

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT126: 28 – 31 January 1916 (January 7)

General Situation

The Ottoman archives have lately yielded up an interesting document which gives evidence of the temperature of the Arabian Peninsula at the beginning of 1916. It was a report of a Turkish Colonel sent to Mecca to inspect the small detachment the Ottomans still maintained there.

“...It is a strange fact that everyone in Istanbul prays towards Mecca but there is in truth no map which shows exactly where it is. We followed the road from Medina but if we had lost it and had no guide we would never have reached our destination. In the hills the road is watched by Bedu. Most have no rifles but they are the eyes of the Sharif and he was well prepared for our coming.”

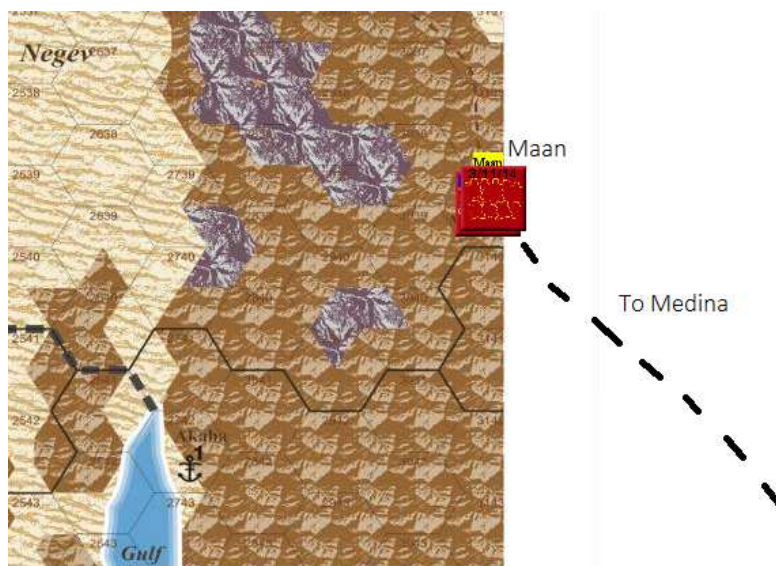


Figure 1: Turkish maps in 1916 were mostly derived from surveys done before the war by foreign technicians and these did not extend very far into Arabia which was only very sketchily mapped.

The interview with the Sharif (attended by his sons Abdullah and Feisal) was pleasant enough. Felicitations were exchanged on behalf of and to the Caliph. The Sharif explained that there were no disturbances in his part of the Vilayet. Abdullah said he was only concerned about the Yemeni tribes to the south who might take English gold to stir up difficulties. I stopped my tongue from asking why then the Bedu were in such numbers watching the road from Medina? I asked about the port of Yeddiyah and the Sharif assured me that although foreign vessels did from time to time visit no English or French ship was allowed to dock. I was not so sure. When Prince Feisal had greeted me at the city gate I had seen he was armed by a new model English rifle that cannot have been out of its package more than a few days.

The Sharif talked about the weather, his hawks, and asked after certain scholars in Baghdad and Damascus who I had to admit I did not know. At the mention of Baghdad, Prince Feisal asked if it were true the British were at the gates of the city? I assured him that the entire population of the city, Arabs, Turks, Jews and Syrians, were helping the Army repel the invaders who would soon be

swept back to the sea. The news of the English defeat at Gallipoli had not yet been told in Mecca and I had the pleasure of informing the Sharif that the foreigners were no match for the faithful.

Later, Prince Feisal accompanied me to inspect the company. On the way I apologised for my inability to answer his father's questions. I explained I had studied in Egypt and mentioned some of my teachers there. I asked Prince Feisal whether it was not the same for him and wondered if he had received any recent letters from his tutors there. This he abruptly denied and he looked at me perhaps knowing that the rumours of him being in Egypt recently had reached my ears.

The soldiers were worthless. There are less than 50 men, all Arabs, and none have the slightest idea that their master might be the Caliph. The Sharif is the only law in Mecca..."

The Near East

The arrival of additional troops in Egypt had stimulated activity in the Eastern Delta. The British resolved to reinforce their outpost at Romani (8-8.1138) and laid plans to establish a whole Indian Division there.

At Baghdad the semi-siege remained in the balance. Von der Goltz (now in effective command of the defence) ordered the 98th Regiment to dig in after their repulse of the first British attack at Kadhimain (7-9.2722). On 29 January, he heard the hopeful news that a regiment of Jerusalem Jandarma was approaching from the north having taken a train from Samara. The train driver, who knew there were very few engines in Iraq, would not take risks and obliged the infantry to march the last 30 kilometres to Baghdad. This meant that they had not arrived when Townsend ordered a second attack on Kadhimain on 30 January.

