

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT116: 15 – 18 December 1915 (December 4)

General Situation

Conrad's Condor operations were mostly short-lived and in mid-December there was little fighting anywhere. The German Army Group at Riga was, however, clearly not finished with its operations and Ludendorff was not willing to scale back the efforts to pass the Lower Dvina just yet.

Falkenhayn was working out German priorities for 1916 as Christmas approached and he was not a little alarmed at reports reaching him of the precariousness of the lines of communication supporting the operations at Riga. Falkenhayn warned Ludendorff to be careful in a note sent on 15 December but got a swift reply from OberOst stating there was nothing to worry about.

The Western Front

The Western Front had been fairly quiet for nearly four weeks by 18 December. All the Armies concentrated their efforts on training. Everyone had accepted that the 1916 campaign would continue in the pattern of trench warfare which had not been broken by the modest movements in the front during 1915.

The Italian Front



Figure 1: General Situation on the Italian Front, 15 - 18 December 1915.

Boroevic made no further efforts to advance against the weakened Italian front between Sappada and Forni Avoltri (6-4.2915). By 17 December, the Italians were reinforcing the vulnerable sector and it was considered fully secure thereafter.

The Eastern Front

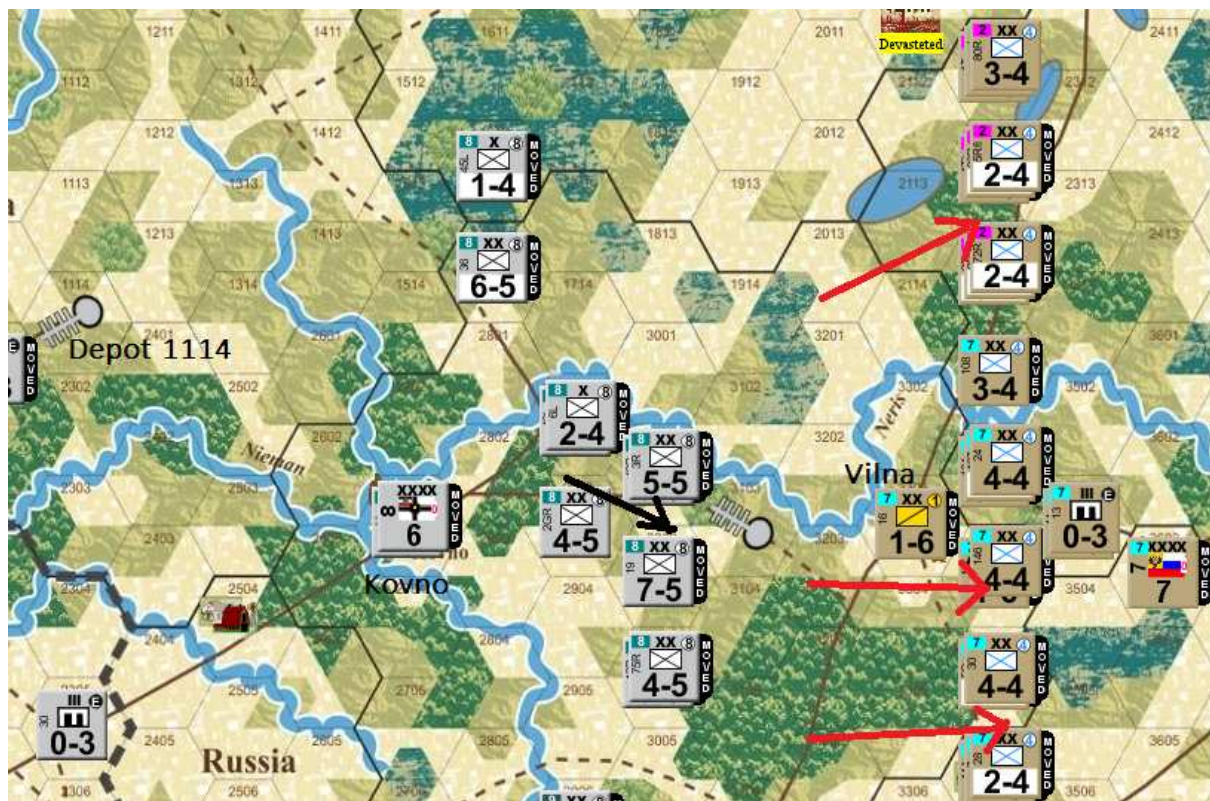


Figure 2: German 8th Army covering Kovno, 15 - 18 December 1915.

Archduke Joseph Ferdinand also pulled back his Austro-Hungarian 4th Army on 15 December not wishing to expose his men to the biting cold winds on the Volhynian plains for any longer than necessary. This was the end of CondorOst.

