

## Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT106: 1 – 5 November 1915 (November 1)

### General Situation

World War One produced a very fine cast of spies and insurgents whose contribution to the war effort was little known at the time unless they got caught. It was also an era when foreign nationals were not interned if they were not considered a threat to national security. There were many French and English wives of German nobles and officials who were left undisturbed in their dignities. A few, however, allowed innate patriotism to control their conduct. One such was the wife of the stationmaster of the Ostbahnhof in Berlin. In Germany, a stationmaster ranked more or less equal to a major and the head of a national rail terminus had almost as much authority as a junior minister.

This stationmaster's French wife was therefore above suspicion. She had a fine strategic sense and realised that her homeland would be very interested in the balance of rail movements between east and west. Every very few weeks she posted to her aunt in Switzerland a sketch hidden in some small gift which showed whether German troop and supply movements favoured one direction or another. French Military Intelligence always referred to this source as "Madame B". Her cover was never blown at least not during the Grand Guerre. She was still sending her railway sketches to a cousin in Switzerland in 1940. She was arrested by the Gestapo after the fall of Paris but since she was then in her 90s and her information was then less than accurate she was uncharacteristically allowed to live out her few remaining days with nothing worse than a severe telling off transmitted through a unfeasibly large ear trumpet.

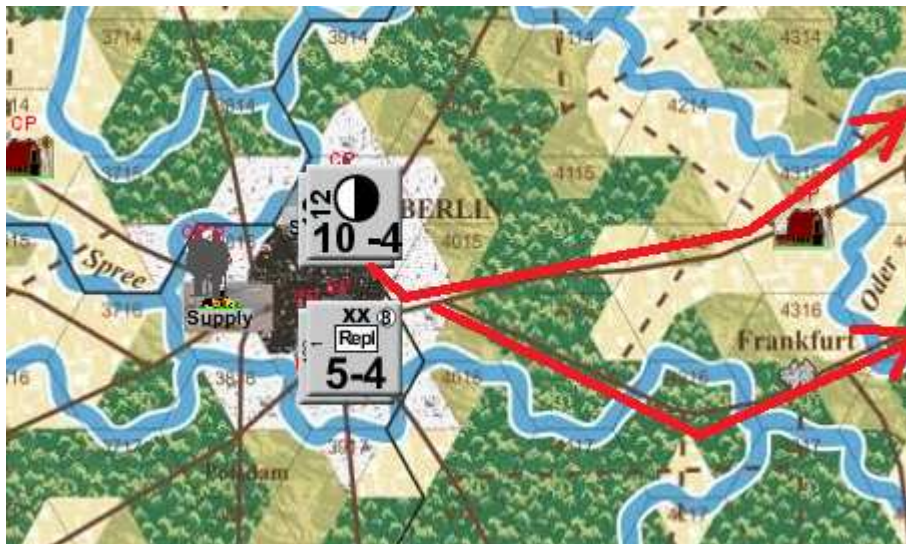


Figure 1: One of Madame B's railway sketches sent on 2 November 1915 showing large troop and supply movements to the east in that month.

### The Western Front

At the beginning of November, Paris was animated by rumours of a secret weapon. For a few days speculation mounted and the War Ministry was forced to deny there was any such thing and what kind of a secret weapon would be subject to an official announcement anyway? Despite this the public got what they wanted when on 3 November a long train emerged slowly from a hidden siding

near the Gare de l'Est. Strange coverings prevented a quickly gathering audience from seeing as much as they would like but it was obvious nonetheless that this was no ordinary military train. It was heavily guarded and the locomotive was armoured. Trains carrying guns and shells were not at all unusual but this looked different. Observers could see that the train left Paris on the main line towards Nancy.



Figure 2: The French attack at Vigneulles, 4 - 5 November 1915.

The next day it was announced that the French 3<sup>rd</sup> Army had gone into action between Vigneulles and the small Lac de Madine (5-3.2216) which lay a short distance north of the railway line to Metz. The announcement also confirmed that siege guns mounted on armoured trains had been used in the attack. Inspired, one of the illustrated papers in Paris was quick enough on 4 November to produce a drawing of such a train bursting through the German trenches spitting fire in all directions. In this imagination of the battle, the Germans were apparently not clever enough to lift the railway tracks.

