

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT103: 19 – 22 October 1915 (October 1915)

General Situation

Although the overblown expectations of the London Committee of the Friends of Serbia had little reality on the ground, it would not be entirely wrong to say there was a crisis in the Balkans for the Central Powers. On 19 October, Falkenhayn found on his desk a fairly stiff missive (copied to the Chancellor and the Kaiser) from the Bulgarian Government. Within days it would be joined by other complaints from Istanbul pleading for equipment needed for the war. The German Chief-of-Staff for good military reasons was inclined to discount what was going on anywhere south of the Carpathian Mountains. No single German soldier had yet gone south of those peaks.

The Bulgarian Ministers wanted to know what help they were ever going to get from Germany or indeed Austria. They pointed out that their forces held the whole frontier with Greece which was very long and all the Austrian forces were concentrated in Albania. Falkenhayn read this point with some sympathy for it did not require great military insight to realise the war would not be won in Albania.

The Bulgarians were quite specific in their concerns. They had joined the current retreat, they said, purely to conform to the Austrian withdrawal despite the limited pressure on their front and despite the fact that they had to surrender some of their own “territory”.¹ Sofia also pointed out that it would not take many more retreats to reach Sofia and the railway which linked Germany with the Ottoman Empire.

The Balkans

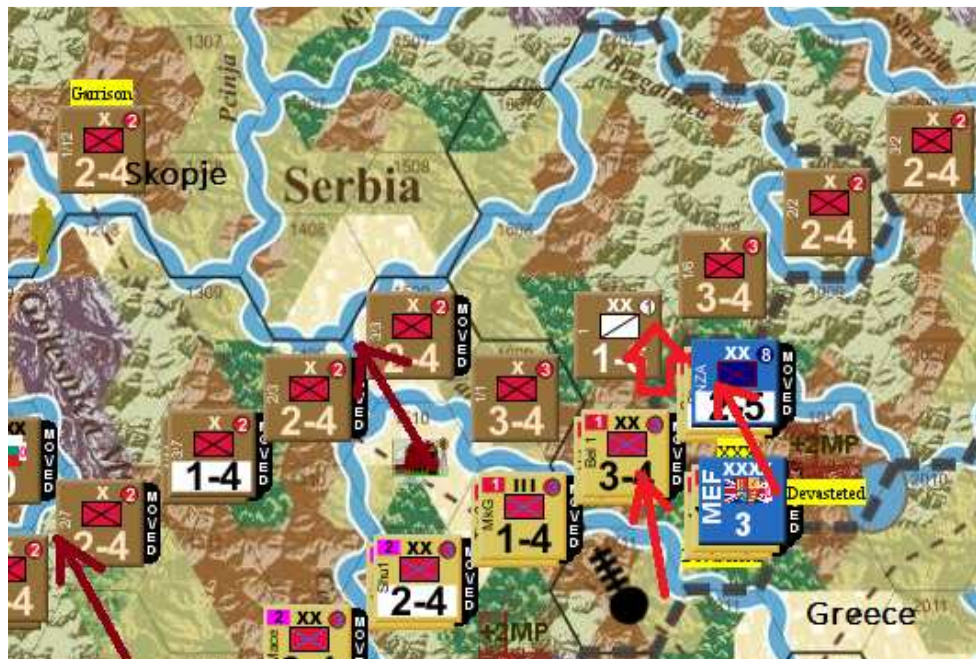


Figure 1: The Battle of Radoviš, 21 – 22 October 1915.

¹ The Strumica Valley had only been in Bulgarian hands since the Balkan Wars.

The Balkan theatre was still in the ferment caused by the Central Powers' retreats. Two Turkish Divisions were on their way to the Greek frontier as Istanbul realised that its interests were at stake in this campaign. The Austrians made no attempt to defend central Albania and the Italians and Montenegrins secured Durrës and Tirane by 21 October.

In southern Serbia, the Serbians cautiously followed the retreat as they lacked the manpower to do something more vigorous. The local population could not easily decide whether they were being invaded or liberated. The Serbians found few young men that might have been drafted into their ranks as they occupied this territory and there was therefore no solution yet for Serbia's shortage of soldiers.

