

## Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT177: 6 – 9 September 1916 (2 September)

### General Situation

The shockwaves from the disaster in Romania were spreading. Most vulnerable to this was Russia, the sponsor of Romanian belligerence. Russia's aid to Romania was completely unequal to the requirements of the situation. The advances of the Germans and Austrians (and the Bulgarians and Turks) were evidently aimed at splitting the Russian-Romanian alliance by proving that the Russians could not help the Romanians save their own territory. Furthermore they were doing it with a display of military mastery which often beat opponents before there was a fight. The brief hope of Jassy-Victoria was forgotten and had to be re-discovered after the war.

### The Eastern Front



Figure 1: Overview of Romanian Front, 6 - 7 September 1916

The citizens of Bucharest who had not fled awaited the arrival of the enemy nervously at the end of the last week of September. German and Bulgarian units were seen massing on the western outskirts on 7 September. However, they did not have orders to occupy the city, in part because of reports of disease in the capital. There was however no doubt that Bucharest was completely under the power of the Central Powers as the Romanian Army was retreating north as rapidly as it could march. The oil city of Ploesti was abandoned by the Romanians on 9 September as the German 12<sup>th</sup> Army closed in.

The place where the Allies were mainly making their stand was in Moldavia where the Romanian 4<sup>th</sup> Army supported by the Russian 14<sup>th</sup> Army (and part now of the 11<sup>th</sup> Army) was trying to stop or delay the advance of the German 18<sup>th</sup> Army and Austro-Hungarian 7<sup>th</sup> Armies down the western bank of the Prut. If the Central Powers reached Galatz the campaign would surely be lost.

After a few quiet days, the Germans and Austrians concentrated for attacks between Vaslui (6-6.2002) and Bârlad (6-6.1904). The weight of this assault was on its left where the German 18<sup>th</sup> Army flattened the unfortunate Russian 12<sup>th</sup> Division and forced others into a pell-mell retreat to the Prut. This was a significant Russian defeat and seriously sapped the remaining fighting power of the 14<sup>th</sup> Army. There were few trenches in these combats and the Russians and Romanians were constantly on guard for the possibility of the Germans infiltrating their lines with their better trained infantry.

## The Balkans



Figure 2: The Naval base at Cattaro besieged by Italian Alpine troops, 9 September 1916.

On 8 September, the hills around Cattaro were occupied by Italian alpine troops (6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Brigades). The numbers of Italians were not large, certainly less than a full strength infantry division.

Nevertheless, they were sufficient to stretch a thin cordon around the town and the bay on which Cattaro was situated.

Rear Admiral Hansa who served as the Cattaro garrison commander was surprised. The fault was undoubtedly a lack of reconnaissance of the inland areas through which the Italians had approached. However, this was hardly surprising given the garrison was only intended to protect the town and the port consisting as it did primarily of naval guards. They were numerous enough to keep the Italians away from the naval base and life in Cattaro was not at first visibly disturbed.

The Italians, nevertheless, would soon make the passage of the entrance of the bay hazardous with mines. Submarines might come and go unobserved even if at some risk. Admiral Hansa at Cattaro signalled to his superior at Pola, Admiral Njegovan, that the situation might become more concerning in little more than a month and he asked for aid by sea or land.

On 9 September, General Sarrail was promoted to command the revived French Army of the Orient. This was a play by the French to ensure their supremacy over the Serbians and the British in the Balkans. These inter-Allied rivalries were not very edifying and they seemed connected to the British decision to withdraw their main fighting unit from this front.

### **The Near East**

Both British armies in the Near East were in the process of re-supplying. A fresh Australian Division was heading for the front in Palestine.

The Turkish 4th Army was reorganising. Djemal Pasha was scouring incompetents out of the Turkish command structure and he focused above all on the corps commands which he declared to be a circle of useless indolence. In early September, he stripped the corps headquarters of manpower just to create an extra regiment of infantry.

### **The Western Front**

On 8 September, the British 5th Army began taking over sections of the French front covering Peronne. This, it has to be said, was stretching Haig's manpower to its limits as there had been little opportunity to replace the losses of the last few weeks. To ensure the Germans did not interfere, the French and British air forces kept up watchful patrols in the skies.

The German side of the front was quiet. The Germans showed their usual diligence in improving their defences and wherever the Allies had obtained a breach the line had been repaired a little further back. Allied intelligence also noted that there were more German guns supporting their front than previously. Improvements in attack seemed to be matched by improvements in defence.

