

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

**GT184: 6 – 9 October 1916 (2 October)**

### **General Situation**

On a little visited stretch of the Essex coast a new dock had been constructed at Tilbury (SM.0810). Since the first foundations had been laid a few months previously, the site had been subject to the most intense security and the War Office was clearly in charge. A short branch line had also been spawned off the railway to Southend (5-3.0102) and it snaked across the marsh to the quay which was capable of receiving large transport vessels.

On 8 October, an order was published in the neighbourhood banning all unauthorised personnel from being anywhere within three miles of the quay for a period of 48 hours. A few weeks later, it became known that three schoolboys had been picked up and interned for over a month to the great consternation of their families and friends for breaching the order while following their train spotting hobby. They protested they didn't know about the ban, but that made no difference. German spies, they were told, would say the exact same thing.

The official report, circulated to the Ministers responsible for the war, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, and General Haig a few days after the arrest of the boys, made a fair assessment of the risk. It stated that there should be more concern about the fact that a Zeppelin overflew Tilbury on 9 October and might easily have taken a photograph. Further, the manufacture and delivery of the new "tanks" were subject to greater security risks. It was doubted whether the boys would have really understood what they had seen and besides the Germans would be getting a closer look soon enough.

### **The Western Front**

As news of the French Offensive in Lorraine spread speculation began that an invasion of Germany was about to begin. Pétain came under some pressure to satisfy this though he also had the ambition to claim the recovery of the lost provinces of Alsace-Lorraine. On 8 October, most of Pétain's army group was focused on the German salient at Réméréville (5-3.2417). However, Pétain didn't want to keep his force battering at a strong position which would not immediately lead to a crossing of the 1914 frontier. Therefore the attacks around Réméréville were suspended and Pétain instead let his right wing push across the frontier in the northern Vosges taking advantage of the XV Corps' capture of the Col du Donon (5-3.2719). In this phase of the offensive, Pétain required the French 1st Army, which was already on liberated soil, to contribute the efforts of its northern wing. The German line between Schirmeck and Natzwiller (5-3.2819) received this attack. The defence was maintained by the Bavarian Ersatz Division which held the rough wooded terrain with the determination of the desperate. This was another battle in which the French placed Senegalese troops at the front of some dangerous attacks with predictable consequences. Between 8 - 9 October, the fighting was at its most intense but the Germans could not be levered out of all their positions and their line retained its integrity until heavy rain stopped the action in the fading light of 9 October.

### **The Italian Front**

The Italian 1st and 4th Armies had the Austrian fortress at Lavarone (6-4.2218) in a vice. However, they could not prevent the Austro-Hungarian 9th Army feeding more mountain troops across the

high terrain to reinforce their covering forces which the Italians had badly depleted in their initial attacks.

The Italians nevertheless kept up the intensity of their assaults which were supported by many large calibre guns. By 8 October, they had got a large howitzer carried up the heights in pieces and reassembled opposite the great steel door of the fortress which blocked access to the subterranean maze in which the garrison huddled. The first shell fired struck the overhanging rock which covered the entrance. The second shell hit the door square at a range of no more than 400 metres and left a definite scratch on its paintwork. The third shell exploded in the gun muzzle. The attempt to knock down the front door of Lavarone ended abruptly.

The fighting continued as the Italians searched for ways to control the fortress' ventilation shafts or to find the back exits. This led to wild thrusts across the open plateau above. Casualties on both sides were awful and the wounded were difficult to evacuate. On 9 October, the commander of the Lavarone fortress sent a message to 9th Army headquarters querying the whereabouts of promised supplies and making it plain that more assistance was needed if the defence was not to crumble.

### The Eastern Front



Figure 1: The Russians and Romanians defend the Kishinev - Prut line, 6 - 9 October 1916.

The Central Powers made a serious effort to breach the Kishinev-Prut line on 6 October. Attacks were ordered in various sectors. This included a diversionary bombardment at Bardar (5-6S.1114) by Austrian artillery which excited effective counter battery fire from the Romanians which showed that even minor powers had large guns at their disposal. Another planned attack across the Danube at Izmail (6-6.2609) came to nothing when the Bulgarian commander had to admit that pioneers needed were back at Cernovoda (6-6.2615) repairing the railway bridge.

