

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT122: 10 – 14 January 1916 (January 3)

General Situation

The news of the fall of Riga reached Berlin late on the evening of 10 January by means of a direct message from the headquarters of the German 10th Army. The telegram also mentioned “extensive civil unrest”.

Hindenburg and Ludendorff attended a conference with the Kaiser two days later in Posen in which there was lengthy discussion of the situation in Russia. They admitted that they had not expected the Russians to withdraw without a fight and there was much debate as to the cause. They confirmed the unrest in Latvia which they believed was mainly due to nationalists rather than socialists and that it was not directed against the German Army.

The representative of the German Foreign Ministry stated that there were reports in Stockholm that the Tsar had returned to St Petersburg from the front and that he was consulting his ministers in relation to the situation in Latvia but also out of concern that it would spread. Anti-war protests had occurred in Tallinn; Narva; and even St Petersburg according to the Swedish source.

There were no firm conclusions from the Posen Conference. OberOst was ordered to maintain military vigilance but should not take any severe action against the Latvian nationalists until it became clearer where their allegiances might lie.

The Eastern Front



Figure 1: The Germans complete the occupation of Riga, 10 January 1916.

The German occupation of the northern half of Riga had been achieved without opposition on 10 January after the last of the Russians had gone. Patrols reported that the main Russian forces (1st and 12th Armies) had pulled back at least 30 kilometres along the Gauja River. They could easily return, but the Germans made the city and its environs quite secure and Army Group Riga had nothing to fear since it had been brought up to strength in recent days in anticipation of a struggle for the city that had been unnecessary.

The population of Riga affected satisfaction that the Germans were in control and there seemed to be a happy mood based on the thought the Germans would be willing to grant Latvian independence. It did not take long for the thought to occur that the Lithuanians (and Poles) had not been offered anything of the kind and the Germans already controlled almost the whole of their countries. Even so optimists were able to say that all these matters would be agreed at a peace conference and in all cases the Russians must never be allowed to return. On this last thought any Germans present were happy to agree.

The Balkans

The only place at which the two sides were in reasonably close contact at this time was in the Lower Bregalnica Valley. The only action was some desultory sniping that was rarely lethal and mostly manifested as warning shots. The Bregalnica River was out of bounds to both sides on account of a tacit understanding that neither should get too close to the other.

The Near East



Figure 2: Turkish troop movements between Syria and Iraq, 10 – 14 January 1916.

The evacuation of the Dardanelles landing zones really began to accelerate on 12 January. At the same time Allied forces were leaving Lemnos. The British 28th Division which had previously been lifted from Sulva Bay (6-8.3711) was sent to Egypt in mid-January.

By the evening of 14 January, most of the remaining infantry and stores had been removed from Beach 3712 (6-8.3712) and Cape Hellas (6-8.3713). Still ashore were two Brigades of British and French marines. The guns of the Aegean Fleet provided those remaining on land with some

protection. The Turks still had six infantry divisions not far from the beaches but these had so far made no move to interfere with the evacuation.

The situation around Baghdad remained tense. Townsend's force was moving backwards and forwards across the plains surrounding the city looking for a way in or around it. Both sides knew through spies and informants that the other side was hoping to be reinforced and that these reinforcements might decide the fate of the city. Townsend was expecting an additional Indian Infantry Division (4th) by the end of the month. He regarded information that there might be as many as four Turkish Divisions on their way to rescue the city as excessively alarmist.

There was little information on what was occurring in Armenia and the Caucasus. There had been very heavy snowfalls across the region on 12 January and there was little traffic between it and the outside world. An exception in escaping the snow was a long column made up of the Turkish Firat (Euphrates) and 34th Divisions which crossed a pass over the hills south of Mus (6-8.2725 – 2726) just hours before it was blocked. These men understood they were going to Syria and they needed little encouragement to hurry out of the wild regions they were leaving.

