 19th Reserve Divisions claimed that they had advanced up the railway and were less than 20 kilometres from the rail junction at Baranovichi (4-5N.0217). They reported that they had engaged at least two Russian divisions which were then falling back through Baranovichi.

Both the Russian 6th and 10th Armies were in danger from this advance and the decision of the 10th Army to retreat to prepared lines further east determined the action of the 6th Army in addition. Along a front about 100 kilometres in length the two Russian Armies started a rapid withdrawal which was already in motion during the night of 16 - 17 October. Many units had to break contact with the Germans and then had to march 80 kilometres to get to their new positions. Most achieved it by late evening on the 18 October. In 1941, this textbook retreat was studied greatly by the Red Army who unfortunately for them would not so easily escape. The 10th Army commander, Radkevitch did himself have a notably easier withdrawal because, at 1510 hours on 17 October, he and his staff boarded the last train leaving Baranovichi at a small station some distance north of the town (4-5N.0317). Radkevitch had a long career ahead of him in Russian Armies of various guises. He was reputed to be a popular leader but he was ever after known as "Railway Radkevitch".

The Balkans

The inaccurate rumours which circulated in London concerning developments on the Balkan Front were in part caused by the surprise which the Central Powers' retreats had caused. Between 10 and 16 October, they had retired about 50 kilometres from the Greek border and apparently given up the southern half of Albania. It was natural perhaps for the Allied troops who witnessed this before they had made any substantial attacks on the enemy positions to assume it must have been because of some internal collapse within the enemy countries.

The truth however was that this was another retreat by the Central Powers for purely military reasons. The positions they held at the southern extremities of Serbia and in southern Albania had been very uncomfortable and as winter approached the priority was to base the defence on stronger lines. It may have been part of the calculation (though the documents which might prove it were never found) that the border defence had only ever been intended as a temporary expedient which could not be sustained when the Bulgarians had overenthusiastically blocked a number of mountain roads upon which their own communications depended. In fairness to the Bulgarians they had been obsessed with all round defence since it had seemed to them that attack from the rear by the

Macedonian population was no more incredible than attack from the front by people from New Zealand.¹



Figure 2: The Central Powers retire in the South Balkans, 10 - 18 October 1915.

The Near East

As the war in the Near East approached its first anniversary it remained static. Whether you considered the Dardanelles; the Sinai; the Tigris campaign; or that of the Caucasus everywhere action seemed bogged down in stalemate. The Russians and British just could not get the better of the Turkish infantry when the latter were dug in and determined not to retreat. The only hope seemed to be to throw more men at the problem and gamble that this would be enough.

The Russians had so many difficulties on their main front that they could only spare a little strength to augment their forces in the Caucasus. Two more Divisions (143rd and 144th) were on their way there in the autumn but Yudenitch was warned to expect nothing else until the spring at least.

The British were not going to reinforce the Dardanelles bridgeheads and London was clearly looking for an excuse to shut down this strategic embarrassment. Some argued for switching the effort to the Balkans and they were encouraged by the fall of Monastir. Nevertheless Kitchener retained considerable suspicion of Balkan operations and instead favoured a more Imperial policy. The Turks, he reasoned, should not be let off the hook but they would be better attacked through Iraq and Sinai. A sign of this policy was the orders given to the 10th (Irish) Division to embark again at Port Said. It had been concluded that the solution of the logistical problems of a Sinai campaign still needed some months' work. It would be better for this Division to go to Mesopotamia and this was confirmed as its destination.

¹ This is a gentle critique of building trenches in difficult terrain. It often only makes the defence weaker than it would be if there was no trench because it makes little or no difference to the defence die roll modifiers, the ability to resist retreat (stiffened defences), and because the movement penalty makes the arrival of reserves more difficult.

The Western Front

The Western Front in Flanders and Picardy had been considerably straightened out by the campaign since the summer. There was still one significant salient held by the Germans (5-3.0912). This ran in an arc from Villiers-Brettoneaux looping to the south-west of Amiens. It then turned south-east running along the line of the small River Avre which was often dry and not shown on small scale maps.

