

## **Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game**

**GT182: 27 – 30 September 1916 (7 September)**

### **General Situation**

At the end of September 1916, the United States' ambassador in Berlin was among a number of neutral diplomats entertained by the German foreign ministry at a weekend retreat beside one of the lakes dotting the outskirts of the city. The supposed theme of this getaway was "*The End of the War*". It was supposed to be a long range look at how peace might be restored and how the post-war European state system would learn the lessons of the past two years.

Although the official presentations were balanced and interesting enough and were "diplomatic" the report of the ambassador to Washington contained two significant qualifications. First, the ambassador warned that the views of the German Foreign Ministry did not necessarily accord with the ideas of the General Staff and, under the Prussian military system, the latter were more influential. Second, during the conference the junior German diplomats were clearly distracted by the news of the start of another offensive in the East and it was clear that their assumptions were that the real diplomacy would not start until there was a sufficiently crushing military victory that would permit Germany to dictate the peace. Accordingly, the ambassador's assessment was that Germany would cross the Rubicon and would increasingly fight unrestrained in order to completely dominate Europe.

### **Eastern Front**

The battle which the junior diplomats in Berlin had alluded to was the Battle of the Siret which began on 26 September. This was conducted by the German 12th Army (supported by elements of the Austro-Hungarian 7th Army) and the objective was to make a crossing of the Lower Siret which was defended by the Romanian 1st Army.

In addition to these operations, the German 19th Army made an attack on the Kishinev Cover Line at the same time. The attack was made along part of the front between Panesesti and Capriana (5-6S.1113) and among the defenders, as far as can be known, was likely the Russian Women's Division. If so, it is partly to their credit that the German attack did not make a successful breakthrough despite two days of probing for weakness.

On the Siret front, the German 12th Army saturated the far bank of the river in shellfire and under cover of this assault troops were able to obtain a number of bridgeheads particularly at Liești (6-6.2108) and Comești (6-6.2007). Prominent among the attacking units were German Mountain Jaegar Divisions which had crossed the Transylvanian Alps in previous weeks. The Romanians arguably fought better here than in any other action in the campaign as they had their own guns firing effectively and the Germans suffered notable losses in the river crossing and the operations immediately following their landings. Despite this, the Romanians couldn't hold the river line and when they lost Călmățui (6-6.2108) after the Germans expanded their bridgehead at Liești they were forced to order more withdrawals away from the river to prevent units being cut off further north.

By 29 September, this retreat had become general and the Romanian 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Armies were ordered back to the line of the Prut. They had little choice as the Russian 14<sup>th</sup> Army was also retiring to this line. However, this meant the abandonment of Galatz and in fact the whole of the remainder of Romanian territory. Neither the Belgians nor Serbians had been driven to this extremity but by

the evening of 30 September there was no Romanian military unit larger than a company on Romanian soil little more than two months after the country had gone to war.

