

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT185: 10 – 14 October 1916 (3 October)

General Situation

Ludendorff was handed a paper on 12 October which was drafted by a staff officer in the German 5th Army. It was a critique of the defence of the Meurthe line by the German 6th Army and contested whether it had been necessary to abandon the front line on 28 September at the start of the French attack. The paper showed that relations were bad between the two neighbouring German Armies as the 5th had been left to defend the Réméréville salient (5-3.2417) as a result of the retreat of the 6th and the 5th had suffered badly during the counterattack at Arracourt (5-3.2518).

Such open criticism was a feature of the German staff system but it didn't make Ludendorff's dark mood any better and hindsight was not supposed to be deployed with such alacrity. He scrawled across the report a comment that the French air force was also a big factor in the recent difficulties endured on this front.



Figure 1: German map drawn about 12 October highlighting the situation at the end of September 1916. This advocated that holding a central position on the Meurthe was feasible and, with light forces, the French could have been prevented from moving on either flank.¹

¹ Player Note: *What is suggested here is that if two German Divisions had stayed in the hex with a black hexagon, the hexes with red Xs would have been sufficiently defended with abandoned trenches. The French would have only been able to advance a single strengthened Cavalry Division (3SP) into the eastern abandoned hex. All other movements into the abandoned hexes would have been impossible because the terrain cost would have been 4 MP (including the trenches and river) and a minimum move under SR 6 – 9 would not have been allowed between enemy ZOCs. The French would have been limited to making an attack on the defenders in the central hexagon hex and would not have shifted them giving the Germans time to reinforce and reoccupy the abandoned hexes in their next turn.*

The next day, on 13 October, a Flemish spy sympathising with the Germans witnessed the unloading of British tanks at Dunkirk. His report was nevertheless ambiguous and accepted the cover story that suggested these vehicles were only part of the logistical effort and not combat weapons.

Western Front

The guns fell silent in Alsace-Lorraine as Pétain suspended the French Offensive on 12 October. The attempt to cross the frontier in Alsace had failed, but the French had gained something of a moral victory in catching the Germans unawares in the early days of the attack and holding their newly won positions thereafter.

The Germans had learned that no part of the Western Front need stay quiet forever.

Italian Front

The sanguinary struggle for Lavarone (6-4.2218) had reached a peak of frenzy at the start of the second week of the month, but on 10 October the front was suddenly quiet again. The Italians just stopped wherever they had grasped some bit of ground but the procession of fresh forces up towards the front stopped and indeed was reversed. The Austrians were given the chance therefore to reinforce their garrison and resupply. The Italians had been somewhat frightened by their mounting casualties and Cadorna, satisfied that the men had done all men could do, called off further attacks. He, nevertheless, announced that Lavarone's days as an Austrian redoubt were numbered.

The conditions in the fortress were indeed somewhat desperate. Many of the key positions upon which the fortress defence depended could only be reached by trained mountain troops. All the roads leading to the fortress were under surveillance by the Italians and, in the Austrian 9th Army, an order to go to Lavarone was increasingly seen as a death sentence.

Eastern Front

Both sides paused for breath. The Central Powers were not ready to make another attempt to cross the Prut and the Russian defences in front of Kishinev needed to be assessed before a further push there could be contemplated.

Balkan Front



Figure 2: Siege of Cattaro, 10 - 14 October 1916.

The recent attacks in Central Serbia did not continue. The French who had been under pressure there were able to think of repairing their trenches. There was no movement in the lines around Cattaro though the Allied force was encouraged by the news of the imminent arrival of Serbian reinforcements as the 1st Morava Division was in Montenegro.

Near East

After the disaster of the Turkish attack in the Murat Valley, the Turkish 3rd Army fell back in the face of the strong pressure being exerted by the Russians on the northern shoulder of the recently advanced Turkish front. Yudenitch drove his forces forward and some units claimed to have advanced as much as 40 kilometres by mid-October.

The situation in Palestine settled down as the Battle of Ramala (8-8.2130) was officially declared over. It was a period when officialdom was held in high esteem and certainly had the powers to make these kinds of declarations giving battles names and definite end points. The front in Iraq remained quiet as it had for weeks. It was still very hot during the day there.



Figure 3: Russian advances in Armenia, 8 - 14 October 1916.

