

## Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT134: 1 – 5 March 1916 (March 1)

### General Situation

The long Battle of Baghdad seemed to be over at the beginning of March 1916, but it had been a significant scare for the Ottoman Empire. Throughout the winter the Turkish government had repeatedly requested more aid from Germany and Austria. It ought to have been easy to make a show of generosity for the sake of the alliance, but the German General Staff were not easily bent from their professional conviction that the war could only be won in Europe. In the end, Liman van Sanders had to make a direct report to the governments in Vienna and Berlin to secure delivery of vital equipment needed by the Turks to reinforce their armies for the continuation of the war. Liman van Sanders told the Kaiser that the Turks had not been prepared for a long conflict and that they would have used up their last reserves had not the Allies withdrawn from the Dardanelles at the beginning of the year.

### The Western Front

Joffre had under consideration a plan for a major offensive on the Western Front which envisaged an advance by the French Armies on a broad front between Peronne and Verdun. Some of the senior staff at GQG advocated taking immediate action before the Germans could pre-empt any French offensive with their own initiative. Joffre had, nevertheless, resolved at the end of 1915 that he would wait until the Germans had thrown themselves to a major effort, whether in the West or elsewhere, before committing the French Army. To excuse this stance, on 4 March, he scrawled across one of GQG's maps the question, "*Et les Anglais?*" A French plan wasn't enough he insisted. It had to be fully coordinated with the British.

### The Italian Front

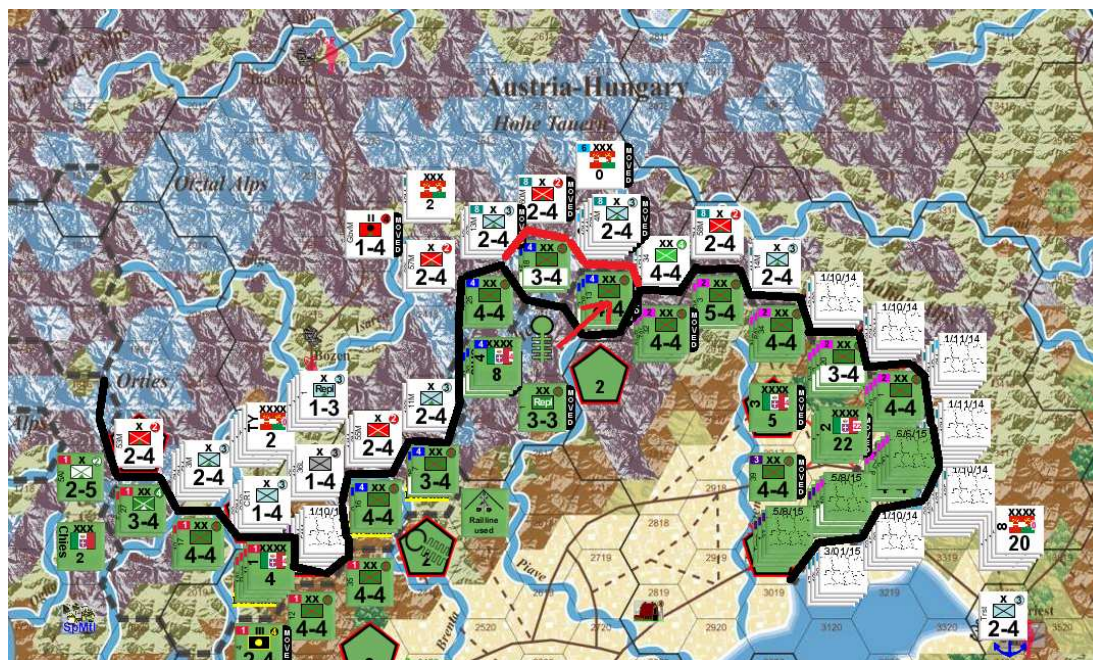


Figure 1: Italian gains leading to the recapture of Cortina, 27 February - 4 March 1916.

On 2 March, Italian infantry freezing on the slopes above the Passo di Lomo (6-4.2614) watched as in the valley below columns of Austrian infantry retreated to the north by a different road. It soon became clear that the enemy was evacuating from Cortina (6-4.2715). Nothing was done to prevent their departure and Cadorna was able to announce the liberation of the town on 4 March. Although this success had its accidental qualities – the Italian offensive had been originally in the opposite direction – somehow Cadorna’s reputation was inflated by the news. The newspapers in Milan speculated that perhaps the war in the Alps was not destined to be won by any single decisive success but the possibility that a succession of small gains might deliver a satisfactory result was proposed.

### The Eastern Front



Figure 2: Volhynian Front, 1 - 5 March 1916.

The northern section of the Eastern Front remained very quiet and both sides avoided clashes. In the central areas down to the Pripet Marshes the situation was still disturbed after the incursions of the German 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Armies which had now moved further south still but were no longer threatening Pinsk. The Austro-Hungarian 1<sup>st</sup> Army activated at the beginning of March and moved forward to cover Kowel and Luck further squeezing the Russians who held the southern margins of the Pripet Marshes.