### **The Italian Front**

Cadorna had a new protégée, General Piacentini, who had been installed as commander of the new 5th Army and had the Carnic Corps subordinated to him as well.

Piacentini was not convinced that a proper test had ever been made of the Austrian line along the Carnic Alps. At least two attempts had been made on the Plöcken Pass (6-4.3014) but the front had been too narrow according to Piacentini. He argued that the Austrian mountain brigades were strung out thinly along the mountain line and that they would break if attacked simultaneously along an extended front. He proposed to do this on 9 September with more than ten Divisions deployed

between Colina (6-4.2915) and Timau (6-4.3015). They wouldn't go through the pass as instead they would go right over the alpine ridges. The offensive would start in the early hours of 9 September.

The Italian blow was expected by the Austro-Hungarian 6th Army who had excellent opportunities to observe the enemy concentrating over the previous few days. On the day of the attack, however, visibility was poor as mist and cloud prevailed. The Italians advanced bravely enough but Piacentini's concept of a broad front attack was not really fulfilled anywhere. Many Italian units were late getting into position and their paths up the mountains were restricted and congested. Instead of attacking on one narrow front, Piacentini risked advancing on ten narrow fronts. Assaults were too frequently against unimportant positions. By the end of the first day of the Carnic offensive, the two sides had only really got to grips in a few localities. The most promising Italian advance was by the 9<sup>th</sup> Alpine Brigade which struggled with Tyrolean sharpshooters around a small lake known to the Austrians as Hohe Warte (6-4.3014). Piacentini, however, assured Cadorna that he was only just getting started and optimistically predicted the collapse of Austrian morale.