The French 10th Army viewed this Avre Salient with some suspicion for it might be a launching position for the Germans to attempt to retake Montdidier. Joffre agreed and he had ordered the French 5th and 10th Armies to cooperate to liquidate the position at the first opportunity. By mid-October, everything was in sufficient readiness and six Divisions were designated to attack on 17 October. The Germans had a good idea of what was coming and by that date they had reduced the defence to a skeleton and when the French advanced this soon disappeared. Once more the French had overcome a phantom defence and the real line of resistance was met next day covering Peronne and Roye (5-3.1012).



Figure 3: The French overrun the salient on the Avre, 17 - 18 October 1915.

The Italian Front

The Italians could not keep up their attacks on the Isonzo. Thirteen Divisions had reported losses of between 20 and 30 percent in their infantry strength and to continue with supplies running low for the guns would have invited disaster. That Cadorna was unprepared for such a scale of losses must be undoubted. There simply were insufficient replacements at hand to keep critical formations at or near full strength. By contrast, the Austrian 8th Army reported on 16 October that its front line units were back at the same strength as they had been on 11 October before the Italians had attacked.

Therefore despite all the carnage, the Italians could be forgiven wondering what they had achieved with their sacrifices.

DM Summary – October 1915

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total [%SM]	Morale
Germany	11	1	10	3				11	36	956	Good
Austria-Hungary	3	-	5	-				-	8	428	Good
Ottoman	-	-	1	-				-	1	50	Good
Bulgaria	-	-	-	-				-	-	12	Good
Central Powers	14	1	16	3				11	45	1426	
France	12	-	9	-				-	21	665	Good
Great Britain	-	-	4	-				-	4	169	Good
Russia	6	2	6	4				-	18	634	Shaken
Italy	-	-	13	-				-	13	35	Good
Belgium	-	-	-	-				-	-	(96)	NA
Serbia	-	-	-	-				-	-	(29)	NA
Entente	18	2	32	4				-	56	1500	

Players Notes

CP:

- *East: Two more attacks against the Russians. My limited withdrawal has had the effect of drawing them out into terrain more favourable for me to conduct attacks. Some are still risky. Both of these attacks come with some risk of failure for a reasonable high expenditure of supply. The first is from the successful bridgehead I seized over the Shchara River. If this succeeds, it will force his whole line to fall back into open ground where I can attack with better advantage. The 2nd is more risky and is along the Lithuanian coast west of Riga. Success here will threaten Riga itself and force his 1st Army to reconsider their entire defensive line.*
- *Balkans: I continue to fall back, drawing the mixed Anglo-Italo-Serb-Montenegrin line with me.*
- *West: No offensives this time. I forced a French withdrawal last time – even if not an outstanding attack result, which compromises his attempt to establish a solid line of trenches abutting my own.*
- *Caucasus: Quiet. Neither side possesses any clear advantage here; so I suspect this gradual jockeying for position will continue until one side has enough of an advantage to risk an attack. The pressure being maintained on Russia by the Germans, I hope, keeps them from massing any effective force against the Turks. This war is a coalition affair, after all.*
- *Mesopotamia: Quiet.*
- *Palestine: The raiding force continues to withdraw.*

- *Gallipoli: Another 4:1 loss to the CW forces. I see what he is doing. He can make these attacks without real consequence to CW DM. Every loss to the Turks, however, has enduring effect. He is degrading TU strength and thus TU morale.*
- *Italy: The expected attack along the Isonzo was delivered in two places. As with CW losses against the Turks, his Italians can afford the losses far more than can AH. The best I can do here is to deter.*

AP: This does not feel like a great period for me. I am worried that the Germans are drawing the Russians into another extended fight in the East. To avoid escalating it, I rejected opportunities for the Russians to make one or two attacks on that front.

I am not sure what to make of the Balkan retreats. I guess I am being tempted forward in order to stretch my supply lines and shorten his. I will be reasonably cautious but since the CP has little power to make a strong counter-strike in this area I think it is safe to go forward so long as I do not spread out too much.

The pattern of the French campaign continues. I do not enjoy the large attacks the Germans have been making but to gain position I am prepared to risk them. I closed down the last salient in Picardy this turn because I didn't want the Germans using it to concentrate a bigger attack against Montdidier.