

## Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

### GT127: 1 – 4 February 1916 (February 1)

#### General Situation

There was as the winter passed increasing speculation as to what campaigns would be fought in 1916. However, it might be remarked that this was much less feverish than at previous moments during the war. The press in the Central Powers was very well disciplined and naturally deferred to the military authorities who were assumed to know best. The Austro-Hungarian success at Cortina (6-4.2715) was widely publicised and it would be fair to say that actions against Italy were universally popular in the Hapsburg lands while the war against Russia was regarded as more problematic.

The publics in the Western powers were also showing more patience. The costs of the campaigns in 1914-15 were sobering and there was widespread awareness that time was needed to prepare a big blow in order to have a chance to overcome the natural and man-made defences presented by the Central Powers. Exceptions to this included the hopes that were still entertained for the early fall of Baghdad and sections of the French press and polity continued to question Joffre's refusal to make an early move to liberate Reims.

#### The Eastern Front



Figure 1: The Archduke's attack, 1-2 February 1916.

The German 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Armies continued their reconnaissance in Eastern Lithuania. On 2 February, the German 1<sup>st</sup> Division was just 15 kilometres south-west of Vilna. There was no sign that the Russians were preparing to defend the city despite its status as an important rail junction.

There was a significant fight on the South West Front when the Austro-Hungarian 4<sup>th</sup> Army made an attack west of Teofipol (5-5.4607). Archduke Josef Ferdinand had heard that the Russians were not standing against the Germans in Lithuania and thought he should determine whether the Russians would similarly give way in the sector of his army. This question was answered when the Austrians attacked on 1 – 2 February. They found the Russian trenches fully manned by a Grenadier Division (8<sup>th</sup>) and a full strength Reserve Division (90<sup>th</sup>). Two good Hungarian Divisions (20<sup>th</sup> and 51<sup>st</sup>) led the 4<sup>th</sup> Army attack and they kept up a steady attack which started to cut into the Russian lines but there was no dramatic breakthrough and on 2 February the Archduke suspended the attack as it was clear that the Russians were not going to pull back with this level of pressure.

### **The Balkans**

The Austro-Hungarian 5<sup>th</sup> Army was still moving forward in the extreme south-west of Serbia. In the first days of February it was advancing around the northern side of Lake Prespanko and penetrating the Plaćenska Hills (7-6.1112 – 1113) searching for the outposts of the Serbian lines covering Monastir.

### **The Near East**

Having been repulsed twice at Kardhimain (7-9.2722), Townsend was coming to realise that the encirclement of Baghdad was no longer practical. However, the 4<sup>th</sup> Indian Division had reached the front and Townsend planned a frontal attack on the parts of the city west of the Tigris on 4 February. To do this he ordered the retreat of the units which had attacked Kardhimain and concentrated a flotilla of river craft to support the bombardment of the city. Despite these preparations the attack was cancelled less than an hour in advance. The 4<sup>th</sup> Indian Division was tired from its march and it was recognised that if it was thrown immediately and unprepared into a street fight then it would quickly become disorganised and lose half its strength through disorientation. Townsend agreed he needed a better plan than this.

The Turkish XIII Corps made an attack on 1 February at Gopal in Armenia. The snow was still thick on the mountains and it is probable that the Turkish commander had thought he could overcome a thin Russian line which amounted to a chain of outposts in which a single Brigade was expected to hold a 20 kilometre length of front.

Despite the advantage of numbers, the Turkish attack encountered a mixture of human and natural disasters. Details of what happened are very obscure but there is some historical evidence that a whole Turkish Regiment was engulfed in an avalanche which, according to one source, was triggered accidentally and, by another source, deliberately by the defending infantry.<sup>1</sup> The XIII Corps did not really know why its attack had failed. Its report simply admitted heavy losses.

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<sup>1</sup> One source says it was the Turkish 2<sup>nd</sup> Frontier Regiment and another source says it was the 218<sup>th</sup> Regiment which met this fate. It would be a coincidence if both regiments suffered the same fate but the evidence does not actually preclude it.



Figure 2: Armenia and the Turkish attack at Gopal, 1 -4 February 1916.

