

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT183: 1 – 5 October 1916 (1 October)

General Situation

Field Marshal Hindenburg cut a picture of Prussian military efficiency when in public but his office procedures were anything but. He was a stranger to the In and Out box and he could not tell the difference between a filing cabinet and a waste paper bin.

At the start of October 1916, Ludendorff was on a visit to Metz where he was consulting with the Crown Prince and Prince R pprecht concerning the latest French offensive in Lorraine. Without Ludendorff around to keep Hindenburg's paper work in order, the Field Marshall managed to miss a scheduled meeting with the Naval Staff on 1 October in which the sailors were intending to advocate the immediate resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare. The whole question had to be shelved for another opportunity which might be several weeks away. Such were the chances which ensured that strategy was not always subject to the objective exercise of reason.

The Western Front



Figure 1: The Great Battle of Lorraine, 1 - 5 October 1916.

Ludendorff supervised a major counterattack against the French near Arracourt (5-3.2518). This resulted in three days' fighting between 1 – 3 October as the Germans struggled to stop the French

2nd Army consolidating on the ground they had recently gained. Unfortunately for the German 5th and 6th Armies they encountered the French in a very determined mood and the French 7th Cavalry Division put up a heroic fight for Arracourt itself which they held until relieved on 3 October. Ludendorff was reportedly hopping mad with frustration and committed more than one verbal offense of *lèse majesté* against the royal princes as he questioned the failure of their Armies to drive the French away.

Ludendorff was in any event partly responsible for the débâcle having selected Arracourt as the focus of the counteroffensive. Prince Rûpprecht had instead suggested beginning the attack further east where the French were still very thin on the ground at the beginning of the month and he pointed out that if they could establish themselves on the eastern flank of the French forward thrust they would then be able to squeeze it and interdict the roads into the salient that would result.

By 3 October, the situation was deteriorating for the Germans who had suffered heavy casualties massing for attacks against Arracourt in part due to excellent spotting work by French aircraft. By then the French had reinforced Arracourt with their III Corps and the weakness on their eastern flank had been rectified by the movement forward of strong forces from their second echelon. Furthermore, the French attack had extended into the Vosges and the French XV Corps recovered the Col du Donon (5-3.2719) on 5 October.

Meanwhile, the Pétain had ordered major attacks from the direction of Nancy as the French 3rd Army joined the offensive. Here they put the German defences at Réméréville (5-3.2417) in a vice between two French Armies. On 4 October, the Crown Prince visited Réméréville and declared it the most acute position on the Western Front as he witnessed heavy French shellfire and received reports of German defences under extreme pressure.

The Italian Front



Figure 2: The 2nd Battle of Laverone, 3 - 5 October 1916.

On 1 October, the Austrian Army of Tyrol had been re-designated the 9th Army under General Rohr von Denta. This Army had been enhanced through reinforcement by two Divisions from the Württemberg and Bavarian Reserves. Rohr von Denta was studying the possibilities of an attack down the Adiga Valley to relieve the pressure on Trent. However, this train of planning was disturbed by the start of the 2nd Battle of Lavarone on 3 October.

The new Italian attack was a first move on the Trentino front since 1915 and delivered from different directions by the Italian 1st and 4th Armies. The entrenched and fortified position at Lavarone (6-4.2218) was the focus of the attack and was in the first hours drenched in accurate Italian shellfire. In the next two days, the Italian infantry attacks lapped up to the perimeter of the Austrian defensive zone and there were costly struggles for commanding positions. By 5 October, the situation of the Austrian garrison was growing parlous. The commandant was not exaggerating when he sent an alarming telegram to Rohr von Denta that three Austrian brigades had been almost wiped out. The Italians had ample manpower concentrated for this attack and for once no one could criticise any aspect of the execution of the attacks which were both brave and skilful. Only the great natural defences of this place kept the Italians out.

Near midnight on 5 October, Italian infantry scrambled up a cliff to get a clear view of the entrance to the Lavarone Fortress. They saw a bridge over a deep chasm and great thick metal doors into a rock face opposite. This was the citadel tunnelled under a mountain! Was this not impregnable?

