

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT129: 9 – 12 February 1916 (February 3)

General Situation

After a month in the capital, the Tsar hurried back to his military headquarters at Mogilev – an insanitary spot which seems to have been chosen to ensure that no accusation of unwarranted comfort could be levelled at the Imperial commander-in-chief. Having tried to halt political disintegration, the Tsar's next priority was to ensure that it did not spread too far in the Army. He was not at the moment asking it to attack but he hoped he could insist it at least stood on the defensive somewhere.

The Eastern Front

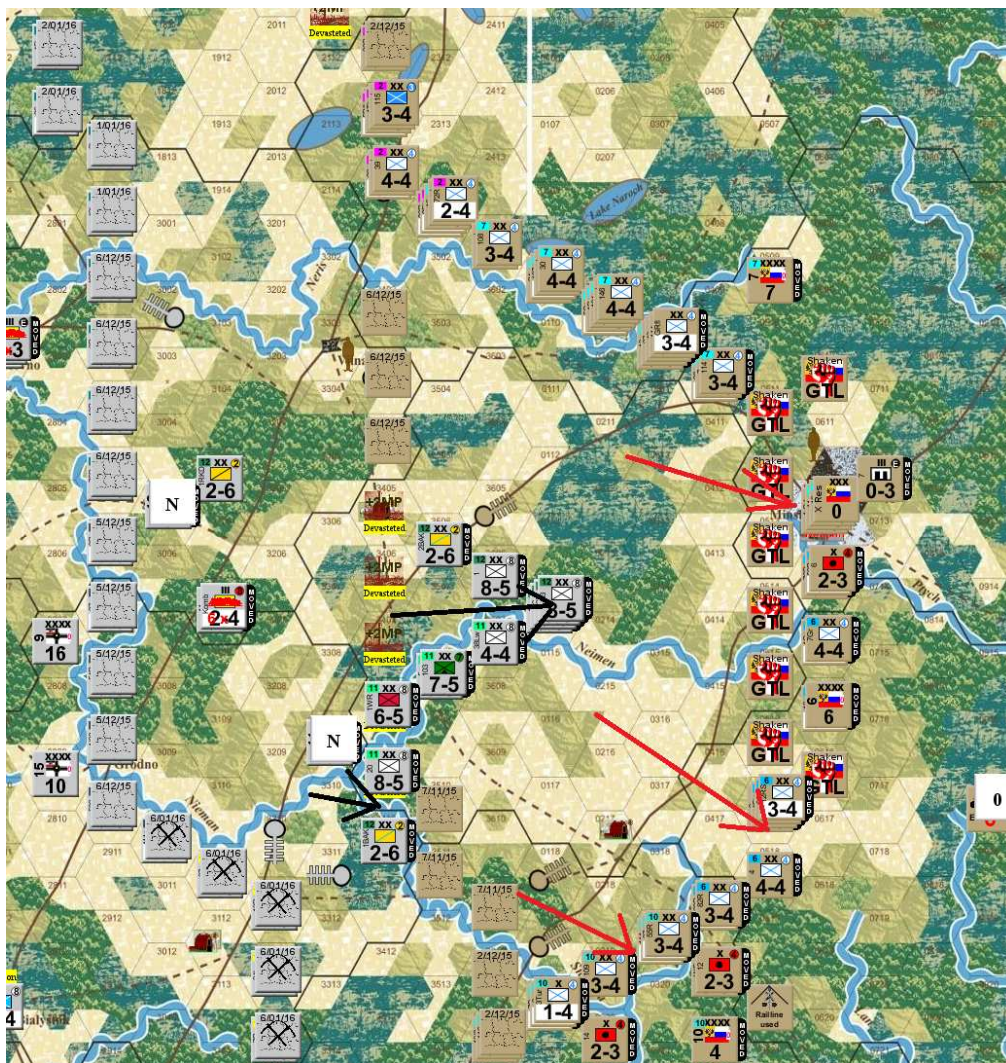


Figure 1: The Russians falling back to Minsk, 9 - 12 February 1916.