This attack was executed by the Indian 17th and 31st Brigades which remained at the extreme end of a long supply chain and which had not replaced their losses from their previous effort. The Turkish 98th Regiment were their opponents again. The Turkish regiment had hardly begun to comply with Von der Goltz' order and it held no trenches that were not mere irrigation ditches. However, these improvised defences were enough and the Indian infantry were stopped for a second time without getting close to their objective.

The Western Front

The war on the ground gave rise to no notable events. In the skies there was a marked quickening at the end of January.

The French air force had been patrolling all month assured of their superiority watching the German lines for signs of preparations for an enemy offensive. The results of this reconnaissance were disappointing in as much as nothing was seen that suggested imminent enemy action. Then during the last days of the month the number of dogfights escalated markedly as German pilots made a concentrated effort to disrupt the French patrols. The Germans had new types of aircraft including their monoplane and a better Albatross. On 31 January, the French scaled back their air operations while they made an assessment of this new threat.

The Italian Front

Boroevic's winter offensive restarted on 28 January. The Austrian and Croatian Gebirgers were soon closing in on Cortina (6-4.2715). The Italian defence rested primarily on the 8th Alpine Brigade but it was considerably outnumbered and although both attackers and defenders fought with great skill and bravery the Italians were overwhelmed and Cortina was lost on 29 January. The Italian 2nd Division should have contributed more to the defence but it was reduced to only 25% of its effective strength with heavy losses due to sickness including snow-blindness and frostbite. The ordinary infantry were not as well equipped as the Alpinists and they retreated down the Piave Valley as far as the fortifications covering Tai di Cadore (6-4.2716).



Figure 2: The Fall of Cortina, 28 - 29 January 1916.

The Eastern Front

The German 11th and 12th Armies had been redeployed from Riga to Eastern Lithuania very quickly. There were reports available to OberOst which suggested that there was indiscipline or laxity in the Russian Armies that were covering the railway from Vilna to St Petersburg which had been partially repaired of the damage it had suffered in the last summer. It seemed the Russians had stopped doing this work and had also ceased work on entrenchments in this area.

OberOst ordered the two German Armies to advance and test the Russian reactions to threats against this railway line and to Vilna also. These orders were followed and the German front moved east about 40 kilometres on 28 – 29 January. There was no Russian resistance to this and more advanced patrols suggested that the Germans could continue at least as far as Vilna without encountering any serious opposition.

Had OberOst access to the Russian plans they would have confirmed that there would be uncontested territorial gains. STAVKA and the Russian West Front command were both requiring their subordinates, including the Russian 2nd and 7th Armies, to avoid further combat during the winter to avoid compounding the grievous losses the Imperial Army had suffered in the Riga campaign.

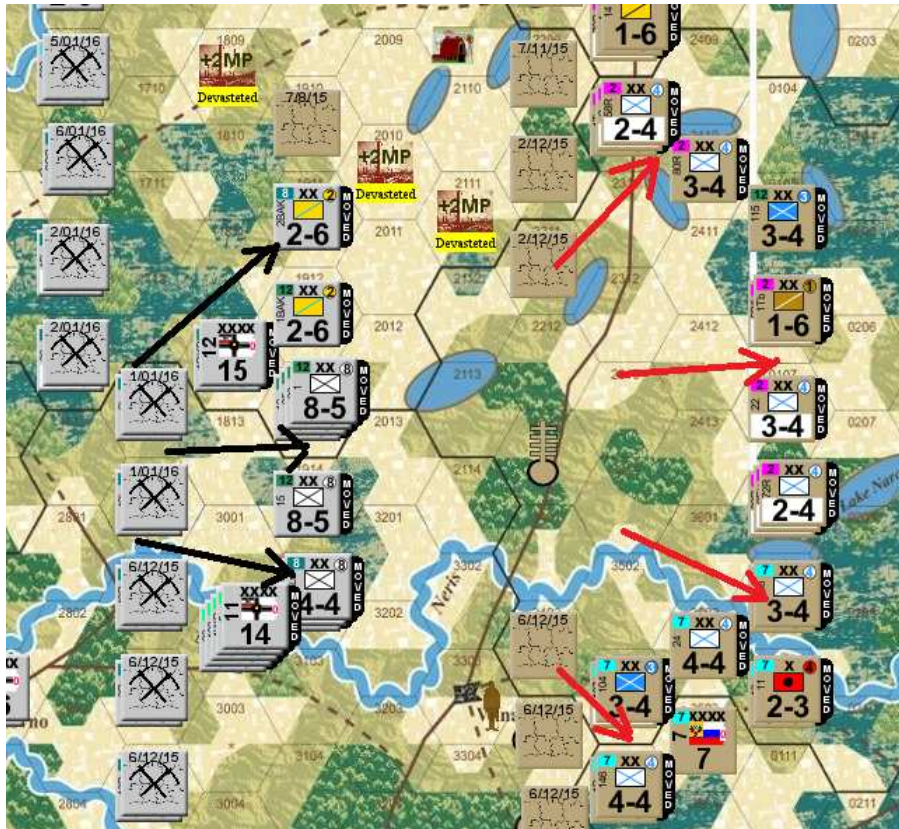


Figure 3: The German 11th and 12th Armies advance in Eastern Lithuania, 28 – 31 January 1916.