Player Notes

CP:

- *East: A quiet turn with no combat. I am determined to end Romania's will to fight but it is a long way to get supply forward and the enemy ZOC into the rail line of Czernowitz is slowing all rail movement into Romanian territory down significantly. It will take some time to stockpile combat supply. The problems created by supply are one of the best aspects of the game system.*
- *Balkans: Nothing transpires here but I am shifting some troops that way.*

- *Caucasus: My last attack against the Russians failed dismally. It was a rules error on my part. I had thought that in mountains, if the defender selected the mountain terrain for the defence and no other, that attacking force was halved but with no other terrain affecting the action. So, my guaranteed hit on the Russians turned into 2 hits on me for nothing. It also weakened me in other areas and his attack (in mountains) overran my single artillery brigade after smashing back the light infantry defending force. So that error has actually cost me 5 DM of hits all together, plus a withdrawal of hard won terrain.*
- *Mesopotamia: Quiet.*
- *Palestine: I am forced to return to m trenches covering the Jerusalem approaches after a less than stunning attack.*
- *Italy: I lost another three Mt brigades in his last attack at Lavarone.*
- *West. Robert has concentrated heavily in the Vosges area. His last attack caused me some pain but his losses were slightly higher. I have now reinforced some of the front line positions after reforming divs with RPLs.*

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	

AP: I am starting to wonder if I made a mistake in allowing the Romanians to fall back so far. They have lost all their cities – 190 DM – and they have less than 20 DM now before surrender. It seemed reasonable that they should play for time and they were in big danger in the Transylvanian mountains as the German and Austrian mountain troops were capable of infiltrating their discontinuous lines and preventing retreats had they tried to stand their ground.

Most of the subsequent campaign was a desperate attempt to ensure nobody could be surrounded and the Russians in particular escaped. A couple of trapped Russian Divisions could have upset all calculations relating to Economic Collapse. Withdrawal from Romania is not easy due to limited

railways and the huge number of rivers crossing the front. I had one Russian Division (5 Siberian) near Brasov and it took nearly a month to get it back across the Prut safely. In other words, Romanian actions have been designed to save themselves and the Russians – but for what? I considered making an attack with Romanians against Bulgarians this turn across the Lower Prut which would normally make sense but now it could use up more than 10% of Romania's remaining morale. I would still have done it to weaken Bulgaria, but the casualties might have opened up an opportunity for the CP to cross the Prut before I evacuated forces further south.

I considered continuing both the Italian and French Offensives, especially the former, but they are both past the point where the costs and the benefits work out. The CP should be wondering whether Lavarone is worth holding (it might be) as it is an inviting target for me and, if I was deprived of it, I would have harder choices. My summer offensive activity is more or less over now. I have a few more cards to play before winter but exhaustion is setting in.

I have suggested to Ivor he may be missing a few tricks with the minimum movement rules especially SR 6-9. This includes the fact that the Italian Alpine troops holding the extreme north western section of the cordon at Cattaro (hex 7-6.1018) cannot be reinforced because the nearest units cannot cross wooded rough terrain from ZOC to ZOC as the other French and Italian units are not mountain units.

This was also relevant to the German response to the Lorraine Offensive. Apart from the possibility outlined in Figure 1 above, another tactic would have been as shown in Figure 4 which would have trapped three French Divisions in a salient.



Figure 4: This is the situation at the start of the CP 1 Oct turn. The pre-emptive retreat of the Germans had caught the French out as they were only able to advance four divisions into two out of three abandoned hexes. Furthest west there were two French infantry divisions and a cavalry Division (in all 14 SP), in the hex immediately to the east only the 88T Division had moved forward (3SP) and the hex to the east of that could not be occupied at all leaving the German trench in place. In response to this move, the Germans attacked the largest French concentration (14 SP) ignoring the weakness to the east. An alternative would have been to concentrate against the 88T Division. This could have been destroyed

with an attack of 47 SP or more which is achievable with the forces available. This would have allowed the Germans to recover the front on the thick black line. This would leave the three French Divisions in a salient which can be attacked from four hexes and the river line would have been outflanked. The French Divisions would then have been in a bind. All the relevant ground is devastated and there is a river between the salient and the rear. That means that the only units which could move in and out of the salient would have been mountain units or cavalry units. Since the French have few of either mountain units or cavalry that salient would have been very difficult for the French to defend. The only way the salient could have been abandoned would have been by retreat from combat applying SR 14-16 which means that half of the retreating units would have been eliminated.