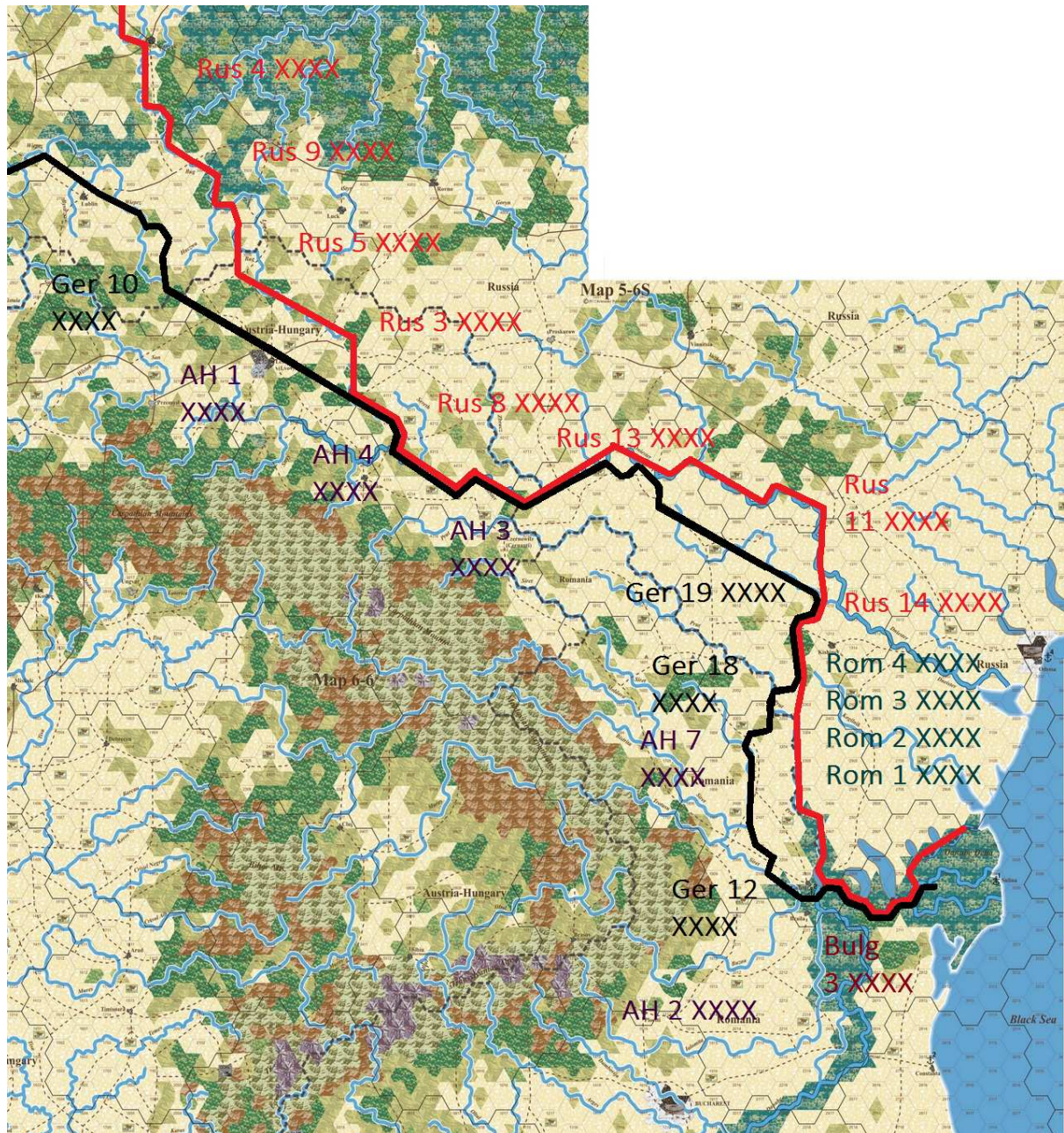


Figure 1: General Situation on the Russian South West and South Fronts, end of September 1916.

### The Balkans

The situation around Cattaro remained in balance as the Central Powers' force under the temporary Corps command of General Morgen scouted the perimeter established by the Italians. The French 72nd Division had also unloaded at Scutari between 25 and 30 September and a French brigade was also moving forward towards Cattaro.

On the main front, the Bulgarians made a local attack against the French 26th Division at Lescovac (7-6.1202). Here the French trenches were no more than 40 kilometres south of Nis. The Bulgarian

8<sup>th</sup> Division broke into a few French positions on 27 September but they were forced back by counterattacks.