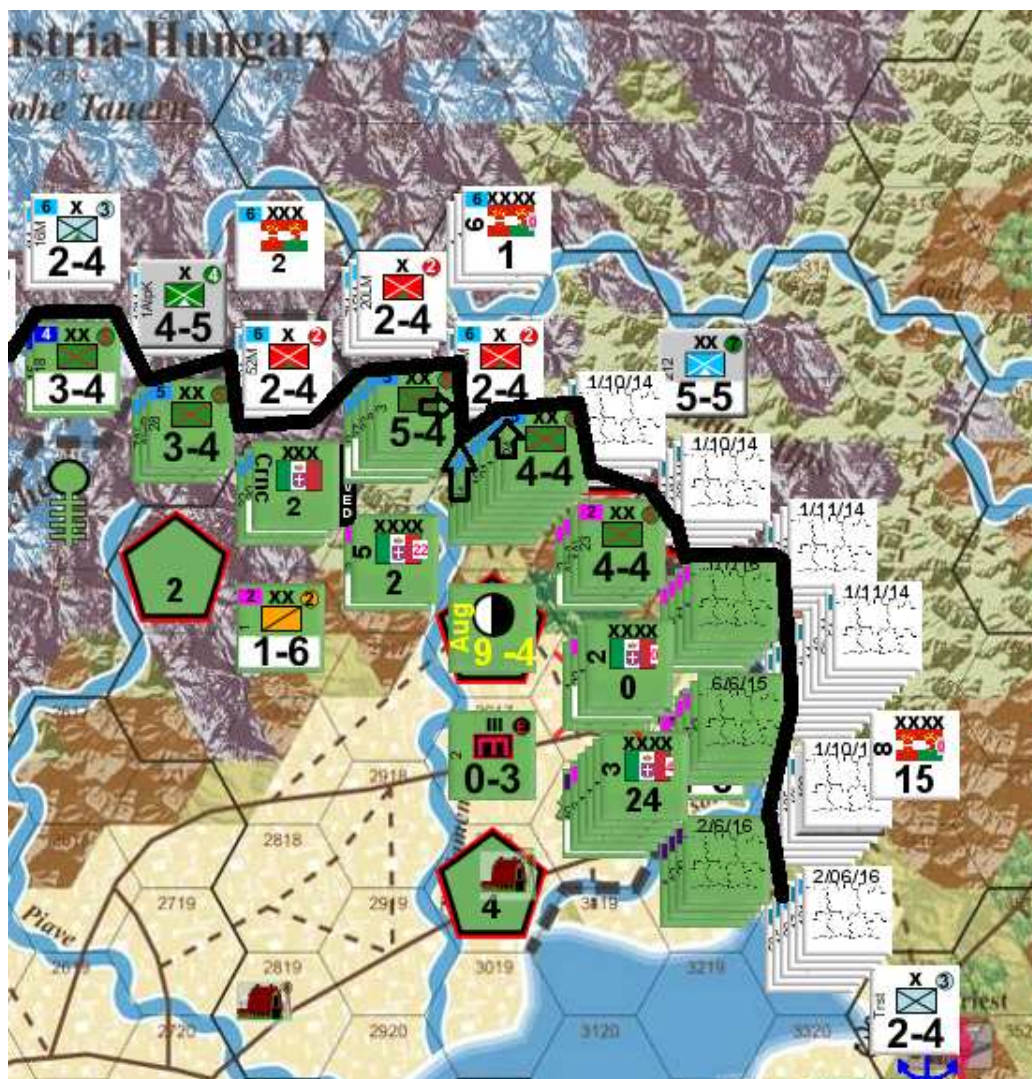


Figure 3: The Italian 5th Army mountain offensive, 8 - 9 September 1916.

## DM Summary – September 1916

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total	Morale
Germany	-	4						13	17	1421	Good
Austria-Hungary	-	4						1	5	589	Shaken
Ottoman	-	-						-	-	88	Good
Bulgaria	-	-						-	-	27	Good
Central Powers	-	8						14	22	2128	
France	-	-						-	-	808	Good
Great Britain	-	-						-	-	391	Good
Russia	-	7						NA	7	846	Shaken
Italy	-	3						-	3	112	Good
Romania	30*	16						-	46	62	*Craiova and Constanta lost
Belgium	-	-						NA	-	(105)	NA
Serbia	-	-						NA	-	(40)	NA
Entente	30	26						-	56	2206	

### Players Notes

CP:

- East: I sense a changing of fortunes again in the east. The ramifications of the Brusilov Offensive and the Romanian declaration of war have completely settled (except for the impact on AH DMs, of course). I have combined armies now concentrated in the south and effectively taking the fight deep into Romania. Strange to think that just a few turns ago I was still reeling and furiously trying to get forces southwards as Sibiu and Brasov on the Romanian border were threatened with occupation. Now, the Romanian river flotilla has been annihilated, I have occupied the towns of Iassy, Constanta and Craiova and the fortresses of Bucharest have been dismantled. Romanian defences along the Danube have been outflanked and the river line has been abandoned. I hold almost as much Romanian territory as Romania still does; perhaps even more. This includes most of the food production centres. However, I think I will be forced to occupy Bucharest which will largely negate that. I even have sufficient strength to be able to launch an unsupplied attack against a depleted Romanian rear guard division. There is no time for complacency, though. AH is racing towards economic collapse and the extensive use of German formations in the east is denying their presence on the WF, where the real threat lies. I will not get Russia to economic collapse this year; the GTL provides too easy an escape outlet. Given the depth of Russian withdrawal in the north, I start to rail German divisions southwards.*

- *Balkans: Quiet in Serbia and Montenegro and I will no longer report on operations on the Romanian Black Sea coast as any front in Romania is now more EF related. I continue to dig in to hold position in Serbia.*
- *Caucasus: Nothing worth reporting. The Russian line is now strong again and there are no options for any viable attack.*
- *Mesopotamia: Quiet.*
- *Palestine: Quiet.*
- *Italy: I note a concentration of Italian divisions and artillery at the foothills of the Italian Alps. I fully expect an Italian offensive soon and am desperately trying to rail German forces to the AH Alpine defences to bolster them.*

*AP: It is a bit funny that both sides have been suggesting the game is unbalanced against them recently. The truth is that this is hard to judge and experience does not help so much. In DWK the conditions of the conflict evolve organically so combat in mid-1916 is nothing like that of 1914. Because of this it is hard to project forwards with much confidence and simply doing it on a straight line basis is most likely a mistake.*

*What is impressive is that the game does deliver historical turning points and this is due to the way the national DM thresholds are set. The turnaround in fortune in the East is related to this. Paradoxically, the Austrians were vulnerable as long as their morale remained good. They were sitting ducks for the Russian summer offensive. However, as soon as the Austrians abandoned their exclusive sphere of influence then it was weak Russian morale which was thrown into the spotlight. At this stage of the game the Russians cannot fight the Germans for any length of time and this is the reason why the Romanians are collapsing because they cannot rely on the Russians. If Russian morale was 100 DM higher now this would be a very different campaign because I would not have been afraid to stand my ground and the CP would have had a much slower and costly advance.*

*The superior capability of infantry with 5 Movement Allowance to infiltrate a discontinuous front is a factor in this campaign at the moment. They can move into an enemy ZOC and then to another hex in another enemy ZOC if the terrain is clear or broken. This is almost as good as cavalry and means I have to check my temporary lines of resistance carefully.*