

## Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT181: 23 – 26 September 1916 (6 September)

### General Situation

There has always been quite a bit of historical controversy on the question whether there really was a Russian Women's Division deployed on the Eastern Front during the summer of 1916? There are a few hazy photographs of female soldiers training but it is hard to be sure where and when they were taken. The entire archive of the Russian 14<sup>th</sup> Army disappeared long ago. The Soviet government had no interest in highlighting the progressiveness of its predecessors. One of the few tantalising pieces of evidence that has been long known about which much speculation swirls is a report of an intelligence officer in the German 33<sup>rd</sup> Division dated 24 September 1916:

*“The situation of the Division is that it is located at Lozova (5-6S.1012) on the northern flank of the 19th Army and facing a Russian line referred to as the Kishinev Cover Line which runs from Panesesti (5-6S.1113) to Caracui (6-6.2302). The front has been quiet in recent days. The Russian line is thickly populated and has been strengthening in the last week. The enemy positions are concealed where possible in broken terrain and woods. Apart from Russians, there are Serbian and Romanian units on this line as identified in Table A. The commander of the 19<sup>th</sup> Army has reported to the Danube Army Group that the enemy 14<sup>th</sup> Army is being reinforced and intends to contest the Kishinev Cover Line despite the widespread retreats and poor morale displayed by the enemy in recent weeks. There are reports of enemy entrenchments in construction in the last two days whereas few entrenched lines have been encountered in the campaign in Romania and Bessarabia to date.*

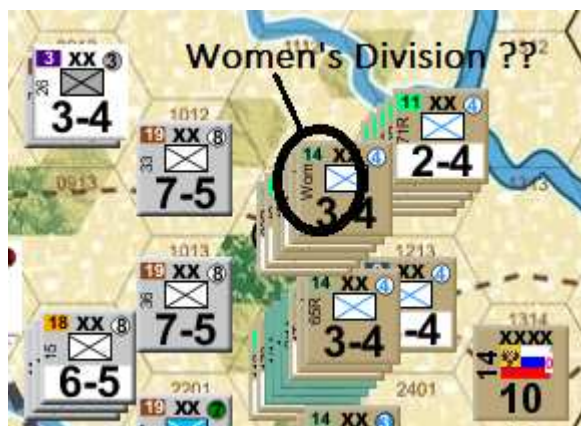


Figure 1: Sketch map from German 33<sup>rd</sup> Division intelligence records querying whether the Russians were using women in front line positions, 24 September 1916.

*Two female prisoners have been taken near Vorniceni (5-6S.1113) both in military uniform, though ill-fitting, and one was in possession of a Russian model rifle. This event is notorious throughout the whole Division and has to the men confirmed the rumour that the Russians had in desperation called up a Division of Amazons. The prisoners were interrogated separately and encouraged to confide in a cooperating Red Cross nurse. It is difficult to determine what is true and what is bravado. The prisoners are from St Petersburg and the whole unit (if it is a Division) was recruited from volunteers. The prisoners have little idea where exactly they are and had been captured when they separated from their unit to ask for directions inadvertently approaching one of our patrols who they thought were Romanians. It appears they have been at or near the front since July and have been in many long marches the purpose of which was unclear to the captives. They have not been in action but heard some gunfire several times. They say their unit is determined to fight and show they are equal*

to the men. However they are tired and disgusted by the alcoholism and snoring of the Russian Army en masse which prevents sleep even though they are in separate encampments.”

### Eastern Front

There were some signs that the front in Eastern Romania and Bessarabia was stabilising. The Russians and Romanians were beginning to dig in between Kishinev and Galatz. At Galatz there was an old river fort commanded the passage of the Danube and from this the Austro-Hungarian river fleet were obliged for the moment to maintain a respectful distance. There was no resumption of the Russian attack in Galicia.



Figure 2: The Southern Front, Bessarabia - Romania, 23 - 26 September 1916.

## Balkans

The German 502nd Division arrived at Dubrovnic on 24 September. In that era, many of the common soldiers were very literate and well-read and there were many in the Division who no doubt hoped that there would be an opportunity to visit some of the famous sights of the ancient citadel and town including the harbour (the “King’s Landing”) and the horrifying hole in the ground where the ancient Sept of Baelor had stood before it was destroyed in a terrible accident with Greek Fire in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century. Despite these attractions, the Landsers Croatian excursion required an immediate force march from the railway station into the hills where they would find the Italian force surrounding Cattaro.