The Balkans

As the Austro-Hungarian 5th Army moved into south-western Serbia from Albania it became apparent that the Central Powers were engaged in a significant redeployment of their forces in the Balkans. Some Bulgarian units were being sent to Albania as part of a swap.



Figure 4: The Austro-Hungarian 5th Army advances through the Serbian Lakes region, 28 – 31 January 1916.

The Montenegrin Corps had also redeployed and was now concentrated to cover Monastir which was threatened by these enemy moves.

At Salonika, French engineers started construction of a new mole on 30 January with the intention of doubling the capacity of the port.

DM Summary – January 1916

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total [%SM]	Morale
Germany	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	10	10	1067 [66.7]	Good
Austria-Hungary	-	-	-	-	-	2	1	2	5	451 [82.0]	Good
Ottoman	-	1	-	-	2	-	-	-	3	61 [17.7]	Good
Bulgaria	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	15	Good
Central Powers	-	1	-	-	2	2	1	12	18	1594	
France	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	671 [74.6]	Good
Great Britain	-	4	-	-	-	1	1	-	6	237 [18.6]	Good
Russia	-	-	25*	-	-	-	-	NA	25	712 [118.7]	Shaken *Riga(N) lost
Italy	-	-	-	-	-	2	1	-	3	53 [17.7]	Good
Belgium	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	NA	-	(96)	NA
Serbia	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	NA	-	(32)	NA
Entente	-	4	25	-	-	3	2	-	34	1663	

Player Notes:

CP:

- *East: Russia is actually still a long way from economic collapse so there is little opportunity for me to use the forces freed up from Riga to do any rampaging as, in most places, there is a divide of around 100km between our front lines. If I advance to contact, I stretch myself and risk creating opportunities to be cut off. He can also just concentrate in some areas and withdraw behind the GTL in others to preserve his strength. I cannot use these armies to support AH on their portion of the EF as the alliance restrictions are back in place until AH economic collapse. For the same reasons, I cannot send German armies to either Italy or the Balkans. That leaves just the WF to consider reinforcing.*
- *Balkans: The RiP with Bulgaria continues.*
- *West: Quiet.*
- *Caucasus: Quiet.*
- *Mesopotamia: I find myself suddenly under great pressure here. I think my understanding of the desert LOC rules has been lacking. Robert attacked my western*

flank outside Baghdad with a 1/3^d chance of failing; which thankfully he did. My counterattack had a 50% chance of succeeding to cause casualties, and it did. It is a discomfiting situation as he can afford the losses; I cannot.

- *Palestine: Quiet.*
- *Italy: My last AH attack met with some success. Whilst losses were even, he is in a diminished position and I still have sufficient strength to attack again. I have a very slim chance of clearing him from this northernmost position in the Dolomites.*

AP: This is one of the months with the lowest losses so far taking account of the fact that almost all DM was inflicted by food deficit and the loss of Riga. Although it is my choice to put a brake on action this month, it does have a significant downside.

It may seem that the CP is under pressure to win quickly to avoid food deficit catching up with them but this is not an absolute factor. So long as overall DM is low enough the CP could ride through to the end of 1919 without losing the war because of that. It is a combination of the aggression of both sides which makes food deficit a potential problem. Efforts to end the war with victory tend to make defeat more likely. This works, for instance, with American entry. Early American entry will be a result of German aggression (mostly), but it will also make it harder for the CP to win.

So a pause in the bloodletting is something the CP should be welcoming now. The Entente has to force Germany and/or Austria to surrender. To achieve that in 1918 I need to inflict almost 50 DM per month on the Germans and nearly 17 DM per month on the Austrians. In 1915, I exceeded these rates in only 3 of the 12 months and relied on the elevated losses of 1914 to stay in touch with the target.

The more quiet months there are the greater will be the pressure to intensify action later on and the more likely I am to expose the French or British to risk of Economic Collapse or worse. This game is a lot about the economy and tempo of effort and resting is as much part of it as unlimited aggression.

In the short term I am not too concerned. I will worry about attacking when the CP has dealt with their Rule 22 pressure.