

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT115: 10 – 14 December 1915 (December 3)

General Situation

The Allies had enjoyed a significant intelligence success when on 10 December it became clear that their source in the high echelons of the Hapsburg government had accurately predicted Austro-Hungarian offensives. The problem with this source had been that his information had been unclear as to where the Austrians might attack. This vagueness had caused both the Russians and the Italians to anticipate they would be the target.

The reality was that Conrad had for weeks been frustrated at the defensive disposition of the Austro-Hungarian Armies and had required all the front commanders to propose offensive plans which were to be executed before the end of November. These operations all shared the same code word “Condor” and this had confused the Allies’ informant.

In the event only the Austro-Hungarian 5th Army in the Balkans had been able to get moving before the end of November. This was operation CondorSud which was just a part of a wider movement of Central Powers’ forces in the South Balkans. Conrad knew this was not the most important operation. He was more concerned about CondorOst and CondorWest.

The Eastern Front



Figure 1: The CondorOst Attack, 10 - 12 December 1915.

The Cordon Ost attack began on 10 December. It was primarily an operation of the Austro-Hungarian 4th Army under Archduke Joseph Ferdinand. He was not the brightest star of the Hapsburg military elite. Historians have found it hard to find good evidence of what Conrad intended with this attack and have concluded by inference that it was an attempted move to try and separate the Russian forces in Ukraine from those who had moved forwards through the Pripet Marshes.

The Archduke got everyone moving forward on the first day but the launching point was over 30 kilometres from the nearest Russian troops. The Austrians therefore had to march for two days through a country where the Russians had destroyed all the large dwellings before they encountered the enemy defences which were well entrenched. Six strong Hapsburg Divisions had aimed for the junction between the Russian 3rd and 5th Armies but they could hardly prepare a methodical attack after a march which had exceeded the abilities of all but the toughest. The attack went in as the light faded on 12 December over a dreary featureless plain (5-5.4506) and against positions which had been subject to no real reconnaissance. The short day saved the Austrians from a worse massacre but in two hours they lost thousands.

The Russian defenders in the shelter of their trenches were inconvenienced by the enemy attack but their losses, so far as is known, were apparently a fraction of the Austrian casualties. This was then a satisfactory defensive success for the Russians but Ivanov complained forcefully afterwards that the Russian 3rd and 5th Army simply remained passive for two days after the Austrian attacks when the enemy lay vulnerable to a counter-stroke that might have enveloped their most advanced and exposed units. The suspicion was growing that the Russians were no longer good for offensive action and, at least on this section of the front, they were limited to parrying the enemy's blows.

At the other end of the Eastern Front, the Battle of Riga which had begun nearly a month previously was taking a pause. The Russians fully expected further attacks for their pilots had seen the large movements of supplies on the roads and rails behind the German front. There would certainly be another German push there before the end of the year.

The Balkans

In Tirane, the inhabitants had begun counting the different occupations they had suffered as the first, second, third and fourth occupations. The first had been between May and June when the Serbians had first taken over Albania and until Tirane first fell to the Austrians. Since then the front had gone back through the city once as the Montenegrins and Italians recovered. Now, on 11 December, the Austrians were back and the fourth occupation began.

Thankfully these rapid shifts in the front were attended by only skirmishes and minor fights. This time the retreat of the Allies was rapid and they left nobody behind to contest Condor Sud. This part of Conrad's offensive scheme was achieved almost without bloodshed.