The Russians considered winter to be their element and orders were given to all Army commanders not in close contact with the enemy to send raiding parties forward to rip up any railway which the Central Powers might use. The commanders of the Russian 2nd and 7th Armies (Smirnov and Nikotin) were more aggressive and also cooperated very well being long-standing close friends.¹ It was their proposal to STAVKA that they move forward along the Neris River and drive the German 8th Army out of Kovno. This, they argued, would cut the only railway the Germans controlled to the north and the German 10th, 11th and 12th Armies at Riga would be cut off.

This was precisely the kind of enemy operation which Falkenhayn had been worried about when he had written to Ludendorff. Ludendorff was confident there was nothing to worry about. He didn't want to withdraw the Army Group on the Dvina because German artillery was even then exchanging fire with the Russians on the other side of the river at Salaspils (4-5N.1404) as a softening up exercise for a further attack near Riga. In reassuring Falkenhayn, Ludendorff said that he had issued orders requiring the German 8th Army to move forward and so prevent the Russians coming close to

¹ After the war they went into partnership together and in 1925 were reported by US Federal agencies to control over 15% of imports of bootleg liquor and foreign tobacco. When Al Capone referred to his Russian connections he was talking about these two ex-Imperial generals. Smirnov helped establish a legitimate global brand of vodka. Nikotin was not so lucky and spent 15 years in Sing Sing Prison before returning to Russia where he had an administrative position in the NKVD.

Kovno. In addition, he pointed out that he had a large reserve depot (Depot 1114) which would be activated if there was any attempt to interdict the railways further east.

These exchanges did nevertheless show that the Germans were still sensitive to the difficulties of keeping properly supplied on the Eastern Front during the winter. The Russian anti-railway operations showed they knew of this vulnerability. Smirnov and Nikotin's plans did not meet favour with STAVKA and on 17 December they were ordered to pull back further and were allowed to keep only a small covering force of cavalry (16th Division) in Vilna.

The Balkans

CondorSud was the only continuing Condor operation. By 16 December, the Austrian 8th Division was south of the Schkumbin River again. In south-west Serbia, troops in the Bulgarian 1st Army were also in sight of Lake Ohrid on that day.

The Italian 14th Division with a Montenegrin Brigade in support was retreating towards Valona. The Serbian command was more concerned with the Vardar Valley and it then seemed that it was willing to allow the old Lakes Redoubt which the Serbians had strongly defended in the summer to fall to the enemy without resistance.