In reality the railway guns were only a minor component of a substantial French attack in which the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army had been reinforced by units of the 4<sup>th</sup> Army. The German defences were not strongly manned here and the German 21<sup>st</sup> Division was forced to defend a 20 kilometre defence for forty eight hours without relief. The French attack woke up the German Crown Prince from what had been a rather dull war for his command (5<sup>th</sup> Army) since September 1914. By 5 November, he had become aware that this was no minor French attack. Even so it was difficult to approach Falkenhayn for help as the German General Staff were all convinced that a big British attack was in preparation. This effort in Lorraine was surely a diversion.

## The Italian Front

The Italians also enjoyed a significant success in early November as they closed in on Riva. In fact, the outcome had already been decided by 1 November because then the Tyrol Army had confirmed it would not send further help to the last survivors of the garrison of the town who had withdrawn to the medieval fortifications on the hill overlooking the city.

This final defence ought not to have given the Italian 1<sup>st</sup> Army much trouble and the first inclination of the Italian commander was simply to starve out the remaining Austrians over the course of a few days. Unfortunately, the Austrians would not cooperate with this plan as they had taken plenty of supply with them and they were also still sufficiently well-armed to keep the road north under fire. Since the Italians wanted to move in this direction and the road was already crowded then this continuing resistance became intolerable as it caused roadblocks and unnecessary casualties on 2 November by which time the town of Riva del Garda was in Italian hands. The last straw was when the Austrians in the fort sent a few shells into the town.

The Italians planned an assault on 3 November led by the 9<sup>th</sup> Alpine Brigade and the 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. One might imagine that the best weapon against a medieval castle was a modern field gun but the Italians had been ordered to preserve ammunition. It was simply assumed that the Austrian garrison was too small to defend its walls and they would surrender when they saw how hopelessly outnumbered they were.



Figure 3: The Fall of Riva, 1 - 3 November 1915.

In fact, the attack was nearly a fiasco and the Austrian defenders had determined to fight to the last which nobody had expected. The result was that the Italian Alpinists and Infantry suffered very high losses rushing forward when a more methodical advance would have achieved the same result more economically. By nightfall on 3 November the castle at Riva was burning and in the darkness you could have been forgiven that you were witnessing a scene from the time of Emperor Barbarossa.



## The Eastern Front

Mackensen's 11<sup>th</sup> Army Offensive was still continuing and he was successfully forcing the Russian 2<sup>nd</sup> Army to give up ground. On 1 – 2 November, there was heavy fighting at Utena (4-5N.2110) which the Russian 79th Reserve Division was forced to give up. From Utena it is 74 kilometres to Daugavpils (Dvinsk). Mackensen certainly had his eye on reaching this city though Hindenberg had expressly told him to go no further than the Dvina River. In the next three days, Mackensen received many reports that the Russians were pulling back on his flanks. This was encouraging because his advance was on a narrow enough front as it was and it also seemed that the Russian defences were strengthening slightly along the main line of advance.

