

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT 120: 1 – 5 January 1916 (Jan 1)

General Situation

The grim and tense mood of Europe carried through to the New Year. As the news from the fighting fronts declined with the pronounced winter lull domestic news managed to edge back in to the consciousness of the reading public. It could be discerned that life apart from the war was actually continuing. Not all of this was good. Paris was shocked by reports of a series of horrific murders believed to be the work of a gang of Belgian refugees and deserters. When it became known who the perpetrators were there were angered reactions from French commentators who couldn't help but comment on the depravity of the murderers against the context of France spilling immense blood to liberate their home country. On New Year's Day, the newspaper *L'Humanité* carried a cartoon showing a veteran war wounded old man 1915 passing the baton of "civilisation" to baby 1916 playing in a bath of blood. The censors must have been on vacation for that to get into print.

Although the public could from time to time forget the war, the war never forgot itself. One thing that all sides were agreed on was that 1916 would surpass 1915 in the level of violence and the Great Powers would all have to be prepared for that. The Allied governments were all concerned with soundly based reports coming from Germany which advised that despite the blockade Germany was shifting more and more of its productive capacity into manufacturing war material and that it still had significant reserves of untapped manpower with which to continue the war, indefinitely, according to the more pessimistic assessments.

Lloyd George as Minister of Munitions in Great Britain was not one to allow pessimism to infect his thinking at all. He promoted a "steady as she goes" outlook to the war industries convinced that the superiority of the Allies would tell in the end. He promoted rational management wherever he could. His own Ministry was decorated by large wall charts which were constantly updated with data coming from the factories and which also monitored the flow of resources in and out of the country. The scope of his activity is well illustrated by an agenda from a meeting with his Permanent-Secretary on 3 January as they reviewed the matters within their purview.

"Meeting Agenda

Room 14B, Admiralty Arch, Horse Guards – 9 o'clock sharp – 3.1.1916.

- 1. Coal exports to France*
- 2. Swedish iron – Narvik too small*
- 3. Canadian and US wheat – submarine threat?*
- 4. Manpower – where are the surpluses – conscription?*
- 5. Munitions – how much less than Germany?*
- 6. Royal Navy Division – upgrade – who pays Navy or Army?*
- 7. Aid to Serbia – are we being too generous?*
- 8. Secret weapons – orders for manufacture."*