On 9 February, the German 11th and 12th Armies pushed forward more aggressively along the Neiman River. By 10 February they were only 100 kilometres short of Minsk. Everywhere they found Russian positions hurriedly abandoned but rarely sighted the enemy. The Russian retreat was general across the whole sector of the Russian West Front and was well organised on the whole. The

war had passed backwards and forwards across this region twice before and it was becoming depopulated and unwelcoming. The average Russian infantryman was happy to be gone.

The Balkans

The first French units took their place in the front line near Stobi (7-6.1510) at the junction of the Crna and Vardar Rivers. The Serbians were, however, more concerned about the prospect of an enemy attack further west where the Austro-Hungarian 5th Army was massing near the headwaters of the Crna.

The Near East



Figure 2: British logistical plans in Sinai, drawn by Captain Lawrence, 11 February 1916.¹

There was a new commander of British forces in Egypt, Murray. There was an expectation that there would soon be some forward movement and therefore the conditions which would be encountered in Sinai became of greater interest.

¹ This map shows the hidden logistical routes of the Sinai desert. The key is to understand that in desert a Line of Communication cannot be more than 2 desert hex sides. However, you are allowed to chain to a HQ and therefore the effective LOC can be four desert hex sides. This diagram envisages a British LOC which will use the railway across Sinai when it is built. Then the LOC can continue to depots (which will be HQ) that can be reached by crossing only 2 desert hex sides. Finally the LOC extends to the combat units from the HQ up to ten hexes (the sustainment limit – cavalry will be only 8 hexes) and again not crossing more than 2 desert hexes. The rough terrain in Sinai allows paths to be traced that reach behind the Gaza – Beersheba line and as far as the Dead Sea but not quite as far as Aqaba.

The Turks can use similar Lines of Communication in reverse. Their first depot/HQ would have to be where the Red Flag Bedouin Camps are shown and the combat units would have a LOC in the positions of the Green Flag Bedouin. I have really only just noticed this and it shows that sustaining a Turkish Army in Western Sinai is not quite as difficult as we thought.

There was a talented British officer working in the map section of Murray's headquarters, Captain Lawrence. He had already participated in a pre-war mapping expedition to Syria and now he prepared a map of Sinai. He had travelled extensively there in the previous months and gained some help from the Bedouin tribes of the region who were then divided into two factions known as the Green Flag and Red Flag Bedouin. Lawrence's chief interest was in how the Turkish defences in front of Gaza might be outflanked and his work was aimed at finding routes into the desert to the south and east by which a military force might be maintained. On 11 February he produced a map which proposed siting depots along Bedouin routes through the rough country of the interior which provided shade, cover and water and might serve the British purposes. He estimated that by these routes the British might be able to project force as far as the Dead Sea or across the northern parts of the Negev.

At Baghdad, Townsend ordered another attack on 12 February only to cancel it for a second time when patrols reported that the line of advance would be across canals, the Lower Diyala River, and into a built up district which the Turks had fortified with some skill. Baghdad was looking like an impossible dream for Townsend now and he was receiving counsel which recommended retreat.

There was a rare movement in the Russian front in the Caucasus on 11 – 12 February when the III Caucasian Corps pulled back from its most advanced positions along the Coruh Valley.

