

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT176: 1 – 5 September 1916 (1 September)

General Situation

The news from Romania kept getting worse. During the summer, the Allies had universally fallen into assuming that the war was going in their direction. The Russian advances had surely brought Austria-Hungary to the brink and Romania's belligerence had to tip the Hapsburg Empire over the edge. However, it had not worked out that way and the speed of the Romanian disaster put the whole Allied coalition into a panic. Britain and France looked anxiously at the whole position in the Balkans. They had supported a major Serbian advance during the summer but was this perhaps a house of cards? It didn't help perhaps that the British were in the process of downgrading their forces in this theatre by withdrawing their 3rd Division.

The reversal of fortune in Eastern Europe was of course also attributed to the new leadership of Hindenburg and Ludendorff who had pressed for an offensive in Romania without delay and against the advice of more cautious voices who had recommended waiting for a longer build up to be completed.



Figure 1: Bucharest is abandoned, 1 - 5 September 1916.

Eastern Front

The military situation in Romania at the beginning of September is perfectly captured in a few paragraphs of Petrescu's, *Last Train from Craiova*. Elya's family freshly arrived from Craiova tries to work out what to do next, she explores the Central Railway station in Bucharest:

"My whole life I had wanted to see a really big city and now I had my chance everything was shut up and half the people were gone. Those that remained were running around just like the chickens in our yard. What good was a train station where there were no trains? Papa allowed me a few minutes to look at the famous illuminated map of the railways above the concourse. It was still working, though the light for Constanta was broken. A railway worker stopped by long enough to tell us that Constanta had been taken by the Bulgarians on 1 September.

Papa's plan had been to go to Constanta and take a ship to Odessa where he had a distant cousin. What would we do now? I began to feel very stupid that I had spent the entire journey chattering about the dress I wanted to buy in the capital when I wasn't teasing Mama and Papa about leaving Granny behind. How they told me off when they got tired of this. I wasn't to understand they said. If Granny left the farm, we lost the farm. Well nothing much made sense to me anymore. A few days before I had been thrilled to think I wouldn't have to go back to school. Now I started to wonder if I would ever be back in class.

Papa left Mama and me sitting on our things sharing the last of our boiled eggs. Hours later he came back, not with the bread we had hoped for but with more tales of woe. The Army had gone, he told us. There was hardly a soldier in the capital. There were fires on the outskirts of the city where the military stores in the forts were being burned. The Germans, he told us, we're at Târgovişta (6-6.1414), no more than 70 kilometres away. According to some responsible people he had spoken to, the enemy could be in Bucharest within two or three days. I had thought history was a dull subject where it took ages for a dynasty to expire and debates on the national constitution never ended. Now I saw that unexpected things could happen very fast.

Papa slumped down with us and was very demoralised. Our home city was already in enemy hands, he was sure. The weather was warm still and we camped in the empty ticket hall. All night we debated what to do. Mama was strongly opposed to walking to Galatz. She would consider a boat down the Danube but Papa said that was impossible as wild Laz tribesmen from the Pontic Mountains had crossed the railway bridge at Cernavoda (6-6.2515/2615). I was sure he just made that up to persuade us to a different course. We had talked about the Laz only a few weeks' previously when I had told him of Miss Florin's unrestrained passion for the Caucasian peoples which had infected her teaching of geography (my favourite subject at school). According to my teacher, if anything was not done by the Laz it was nothing but a modern corruption. I wondered how excited Miss Florin would now be if she had heard the Laz were actually coming to visit us.

Morning brought us no relief from our indecision. Mama wanted to go home, but Papa wouldn't. The stirring speech he had given before we left about joining the national resistance was now an embarrassment. We would have to stay away some time just to allow that to be forgotten. I had never had such a thought before now, but I was sorry for my confused parents and became concerned at protecting them from the harsh consequences of their actions. That was the first difference between peace and war..."

While it was certainly the case the Romanians were on the run, in many places their resistance had not yet ended. In fact they were forced to draw up defensive positions periodically to counter the infiltration tactics being adopted by their adversaries. This was a danger to the retreating Romanians

as they pulled out of the mountainous terrain of Transylvania and they often found themselves being overtaken by German Jaegers advancing down parallel roads.

The Romanian government fled from Bucharest on 3 September heading for Galatz. To cover the flight of the bureaucrats, the Army was ordered to hold Ploesti. About six Divisions interrupted their retreat to comply with this order including one Russian unit (5th Siberian). These were a mixed bag of units from both the Romanian 1st and 2nd Armies. These upper echelon formations were not functioning as intended not least because the commanders had joined the flight from Bucharest.

