

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT110: 19 – 22 November 1915 (November 5)

General Situation

November 1915 was the month that the war really came home to Great Britain. By the end of the third week the newspapers had started calling it “*Dark November*”. When the Daily Mirror referred to it as “*Bloody November*” in its early edition on 21 November it caused a scandal which required the sacking of its editor in order to avoid serious sanctions. What could not be hidden was the fact that there was a very serious crisis at the front and the casualties had been unprecedented. With a new commander at the head of the British Army it was hoped that steps were being taken to salvage the situation. The news that the Army was pitifully short of shells caused further national outrage and the collection of vast quantities of scrap metal that was of little short term value.

In Germany, November had been a tale of two Crown Princes. William had endured the ordeal of the successful French offensive in Lorraine which had hurt the reputation of the German Army and, it had to be said, the Imperial dynasty too. Rupprecht of Bavaria however had led the German 16th Army in the attack on Armentières with great shrewdness and threatened to humiliate the British Empire. The Prussian Guards had also been prominent in the fighting against the British and quickly restored the German sense of military superiority against all comers.

The Western Front



Figure 1: The German attacks on Armentières continued, 19 – 22 November 1915.

On 19 November, the German 16th and 1st Armies began two further days of attacks on the British around Armentières.¹ The Germans had reinforced and had a strong concentration of artillery to support their advances. These were methodical and never sought to gain more than a few hundred metres at once. The British played into their hands to some extent for they refused to countenance retreat from Armentières and sacrificed huge numbers defending the approaches to the shattered small town.

By 20 November, the British 2nd Army, which was responsible for this sector, was on the point of disintegration. At the artillery batteries British gunners had a single box of shells delivered and were told that this would have to last until the next weekend. The 2nd Army had five Divisions at the front on 19 November. The III Corps which had been at the front during the initial German assaults simply had no one left to put in the line by 21 November and the 27th and 36th Divisions which had been in reserve were seriously depleted trying to keep the line intact during the most difficult hours late on 20 November when the 1st German Guards Division, supported by a Marine Division (2nd), occupied the outskirts of Armentières. It was said during that night the British defences depended on a ghost company of casualties who were “pretending” to be still alive. Had the Germans realised that everyone was dead then the town was theirs for the taking. Modern historians of course can find no evidence for this central legend of the Battle of Armentières.

Sir Douglas Haig was starting to exercise some control of the situation. His old rival Smith-Dorrien was dismissed as commander of the British 2nd Army and Sir Herbert Plumer took his place. Haig fed whatever reserves he could find towards the beleaguered front and this was a mixed bag indeed. The 1st Division had recently refitted and was rushed up to Armentières from 4th Army. The 6th Canadian Brigade was sent as an emergency stop-gap when no other unit in 3rd Army seemed fit to make a forced march. Haig also spared no cavalryman. By 22 November, both British 1st and 2nd Cavalry Divisions were getting their boots wet acting as mobile infantry in the 2nd Army trenches. By the end of that day, Haig felt confident enough to tell his staff that he couldn't prevent the Germans attacking again but he no longer thought they might break through.

The Italian Front

Cadorna hoped to renew the attack on Lavarone (6-4.2218) which he described as the key to Trent. A major new attack was planned for 22 November but two days before this the Italians learned that the Austrians had strongly reinforced this mountain fortress and Cadorna quickly had second thoughts. These were confirmed when the quarter-masters of the Italian 1st and 4th Armies both declared that any fresh attack would have little artillery support because the initial attack had exhausted over 80% of their stocks.

The Italian Armies on the Trentino front were stood down and many units sent back to the lowlands to get some rest and recuperation. Cardona nevertheless would not accept the campaign was yet over and he warned his staff that there was still work to do before winter closed in.

¹ German official sources always referred to this as the Battle of Bethune though this was a rather distant objective and not in the same district.



Figure 2: The Trentino Front after the attack on Lavarone, 19 - 22 November 1915.

The Eastern Front

The Germans were steadily increasing their concentration against Riga. By 20 November, the German 11th and 12th Armies had come up to support the German 10th Army and the Russian 1st Army was getting shouldered back into the city. Three Russian artillery brigades were deployed in and around the city as it was announced that the Germans would be prevented from capturing Riga at any cost.

On other parts of the Eastern Front the Central Powers were falling back. This was not due to any pressure from the Russians but a reflection of the German High Command's refusal to get drawn too deeply into Russia. Only on the front covering Eastern Galicia did the Central Powers remain in their existing lines as Conrad vetoed retreats there.

The Balkans

Having been repulsed after their attempted crossing of the confluence of the Vardar and Bregalnica Rivers, the Serbian 2nd and 3rd Corps were unwilling to take a chance of another attack. Shortage of ammunition was the reason cited for this passivity.