The Eastern Front

In the first few days of October, the Central Powers forces led by the German 12th Army moved forward into contact with the Romanian positions on the far side of the River Prut. Galatz was occupied on 1 October, the last major town in Romania to be conquered.

The 12th Army looked for crossing points of the Prut but initial reports suggested it would be difficult and require an effort at least as great as that which had carried the Siret and Birladu Rivers.

The Balkans

At Salonika, the pro-Allied National Defence Committee had managed to raise and equip a Division (the Seres Division). General Sarrail naturally wished to incorporate this into his Army of the Orient. However, before that could be done questions needed to be asked about the propriety of neutral nationals being used in this way.

The Balkan Front was essentially quiet and this included the lines of both sides at the Siege of Cattaro where the Allies had been reinforced by the French 72nd Reserve Division.

The Near East

The Turkish 4th Army retreated to its entrenched lines in Palestine on 1 – 2 October after it became clear that the Allied forces were capable of strong counterattacks which the Turks could not face in the open.

Murray, however, pleased with the results of the fighting at Tarkumiya (8-8.2232) at the end of September smelt weakness further east. He was aware that two Turkish Regiments had withdrawn to Arad (8-8.2432) and Ein Gedi (8-8.2431) which was the eastern extremity of the Turkish trench

line terminating at the Dead Sea. A rapid pursuit was ordered as Murray hoped to cut them off or stop them settling in to strong positions. This required the Egyptian Expeditionary Force to concentrate once more on its right and the artillery was largely left behind.

On 4 and 5 October, there were scattered fights between the Turkish infantry and the Australians and British who tried to break through to the inland sea. However, this was to no avail. The British Imperial forces were already tired and they had little ammunition. The Turks were indeed short-handed but they had the advantage of knowing the terrain and their pursuers were unable to pin them in position. On 5 October, Murray conceded that the Turks had got away before he could have a clear shot at attacking Ein Gedi.



Figure 3: Murray strikes east toward the Dead Sea, 1 - 5 October 1916.

DM Summary – October 1916

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total [%SM]	Morale
Germany	19							12	31	1463	Good
Austria-Hungary	6							-	6	602	Economic Collapse
Ottoman	-							NA	-	97	Good
Bulgaria	-							-	-	28	Good
Central Powers	25							12	37	2178	
France	12							-	12	821	Good
Great Britain	3							-	3	404	Good
Russia	-							NA	-	854	Shaken
Italy	7							-	7	123	Good
Romania	15*							-	15	228	Good *Galatz lost
Belgium	-							NA	-	(105)	NA
Serbia	-							NA	-	(40)	NA
Entente	37							-	37	2407	

Player Notes

CP: *Monthly administration is pretty uneventful. Nobody gets any breakthroughs with gas development and the Entente maintain their air superiority on the Western Front. Greece remains neutral although likely for not much longer. I see them entering the war around winter time, which will mean they are unlikely to be able to support any offensive but will have winter to build up, deploy and manoeuvre. Occupation of Romania nets AH an extra special metal resource but, more importantly, allows them to achieve zero DM for food penalties whilst Germany's deficit is 12 this turn. There are no turning points in this war but the French pending offensive in Lorraine is an unwelcome development. One plus factor is that this month Germany deploys over 40 RPL which will significantly bolster my frontline strength in the west. Also, of course – "winter is coming".*

- *East: My efforts to drive a wedge between the Russian 11th and 14th armies failed, so now there is a stalemate on this part of the front and Kishinev remains secure. However, once supply catches up, this is a useful area of operations to be able to attack the Russians in open ground. My rail communications are starting to catch up in Romania so supply will start coming forward more rapidly and is greatly needed in theatre. The great plus is Russia's own supply situation. As for Romania; as a country it has been pretty much overrun in the last two months. It seems not that long ago that Romanian forces posed a real threat to the AH towns of Sibiu and Brasov and now the last remaining Romanian city of Galati has been occupied. Only the easternmost port town of Sulina and some eastern marshlands in the Danube Delta has not seen the tread of CP boots. Like Belgium, Romania still retains large forces in the field but only because of the*

willingness of Russia to play host. My two attacks last turn managed to seize bridgeheads across the Siret which made the Galati defences untenable due to being outflanked. No attacks this turn; just steadying of the line.

