

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT105: 28 – 31 October 1915

General Situation

At the end of October 1915, Turkey was able to reflect on what it had achieved in a year of warfare. It could not be said that all the hopes of Enver Pasha and his small clique had been realised. The initial Turkish victory at Sarikamis had been largely forgotten. The objectives of the offensive war had hardly been realised and the efforts to provoke uprisings in the Imperial domains of the European powers in Asia and North Africa had not come to much. Nothing had occurred that would disturb the movement of a single Allied Division engaged against Turkey directly.

The Turkish Army had enjoyed some substantial defensive successes none more important than the resistance at Gallipoli. The Russians had advanced into Turkish Armenia but they had been stalled for months east of Erzerum and had in fact lost some of their most forward gains as a result of Turkish counterattacks during the summer. The war in Iraq had also had a see-saw character but so far the British had not been able to break any Turkish defence around Kut.

These achievements still stood, but as Enver Pasha read the weekly reports from distant commanders he suffered an uncharacteristic and temporary loss of confidence that autumn as he recognised the renewal of British and Russian pressure in Iraq and the Caucasus.¹ He knew better than any that Turkish endurance was not limitless and more aid would be needed from Germany if the Ottoman forces were not to degrade slowly from the unrepaired consequences of constant action.

The Italian Front

On 30 October, the mostly aged civilians still living in Riva del Garda (who had refused many opportunities to evacuate) were woken by the sounds of gunfire in the surrounding hills. Within minutes this noise reached a terrible crescendo that signified the start of a major Italian attack. The Austrian garrison in the town was soon showing signs of anxiety and by that evening enemy shells were falling close to the city outskirts.

The Italian attack was a full blown effort by the Italian 1st Army advancing up the lakeside from the direction of Verona. This was supported by the Chiesa Corps operating on the western side of Lake Garda. In fact the Austrian defence was also compromised by Italian forces in the hills to the east of Riva as well for there were four more Italian Divisions on the eastern side of the Adige River with weapons ranged on the small town and the roads leading through the narrow corridor by which Riva was connected to the remainder of the Austrian positions in the Trentino.

By the evening of 31 October, the Austrian defence was in a desperate state. Neither the old garrison brigade (96th) nor the 50th Mountain Brigade could offer any more effective resistance. There was still a small chance of rescue from the Croat Brigades north of the

¹ He never publically admitted this but it was recorded in his private notes read after his assassination.

town though no news reached Riva which might signify what their orders were. The survivors of the Austrian defence spend an uncomfortable night in the old medieval castle outside Riva which in previous times had given tourists an enjoyable excursion. Now it reverted to its original function as a stronghold or refuge.

The Eastern Front

The German 10th Army now pulled back from the vicinity of Riga as the Russian defences around the city had demonstrated stubborn resistance in the past week.

Mackensen's 11th Army continued to push back the Russian 2nd Army in Eastern Lithuania. Mackensen advanced on a very narrow front and the German 9th Cavalry Division suffered heavy losses as it moved towards the Aukstaitis Forest (4-5N.2210) into whose gloomy groves the Russians retreated.

Most of the rest of the Eastern Front was quiet. An inspection of the front held by the Russian 6th and 10th Armies in Belorussia discovered that they were insanitary and typhus was rife. As an emergency measure whole lengths of the front were given up in order to start constructing new defence at least 500 metres in front of or to the rear of the present line. The weary Russian soldiers accepted these new strictures without complaint. The time for complaining had long since passed.



Figure 1: General Situation on the Russian North West Front, end of October 2015.

The Balkans

The situation in the Balkans began to settle down a bit. The Bulgarians took up positions behind the Vardar and Bregalnica Valleys which the Allies did not challenge for the present.

The opposing forces in South East Serbia were separated from the front in Albania and South West Serbia and without the coordination of both it would be difficult to achieve much of military significance.

The party which was most pleased about recent developments on this front was the Greek Government which could make up its own mind on its place in this conflict without several armies camping on its territory or threatening its borders.



Figure 2: General Situation in the South Balkans, end of October 1915.

The Near East

Although the Dardanelles campaign had lost much of its strategic potency this did not mean that the bridgeheads did not need to be sustained by new drafts of replacements. The incessant losses meant there was constant demand for new infantry or else whole battalions or even larger formations might be permanently removed from the order of battle. Since, the last fighting the most depleted unit in the bridgehead had been the Royal Navy Division. This could replenish its numbers from naval establishments and redundant ships and these supplied a large number of “sailors” who had been sent to the Straits to keep the Navy in the land campaign.