The Bulgarians on the opposite side of the water were ordered to repair their defences. This provoked the Brigade – Leader of the 2nd Brigade of the Bulgarian 7th Division to enquire of the 1st Army headquarters' staff how they expected he could repair a river. In reply, the Chief-of-Staff told the Brigade – Leader not to trouble himself as no man can cross the same river twice and, since the Serbians were undoubtedly men, there was no reason to worry about a second attack. After this light-hearted exchange the Brigade – Leader was promptly dismissed for making the cardinal military mistake of thinking a river could be a useful defensive line.

The Near East

On 21 November, the Australian 2nd Division made another attempt to break out of Chicken Valley and advance across the higher ground to the still unreachable village of Krithia (7-6.3812). Nothing redeemed this attack. The world's gaze had moved on to other places and the Australian sacrifices

incurred in this small slaughter were not so much noticed when all eyes were on the Western Front and there was no novelty anymore in the Dardanelles campaign. Everything that could be attempted had already been attempted and repetition of these mistakes was perverse. Even the Turks were losing some interest and were reducing their forces on the peninsula.

The Turks were also losing interest in the Suez Canal and on 19 November their latest foray towards Egypt was terminated when their force headed back east across Sinai. When this was confirmed, the British 3rd Division was swiftly turned around at the point of unloading at Port Said and it was advised that it was now ordered to unload at Salonika.



Figure 3: The Turks pull back in Sinai, 19 - 22 November 1915.

Townsend's forces only briefly lost contact with the withdrawing Turkish 6th Army. There was a further round of fighting in the desert on the southern bank of the Tigris (7-9.3323) on 22 November where the pursuing Indian infantry forced the Turks to stand and fight a costly rear guard action for a few hours until nightfall allowed the Turks to get away again. Before this encounter, the British force had moved another 40 kilometres up the Tigris in four days and the supply situation was getting more difficult as the British were advancing through a desert. The river head now had to be advanced so far from Basra that the turn-around for river-borne supply was appreciably less efficient.

The Caucasus Front remained inactive. The Russians were still stalled about 35 kilometres east of Erzerum their chief objective.

Player Notes

CP:

- *East: I have massed strong forces – three armies worth – against the defenders of Riga. I was tempted to attack but have not yet got my army in place to support, so paused to allow for massing of greater effort. The rest of the front continues to curve the line backwards and relinquish control of various cities. This frees up garrison troops and will hopefully free up more food if I bend the lines to hold onto food resources and relinquish*

control of cities. If he tries to advance to deny food resources, I can then attack him in – mostly – open ground.

- *Balkans: His last attack was a trade-off. He can afford these; the Bulgarians cannot. I can expect more of the same though.*
- *West: My last attack against Bethune caused large British losses. I do the same again with a hope of even more losses to the British. I would rather be attacking the French, though.*
- *Caucasus: Quiet.*
- *Mesopotamia: I was not expecting him to attack me here, but he did and forced me back towards Baghdad. He has the strength – and more coming – to start making this theatre very uncomfortable for me.*
- *Palestine: The raiding force heads back to Sinai. I think I'm done with these meaningless forays.*
- *Gallipoli: Quiet.*
- *Italy: I think he has launched his last offensive until the winter now. He took comparatively heavy losses; but again, the Italians can afford them and AH cannot.*

DM Summary – November 1915

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total	Morale
Germany	6	15	7	5	7			11	51	1010*	Good
Austria-Hungary	1	-	1	2	-			1	5	438*	Good
Ottoman	1	-	-	2	2			-	5	57	Good
Bulgaria	-	-	-	1	-			-	1	15	Good
Central Powers	8	15	8	10	9			12	62	1500	
France	4	2	-	-	-			-	6	671	Good
Great Britain	-	14	15	13	16			-	58	227	Good
Russia	3	1	2	-*	-			-	6	649	Shaken *Pinsk and Rovno recaptured
Italy	2	-	1	5	-			-	8	46	Good
Belgium	-	-	-	-	-			-	-	(96)	NA
Serbia	-	-	-	1	-			-	1	(32)	NA
Entente	9	17	18	19	16			-	79	1591	

AP: *I will never allow my supplies to get so depleted in the face of a fully supplied German Army again. It is going to be a while before the British are able to attack again on the Western Front.*

I thought seriously about abandoning Riga again this turn. Ivor keeps cancelling his attacks on this front and I keep falling back in the face of these non-blows. I cannot take the punishment of too much fighting with the Russians and I guess if the Germans do make a serious attack I may have to let Riga go. But I don't want to.

The other most interesting situation at the moment is in Iraq. My advance above Kut has forced me to move the riverhead and now it can only supply 12 SP. After combat I have 13 SP left so this will hurt someone. There are therefore some significant logistical problems which may mean I cannot get to Baghdad now. However, I will improve the logistics with an upgrade of the Basra Supply Value in January 1916 and I will have a window then of about 2 months before the flood hits again.