

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT124: 19 – 22 January 1916 (January 5)

General Situation

In St Petersburg, the Tsar's deliberations with his ministers had resulted in a compromise revealing the possibility of a change in policy in the future but without any immediate commitment. An Imperial decree was drafted and published on 21 January (new calendar). This announced that elections for a new Duma would take place in March or April and that it would have the specific purpose of advising the Tsar's government on post-war reforms. There was no suggestion that the Duma would have any say in respect of war-policy, no Duma ever had.

The precise arrangements for the Russian elections were still being worked out. There was a problem of what to do in relation to the territories occupied by the Central Powers. Since a lot of Polish radicals might be kept out by the inability to test opinion there this was not altogether inconvenient. There was just a vague promise that there would be representation in some form of the occupied areas and indeed those in undefined "military zones".

The election decree was helpful to the Imperial regime. It showed a willingness to listen to a range of opinion interested in political reform and although nothing was yet fixed it gave radicals something to focus on in the short term which relieved the immediate pressure on the government.

As for foreign policy, the Tsar had a separate proclamation on the same day. He confirmed that Russia still stood in complete unity with Britain and France. He nevertheless stated that Russia stood for justice for Serbia and a reasonable solution to other European issues including the independence of Belgium and other territorial disputes. Although the language used was very mild, the French and British ambassadors in Russia were infuriated with this unilateral gesture. The Italian emissary had a stroke when he realised his country was not mentioned at all. The proclamation did not represent joint war aims and Germany would surely see this as a coded message inviting the possibility of playing off Russia against the West. It might be imagined that the Tsar could think it was "reasonable" for Germany to keep Alsace-Lorraine in exchange for the restoration of the status quo ante in Poland.

In Berlin, the Tsar's announcements were treated with some suspicion. The reference to justice for Serbia was designed perhaps to open up distance between Germany and Austria-Hungary. Nevertheless, the advantages of the changing mood in Russia were not completely lost on the German government. Falkenhayn also realised he needed to be at the centre at this critical moment and agreed to return to Berlin to give the General Staff view. It was impossible to keep Hindenburg and Ludendorff away from such a conference which would concern future operations on the Eastern Front most of all. The Kaiser graciously agreed to hold this meeting at the Palace of Sans Souci in Potsdam on 24 January.

The Western Front



Figure 1: Reims close to the front line, 19 - 22 January 1916.

On 20 January, the French newspapers published extracts from a Red Cross report which they had obtained. It detailed the privations of the population of Reims. By selectively quoting they were able to give the impression that nobody was feeding the unfortunate inhabitants of the city and in effect they were being deliberately starved. This was not a fair picture. The German Army was complying with its humanitarian obligations though in the words of the Red Cross they were “merely following the rule-book” and nothing more. However, the Red Cross were embarrassed by this partisan use of their report and issued a clarification giving so-called errata of their document on 22 January which confirmed they had no criticism of the German authorities who were simply doing their best in a difficult situation.¹

The purpose of the French journalists was to try and push Joffre into a swift effort to re-capture Reims which was then very close to the front line and according to unnamed French military sources “ripe for the taking”. Joffre, however, was not going to let his military decisions be dictated to by the popular press and GQG refused to comment on the situation at all.

¹ Reference here is to cities abandoned by those who control them and not recaptured by the enemy - possibly to manipulate food deficit (on either side). David Schroeder confirmed in the errata that such cities do not have to be fed. I agree. The French are being offered an advantage here as if they occupy the city they will recover a monthly manpower point. If they choose not to take it, the Germans should not be penalised in food. In any event, abandoning cities to change the food deficit rarely works because there is usually a food resource within one or two hexes of a city and the change in possession of a city usually impacts food production as well.

The Italian Front

In Hemingway's unpublished "*Guns of Lavarone*" a famous historical snow storm that swept across the Alps between 19 - 21 January is the setting for the flight of the young revolutionaries Carlo and Marina across the Swiss border so that Carlo could escape arrest for desertion. This part of the adventure featured a chase by gendarmes on skis, a perilous crossing of a snow bridge, and finally rescue by a St Bernard dog.

Marina was intent on introducing Carlo to Lenin and Zinoviev but a planned rendezvous at the Grand Hotel Zermatterhof in Zermatt was foiled by the bourgeois pretext that Carlo was inappropriately attired to gain entry to the tea room.² Leninist hagiography almost always omits the fact that Lenin used his time in Switzerland to become an accomplished downhill skier. A trace of this pastime can be detected in Stalin's final indictments of Zinoviev 20 years later when he was accused of veering first left and then right in the manner of the slalom skier he was.

The Eastern Front

Behind the front lines both sides were conducting redeployments. The German Army Group Riga was being dismantled and the Russians were also reducing their troop concentrations in Latvia in order to replenish their strategic reserves.