- *Balkans: There will be a fight around Cattaro but I fear too late. I have reinforcements now heading from Romania to the Serbian Front in anticipation of Greek entry.*
- *Caucasus: Quiet, but I have now built up reasonable supply and think I will entertain the opportunity to establish Kalfas units.*
- *Mesopotamia: Quiet as we sit out the last month of summer.*
- *Palestine: My attack hoping to outflank the British forces here and pin them against the coast failed. As a result, I am forced back into my trenches. The losses I took were not worth the outcomes but I had a fair chance of threatening his supply line and reducing his room for manoeuvre, so I still believe making the attack was the right thing to do. Just wish I had had more combat power to use.*
- *Italy: My remains strong in all likely places of attack. I even anticipated an attack of my own, but thought better of it. Several German divisions have been attached to AH armies in the east and the Tryloean Army becomes the AH 9th Army.*
- *West. The withdrawal I made in Lorraine in the last few days of Oct saved me from a sever pounding. I had some hits against a Div by massed French artillery. I don't think the amount of resource he expended was worth the losses he inflicted and now he is forced to make infantry attacks in the region within the next week. I'm fairly certain it will come now before I am able to reinforce my defences too much; I am still in hasty defence in my current positions. However, his advance into my former positions has been made by light forces to hold assembly areas for future operations, so I launch a spoiling attack against his positions held SE of Metz-Sud. I am able to attack this from three locations, so I think is worth making it. Sadly, my river defences also provide the French with a river line and he has air superiority over the front. I can only hope for decent results.*

AP: *There is something to be said for winding up the Allied offensives and waiting for 1917. This is because if I accumulate supply now and spend it next year it will benefit from the 1917 - 19 CRT. However for the moment this argument does not prevail.*

First, a long pause now would give me an increased monthly target, that is the German DM I need to inflict every month to get Germany to surrender before the end of 1917, 1918 or 1919. 1918 is a realistic and in some ways necessary target. To win in 1918 I have to inflict 45.11 DM on Germany every month from now on. For the CP to win they have to inflict 25.59 DM on France every month¹. I make no assumption that it would be easier to win by defeating Austria (11.26 DM per month) because they are now very hard to get at.

Second, my next intermediate goal is German Shaken Morale. I want to equal or beat the historic date (April - May 1917). The opportunity in Lorraine combined with some more British attacks is too good to miss. I probably will not achieve this this year but I want to be in near striking distance by the start of 1917. The closer I am the more the Germans will be obliged to scale down their efforts elsewhere particularly on the Eastern Front where the Germans will find it tiresome doing all the hard work while the Austrians sit back. This may give Russia relief during the winter (if it doesn't, I will pull back). The situation is sufficiently favourable that I am not avoiding use of the French in combat. It

¹ Or 53.66 DM on Britain.

will be noted perhaps that French and German DM is almost exactly equal now as a percentage of Shaken Morale and the ratio of absolute Morale is less than 2:1 in Germany's favour.

Third, the Italian offensive will now definitely push Austrian-Hungary into Economic Collapse. The attack on Lavarone benefitted from a "6" and that position may not be tenable long term. This it should be emphasised is not military collapse. In fact Austrian-Hungary is recovering from the Brusilov offensive as I find it very hard to get to grips with the Austrians and my offensive options are very narrow as Russian attacks are increasingly out of the question. This means in a few months, the CP will likely see advantage in putting the Austrians in danger again as they refresh their morale in 1917 and the Germans start to eye the unused resources of their allies' morale.

Austrian economic collapse will strain German resources and eliminate the CP's supply production advantage. That is a significant turning point as supply abundance is a big component of combat effectiveness.

Some similar factors are playing out in the Near East. The Germans are sending weapons to Bulgaria and the Ottomans. The current fighting in Palestine has been hard on both the British and the Turks. However, I doubt Ivor wanted to give me an opportunity to keep it going for three successive turns and an additional one in three chance to make a breach in the trench line. This, however, did not work out.

This turn I benefitted from excellent die rolls in the West and Italy. Given how dire September was for me this is a welcome change in fortune.