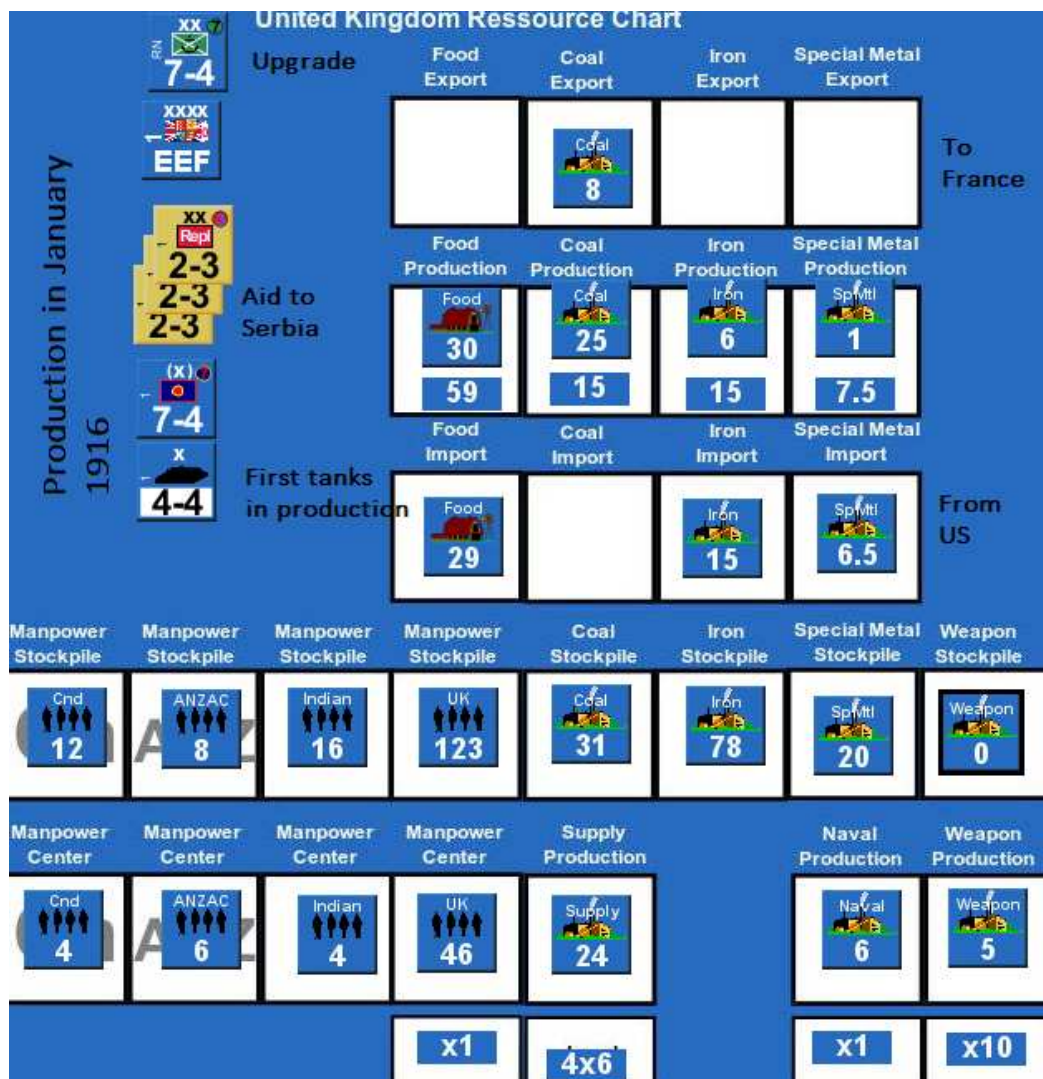


Figure 1: Wall chart from Ministry of Munitions, January 1916.¹

The Western Front

Although there had been no major action for several weeks, both sides anxiously scanned aerial photographs for evidence that an enemy initiative was being planned.

The Germans monitored the flow of British supplies to the Continent especially through Dunkirk. The German Embassy in Washington DC collected Canadian newspapers and obtained day by day updates on the mobilisation of the Canadian 3rd Division which was expected to leave for Europe at the end of the first week of January if the ice in the St Lawrence Seaway did not get too thick. The efforts of the French to consolidate their recent gains between the Oise and the Marne were watched very closely.

¹ I should say I am a big fan of the resource tables in Peter Dietrich's Vassal Module of which this is an example in use. Once you get the hang of using them they really speed up calculating monthly production. I have shown here the situation after the January production process. The iron imports are coming partly from the US and partly from Narvik (as it is the winter and the Germans cannot get the Swedish ore at this time). The new units built go on the production chart to arrive as reinforcements later in the year. The tanks are at the Inferior Model rate and the Serbian replacements are built with British weapon points and Serbian manpower (which is rather limited).

The French did give some credence to the possibility that there might be a German offensive in the winter. A strong concentration of German guns had been identified in Lorraine and this might be expected to be a sign of imminent action. Joffre, however, was dismissive as he insisted the Germans had too little infantry on this section of the front to be able to risk a serious offensive. General Sarrail of the French 3rd Army disagreed with Joffre and in a note of 4 January he pointed out that it would not be difficult for the Germans to concentrate a large force by rail in a few days on this part of the front that was well served with railways.

The Italian Front

Cadorna made a favourable report on the Army to the King shortly after New Year. He stated if the weather was better he would have been prepared to order new attacks but in the circumstances would wait and accumulate supplies. The Austro-Hungarians were playing a waiting game also.

The Eastern Front

The continuing build-up of German forces near Riga was unmistakable to the commanders of the Russian forces hanging on in the northern half of the city. German prisoners had said they were waiting for more guns and ammunition but they expected the Russians would be blasted out of Riga before the spring.



Figure 2: The Volhynian Front, the Austro-Hungarians advance, 1 – 5 January 1916.

Elsewhere the only other significant initiative on this front was a move of the Austro-Hungarian 1st, 2nd and 4th Armies in Volhynia. Over a long stretch of the front, the Austrians moved forward about 20 kilometres on 2 – 3 January. This was a cause of immense cursing and grumbling from the troops involved. It has been said this typified the inhumanity of the commanders of the era. Most of the Hapsburg infantry had spent the last month digging fresh trenches after a previous movement of the front and then just as these positions were becoming familiar and less uncomfortable they were uprooted again. The march across the frozen plains was not excessively long, nor was there any opposition from the Russians except at the eastern extremity of the movement. It was, however, a step back into the unknown and every step was further from home. Perhaps the problem was the lack of communication between the aristocratic elite commanders and the rest. The movement had been designed to protect food supplies and if that had been known perhaps there would have been more common purpose.