The situation in Moldavia was still very threatening and the Central Powers manoeuvred forward levering the Romanians and Russians out of positions they could not defend. Belatedly the Russians were attempting to support their 14th Army with the stretched 11th Army which was ordered to send units across the Dniester and prevent further movements by the enemy in Bessarabia.

Apart from the far south, the Eastern Front was mostly quiet in the first few days of September.



Figure 2: The Lower Danube, 1 - 5 September 1916.

The Balkans

The Italian 6th and 8th Alpine Brigades marched from Scutari into Montenegro. The country considered that it had already liberated itself from the Austro-Hungarians although it would be fairer to say that the Austrians had not found occupation of the country to be very worthwhile. The Italians were not much interested in it either. Their aim was simply to make a passage through the coastal regions and then a turn inland up the Maricu Valley. This detour was a ruse, for they intended to return to the coast via the hidden roads of the hills and surprise the Austrian port of Cattaro.

The Near East

The British railway across Sinai reached Gaza on 3 September about six months after construction had begun near the Suez Canal. The 5th Australian Division was railed up from Suez between 3 and 5 September but they were unceremoniously discharged from their trains at the Palestinian border and forced to march the remainder of the journey to the front about 70 miles further north. When the Australian commander complained to the railway engineers that the railway was supposed to be complete up to Gaza he was told that “complete” had many meanings. It was true that the railway was practically complete according to clause 3-18 of the OH Standard Contract for Imperial Procurement Projects in the Near East. However, that didn’t mean anybody could use it. By the terms of the Special Conditions, until the Khedive’s private train¹ had rolled down its tracks the line would not be released for more ordinary purposes. Despite Britain’s military power these kinds of compromises were necessary to sustain Imperial control.



Figure 3: The Jerusalem-Jaffa line, 1 - 5 September 1916.

¹ The Khedive was in exile in Cyprus but contracts are contracts and the Special Conditions only required the Khedive’s train, which was available, not himself.

In Iraq, Maude did not have problems of the same type. He had no railway worthy of note. Nor were there local magnates of greater significance than tribal leaders.

The Caucasus Front was quiet during the first days of September.

Western Front

There was another lull in the fighting on the Somme as the Allied attacks were suspended. The British badly needed a pause to get their artillery into useful firing positions and they needed resupply in any event.

Haig and Joffre were also engaged in another manoeuvre. The French wanted the British to take over a longer section of the line and Haig was also keen to take over the southern flank of the Somme operations. Accordingly, the British 5th Army which had hitherto been a reserve/training formation was ordered to prepare to take over the front between Peronne and La Fere which would be abandoned by the French 5th and 10th Armies. This promised to be a tricky operation because the Germans might easily interfere. By 5 September, the French still held their front but British units were moving into their rear areas in preparation for the switch.

Italian Front

Four Italian Armies had spent 15 months battering at the Austrian defences and had made only the most modest gains. On 1 September, Cadorna ordered the mobilisation of the Italian 5th Army (commanded by General Piacentini) and its headquarters left Milan for the front on 4 September. The plan was for the new command to split the over large Italian 2nd Army which held a long front in the Carnic and Julian Alps as well as the northern sectors of the Isonzo Front. It was hoped that both the 2nd and 5th Armies would benefit from better focus than the existing arrangement which suffered from the excessive application of broad front doctrines.

Player Notes

CP: Food situation remains dire, even without having to feed Warsaw. I only get 2 x food from Russia and another 2 from Romania because I avoided occupying Iassy. This leads me to further question how the food penalties work. I think it is a good system but, if it compels me to make decisions not to occupy an essential rail junction and a key city of the enemy when I don't even have to fight for it, then there is something wrong with the principals involved. I am executing poor strategy just to avoid food DMs. I have done the same with an open Constanta and feel loathe to occupy any more enemy personnel centres. I think the way the rule is executed is dictating my operational decisions. Does this rule warrant a review? I think so. I also vacated Warsaw to place it beyond my front lines; both last turn and now again. I will not re-occupy it just to reinforce that it is no longer within my front and therefore is not my responsibility (with 6 food required to feed it). The food resource requirements is an excellent rule, but just the way it has come to influence my play causes me to question the way it is executed.