The Near East

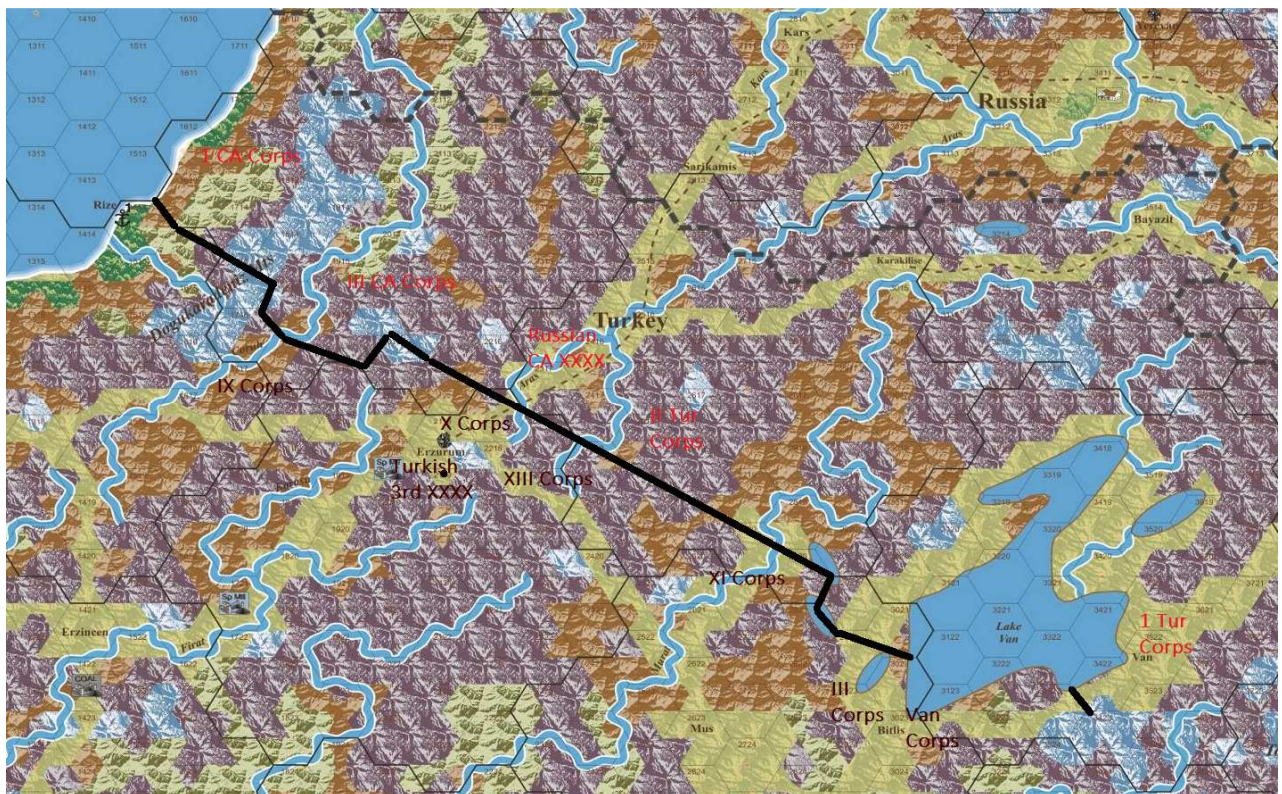


Figure 3: General Situation on the Caucasus Front, 15 - 18 December 1915.

In Iraq, there was increasing sickness in the British camp. Townsend noted a sudden decline in the number of effectives in the 16th Indian Brigade in the returns of 17 and 18 December. Not enough supplies were coming upriver according to the Indian Corps' quartermasters. Townsend revealed to his diary his indecision. Every possible course of action seemed to involve some unpleasant

possibilities. An attack would waste his men and leave them more vulnerable. To remain in place would be risky when the floods came. To retreat was unthinkable.

Townsend's situation was not completely unique. The other Allied Armies in the Near East were facing very similar dilemmas. Winter provided an excuse for inaction but there was a lack of ideas as well.

DM Summary – December 1915

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total	Morale
Germany	2	9	-	2				11	24	1054	Good
Austria-Hungary	-	-	6	-				1	7	446	Good
Ottoman	-	-	-	-				-	-	57	Good
Bulgaria	-	-	-	-				-	-	15	Good
Central Powers	2	9	6	2				12	31	1572	
France	-	-	-	-				-	-	671	Good
Great Britain	-	-	-	-				-	-	227	Good
Russia	5*	4	1	2				-	12	686	Shaken – *Riga (S) lost
Italy	-	-	2	-				-	2	50	Good
Belgium	-	-	-	-				-	-	(96)	NA
Serbia	-	-	-*	-				-	-	(32)	NA - *lost Tirane
Entente	5	4	3	2				-	14	1634	

Player Notes

CP:

- *East: The AH attack did not go well with a loss ratio of 4:1. I can replace the losses with manpower, but that is 4DM more than I can afford on casual efforts. This turn I re-stabilize the AH 2nd and 4th armies after that attack and also consolidate my German forces to prepare for the winter. Around Riga I build up my supplies and conduct a small counter-battery effort. I will have to attack as a result and fairly soon, but would have to regardless so may as well try and write down some of his artillery.*
- *Balkans: The AH 5th Army pushes further into Albania and the Italians withdraw a little more. I can't see much action on this front, but I want to place myself I as strong a position as possible and build up some supply and strength over winter.*
- *West: Quiet. I suspect there will be a TE attack at some point during the winter so just plan to make myself as strong as possible as broadly as possible; concentrating on the highest threat areas.*

- *Caucasus: Quiet.*
- *Mesopotamia: Quiet.*
- *Palestine: Quiet.*
- *Gallipoli: Quiet.*
- *Italy: Content with a reasonably successful attack last turn, I now opt to wait out the winter.*

AP: For a brief moment I thought I had the Germans in a Stalingrad situation at Riga. It was a very brief moment. Their line of communication runs through the rails via Kovno. The Russians had the capability of putting at least one hex on that railway in their zones of control. To keep the line of communication open the Germans would have to fight for the railway with a relatively weak covering force. The Russians are also very weak but it might have been too risky for the Germans to keep an Army Group at Riga with no other line of supply.

This fantasy fell apart when I also realised there was another rail head within 10 hexes of the Dvina in Lithuania. It wouldn't sustain Germans north of the river but it would keep them safe on the south bank. In any event, I really cannot afford to fight another pitched battle at Kovno. It looks like the Germans have got another assault on Riga coming.

I was going to summarise what I thought had gone well for the Entente in 1915. However, I will save that for next time. Instead, there follows on the next pages summary tables on production of supply, weapons and manpower in 1914 – 15.