## Near East

To soldiers serving in the Egyptian Expeditionary Force, there was a distinct change in their environment in the last week of September. The air chilled overnight under clear skies and in the daytime the heat ceased to be a deterrent to heavy work. General Murray recognised that this was the moment to execute a long planned move but he adjusted it at the last moment. His original plan had been to attack the Turkish lines on 26 September close to the coast and to achieve this he intended that the forces which had been deployed inland would execute a coordinated rolling movement in less than 48 hours to concentrate and deliver an attack up the coastal road. The modification was that the point of attack would be delivered in the centre with Ramala (8-8.2130) as the primary objective. This reduced the distance most units had to march as it was in the middle of Murray’s line and also meant that practically the whole strength of his force could contribute to the assault or its follow up. Only the 2<sup>nd</sup> Mounted Division guarding the right flank could be regarded as having a secondary role.

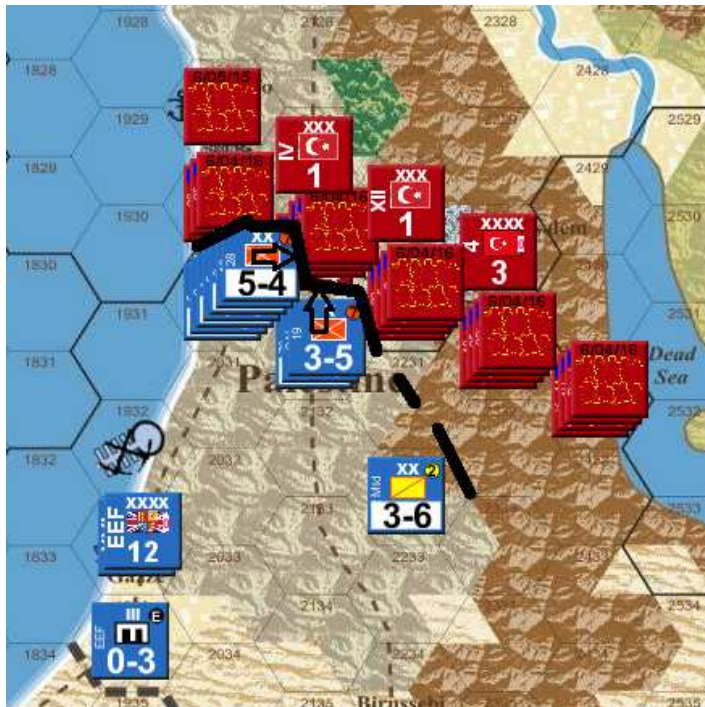


Figure 3: The Ramala attack, 26 September 1916.

The Turkish defences were formidable having benefitted from weeks of preparation. South of Ramala, the defences were manned by the Turkish 1<sup>st</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Divisions and they rushed to occupy their positions at full strength as the dust cloud thrown up by the Allied movements gave

unmistakeable signs of the coming attack. The Australians hit the Turkish 1<sup>st</sup> Division soon after dawn on 26 September and the Turkish front line was gained in less than an hour albeit at considerable cost. For the rest of the day, the Australians steadily took their Turkish opponents apart but the methodical approach meant that the opportunity to advance into Ramala was missed. Instead, the Australians waited for success on their right where the British and South Africans were held up all day by the resistance of the Turkish 10<sup>th</sup> Division whose positions were skilfully sited on the Palestinian hills and were able to bring successive Allied attacks to an abrupt halt.

## **Western Front**

Joffre and Haig had come to an agreement on the further development of the campaign in France. Haig had indicated that he would resume offensive operations as soon as possible. He was concerned that having stretched his front to take over more line from the French that he would not be able to achieve sufficient numerical superiority over the Germans who had concentrated heavily on the front opposite the British. He needed the French to make a diversion but Joffre was unwilling to do so against the strong German positions between the Aisne and Verdun. However, he was prepared to do so further east and Joffre had indicated to Haig that before the end of September he would attack in Lorraine.

To this end a major French railway operation was underway from 25 September with considerable numbers of reserves and heavy guns moved to the French 2<sup>nd</sup> Army front which had with rare exceptions been inactive since 1914. The German 6<sup>th</sup> Army had a very thinly held front (by Western Front standards) opposite the French 2<sup>nd</sup> Army along the Muerthe River. By 26 September, the Germans had detected by aerial reconnaissance a French build-up and the 6<sup>th</sup> Army asked Ludendorff for immediate support. This would not be easy to provide as all German dispositions had been made anticipating further Allied attacks in Picardy or other parts of the western part of the Western Front.

## **Italian**

Two German Divisions (2<sup>nd</sup> Württemberg Reserve and 39<sup>th</sup> Bavarian Reserve) were arriving in the Trentino in the fourth week of September. This was another example of the increasing support which the Germans were being forced to give to the ailing Austro-Hungarian Empire at this time and given that it was required on the Italian, Balkan and Eastern Fronts this was in total a heavy demand on German manpower and a reason why on the Western Front the German 6<sup>th</sup> Army was wondering what reserves might be available to aid it.

