

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT123: 15 – 18 January 1916 (January 4)

General Situation

Prime Minister Asquith announced the final evacuation of the Dardanelles bridgeheads to a sombre House of Commons on 17 January. In doing so he reiterated his Government's resolute purpose to prosecute the war against the Ottoman Empire and reminded the Members of Parliament that even then a British Army stood at the gates of Baghdad. Despite the brave front which had been put on it and despite the Inquiries which were promised there was no concealing the fact that this major strategic initiative was an acknowledged failure. The Prime Minister was asked to confirm that henceforth he would allow less diversion from British efforts on the Western Front. Another significant question posed in Parliament was whether the Prime Minister had anything to say about the reported political troubles in Russia? To this a stock response was given confirming the Government's complete confidence in the commitment of the Russians to the war effort.

In St Petersburg the situation had a different hue. The Tsar had returned temporarily to his capital and he was placed under great pressure to announce political reforms. Some of this pressure was external. Strikes and demonstrations were breaking out all over the Empire and the spirit of 1905 seemed to be returning. Although the subject matter was mainly about wages and food prices, more radical elements were using the opportunity to call for an end of the war and for more political liberties. As in Latvia, nationalist spokesmen were also calling for more self-government in non-Russian areas.

Ministers and senior military officers were alarmed by these developments and repression was considered too risky. Most striking of all was that some high ranking officers doubted that the Army would be prepared to take offensive action if there was no political reform. Several even broached the possibility of negotiating a separate peace with the Germans. The thought was occurring to parts of the Imperial elite that accommodation with Germany might preserve their privileges but continuation of the war could destroy their system and only for the sake of Western war aims. The Tsar was therefore urged to consider a grand political-strategic gesture to help save his dynasty. He was known to be extremely reluctant and considered the pacts that had been made with the Western powers to be inviolable. It would mean abandoning Serbia as well.

The Eastern Front

Fortunately while this political crisis was increasing in temperature there was no real pressure on the Eastern Front. The Germans had made themselves secure in Riga and were starting to redeploy the forces they had concentrated there.

The Balkans

This theatre also was very quiet. In Albania, the Austro-Hungarian 5th Army pushed further south by another 20 kilometres. There were no Allied forces present to contest this. The Italians still guarded Valona to help hold the narrowest part of the Straights of Otranto but they had few urgent interests elsewhere. With the forces available they could not hope to stand in front of a strong enemy force anywhere other than at Valona.

The Near East

As announced in London, the final evacuations of the last Allied soldiers on the Gallipoli peninsula were completed early in the morning of 17 January. The Turks still remained in

their own trenches and made not the slightest effort to interfere. The news travelled back rather slowly to Istanbul and there were no official announcements or spontaneous celebrations of the Ottoman victory until 19 January.



Figure 1: The end of the Gallipoli Campaign, 17 January 1916.

In Egypt, some of the British survivors of the campaign on the Dardanelles were unloading at Port Said on 17 – 18 January. At the time this was just to give them some rest in a warmer dry climate. Strategic direction from London was rather faint at this time and the future use of these troops was then uncertain.

In Iraq, Townsend had apparently cast off his uncertainties and was now acting with some real vigour around Baghdad. The anticipated reinforcement and resupply of his command was a factor behind this new resolve. Having previously made a feint around the eastern side of the city, Townsend now tried on the west. The 3rd Indian Division was sent across to the western bank of the Tigris and then between 17 and 18 January marched all the way across to the Euphrates which provided a route around Baghdad in this direction. Ahead of the main body, the Indian 31st Brigade moved further forward and squeezed into the gap where the Euphrates came closest to Baghdad at Abu Habba near the ruins of ancient Sippar (7-9.2823). If the British could get through at this point then they might get north of the city and cut it off from relief. Townsend described his move as a “gamble” in his correspondence with his superior Nixon at Basra.



Figure 2: Townsend's gamble, 17 - 18 January 1916.

The Western Front

It was a military commonplace that work on the defensive trench lines could never cease. They were, according to this view, always improvable and so there could never be any lasting break from the duty of the front line troops to make them better. Hard ground and shorter days did, however, slow the progress of the work.

Experience was also showing the value of dedicated engineering units on the Western Front. The Germans had nine regiments of engineers in reserve awaiting the warmer weather when reserve lines of resistance might be built. During the mid-winter period they were already active in preliminary survey work. Among the Allies, engineers were particularly proficient at advancing rail lines as close to the front as could be dared.

The Italian Front



Figure 3: The Cold War on the Carnic Front, 15 - 18 January 1916.

The worst part of the line on which to be posted during the winter of 1915 – 16 was in the Eastern Dolomites and Carnic Alps. Here the altitude of the front line was at its greatest average extent. Both sides stopped fighting each other and concentrated on protecting themselves against the elements. The commander of the Italian Carnic Corps published a memoir after the war which described the rigours of this campaign under the title “*The Cold War*”.

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: The evacuation of Riga allows me to release two of the three armies I had committed to taking the city. It will take some time to re-deploy these forces but I will take full advantage of this dividend. I will say no more here as there are spies...*
- *Balkans: Quiet; although with a small advance by AH troops.*
- *West: Quiet.*
- *Caucasus: Quiet.*
- *Mesopotamia: Quiet. I am concerned about getting reinforcements to Baghdad in good enough time.*
- *Palestine: Quiet.*
- *Gallipoli: Quiet. I am now certain there is an evacuation underway as intelligence suggests there are no longer any HQs on the peninsula.*
- *Italy: Quiet.*

AP: *This is one of the most enduring lulls in the game so far. Clausewitz was the one who showed that it was possible to understand inactivity in warfare from the consequences of the imbalance between attack and defence. This is present in DWK to a degree unprecedented in my gaming experience. Few wargames can depict delay let alone inactivity.*

Despite this the contest is still being fought to the best of our ability. I am using this period to build up strength so I can attack more effectively later. I also know the CP is going to have to attack first because of Rule 22. My desperate offensives in November were deliberately running down supplies for this opportunity.

The Gallipoli campaign is over. Here is a chart identifying what losses were suffered by both sides. All combats were Allied attacks. That is not surprising – I think the Germans would be needed to help any Turkish counter-offensive. Overall I think that the results are worthwhile.

Nationality	DM suffered Gallipoli	% of total DM
Turkish	18	30.5
British	44	18.7
French	9	1.3

I was not entirely satisfied with these results but the proportion of total Turkish losses to date is the real justification. There may be some other places in which to use the Allied amphibious capacity but the advantages of this location are that the Turks cannot retreat inland without giving up critical land and secondly the terrain prevents the Allies being driven back into the sea easily.