Production Totals

Supply

Date	Ge	AH	Ot	Bul	CP	Fr	Br	Rus	Be	Se	It	Rom	Gr	US	Ent
Oct 14	77	18	-	-	95	20	18	10	-	-	-	-	-	10	58
Nov 14	77	18	-	-	95	20	18	10	-	-	-	-	-	10	58
Dec 14	77	18	2	-	97	20	18	10	-	-	-	-	-	10	58
Jan 15	77	26	2	-	105	30	18	20	-	-	-	-	-	10	78
Feb 15	77	26	2	-	105	30	18	20	-	-	-	-	-	10	78
Mar 15	77	26	2	-	105	30	18	20	-	-	-	-	-	10	78
Apr 15	77	26	2	-	105	30	18	20	-	-	-	-	-	10	78
May 15	77	26	2	1	106	30	18	20	-	-	-	-	-	10	78
Jun 15	77	26	2	1	106	30	18	18	-	-	10	-	-	10	86
Jul 15	77	26	2	1	106	30	18	18	-	-	10	-	-	10	86
Aug 15	77	26	2	1	106	30	18	14	-	-	10	-	-	10	82
Sept 15	77	26	2	1	106	30	18	14	-	-	10	-	-	10	82
Oct 15	77	26	2	1	106	30	24	14	-	-	10	-	-	10	88
Nov 15	77	26	2	1	106	30	24	14	-	-	10	-	-	10	88
Dec 15	77	26	2	1	106	30	24	14	-	-	10	-	-	10	88

Weapon Production (+drawdown on pre-war stockpiles)

Date	Ge	AH	Ot	Bul	CP	Fr	Br	Rus	Be	Se	It	Rom	Gr	US	Ent
Oct 14	42 +43	23	-	-	108	27 +70	50 +20	50	-	-	-	-	-	-	217
Nov 14	42 +26	23	-	-	91	27 +70	50 +20	50	-	1	-	-	-	-	218
Dec 14	42 +7	23	2	-	74	28 +30	50 +20	50	-	-	-	-	-	-	178
Jan 15	42	23	2	-	67	27	50 +20	50	-	1	-	-	-	-	148
Feb 15	42	23	2	-	67	27	50 +20	50	-	-	-	-	-	-	147
Mar 15	42	23	2	-	67	27	50 +20	50	-	-	-	-	-	-	147
Apr 15	42	23	2	-	67	27	50 +20	50	-	-	-	-	-	-	147
May 15	42	23	2	1	68	27	50 +20	50	-	-	-	-	-	-	147
Jun 15	42	23	2	1	68	27	50 +20	50	-	-	14	-	-	-	161
Jul 15	42	23	2	1	68	27	50 +20	50	-	-	14	-	-	-	161
Aug 15	42	23	2	1	68	27	50 +20	30	-	-	14	-	-	-	141
Sept 15	42	23	2	1	68	27	50	30	-	-	14	-	-	-	121
Oct 15	42	23	2	1	68	27	50	30	-	-	14	-	-	-	121
Nov 15	42	23	2	1	68	27	50	30	-	-	14	-	-	-	121
Dec 15	42	23	2	1	68	27	50	30	-	-	14	-	-	-	121

Manpower (Colonial)

Date	Ge	AH	Ot	Bul	CP	Fr	Br	Rus	Be	Se	It	Rom	Gr	US	Ent
Oct 14	69	36	NA	-	105	41 (+8)	59 (+13)	80	2	6	-	-	-	-	209
Nov 14	70	37	NA	-	107	39 (+8)	59 (+13)	80	1	6	-	-	-	-	206
Dec 14	70	37	NA	-	107	39 (+8)	59 (+13)	80	1	6	-	-	-	-	206
Jan 15	70	37	NA	-	107	39 (+8)	59 (+13)	80	1	6	-	-	-	-	206
Feb 15	70	37	NA	-	107	39 (+8)	59 (+13)	80	1	6	-	-	-	-	206
Mar 15	70	37	NA	-	107	39 (+8)	59 (+13)	80	1	2	-	-	-	-	202
Apr 15	70	37	NA	-	107	39 (+8)	59 (+13)	80	1	2	-	-	-	-	202
May 15	69	37	NA	9	115	40 (+8)	59 (+13)	80	1	1	-	-	-	-	202
Jun 15	69	39	NA	9	115	40 (+8)	59 (+13)	80	1	1	NA	-	-	-	202
Jul 15	69	40	NA	9	116	40 (+8)	59 (+13)	80	1	1	NA	-	-	-	202
Aug 15	69	41	NA	9	117	40 (+8)	59 (+13)	50	1	1	NA	-	-	-	172
Sept 15	69	41	NA	9	117	40 (+8)	59 (+13)	50	1	1	NA	-	-	-	172
Oct 15	69	41	NA	9	117	40 (+8)	46 (+14)	50	1	1	NA	-	-	-	160
Nov 15	69	41	NA	9	117	40 (+8)	46 (+14)	50	1	1	NA	-	-	-	160
Dec 15	69	41	NA	9	117	40 (+8)	46 (14)	50	1	1	NA	-	-	-	160