The combats in on the Szumsk – Teofipol line (5-5.4506) also dragged on into a second week. On 2 March the Austro-Hungarian 4<sup>th</sup> Army began a new round of attacks on the Russian lines employing six first rate Divisions supported by heavy German howitzers. Although, the Russians were stubborn in the defence of their positions, the fighting on the flat steppe allowed little scope for traditional heroics and most of the casualties were from shellfire as each side tried to blast their opponents out of their positions. The morale of the Russian infantry was not good and that of the Austro-Hungarians was sinking as well as they could find no way through the dense network of defences which the defenders had thrown in their way. Only the most brutal commanders could keep their nerve in these conditions. When the commander of the Russian 14<sup>th</sup> Division told the staff of the Russian 5<sup>th</sup> Army on 2 March that his Division would be destroyed in less than 24 hours if not relieved, he was told that if he could keep some of his men alive for two days they would see their replacements.

### The Balkan Front

The Allied forces in the Balkans had withdrawn all their bridgeheads over the Cvrna River and Bregalnicu River as they had detected a growing strength of Austrian and Bulgarian forces closing in on the river lines. On 3 March, Austrian and French patrols met around Rosoman and Gradsko (6-4.1409).

### The Near East



Figure 3: Commencement of Construction of the Sinai Pipeline, 3 March 1916.

Engineering work began on a narrow gauge rail track east of the Suez Canal on 3 March. Shortage of labour meant the work would progress slowly. In the meantime, the numbers of Allied troops in Egypt were slowly growing and the British 25<sup>th</sup> Division was mustering at Port Said.

In Iraq, Townsend's retreat from Baghdad was speeding up heading for Kut and breaking contact with the Turkish forces probing south east of Baghdad. The water level in the river was beginning to rise.

In the Caucasus, the Turkish IX Corps was moving forward in the Coruh Valley. The Russians were giving up ground there and offered no determined defences anywhere having no more than three understrength infantry and Cossack brigades in the sector.

### DM Summary – March 1916

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total	Morale
Germany	-							12	12	1115	Good
Austria-Hungary	4							1	5	472	Good
Ottoman	-							-	-	68	Good
Bulgaria	-							-	-	16	Good
Central Powers	4							13	17	1671	
France	-							-	-	673	Good
Great Britain	-							-	-	251	Good
Russia	4							-	4	729	Shaken
Italy	-							-	-	58	Good
Belgium	-							-	-	(100)	NA
Serbia	-							-	-	(33)	NA
Entente	4							-	4	1711	

#### Player Notes

CP: *Not much to say about the end of month phase. Food continues to bite although an extra food from Albania helps with AH.*

- *East: The German 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> armies continue to push to the south to support the N flank of the AH armies which will allow them to concentrate more force to attack the Russians. Engineers also allow the AH 4<sup>th</sup> Army HQ to occupy forward trenches and support another artillery supported assault against a weak point in the Russian 5<sup>th</sup> Army's line. I am hoping that, by keeping up pressure on the Russians like this, I will diminish his opportunity for any type of smashing offensive. Also, by keeping two strong German armies on the flank of the AH line, I threaten an immediate and powerful counterattack against any Russian attempt at penetration.*
- *Balkans: I have now manoeuvred the AH 5<sup>th</sup> Army into contact against the French forward divisions in the Balkans. I foresee imminent combat between French and AH units for the 1<sup>st</sup> time in this war. In Albania, the Bulgarian occupation forces start a gradual strategic withdrawal to avoid any attempt to prise a gap between them and the AH 5<sup>th</sup> Army.*

- *West: Engineers start building the Hindenburg Line whilst enormous quantities of supply and RPL, along with some new artillery regiments, begin to inload. Now that winter is over, I expect much concentration on the WF for future offensives. The BEF is looking particularly muscular.*
- *Caucasus: The Turks are able to squeeze between some of the Alpine passes as the Russians seem to relinquish some of the mountainous positions they were holding. I am awaiting some sort of Russian effort along the coast to draw off Turkish forces.*
- *Mesopotamia: For the 1<sup>st</sup> time in some time I am able to push the line forward from Baghdad; although there are powerful reinforcements moving up from Basrah so I think I am fooling myself somewhat.*
- *Palestine: Quiet; although I continue to build up my forces along the border of Sinai.*
- *Italy: Quiet.*

*AP: I am by no means 100% happy with the strategy I am currently following.*

*Germany has been allowed a significant break during the last three months and I cannot forget I need to inflict an average of over 50 DM on Germany every month if it is to surrender in 1918. I am also aiming to get the Americans in the war and I need to inflict more than 300 DM this year to start the clock running on this. These objectives will increasingly be in conflict with my aim of out waiting the Germans and my desire to nurse French morale.*

*More satisfactory for me is the fact that the Austrians have been forced into activity although it is balanced by the fact that the Russians are taking the brunt of it. The Austrians are now within 14 DM of their first threshold at 485 (the trigger for Russian Artillery Surprise). However, with Russian DM where it is: Brusilov is going to be a big risk for Russian stability; and Romania will get very little help if it comes in later this year.*

*I disputed the food in Albania but we may have to check. I think the CP must feed Tirane and there were Italians close enough to disrupt the food resource at the end of last month.*