The Balkans

The British Government announced further aid to Serbia on 5 January. From being a Russian satellite at the beginning of the conflict the Serbians had become dependent on the Western Allies a year and a half later. The French and British were competing to be generous. The French Government was concerned that they had no land forces in the Balkans and as with the Near East risked leaving this theatre under British influence.

The Near East

A potential solution for the French concerned about losing influence in the Balkans was to move its forces at Cape Hellas (7-6.3713) to Salonika. The French still had two Divisions and a Marine Brigade in the Dardanelles campaign but they had not contributed much to it for several months. As it became more and more apparent that the British were losing interest in the campaign, the French were less and less inclined to keep up their commitment there.

Outside Baghdad, Townsend's force continued to fester unable to resolve any useful action. At the beginning of the year there was some positive news. On 3 January, Nixon (in Basra) had cabled to Townsend (they had laid a cable) confirming that the Indian 4th Division could be sent up-river to join Townsend. This was possible because of growing shipping capacity at Basra. Significant British forces, in particular the 10th (Irish) Division were kept in reserve in Lower Mesopotamia. The Irish were based at Qurna and it is fair to say the posting was equally unpopular with both the soldiers and the inhabitants.

The Turkish forces in Baghdad had for some time been drawn into the city environs as if preparing for a siege which Townsend was incapable of establishing. There was therefore for the Turks some hope of rescue before the British might be able to resume their advance. A Turkish supply column was also on the way south from Mosul which would also give comfort to the defenders and the populace.



Figure 3: The occupation of Lower Mesopotamia, 1 - 5 January 1916.

DM Summary – January 1916

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total	Morale
Germany	-							10	10	1067	Good
Austria-Hungary	-							2	2	448	Good
Ottoman	-							-	-	58	Good
Bulgaria	-							-	-	15	Good
Central Powers	-							12	12	1588	
France	-							-	-	671	Good
Great Britain	-							-	-	231	Good
Russia	-							NA	-	687	Shaken
Italy	-							-	-	50	Good
Belgium	-							NA	-	(96)	NA
Serbia	-							NA	-	(32)	NA
Entente	-							-	-	1639	

Player Notes

CP: *For the first time in a long time my food deficit is less.² Only by one, but less nonetheless. German weapons production has also increased substantially, but Austrian supply production has dropped a little. I can thus produce numerous German RPLs whilst also investing in some artillery. AH invests heavily in the production of mountain artillery to use in Italy.*

- *East: A quiet period as supply and replacements stream towards the front; the bulk being for Riga. AH forces along their border with Russia opt to advance another 20km into Russia to enable a crucial food production region to remain well behind the lines.*
- *Balkans: Sitzkrieg.*
- *West: Quiet, with supply and RPL moving rapidly forward.*
- *Caucasus: Quiet. I move two divisions along the valley to keep him guessing.*
- *Mesopotamia: Quiet.*
- *Palestine: Quiet. I have completed my trenches on the approaches from the Sinai.*
- *Gallipoli: Quiet – I withdraw more troops from this front.*
- *Italy: Quiet.*

AP: *Another calendar year begins.*

One of the most important events now is the increase in German production in January 1916. German monthly weapon points rise from 42 to 76 and German monthly manpower increases 13. Since relatively the weapons increase more than the manpower the Germans will be encouraged to build more new units and artillery.

Ivor asked me a turn or two ago how the Arab Revolt is depicted in the game. I have an interpretation.

First, the Hejaz revolt is off map. That might be a shame but since the Turks defended Medina until the end of the war and there was very little transfer of forces between the Hejaz and the map areas, I think it can be justified leaving this out.

The other place you find the influence of the Arab revolt is in the DM value of the main Arab cities. If the Turks lose Jerusalem; Damascus; Baghdad and Mosul their DM increases by 225. That is a high proportion of Ottoman morale and depending on how DM has moved before the capture of these places the whole Empire can be heading for collapse if the Turks lose control. Since morale is a big factor in troop quality, the Turks are forced to try and defend these places and their loss makes it harder to fight effectively or even to continue the war.

The Arab issue is therefore the biggest vulnerability the Turks have and I would say that they can afford to lose far more in the Caucasus than they can on the southern fronts especially as in the Caucasus they may bounce back if the Russians go down.

None of this brings in any significant Arab forces or even Lawrence of Arabia. I presume from this that the design decision was that the Arab forces which took Aqaba and joined in Allenby's campaign late in the war are regarded as peripheral factors. It is possible to agree with that while regretting slightly the loss of the romantic element. At least there are a few camel regiments knocking around.

² Sadly for the CP it wasn't after further checking of the maths.