A more serious attempt to cross water had been made by the German 12th and Austro-Hungarian 7th Army at Leova (6-6.2406). The Prut here was a pretty impressive water way and only the self-confidence of OberOst would have ever described it as a minor river (see their dispatch of 7 October). On 6 October, the Central Powers' artillery opened up. Austrian siege guns contributed their distinctive thump unnerving the defenders but, in truth, all their shells ended with a sickening squelch as they buried themselves in soft mud and in fact could hardly harm the defenders who were not in fixed defences. The Romanian defences were stiffened by generous rounds of vodka as they awaited the onslaught which they knew would come. That night there was a crossing by several Austrian brigades and by morning there was a terrible melee with the Romanian 10th and 21st Divisions in the marshes on the eastern side. In the afternoon, the Romanians counter attacked determined not to be forced out of positions from which (with binoculars) they could still see their homeland.

The slaughter continued until dusk. The Romanian infantry by then hardly had a man standing and in their final desperation their cavalry stood ready to make a last futile charge. However, it was not necessary, the Austrians were evacuating as they had not received the support they expected from the Germans. The Romanian survivors blinked in disbelief that they had prevailed after such a close shave. In the next two days, reinforcements would arrive and prevent any further effort by the enemy.

The only clear success of the Central Powers was at Cricova (5-6S.1212) where the German 19th Army managed to drive the Russian 14th Army back from their lines covering Kishinev. By 8 October, the 14th Army had issued orders for a last ditch defence of Kishinev. STAVKA encouraged the defence in Bessarabia by advising that the Russians' enemies were suffering from shortages at the end of lengthy supply lines and further strong attacks were increasingly less likely.

## **The Balkans**

The Austrian 5th and Bulgarian 1st Armies combined on 7 October to make attacks on the positions of the French 26th Division outside Leskovac (7-6.1202). The French infantry were well entrenched and, given the terrain, their attackers could make only slow progress while French machine guns cut down more than one Austrian assault.

At Cattaro, the Italians expected enemy attacks from the direction of Dubrovnik but none materialised. The Austrian Admiral inside the besieged city was most perplexed by the lack of action. A destroyer was sent out during the night of 6 October, evading the Allied mines and blockade, carrying with it a warning to the Fleet Commander in Pola that the naval garrison might be forced to capitulate if relief did not arrive within a week.