The Serbians did, however, have some allies in action. At the eastern extremity of the Serbian line, the Serbian 1st Corps was advancing with the support of the New Zealand Division (though it too was very understrength). The New Zealanders had moved into Bulgaria on 17 October and had reached Strumica (7-6.1809) on 21 October. This was an area which the Serbians had wanted to take back from Bulgaria during the Balkan Wars and now there was an opportunity to do so under the cover of this fresh conflict. Ahead of the New Zealanders, there was a tough no-hold barred cavalry fight between Serbian and Bulgarian mounted troops in the high hills around Radoviš (7-6.1709). On 22 October, the new Serbian Volunteer Division supported by the grizzled veterans of the Obrenovac Brigade pushed into the small town. This was a small but valuable moral victory for the rebuilding Serbian Army even if they had to disband their Cavalry Division after what had been a hard fight for them.

The Near East



Figure 2: The Turks abandon their positions around Ali Gharbi, 19 - 22 October 1915.

The most significant development in the Near East was a change in the Mesopotamian Front. On 19 October, the Turkish 6th Army began withdrawing from their entrenchments around Ali Gharbi. They had a twenty four hour head start over the pursuit by the British-Indian force which was further

delayed by a very cautious advance through the abandoned Turkish positions. The Turks had effected what destruction they could to the already limited communications of the country. A few broken dykes were able to slow the enemy by several hours.

At the Dardanelles, the Turkish defenders were increasingly conscious that they had already stopped the invasion and might indulge a little the thought of driving the surviving Allied troops into the sea. An appraisal of this dated 20 October by General Kemal for the Turkish 5th Army was more realistic and recognised that to attempt this would lead to a bloodbath. Kemal asked General von Sanders whether he could prevail on the German General Staff to send assistance for an offensive operation. Von Sanders was doubtful that they would get a positive response but agreed that the request should be made.

The Western Front

There were no major operations conducted by either side. There was planning. The German 3rd Army also came close to executing a large attack against the French front at Châtillon-sur-Marne (5-3.1316) but this was cancelled a few hours before the start time on 20 October. The Germans knew that the French had some elite units in this sector (2nd Colonial, 45th Algerian and 47th Mountain Divisions). In close terrain and with a river crossing needed the German 3rd Army found it difficult to assess what resistance they would face and decided it would be better to consider the options further.

The Italian Front

The Italians licked their wounds following their last effort on the Isonzo. The time for further action before winter was decreasing. Nobody with any knowledge of the situation from the Italian side believed any more that an advance to Trieste was possible this year. Only a week or two previously such opinions would have been so unacceptable that they could hardly have been declared.

The Eastern Front

The German 10th Army made further advances on the Babite isthmus reaching the mouth of the Northern Dvina (Daugava) on 20 October and establishing themselves on the very outskirts of Riga at Mezares (4-5N.1204). This foothold, held by the 3rd Wurttemberg Reserve Division, was admittedly not very strong but the Russians showed no sign of any capability or even intent of evicting them.

The other German success was the capture of Baranovichi (4-5E.0217) by the German 15th Army on 19 October. By this time the Russians had pulled back another 30 kilometres and the Germans enjoyed their new conquest in peace. For those citizens of the town who remained, the occupation was indeed unusually peaceful in the sense that the trains had stopped running. This is what the mayor of the town meant when he said "Now everyone could sleep easily" during his welcoming address to the commanding German Oberst.