- East: Very little happens this turn. The front is quiescent. I continue to concentrate combat force in Romania (still avoiding occupying Iassy and Constanta). Last turn I entirely destroyed the Romanian Danube flotilla in a battle of the gunboats. There is now no longer a Romanian naval threat.*

- *Balkans: Quiet in Serbia and Montenegro, but this turn I manage to cross the Danube in several places due to Romanian withdrawals. I had been using my AH Danube flotillas as an interdiction threat for any attempted Romanian crossings. Now that any threats to cross have diminished I free up all of the AH flotillas to launch an attack against the Romanian Danube flotilla. This is the first of any sort of naval encounter in this game and makes for an interesting diversion.*
- *Caucasus: I have started an advance from the west bank of Lake Van along a 100km frontage. I don't see this leading to anything, but it makes me feel better!*
- *Mesopotamia: I prepare to defend the approaches to Baghdad.*
- *Palestine: Quiet.*
- *Italy: Quiet.*

AP: *I was surprised and relieved that there were no CP attacks this turn particularly in Romania where the Allied front is very fragile.*

However, as I worked through my own move I realised that there was hardly any need for the CP to attack since their moves were enough to disrupt my current positions and force further withdrawals. The conditions for the abandonment of Bucharest had also been triggered (GCR15-3) and this only added to my determination to pull back at full speed in Central Romania. I am quite concerned that I will not be able to get the entire Romanian Army out of the country before the CP reaches Galatz in which case some units will be trapped. I am especially concerned not to leave any Russian units behind.

DM Summary – September 1916

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total	Morale
Germany	-							13	13	1417	Good
Austria-Hungary	-							1	1	585	Shaken
Ottoman	-							-	-	88	Good
Bulgaria	-							-	-	27	Good
Central Powers	-							14	14	2120	
France	-							-	-	808	Good
Great Britain	-							-	-	391	Good
Russia	-							NA	-	839	Shaken
Italy	-							-	-	109	Good
Romania	30*							-	30	46	*Craiova and Constanta lost
Belgium	-							NA	-	(105)	NA
Serbia	-							NA	-	(40)	NA
Entente	30							-	30	2180	

On the following page is a table showing supply production since October 1914. It will be seen that since Austrian Morale was shaken the advantage the CP enjoys in this area has nearly been lost thanks also to increases in British and American production. This will help the Entente because supply is such a big factor in combat effectiveness and German combat superiority in this game is mainly a matter of morale, stacking and supply. As Austrian supply production falls off further then the Germans will be under more pressure to give supply to their allies which will weaken their capabilities.

In recent months, the US supply went mainly to Russia and sometimes to Italy. This is so I can get more fight out of these minor allies. With Russia fading, I have stopped providing it with extra supply which is now being shared by Italy and Great Britain. As further time passes I expect to give the British even more supply

Supply

Date	Ge	AH	Ot	Bul	CP	Fr	Br	Rus	Be	Se	It	Rom	Gr	US	Ent
Oct 14	77	18	-	-	95	20	18	10	-	-	-	-	-	10	58
Nov 14	77	18	-	-	95	20	18	10	-	-	-	-	-	10	58
Dec 14	77	18	2	-	97	20	18	10	-	-	-	-	-	10	58
Jan 15	77	25	2	-	104	30	18	20	-	-	-	-	-	10	78
Feb 15	77	25	2	-	104	30	18	20	-	-	-	-	-	10	78
Mar 15	77	25	2	-	104	30	18	20	-	-	-	-	-	10	78
Apr 15	77	25	2	-	104	30	18	20	-	-	-	-	-	10	78
May 15	77	25	2	1	105	30	18	20	-	-	-	-	-	10	78
Jun 15	77	25	2	1	105	30	18	18	-	-	10	-	-	10	86
Jul 15	77	25	2	1	105	30	18	18	-	-	10	-	-	10	86
Aug 15	77	25	2	1	105	30	18	14	-	-	10	-	-	10	82
Sept 15	77	25	2	1	105	30	18	14	-	-	10	-	-	10	82
Oct 15	77	25	2	1	105	30	24	14	-	-	10	-	-	10	88
Nov 15	77	25	2	1	105	30	24	14	-	-	10	-	-	10	88
Dec 15	77	25	2	1	105	30	24	14	-	-	10	-	-	10	88
Jan 16	77	25	2	1	105	30	24	14	-	-	10	-	-	10	88
Feb 16	77	25	2	1	105	30	24	13	-	-	10	-	-	10	87

Mar 16	77	25	2	1	105	30	24	13	-	-	10	-	-	10	87
Apr 16	77	25	2	1	105	30	24	14	-	-	10	-	-	10	88
May 16	77	25	2	1	105	30	24	14	-	-	10	-	-	10	88
Jun 16	77	25	2	1	105	30	24	14	-	-	10	-	-	15	93
Jul 16	77	18	2	1	98	30	28	14	-	-	10	-	-	15	97
Aug 16	77	18	2	1	98	30	28	14	-	-	10	-	-	15	97