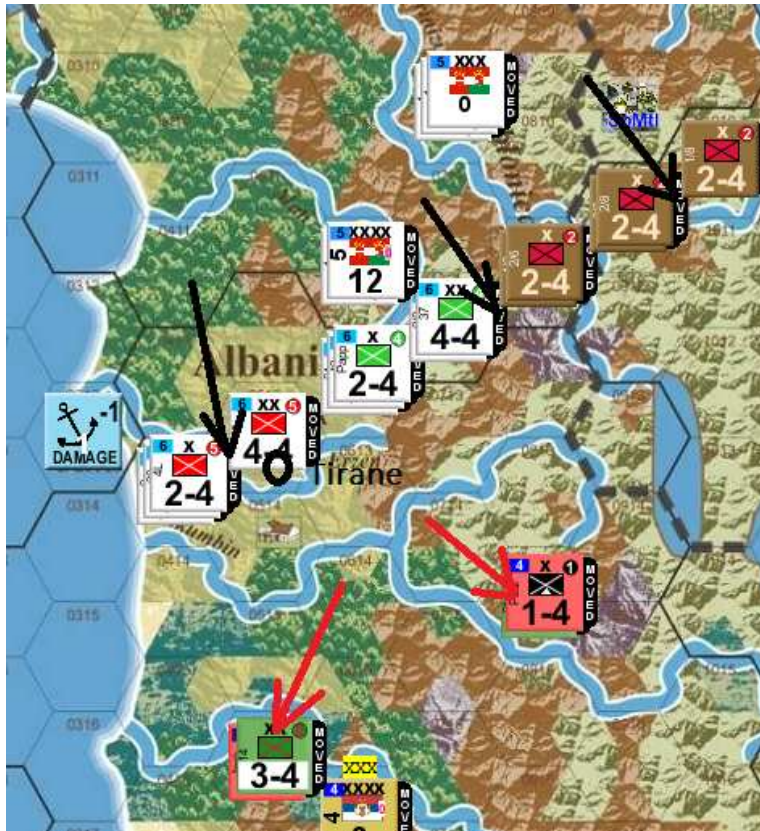


Figure 2: CondorSud, the fourth occupation of Albania, 10 - 14 December 1915.

The Near East

The Allied campaigns in the Near East could have been fairly described as moribund in early December 1915. There seemed so little prospect of the Allies initiating any major effort that another Turkish Division (9th) was withdrawn from the Gallipoli Peninsula.

The easing of the pressure on the Turkish front in the Caucasus also allowed the Turkish 3rd Army to thin their lines at some points and move units into reserve.

The Western Front

The war in the west had been reduced to local actions of a routine nature. As the ground froze trenches became a little more comfortable from a drainage point of view and at least they were a shelter of sorts.

After the Chantilly Conference, the Allied commanders instituted an intensive process of planning and preparation for an offensive in 1916. Everyone was motivated by the sense that this would have to be the “Big One” and the scale of action was still going to increase. Whatever happened next was likely to be the biggest battle history had ever seen.

The Italian Front

The CondorWest attack had been left in the hands of Borojevic’s 6th Army. Borojevic had hardly welcomed his orders but believed he could take advantage of surprise since few were expecting significant action in the Alps in winter. An exception to this was Cadorna who was indeed trying to

strengthen the Italian defences but the Italian Army was responding slowly to his commands to strengthen the front line positions. Nobody wanted to rush up to bolster the outposts in the high mountains if they could linger longer in the valleys.

Boroevic struck on 11 December along the Italian line covering Sappada and Forni Avoltri (6-4.2915). There had been a previous attack at Sappada which the Italians had only defended with difficulty and the Austrians hoped they could now break this isolated front before help arrived. The Hapsburg attacks were led by Austrian and Croat mountain troops both of which Boroevic was able to motivate well. On the Italian side, Boroevic's expectations were largely fulfilled. The defence was too thin to make best use of the forbidding mountain terrain through which the attack was delivered and Austrian losses were no worse than in other actions while the Italians lost a high proportion of their force when their outposts were overrun. By 12 December, the Austrians were only a couple of kilometres from Forni Avoltri and the Italian 24th Division was struggling to keep the attackers away from Sappada. Worst of all for the Italians was that the roads by which reinforcements would arrive were very congested and suffering from the winter conditions. The 3rd Division was on the way to help but it was on a very round-about route and the 24th Division was told that its relief would not arrive until 17 December.