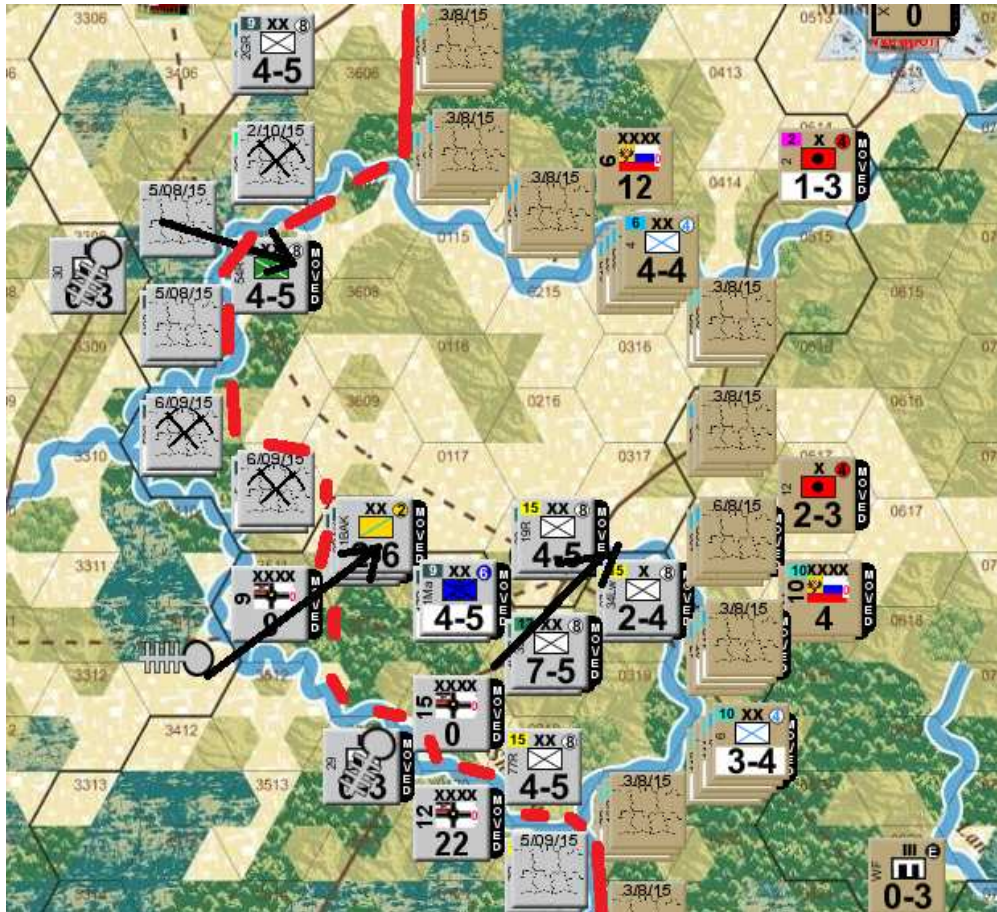


Figure 3: The Germans take Baranovichi on 19 October, showing the advance from the Russian line (red dashes) on 10 October 1915.

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	-	-	-	-	2			-	2	14	Good
Central Powers	14	1	16	3	2			11	47	1428	
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	-	-	-	-	(2) *			-	-	(31)	NA *Tirane recaptured
Entente	18	2	32	4	-			-	56	1500	

Player Notes

CP:

- *East: My last two attacks were successful, driving the Russian back some distance in some areas and disrupting their efforts to establish new trench lines. In the north, I am able to advance adjacent to Riga, forcing him to withdraw forces to defend the city. As long as I pose a threat to Riga, I will keep him unsettled and on the defensive in Lithuania. No attacks this time, however.*
- *Balkans: More withdrawal.*
- *West: No offensives this time. I can see the British massing artillery and know they will attack within the next turn or two. There is not much I can do about this but I have shifted artillery up to the Lille area for the future. I only hope he delays the attack another turn so I can rebalance some infantry.*
- *Caucasus: Quiet.*
- *Mesopotamia: Quiet.*
- *Palestine: The raiding force withdraws back into Palestine.*
- *Gallipoli: He is withdrawing and I would love to attack. However, this would cost me more losses than him; so I exercise restraint.*
- *Italy: Not much – just a rebalance of troops along the mountain lines.*

AP:

Ivor's attacks in Russia have indeed been effective. I chose to spend supply in defence which has meant I have sacrificed opportunities to attack. This is not just theoretical. If supply was no object I have had some good targets in the last few turns.

My opponent continues to use the tactic of voluntary retreats now in the Balkans and Iraq. The one in Iraq exposes the fact that I do not have an engineer regiment there. This delayed my advance and caused me to miss a chance to attack in Iraq as my HQ cannot get through the old trench lines and devastated hexes without difficulty.

The CP must watch the southern Near Eastern Fronts more carefully now as in the next few months I will be able to build up larger forces in Iraq and Sinai and in the spring I will be able to move forward. The Turks will not be able to rely on their very weak replacement rates then and they will have to redeploy from Gallipoli or the Caucasus or get extra builds from Germany. All this takes time to prepare and would involve sacrifices elsewhere. A collapse in Sinai or Iraq may be quite disastrous if it occurs in 1916 – 17.