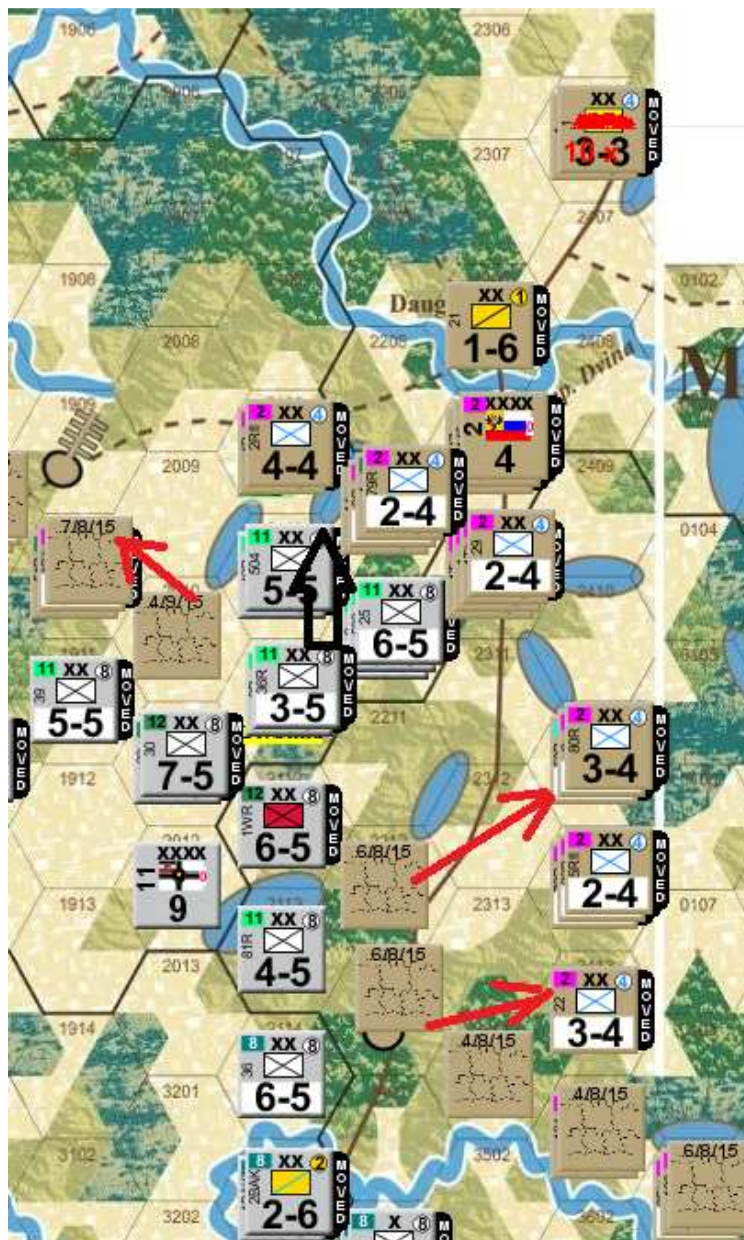


Figure 4: The Battle between the German 11th Army and Russian 2nd Army in Eastern Lithuania, 1 – 5 November 1915.

## The Balkans

The Central Powers forces in the Balkans were still drifting backwards across the whole front. They had also broken contact with the Allied armies which were probing forward with the greatest of caution. By the middle of the first week in November it seemed that the Bulgarians were no longer interested in contesting their territory southwest of the Struma River. Serbia south of the Bregalnica was left to the Serbians as were the mining regions on the western side of the Jabolnica Mountains. In Albania, the Austro-Hungarian 5<sup>th</sup> Army had fallen back 75 kilometres north of Tirane.

## The Near East

In Sinai, the Turks moved forward again trying to disturb the security of the British in Egypt. This time, the Egyptian garrison had a fair warning of the Turkish movement and, on 4 November, the Indian 18<sup>th</sup> Brigade was sent forward to investigate leaving the safety of its entrenchments near Romani (8-8.1138).

In Mesopotamia, the Turkish 6<sup>th</sup> Army had pulled back as far as the city of Kut and on the western side of the Tigris had formed up behind the canal networks which fed into the Hai (7-9.3723 and 3823). Townsend's plan was to concentrate against the Turks outside Kut before turning on the city itself. The Turks were estimated to have three Divisions behind the Hai Canals and Townsend considered that with the equivalent of three Indian Divisions he should be able to beat them this time.

In the Caucasus, the battle for the Ardi Valley (6-8.2417) resumed on 3 November and continued for another three days. Yudenitch was well aware that his troop strength had been depleted by the first round of fighting in late October but the weather was still good and there was no sign the Turkish defenders had been reinforced. There was still some hard resistance and parts of the Turkish 6<sup>th</sup> Division were reputed to have fought to the last man but the small town of Ardi fell on 4 November. The Trabzon Jandarma Regiment formed a rear guard covering the Turkish retreat over the dividing mountains while the Russians pursued as fast as they were able.