### The Near East

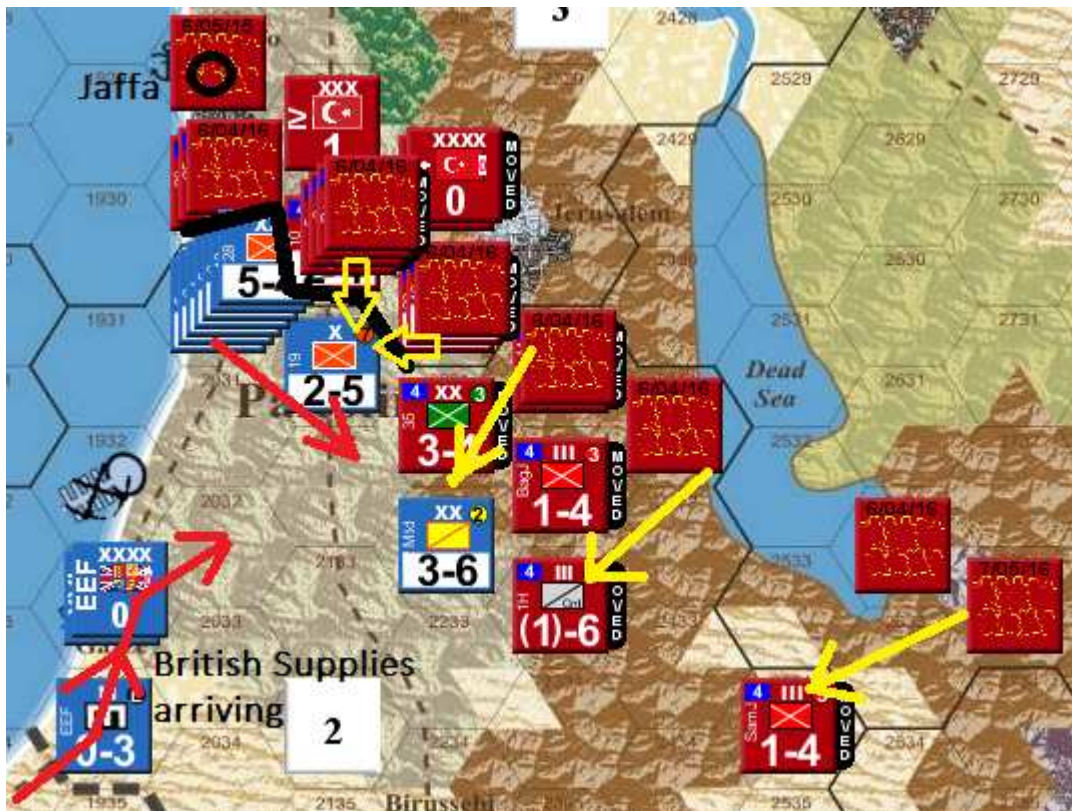


Figure 2: The Turkish counteroffensive, 28 - 30 September 1916.

Murray was assessing the situation on 28 September following his attack towards Ramala (8-8.2130) when gunfire was heard to the east. After a delay, it was confirmed that this was the sounds of a very significant Turkish counterattack against the right flank of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force. By nightfall Murray was informed that the South African Regiment and the 76<sup>th</sup> Brigade had been very roughly handled. Both these units had been under strength after the Ramala attack. The Turkish attack had only been stopped by the intervention of the 19<sup>th</sup> Brigade which had stiffened the line and stopped the enemy advance as the light faded.

Murray considered this an opportunity and ordered an immediate counterattack next morning using forces which marched up overnight from the coastal flank. Artillery shells which were on their way from Alexandria to replenish the stocks of units that had been engaged in the Ramala attack. These were hurried forwards with great urgency and reached the front line with barely minutes to spare. There had been little time for reconnaissance and the critical point was at Tarkumiyah (8-8.2231) where the Turkish 35<sup>th</sup> Division had been hoping to exploit a gap which had yawned wide on 28 September between the British 19<sup>th</sup> Brigade and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Mounted Division. On 29 September, the Turks broke their camps only to discover that they were confronted by an attack led by the Australians who Murray had slotted in to the gap during the preceding night. Within a short space of time the Australians had the upper hand and the Turkish soldiers were caught in unprepared positions uncertain whether they were supposed to advance or stand. In the end, they had to retreat with serious losses as the Australian 2<sup>nd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Divisions drove them back to the Jaffa – Jerusalem line.

## Western Front

On 27 September, Joffre had confirmed that Pétain would command an Army Group in Lorraine consisting of the French 2nd Army and the substantial reserves which had been accumulated behind this front. Joffre required that this force would strike the German front in Lorraine within 48 hours.

The German 6th Army responded to the threat of an imminent French offensive in Lorraine by weakening its front line along the Meurthe River. When, the French shelling opened up on 29 September, the detonations struck empty trenches. The French infantry followed rather slowly but the spearheads were allowed to advance as far as the Franco-German frontier. Pétain had required the 2nd Army to lead the advance as they knew the ground. Within two days, they had attained a line between Arracourt (5-3.2518) and Repaix (5-3.2618). However, none of these places had been defended with any determination by the Germans and all the indications were that the enemy was railing in reserves and would certainly contest the line of the Rhein-Marne Canal.

Only four French Divisions had been committed to these initial moves as Pétain's reserves were too far back and still organising themselves. Recognising that the Germans might easily counterattack, Pétain provided his spearheads with a strong air cover to help spot any enemy movements. In addition a fierce bombardment was made of the German lines on the western flank of the advance around Réméréville (5-3.2417). Pétain hoped to outflank these positions in the next phase of the offensive but in the meantime he hoped the Germans would be forced to keep their heads down.



Figure 3: Pétain's Army Group crosses the Meurthe River, 29 - 30 September 1916.

## Italian Front

Major Italian redeployments were under way again in late September. Unmistakeably the Italians were making a major reinforcement of their Armies in the Trentino and speculation was rife that the long delayed attack on Lavarone (6-4.2218) was imminent.