The Balkans

The French had determined that they would transfer their forces which had been at Cape Hellas (7-6.3713) to Greece. By 22 January, ships carrying these troops had begun to arrive off Salonika and Kavalla. Joffre had confirmed that the commander of the French 3rd Army, General Sarrail would go to Salonika to take charge there. This removed a significant rival of Joffre from the Western Front.

The French were not, however, granted immediate permission to land at Salonika. The Greek National Defence Committee dominated by Prime Minister Venizelos wanted the French to participate in the Balkan campaign but had to make a show of difficulty.

The Near East

On the Gallipoli peninsula, Turkish troops roamed over the beaches which the Allies had recently left scavenging for any equipment that had been left behind. In Istanbul a spectacular firework display over the Bosphorus on 19 January trumpeted the Turkish victory. Representatives of all the Central Powers joined in and Enver Pasha warmly embraced Liman von Sanders in front of the crowds. Although this appeared to signal gratitude for German assistance, in private Enver Pasha berated von Sanders for the lack of material support. A few advisers were not much good he said when Erzerum and Baghdad might be lost any day to the Allies.

Erzerum was not in any real immediate danger but the situation at Baghdad was growing more uncertain. Townsend's latest moves seemed to be threatening an envelopment of the city on both sides. By 20 January, the Turkish 6th Army considered it had to react. A new Turkish commander,

²This plot twist seems to have reflected similar episodes in Hemingway's own life.

Halil Bey witnessed this rout and it seemed to uncover a mental illness in him. He never subsequently spoke a single word of reason and totally neglected his military duties. He commented as he rode away from the scene of the disaster that he was still the “King of Baghdad” and he was not afraid of the Mongols.

Having defeated the Turkish effort to stop his plans, Townsend urged the two wings of his force forwards. By 22 January, 31st Indian Brigade was at Mufraz Post (7-9.2723) on the Euphrates while the 6th Indian Cavalry Brigade had moved on from Al A'Zamiyah on a wide flanking move through the desert to the east. That evening, Townsend studied the prospects of letting his spearheads loose north of Baghdad joining hands around Ba Quba over 50 kilometres north of the city. If it was cut off in this fashion the Turkish 6th Army would surely collapse and surrender. Townsend had just heard about the evacuation of the Dardanelles and the thought occurred to him that he could make up for that disappointment at Baghdad.

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	-	-	2			-	3	62	Good
Bulgaria	-	-	-	-	-			-	-	15	Good
Central Powers	-	1	-	-	2			12	15	1591	
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: I have reconstituted the 10th Army as the northern army which will be responsible for holding Riga. It denies the Russians a factory complex and a port, so it is worth holding onto but not with too much strength which can better be employed elsewhere. The two very strong 11th and 12th armies extract from the Riga front and start to head south for the rail connections to be used elsewhere. This is now a very strong concentration of force which I will use at a time and place of my choosing. It should also*

serve to keep the Russians honest and allow me the flexibility of sending some German divisions to other fronts.

- *Balkans: Quiet.*
- *West: Quiet.*
- *Caucasus: Quiet.*
- *Mesopotamia: I have two options here; sit and wait for the British to concentrate and whittle me down, or take some offensive action to keep him off balance. As a result, I go for a sortie out of Baghdad to attack his northern flank. If fortune smiles, I may force him back and place myself in a position to threaten his riverhead.*
- *Palestine: I start to reduce the garrisons in some of the towns but leave sufficient garrison to deny any opportunistic amphibious options.*
- *Gallipoli: He has managed to slip away so I occupy the landing beaches to deny further such attempts. The bulk of the Turkish 5th Army commences a re-deployment out of Gallipoli and heads towards the communication nodes in Constantinople.*
- *Italy: A little bit of re-balancing in the Alps but nothing more.*

AP: In this AAR I am highlighting how DWK does politics mainly through morale effects.

Once Riga is taken there are no territorial objectives left for the CP in the East until Romania declares war and opens up itself and Bessarabia to invasion. The destruction of the Russian Army is a proper CP objective but with DM already well over 700 in this game that job has already been done to a very considerable extent. Russia really only has one good offensive left in it now (Brusilov) and its offensive potential is heavily diminished because unsupplied attacks are no longer allowed and Russia is not supply rich. This means that most Russian units will only be able to fight if attacked. The number of strength points an Army has in DWK is a very weak predictor of combat power. Morale and supply are much more important.

I am enjoying the Battle for Baghdad. This highlights the detail you get with DWK and the discovery of interesting situations which did not occur in the same fashion historically. As with the Battle of Riga, the game allows situations to evolve over many moves and precise positioning is always important. The Germans took Riga with sheer force applied over several months of threats and direct assaults with several periods of escalation and relaxation until the Entente's will collapsed. At Baghdad the situation is very different and I am trying to capture the city by threatening envelopment. The Turkish attack this turn could hardly have gone worse for them as I didn't suffer any combat loss which was critical as I am trying to do this with 11 SP and used my last supply point until the arrival of my reinforcements.