Like Haig and Joffre, Cadorna was equally determined to keep up the pressure on the Central Powers even as the men tired and supplies were running down. After the failure of the Carnic Offensive, Cadorna wanted little delay before resuming offensive action. The Italian 4<sup>th</sup> Army was asked to report on the situation around Laverone (6-4.2218) and Cadorna indicated that additional Divisions would be released from the Isonzo Front to support a further attack in the Trentino that should take place no later than the first week of October.

Player Notes:

- *East: Very little happened here this turn other than that I closed up deeper into Romania and am also threatening Kishinev in Russia and Galati in Romania. I have aspirations to use my gunboats to bombard the Galati fort but it is not clear within the rules whether this can be done. Realistically, the fort is there to cover the river communications at a major river junction and also connection across the river to Braila – hence vulnerable to*

fire from river gunboats. Gunboat calibre is not great, but this is covered by the reduction of gunboat strength by thirds when supporting ground combat. This will require game designer arbitration. There was one very large Russian offensive against trenches east of Lemberg on the river Strypa. This attack used up a lot of Russian supply but was worth it as it destroyed a Hungarian division. It is troubling; I cannot place Germans everywhere.

- *Balkans: I am very concerned I will not be able to break the siege of Cattaro.*
- *Caucasus: Quiet.*
- *Mesopotamia: Quiet.*
- *Palestine: Quiet, but not for long I suspect as summer comes to an end in Palestine.*
- *Italy: I have also started reinforcing the Trentino front with Germans which I am hoping will give the Italians pause for thought and maybe compel them to transfer reserves from east to west thus diminishing his effectiveness – and likelihood of attacking – on the Isonzo.*
- *West. The WF remains quiet for now. I make no moves.*

#### DM Summary – September 1916

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total	Morale
Germany	-	4	1	1	-	-		13	18	1423	Good
Austria-Hungary	-	4	2	1	4	-		1	12	596	Shaken
Ottoman	-	-	-	-	-	4		-	4	92	Good
Bulgaria	-	-	-	-	-	-		-	-	27	Good
Central Powers	-	8	3	2	4	4		14	35	2141	
France	-	-	-	-	-	-		-	-	808	Good
Great Britain	-	-	-	-	-	6		-	6	397	Good
Russia	-	7	-	3	3	-		NA	13	852	Shaken
Italy	-	3	4	-	-	-		-	7	116	Good
Romania	30*	16	131**	-	16***	-		-	177	209	*Craiova and Constanta lost **Jassy, Ploesti, and Bucharest lost ***Braila lost
Belgium	-	-	-	-	-	-		NA	-	(105)	NA
Serbia	-	-	-	-	-	-		NA	-	(40)	NA
Entente	30	26	135	3	19	6		-	219	2369	

AP: I am approaching the end of what might be considered the fourth month of the Allied offensive. There is still some more to come but I think the Russians are finished.

The new point is that I have made a serious effort to break through in Palestine. It has only a one in six chance but I should have more opportunities to do this in the next few months and that will put real pressure on the Turks for the first time. I want to force more aid from Germany just at a time when Austrian Economic Collapse starts to eat into CP resources.

I have to find some way now of weakening the Western Front. The attack on Lorraine will demonstrate that the time when it was sufficient to hold anywhere with just one Division is running to an end. The first tanks will be appearing soon. There are going to be further changes in the conduct of the war. It is not all going to be the same.

The following illustration shows the thinking behind the forthcoming French attack in Lorraine.



Figure 4: French railway concentration for an offensive in Lorraine. This demonstrates how an attacker can prepare a surprise attack against a weak front in trench warfare. The French have 15 rail capacity and most of the force occupying the hexes behind the front have been moved into position in a single turn most using the double track railway lines which serve the rear areas of this front. The Germans have only one turn to react before the attack will be delivered. Within that time no reinforcements can reach the two most vulnerable hexes 5-3.2518 and 5-3.2618. This is due to the movement costs of the trenches, ZOC and the rivers and woods which intersect the front. Movement of infantry units between front line entrenched hexes in ZOC can only happen if the terrain between them is clear or broken or hilly (in Palestine). Germans have one other possibility which is that an already entrained unit within 10 hexes of a hex next to a front line hex (and no difficult terrain) can reinforce that hex. This could help the defence of 5-3.2618 which has a railway leading to it and no awkward river crossings. However, there is no German unit entrained in the near vicinity so the French will attack before reserves can arrive.