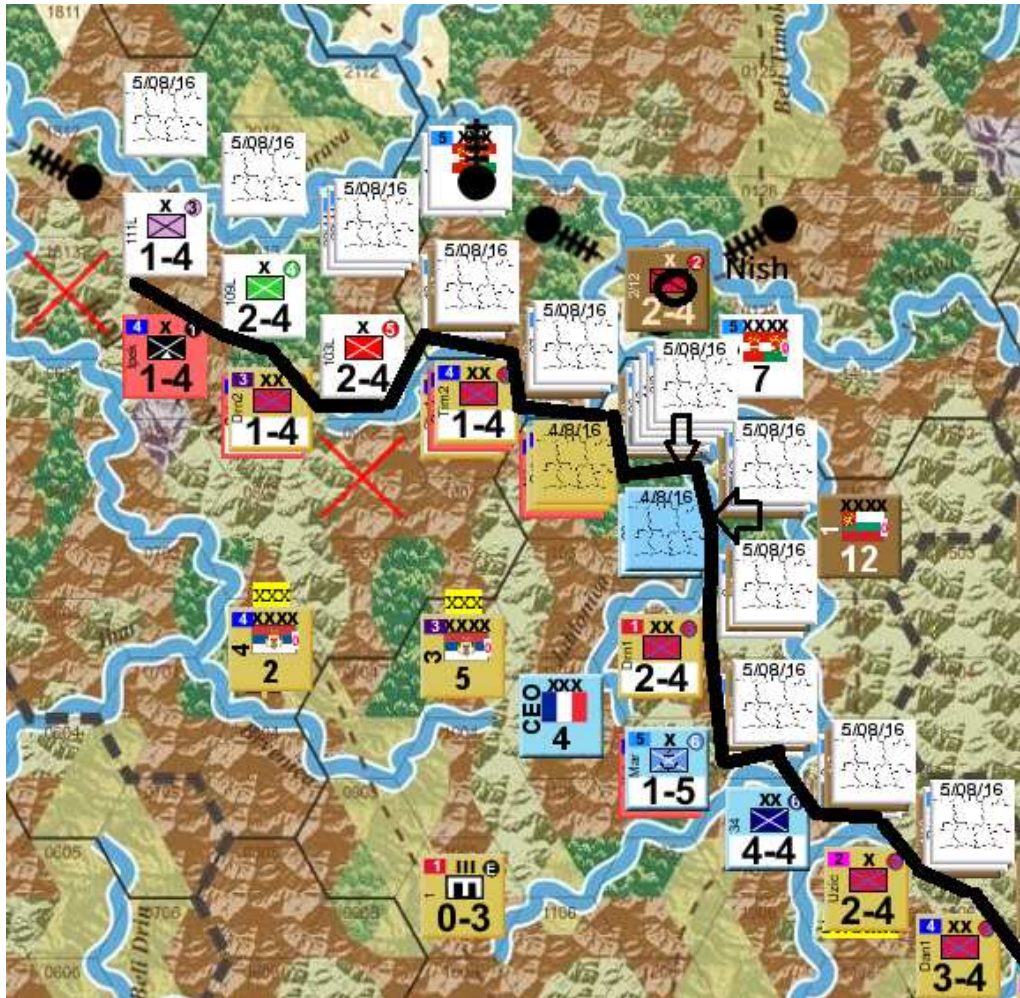


Figure 2: The front in Central Serbia, 6 - 9 October 1916.

### The Near East

The fighting in Palestine did not let up. Murray's force was more or less out of all ammunition larger than a rifle round. The Turks had their own supply deficiencies but Djemal Pasha thought this would be best concealed by continuing offensive operations. Having been driven back in the East, the Turks attempted something closer to the coast. On 7 October, the Indian 5th Division was forced to defend its positions near the wells of Kaffir Bilu (8-8.2131) as they were assailed by no less than seven Turkish Divisions. The Indian defences held all day but Murray was forced onto his back foot in this contest.

The Turks were also making attacks in the Murat Valley in the unmapped Caucasus. At least they were unmapped as far as even divisional commanders in the Turkish 3rd Army were concerned. This was the only explanation for the massacre near Yukarikarglik (6-8.2918) on 6 October. On that day, the 3rd Army intended a major push against Armenian irregular forces and Cossacks which were operating out of mountain redoubts in this part of Armenia. Five Turkish Divisions set out simultaneously to crush the Armenians and it appeared that most had not prepared themselves for the obstacle of the Murat River which stood between them and their objectives. Late summer storms had caused the river to rise unexpectedly sweeping away sandbanks across which the Turkish infantry were attempting to ford the wide stream. It took a long while before the Turks realised that the crossing was a deadly trap and most of the major units involved lost a company or in one case a battalion to the floodwaters before the attempt was abandoned. The Armenians claimed to have

rescued a number who made it to the opposite bank, but more likely they did not spare the prisoners.

Meanwhile, Yudenitch was preparing his own operation not far away. He had responded to the signs of the Turkish concentration to match it and deliver an attack at Dibelek (6-8.2718). This also occurred in mountainous terrain, but there was no obstacle like the Murat River to stop the Russian attack. When it began on 8 October, the Armenians were even able to send assistance having secured already their positions further south. This effort was the most successful Russian attack on this front since the fall of Rize. The Turks were badly frightened by this show of Russian aggression and retreated for a whole day giving up to Yudentich some of the better guns they had on this front when the Turkish 3rd Heavy Artillery Battalion was overrun while trying to escape from Aykele (6-8.2718).



Figure 3: Renewed fighting in Armenia, 6 - 9 October 1916.

#### Player Notes

CP: *It has happened; AH has reached Economic Collapse. It is an extremely disheartening sensation and I have to confess caused a crisis of morale in the CP camp. It is a disaster and I cannot pretend otherwise. Not only that, but once again my German attack in France caused me more casualties than him. Robert suggested this was an isolated instance but I can show an audit trail of German attacks in France since the glory days of early war 1914 where, on the WF, German attacks result in more German than French losses and Anglo-French attacks also seem to result in more German losses. Having had almost continual TE air superiority hasn't helped my cause. Russia seemingly can avoid Shaken Morale by popping back to the GTL whenever suits and Romanian surrender will be meaningless in the*

grand scheme. I don't see how, even remotely, Russia will succumb to revolution in 1917. Anyway, so morale was very low. As a result, I opted to look on the bright side; I can stop worrying about AH morale. The outcome – the CP launched attacks on almost all fronts.