The British advance along the Tigris was by the end of the month pushing towards the Es Sinn positions (7-9.3821 – 3822) from which the Turks had defended Kut the last time.

On 30 October, Yudenitch unleashed his final autumn offensive. He had four full strength Russian Divisions supported by an artillery brigade concentrated for a drive into the valley which led up to Ardi (6-8.2417). The way forward was blocked by the Turkish 6th Division supported by a regiment of Trabzon Jandarma. Both sides fought with huge bravery and the 6th Division stated afterwards that it had barely a third of its men effective after a second day of fighting. The Russian Divisions had all suffered significant losses before they paused to reorganise at the start of November. Yudenitch was not satisfied with the limited ground gained and was prepared to order new attacks within days despite the fact that some in his headquarters doubted whether the Ardi Valley was not a dead end which would not yield any important strategic gains.



Figure 3: General Situation on the Caucasus Front

The Western Front

Aviators flying over the Western Front were more frequently impeded by bad weather. It became harder to detect enemy movements. Squadron Leaders became frustrated by the negative reports which kept turning up. There turned out to be a rational explanation for this. Both armies were tired. Even the senior commanders were tired. The campaigning season as it had been historically understood was nearly over. By late October, the two sides deadlocked as they were in their trenches started to ossify at little and few movements were seen because few actually occurred. Four days of heavy rain were enough to make everyone who could do so remain in shelter.

CP.

- *East: I conduct a complete re-organization of the northern half of the EF, withdrawing into concentrated army groups in most places to free up more combat power to try and break through the centre of his 2nd Army south of Daugavpils and get round one of his flanks. If he stays in position, he risks having units cut off and isolated for easy mopping up. If he withdraws, my ZOCs will limit his ease of withdrawal and allow me to attack him in strength on open ground. I have dispatched two arty regiments and another 2 divs from 12th Army northwards by rail to assist. The southern half of the front remains largely static and inactive.*
- *Balkans: A more considered withdrawal continues. Two Turkish divs have now deployed onto the eastern Greek border to keep them honest.*
- *West: Minimal movement on this front. There is little I can do to shore up these positions now until more replacements come in over the next month. I will be surprised if the British don't attack during his turn.*
- *Caucasus: Quiet; although he is concentrating force and supply (he has accumulated a lot of supply here) and I am expecting an attack within weeks.*
- *Mesopotamia: I start to consolidate a position around Kut.*

- *Palestine: Quiet.*
- *Gallipoli: Quiet.*
- *Italy: The Italians have railed substantial forces westwards to assembly areas north of Verona and Vicenza. I am expecting an attack anytime soon in the Trentino area and have started to shift some brigades back into the area where my defences are quite sparsely manned.*

DM Summary – October 1915

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total [%SM]	Morale
Germany	11	1	10	3	-	1	2	11	39	959 [59.9]	Good
Austria-Hungary	3	-	5	-	-	1	4	-	13	433 [78.7]	Good
Ottoman	-	-	1	-	-	-	2	-	3	52 [15.1]	Good
Bulgaria	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	2	14	Good
Central Powers	14	1	16	3	2	2	8	11	57	1438	
France	12	-	9	-	-	-	-	-	21	665 [73.9]	Good
Great Britain	-	-	4	-	-	-	-	-	4	169 [13.3]	Good
Russia	6	2	6	4	-	4	5	-	27	643 [107.2]	Shaken
Italy	-	-	13	-	-	2	1	-	16	38 [12.7]	Good
Belgium	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	(96)	NA
Serbia	-	-	-	-	(2) *	-	-	-	-	(31)	NA *Tirane recaptured
Entente	18	2	32	4	-	6	6	-	68	1512	

AP: *I made two attacks this turn. The Austrian fortress at Riva is perhaps the most vulnerable hex on the map and one of very few currently exposed to attack from five hex sides. I preferred to take it before winter as further assaults will then be more costly and I got an excellent 4:1 loss ratio in my favour. I won't mind if the Austrians elect to stand and fight there as it will give me a chance of killing more of them next turn as I will be able to resupply.*

The attack in the Caucasus is harder to justify. I am also trying to complete an offensive there before winter. It is more risky now to throw Russians into mountain combat but the Turks are showing a few signs of weariness themselves. They have not replaced all their losses and the pressure is increasing in Iraq. The Russian attack will make it harder for the CP to focus on the British in the Near East.