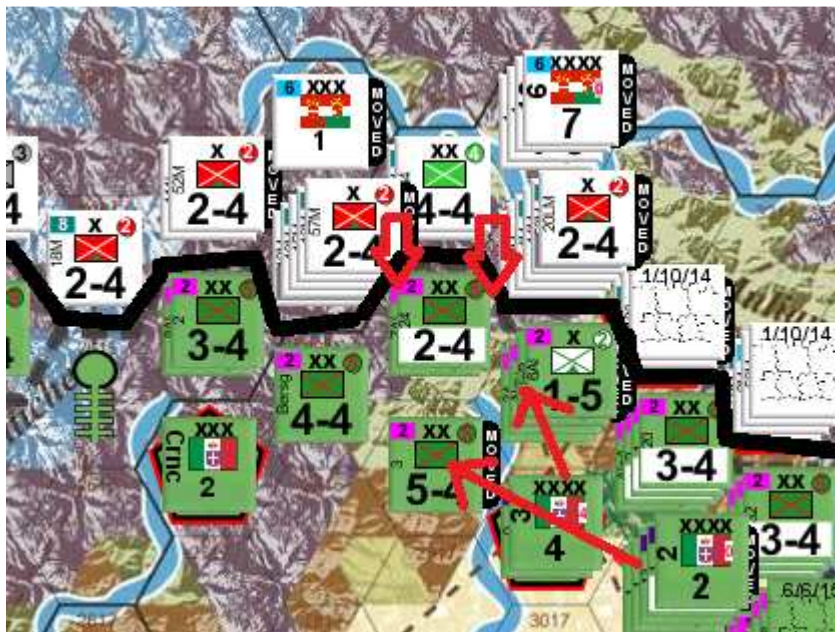


Figure 3: The CondorWest Attack, 10 - 14 December 1915.

Player Notes

CP: .

- *East: I took a battering attacking the SE approaches to Riga last turn. In part, I had forgotten the shortening of supply lines during winter so my coordinating HQ was just short of being able to provide the full supply. I have sufficient force and supply in the vicinity but just need to consolidate it now before attacking again. I did attack much further south with AH, though. With December's supply inflow I have now accumulated more than is acceptable to Conrad, so he has demanded action. It will no doubt hurt, but*

I have plenty of RPL waiting in the wings to replace the losses. It is the effect on national will that troubles me more with futile attacks.

- *Balkans: The AH 5th Army pushes yet deeper into Albania and the Italians withdraw.*
- *West: Quiet; but I have a plan mulling over in my mind.*
- *Caucasus: Quiet.*
- *Mesopotamia: Digging in.*
- *Palestine: Quiet.*
- *Gallipoli: Quiet; to the point where I feel secure enough to withdraw another division to send off to the Greek border.*
- *Italy: AH opt to launch another attack in the north in the interests of assuaging Conrad's impatience. I would not make this attack – or that in Russia – but for the need to reduce supply stocks. I need to do a little more than necessary here to buy a little more time before the next mandated offensive action.*

DM Summary – December 1915

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total	Morale
Germany	2	9	-					11	22	1052	Good
Austria-Hungary	-	-	6					1	7	446	Good
Ottoman	-	-	-					-	-	57	Good
Bulgaria	-	-	-					-	-	15	Good
Central Powers	2	9	6					12	29	1550	
France	-	-	-					-	-	671	Good
Great Britain	-	-	-					-	-	227	Good
Russia	5*	4	1					-	10	684	Shaken – *Riga (S) lost
Italy	-	-	2					-	2	50	Good
Belgium	-	-	-					-	-	(96)	NA
Serbia	-	-	-*					-	-	(32)	NA - *lost Tirane
Entente	5	4	3					-	11	1630	

AP: As we are approaching the end of 1915, I am astonished how finely balanced this game is. I was feeling rather pleased with myself in October and even to the November 2 turn. However, for the last month the situation of the Entente has deteriorated. This time I will say what I think the CP has done well about in 1915 and next time what I think the Entente successes were.

The main CP success is the hammering it has given Russia. I have been sceptical about some aspects of it but from the Entente's perspective late in the year I think that the CP has bought a lot of time in

1916 when the Russians will be of no threat. The only way Russia will avoid Economic Collapse in 1916 is if it radically reduces the rate of attrition. This will delay Austria getting to the state that leaves it vulnerable to Brusilov, delay Rumania and delay Austrian Shaken Morale and Economic Collapse all of which interfere with Entente goals for 1916. This has also stymied Russian progress in the Caucasus which will give the Ottomans more flexibility as the British threat grows.

In the short term, the pressure applied by the Germans at Riga has been very unpleasant and again leaves me only bad choices.

The CP defence in the West has been steadily improving. It has been harder and harder for me to gain easy successes there and the last British offensive suffered a terrible mauling.

The CP disposed of Serbia very efficiently and without Austria calling on German help.

The CP has frequently used tactical retreats to control the tempo of the action and this has frustrated several Entente plans on almost every front. German and Austrian losses seem quite high to me but so too do those of Russia and (less so now) France. The balance of DM will control who has the initiative in the next few months and in their present state the Allies cannot do much to impede CP choices at least in the early part of next year.