- *East: Russian and Romanian forces were the greatest recipients of my renewed aggression. North of Kishinev, I try again to smash a way in towards the city and also to separate the Russian 11<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> armies before the reinforcements from Odessa can arrive. A little further south, AH artillery fires into depth to try and suppress and attrition the Romanian 1<sup>st</sup> Artillery Regiment. I will have to attack but can now use AH forces in such attacks without too much concern and have supply en route. It is win-win for me. I kill Russians – I drive their DM up. I kill Romanians – I drive them closer to surrender. With that in mind, a combined AH gunboat in support of Bulgarian ground forces attack goes in against the Romanian 9XX sitting on the Danube blocking access at the entrance to the Delta and another against a Romanian force on the Prut to try and gain a bridgehead. I want to settle with Romania to free up Bulgarians for the Balkans and AH for Italy while allowing Germany more latitude against Russia.*
- *Balkans: Another attack against the French in the Balkans to keep attritioning them.*
- *Caucasus: I have concentrated force towards the east of the line and am now ready to execute what is – I hope – a bit of a surprise attack on the Russian Armenian Brigade and a cavalry division. I want to keep pushing up Russian casualties*
- *Mesopotamia: Quiet.*
- *Palestine: Palestine is an interesting see-saw at the moment. Most of the Commonwealth forces and shifted east, so I push south out of my westernmost trenches to apply pressure on the reduced 5 Indian XX; the only troops protecting the railway line on the coast.*
- *Italy: I lost three Mt brigades in his last attack, which is what tipped AH over the rim. I continue to stiffen AH positions with Germans.*
- *West. There is enormous pressure on me in Lorraine and the Vosges. The French attack in Lorraine caused me more casualties than the attackers – a not uncommon theme. Similar outcomes to when I attack. It has been lose-lose for me fairly consistently on the WF and this is where the war is ultimately won or lost. That does not bode well. All I can do is continue to fight fires and try and rush troops to where they are most likely needed. Currently, that is the Lorraine-Vosges area.*

AP: *I should not have been surprised that the CP made a flurry of attacks this turn (7) to which I responded with three of my own.*

*Austro-Hungarian Economic Collapse seems to have liberated the Hapsburgs as they no longer have quite the same incentive to avoid losses. I doubt that will last long. However, both my French attack in the Vosges and the Russian attack in the Caucasus are arguably unnecessary attacks and there is some risk in them. Nevertheless it is troubling me that the Turks have only just reached 100 DM and having been pleased at the failure of the Turkish attacks it seemed a fit moment to add some further attrition and I had a chance of destroying a Turkish artillery unit which paid off.*

*I got a great result last turn in my attack in the Trentino and by repeating the attack I am hoping to persuade him to abandon Lavarone (6-4.2218). The position can only be reinforced by*

*mountain units and is vulnerable to attack on 4 hex sides (though I use only 3 hex sides) so that it is now the most attackable place on the whole front. I will run out of supply soon, but I will use it up here as a last chance to inflict sizeable losses on Austria before the weather turns. So long as the Austrians present this salient it is the best place for me to attack, and I will not need to go back to the Isonzo to make non-mountain attacks.*

#### DM Summary – October 1916

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total	Morale
Germany	19	5						12	36	1468	Good
Austria-Hungary	6	12						-	18	614	Economic Collapse
Ottoman	-	6						NA	6	103	Good
Bulgaria	-	-						-	-	28	Good
Central Powers	25	23						12	60	2201	
France	12	5						-	17	826	Good
Great Britain	3	1						-	4	405	Good
Russia	-	4						NA	4	858	Shaken
Italy	7	8						-	15	131	Good
Romania	15*	5						-	20	233	Good *Galatz lost
Belgium	-	-						NA	-	(105)	NA
Serbia	-	-						NA	-	(40)	NA
Entente	37	23						-	60	2430	