### DM Summary – September 1916

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total [%SM]	Morale
Germany	-	4	1	1	-	-	9	13	27	1432 [89.5]	Good
Austria-Hungary	-	4	2	1	4	-	-	1	12	596 [108.4]	Shaken
Ottoman	-	-	-	-	-	4	5	-	9	97 [27.7]	Good
Bulgaria	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	28	Good
Central Powers	-	8	3	2	4	4	15	14	50	2141	
France	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	809 [89.8]	Good
Great Britain	-	-	-	-	-	6	4	-	10	401 [31.5]	Good
Russia	-	7	-	3	3	-	2	NA	15	854 [142.3]	Shaken
Italy	-	3	4	-	-	-	-	-	7	116 [38.7]	Good
Romania	30*	16	131**	-	16***	-	4	-	181	213	*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	11	-	230	2370	

### Player Notes

CP: *It is not often that there is this much for me to report on an end of month turn, but this has been quite an important one from my perspective with 5 attacks being made by the CP.*

- *East: A pretty aggressive move from the combined CP forces this turn. The vast extent of the Russian front remains static with swathes of no man's land separating the opposing sides. In contrast, along the length of the Stryp to where it meets the Dniester dense concentrations of Austro-Hungarians sit deeply in their trenches eyeing the equally entrenched Russians across the river. Apart from that vicious assault from the Russian 3<sup>rd</sup> Army earlier in the month which cost me a Hungarian division, it remains a stand-off. N Romania is cleared of enemy forces and I have penetrated deeply into Russian territory, driving most of his forces across the Dniester – except for as we approach Kishinev which he is determined to hold. It is 40km NW of Kishinev where I launch a strong assault by a joint German 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Army force to try and drive a wedge between the Russian 11<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> armies. If I can succeed in this offensive I might make holding Kishinev untenable and compel him to withdraw all Russian forces here back across the safety of the Dniester line. This will isolate the remaining Romanian die-hards as they become squeezed into the Galati defensive zone, which is all Romania has left. I have been quite shocked at the extent of the Romanian collapse. I also make two assaults against Romanian forces to gain a bridgehead across the Siret River, which will outflank Galati and allow me open ground approaches to attack towards the fort, which is already fixed by forces on the Danube.*
- *Balkans: I have forces in sight of Cattaro but just not strong enough to break through to the besieged fort. Along the Serbian front, I launch a limited attack against the French 28XX to start attriting it. I advance light screening forces at the north of the line to start a turning move on the combined Montenegrin-Serbian-French line.*
- *Caucasus: Quiet.*
- *Mesopotamia: Quiet.*
- *Palestine: The British launched a bruising attack on me south of Jerusalem last turn. But has left weak forces on his eastern flank. There is possible opportunity in this so the aggressive and opportunistic 4<sup>th</sup> Army commander conducts a converging offensive against this light flanking force to try and drive it back and place the bulk of the British forces at risk of being cut off.*
- *Italy: My defence is quite strong in all likely places of attack.*
- *West. Good intelligence picked up on significant French rail moves and the establishment of assembly areas to the rear of the Nancy fortification line. It is very clear to me the French have seen opportunity to launch devastating, concentrated attacks against my lightly held river line running between Metz and the Vosges. I cannot rapidly reinforce these defences and risk their annihilation. So I have taken the drastic measure of withdrawing to deny the French their easy victories and to place my forces in locations more easily reinforced. I also duly send reinforcements to the 6<sup>th</sup> Army holding the line there. He will not be able to bring the bulk of his force into action this turn and I know this will frustrate him. I would have lost at least one of those positions had I stayed in place and then been forced to retreat from the others, so I think this is the sensible move. It does create a salient at Metz-Sued though.*

*AP: We pass a significant milestone as German DM exceeds 1425. This means the US will enter the war at some time between November 1916 and April 1917 - so up to 6 months early. I doubt this could have been avoided this turn as I could have settled the point with a British attack or bombardment but the German attacks in the East made that unnecessary. Germany might have delayed this threshold passing by adopting a more strictly defensive strategy in the past few months*

*or indeed any time since the end of the initial campaigns in 1914. My own thought is that the continuous German campaigning in late 1914 and early 1915 (historically the main effort against Russia did not begin until May 1915) is a reason why this game is mostly running a bit faster than history.*

*The German retreat in Lorraine was, I think, a good move. There was an alternative of just abandoning one of the trenches in the front line. I would have been restricted in my advances due to the difficulties of infantry moving through trenches and ZOC at the same time. Either way my position is much more difficult and the advantage of defence in depth is demonstrated.*

*I was surprised by the Turkish attack and wonder if it was forced by supply stockpile considerations (GCR 22-13). In any event it creates an opportunity for me to increase attrition which I welcome. British DM is now almost half French DM so I am steadily making progress towards the aim of equalising their morale. That of course is not a historical idea but what it relates to is that the Franco-British alliance is most harmonious (and maximises its Morale budget) when their national sacrifices are comparable and the British still have catching up to do.*