The Western Front

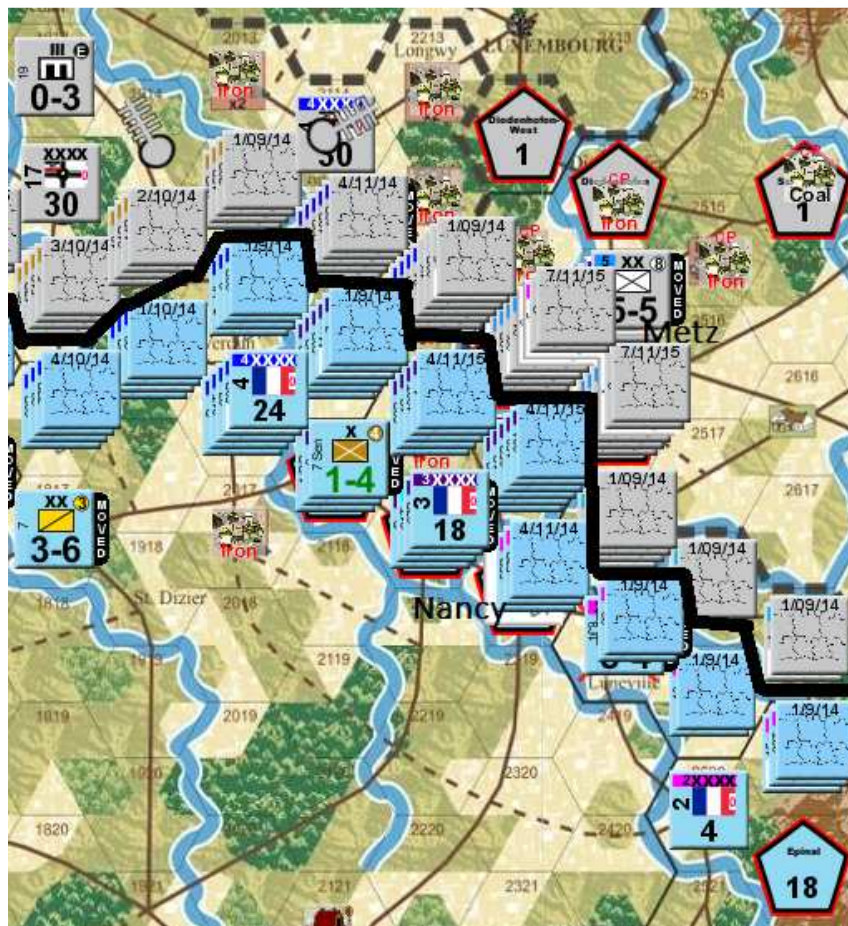


Figure 3: North Eastern France, 10 - 14 January 1916.

The British and French were still at a preliminary stage of their preparations for their 1916 offensive in France. Nothing of substance had been agreed beyond the approximate and aspirational dates

discussed at the Chantilly Conference in December. The news of the fall of Riga reached France on 11 January and in French military circles confidence in their Russian ally dropped another notch.

Joffre was concerned about the possibility the Germans would begin an offensive in France before the Allies were ready. Joffre was not worried about any attack on the British sector. The British could look after that. The front between the Aisne and the Marne did not seem likely to see a German attack either. The Germans had only recently given up ground here and both sides were relying on a defence in depth. The other end of the French front in Alsace also seemed to have little likelihood of a major action though it would need to be reinforced if this assumption was wrong. The chief concern of Joffre's headquarters was that part of the front in North East France from Reims to Épinal. Between Nancy and Metz the French 3rd Army had detected a "thickening" of the enemy front. Joffre didn't enjoy Sarrail (the commander of the 3rd Army) bleating about the risks of the situation but he had to recognise that he might be right.

The Italian Front

The Italian 2nd and 3rd Armies remained stuck on the crossings of the Isonzo River. They were barely 55 kilometres from Trieste but as the two Army commanders admitted when they met for dinner on 13 January they had advanced less than a kilometre since June 1915. They knew, however, that come the spring they would be expected to try again.

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	-	1	-					-	1	59	Good
Bulgaria	-	-						-	-	15	Good
Central Powers	-	1	-					12	13	1589	
France	-	-	-					-	-	671	Good
Great Britain	-	4	-					-	4	235	Good
Russia	-	-	25*					NA	25	712	Shaken *Riga(N) lost
Italy	-	-	-					-	-	50	Good
Belgium	-	-	-					NA	-	(96)	NA
Serbia	-	-	-					NA	-	(32)	NA
Entente	-	-	25					-	29	1658	

Player Notes

CP:

- *East: Robert has occasionally expressed surprise at some of my withdrawals. I was this time very surprised at his evacuation of Riga, which incurs a big DM penalty for him. Clearly, he deemed the losses he would accrue on top of the DM loss of Riga as too high; although after moving so much supply and arty and so many RPL to Riga I thought he would put up more of a fight first, even if just to turn it into Germany's EF Verdun. To be honest, I'm quite relieved he has opted not to fight for it; it could have been very expensive for me in casualty DMs. I have already started to re-route some of the arty back to central and southern sectors. The Baltic States will become less important now and focus will shift further south.*
- *Balkans: Quiet.*
- *West: Quiet.*
- *Caucasus: Quiet.*
- *Mesopotamia: Quiet; although I do have reinforcements starting to arrive. It takes a couple of months to get fresh troops to this theatre for the Turks.*
- *Palestine: Quiet.*
- *Gallipoli: Quiet.*
- *Italy: Quiet.*

AP: *Apart from the fact that the Russians cannot stand the attrition any more, the other reason to abandon Riga was to deny the Germans the opportunity to spend a lot of supply in continuing the combat there. The Germans and Austrians are both still under greater pressure from Rule 22 than the Entente powers and I will not let them relieve it against Russia any more – not the Germans at any rate.*

Another thing worth considering at the start of a year is how close we are to critical thresholds. So far we have focussed on Shaken Morale, but some powers are facing possible Economic Collapse this year and even Surrender is not impossibly distant. The table shows how close we are getting.

	DM End of 1915	% Shaken Morale	% Economic Collapse 1916	% Surrender 1916
Germany	1057	66.0	58.7	51.6
Austria-Hungary	446	81.1	74.3	63.7
Ottoman	57	16.3	12.7	11.4
Bulgaria	15	NA	NA	12.0
France	671	74.6	63.9	55.9
Great Britain	231	18.1	17.8	15.9
Russia	687	114.5	76.3	65.4
Italy	50	16.7	11.1	10.0

It is wrong to think that the thresholds shown are the most important ones. Depending on the time frame a player should have a sense of how bad the morale of a nation is getting especially in comparison with likely opponents. For me the Russians have already passed a point where I think they can stand extensive engagement with Germany. It still makes sense for them to fight the

Austrians and the Turks but the Russians are practically ready to offer peace to Germany. Morale in this sense can recover. If DM advances slowly enough the passage of time makes risks more acceptable again.