### The Western Front

There was increasing activity in the rear of the front lines. The build-up of supplies had been progressing all winter and some of the logistical centres were huge by the beginning of February. It was impossible to conceal the scale of the preparations but the abundance of these stockpiles gave few clues as to the precise intentions of planners on both sides. Intelligence estimates all seemed to agree that, with the exception of the Vosges sector, an enemy offensive could begin almost anywhere. This was actually the assessment of both sides in early 1916.

As each day passed, the tension mounted. Few were party to the planning of the senior staffs, so most had to guess when the storm would break.





Figure 3: Western Front positions showing major supply dump positions (20 = 200,000 tonnes metric) from Allied intelligence estimates, 4 February 1916.

### The Italian Front

The Italian 39<sup>th</sup> Division, newly raised, unloaded at the station at Codroipo (6-4.3017) on 4 February after a rail journey from Milan. The snow on the platforms was quickly crushed under their boots as the new recruits looked around uncertainly wondering where they were. Then quickly they were mustered into their units and marched off through the dark town. Most of them were a long way from home and would never have heard of Codroipo. Perhaps one or two might by chance have originated from this far corner of Italy and they would have been very surprised to realise they were back again.

## DM Summary – February 1916

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total	Morale
Germany	-							12	12	1079	Good
Austria-Hungary	2							1	3	454	Good
Ottoman	3							-	3	65	Good
Bulgaria	-							-	-	15	Good
Central Powers	5							13	18	1612	
France	-							-	-	671	Good
Great Britain	-							-	-	237	Good
Russia	2							-	2	714	Shaken
Italy	-							-	-	53	Good
Belgium	-							-	-	(96)	NA
Serbia	-							-	-	(32)	NA
Entente	2							-	2	1665	

### Player Notes

CP: *The CP are now starting to continuously exceed upper supply limits forcing me to conduct attacks that are not necessarily to my advantage. After this round of production, AH will have to expend over 12 points of supply on offensive action and Turkey at least two. I also realised I failed to keep abreast of the rules and have missed opportunities to build certain special units for AH and Germany. I build those now; all of them mountain brigades or divisions. On a plus side, there is now air parity.*

- *East: The Russian 2<sup>nd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> armies recoiled eastwards to keep distance between themselves and the powerful roving concentrations of the German 11<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> armies, released from duties around Riga and effectively seeking opportunity to attack Russians opportunistically. The German Sud Armee commits a Div in support of the AH 4<sup>th</sup> Army, which is compelled by Conrad to conduct an assault “somewhere”! These attacks will hurt but I have to make them.*
- *Balkans: The RiP with Bulgaria continues.*
- *West: A large tranche of RPLs all heads west this month to bolster defences and perhaps seek opportunity to attack.*
- *Caucasus: The Turks, under similar political pressure to attack, decide to conduct a poor odds attack in the Causasus.*
- *Mesopotamia: Robert launched another unsuccessful attack on the southern flank of the Baghdad defences at the end of Jan. I have reinforcements en route, but it will be a close run thing here.*
- *Palestine: Quiet, but I suspect this will be the next location for increased pressure on the Turks. I have started to send some reinforcements to this theatre too.*

- *Italy: A period of rebalancing and rebuilding along the Italian frontier.*

*AP: I was unlucky that my two attacks near Baghdad at the end of last month had both failed to capture a hex defended by a single strength point. This shows that sometimes 1 SP is just enough to hold a hex. I will not complain about the bad luck as it is as much a result of the weakness of these attacks.*

*It is a commonplace to say that luck does balance out and DWK has enough combats to ensure this is true. I certainly got payback with the Turkish attack in the Caucasus this turn which had a loss ratio of 0:3 in my favour with a +4 winter/mountain modifier so that my 2 SP were lethal.*

*I wouldn't change the role of luck in the game. The outcome of critical attacks is not predictable. You really feel the hurt if a big attack with a lot of supply expenditure ends with a disappointing "1" die roll and the big counter-attack that rolls a "6" is to be feared.*

*Players can also control some risks. There are the 10 combat strength attacks which guarantee one loss on the defender. If it is absolutely necessary to inflict a certain loss on a defence, it is possible to calculate exactly what numbers of attackers are needed to achieve this. The answer is sometimes very large and that would often represent over-insurance but it is nevertheless an option.*