The Western Front

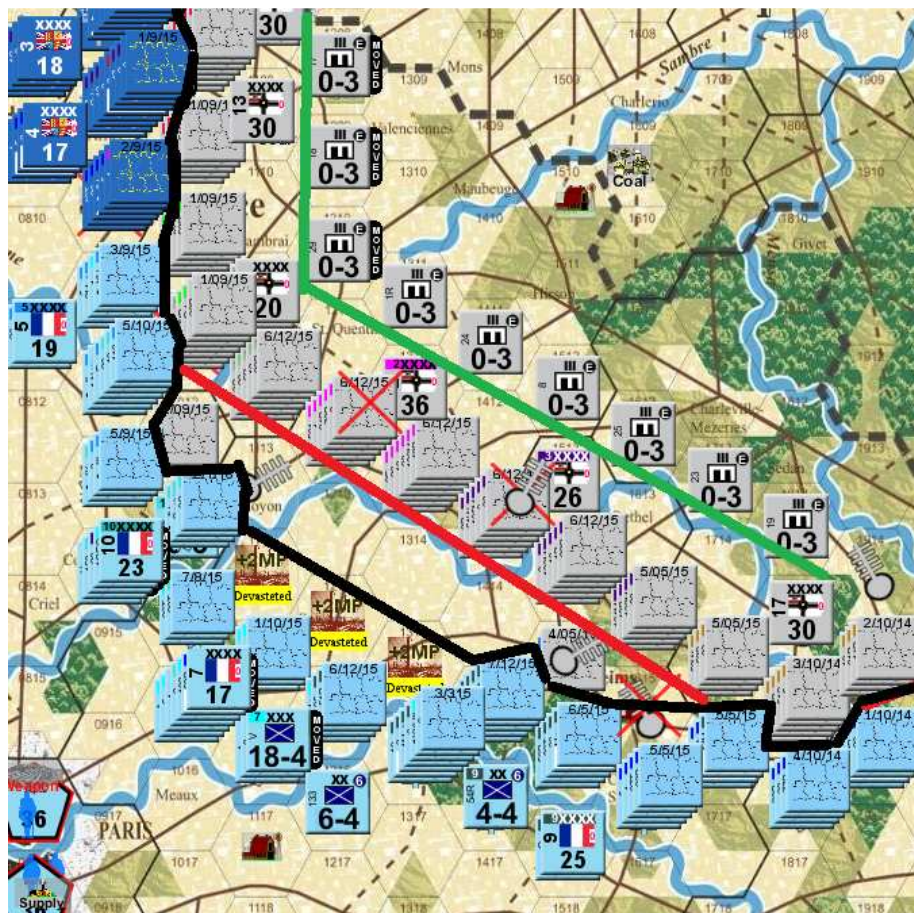


Figure 3: German defensive lines in the West, Black - Red - Green (planned), 9 - 12 February 1916.

In the West, the German General Staff had completed an elaborate defensive plan for the central sectors of the front. It was a scheme for defence in depth. The front line (Schwartzte Befestigung) would be lightly held. The main line of resistance was 20 kilometres back and this was the Rote Befestigung. Work had been recently completed on this line and it was already fully manned with the German reserves. Some of the finest farm country in France had been completely dug out to construct the entrenchments along this Red line. Another 40 kilometres to the rear would be the Grüne Befestigung which would be the strongest of all, built in concrete and fully engineered; it would take nearly a year to complete.

The existence of these defensive plans did not imply, Falkenhayn insisted, that Germany's war policy would not depend on taking offensive action. Defence was temporary and local he explained. Only a small team of officers were working on the plans for Germany's next offensive and everything they did was under conditions of top security.

The Italian Front

There was some stirring of activity on the Italian front. On 11 February, Cadorna had ordered the creation of a strategic reserve, initially to be of six Infantry Divisions. These units were pulled out of proximity to the front and put into camps close to the railways.

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:

- *East: Russian avoidance strategy is proving effectively frustrating. I cannot get to grips with the enemy where I wish to and can do no more than destroy trenches and chew up railway lines which will easily be repaired. Where I am able to come to grips with him are where the AH line is. This is where supply rules will force me to engage but also where I least desire to. I have also started sending the last EF German Engineers back westwards as I have insufficient in the west to build the Hindenburg Line. I may have to borrow AH Engineers to assist.*
- *Balkans: I now have my AH forces in the Balkans in position to conduct operations; but it is an unfavourable area to do so and from un-entrenched positions too.*
- *West: Not much I can do here other than conduct minor troop movements.*
- *Caucasus: A fresh division has been sent across by sea to make up for the recent losses.*
- *Mesopotamia: I feel a glimmer of hope in being able to resist for longer in Baghdad; but reinforcing is still a slow process.*
- *Palestine: Quiet; but again with reinforcements filtering into the front lines on the Sinai border.*
- *Italy: Quiet.*

AP: Another turn where I am sitting tight waiting for the storm to break. I am finding it hard to read the CP's intentions. I wouldn't be surprised if there was a major attack in the Austrian sector of the Eastern Front and I have been trying to build-up strength there but it is slow work because the front is long and the Russian rail net is not helpful and it is not my only priority.

I have plans unfolding myself. I am pulling units out of the front line in the West and on the Italian Front so I can take advantage of railway mobility. I don't want to give up too many clues as to what I will do next so there are many fake re-deployments in order to mask the significant ones.