## Player Notes

*CP: Production sees no improvement in the food situation. The overall effect of this places me in a worse position, overall, than the TE. I am not losing on the battlefield – holding on the WF and holding my own with the Turks whilst being superior in arms to the Russians; with only the Italian Front being a weak point in terms of CP performance. Yet still the pressure at home from food shortages places me in a more precarious position. This turn, GE loses 11DM and AH 1DM. GE builds RPLs again. The preponderance of Inf Divs & Bdes in the dead pool makes this feasible. AH has more than rebuilt its losses so undertakes the slow process of trying to raise some new formations.*

- East: I continue to consolidate in some areas and apply pressure in others on the EF. I continue to attack at the junction of the Russian 2<sup>nd</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> armies to drive a wedge between them and make the 12<sup>th</sup> Army line untenable to hold as it becomes outflanked. The AH forces continue to hunker down and wait for the winter respite.*
- Balkans: More gradual withdrawal. There is no advantage in holding my line right on the Greek borders and the terrain I am giving up is worthless. Robert expresses surprise at*

*my retreats. I think of them as strategic withdrawals – I am under no external pressure to conduct them so they are not retreats. They take me closer to my own railheads as the AH forces have found getting RPLs and supply to the front a nightmare logistically. For the TE; he can sit comfortable in easy reach of beachheads which I cannot place any pressure on. Let him be discomfited by moving away from his logistic nodes.*

- *West: More shoring up. I foresee probably two TE offensives on this front before the winter sets in.*
- *Caucasus: My Turks are hoping to just hold their line for the winter at this point. For me to concentrate to attack anywhere would leave me too weak somewhere else and the Russians have sufficient force and supply to exploit such a weakness.*
- *Mesopotamia: Quiet.*
- *Palestine: Another raid into Sinai to keep him guessing.*
- *Gallipoli: Quiet. This theatre is now moribund but, if I thinned it out, he could still strike at the opportunity presented. I would love to attack, but would take unnecessary and irreplaceable losses.*
- *Italy: His attack at Riva was brutal and wiped out 50% of the garrison and all of the brigades holding it. However, he only has sufficient for one attack like that per month and, if I lost the Riva salient, it would almost be a blessing.*

#### **DM Summary – November 1915**

<b>Nation</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>Food Deficit</b>	<b>Month</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Morale</b>
<b>Germany</b>	6							11	17	976	Good
<b>Austria-Hungary</b>	1							1	2	435	Good
<b>Ottoman</b>	1							-	1	53	Good
<b>Bulgaria</b>	-							-	-	14	Good
<b>Central Powers</b>	8							12	20	1458	
<b>France</b>	4							-	4	669	Good
<b>Great Britain</b>	-							-	-	169	Good
<b>Russia</b>	3							-	3	646	Shaken
<b>Italy</b>	2							-	2	40	Good
<b>Belgium</b>	-							-	-	(96)	NA
<b>Serbia</b>	-							-	-	(31)	NA
<b>Entente</b>	9							-	9	1521	

AP: *There is a lot going on at the moment.*

*I am nervous doing a French offensive which is not backed by a lot of Artillery but I have been scoping out the possibility of doing something in Lorraine and have been subtly shifting units in preparation for some time. The defence there is weak so I should not suffer excessive casualties. I need to use up*

*some supply to avoid being under constant pressure to make French attacks. I may be able to continue this for another turn as it won't be easy for the Germans to reinforce this part of the front quickly. Furthermore, it will force him to consider whether the whole German defence in Lorraine is adequate and that might weaken what is otherwise going to face the Allies in Picardy and Flanders.*

*I am very cheerful about the result at Riva del Garda. This does not exhaust my possibilities in Trentino and I expect some further action there before winter closes in.*

*The situation in Russia is still finely balanced. The Germans are not doing enough to make me want to retreat to the Grave Threat Line but they are nearly doing enough so turn by turn I am reviewing this. Partly I am keeping the fight going because I still prefer to see the Germans fight in Russia rather than France. (This is also finely balanced so if I change my mind on this it is not insincere and it could also change in an instant).*

*I am more confident that I might get past Kut this time because I have the strength now to make a fight of it and I can replace my losses with new forces arriving. Beyond Kut, the logistics get more difficult. I do not mind saying the CP needs to think seriously about strengthening this front (if only to replace the losses that may come). That may have to be at the expense of the Caucasus or even the European fronts (German weapon points).*