

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT186: 15 – 18 October 1916 (4 October)

General Situation

Marshal Joffre was subject to a newspaper scandal in mid-October when it was learned that he had spent two weeks “resting” in a luxurious villa in a secluded village near the Côte d’Azur (6-4.0332). It seemed that hardly had Pétain’s offensive in Lorraine been concluded than Joffre had absented himself on this “vacation” apparently justified by overwork. The French papers spared no detail. The Marshal’s gastronomic habits were well known and could be presented as patriotic enjoyment of the simple pleasures of the national cuisine. However, the headline “La piscine du maréchal” did him no favours especially when the English press very loosely mis-translated it and suggested that the victor of the Second Battle of the Marne was “pissin’ around” in the South of France.

The current French government was nevertheless favourable to Joffre. It could not suppress the story but it did defend their generalissimo and offered all kinds of reasons why he had needed a break, some more convincing than others.

The Eastern Front



Figure 1: The retreat to the Dneister following the fall of Izmail, 15 - 18 October 1916.

On 15 October, the Bulgarians finally managed to transport a force across the Danube at Izmail (6-6.2609). This town at the extremity of Russian territory was empty of enemy troops and presented as something of a ghost town to the Bulgarian infantry. The ancient Turkish fort there provided no further military service to anyone.

Once the news was out that the Bulgarians were in Izmail, the Romanian and Russian Armies along the Prut knew that they were outflanked. There were many in the Romanian Army who questioned what was the point of fighting on now the enemy held the entirety of their homeland saving only remote parts of the Danube delta – home of the Roma Cajuns? One notorious advocate of capitulation was the commander of the Romanian 2nd Army, Crăiniceanu, who resigned his command on 17 October and got on a Russian train at Tvardita (6-6.2604) in order to consult with STAVKA. This train broke down not far beyond the Dniester forcing the ex-commander to camp in an onion field near Mykhailivka (6-6.1713) in Odessa Province.

Nobody gave the order to retreat, not to the Russians, nor the Romanians, but by the evening of 17 October there was a great retreat in train as the Prut line was abandoned. Almost 50 Divisions were involved. The Romanians thought they were following the Russians and the Russians thought they were following the Romanians. Tolstoy would have had a field day describing this instinctive lurch to the rear. The roads were crowded. The goal for everyone was the Dniester River. No plans were made for the crossing of the great river. There was one great railway bridge near Tiraspol (5-6S.1514) but otherwise boats would have to be found or pontoons devised. The crossing of the Berezina during the Retreat from Moscow in 1812 would be child's play compared to what the Russian and Romanian Armies now faced. However, it was not winter so there was that blessing.

The Balkans



Figure 2: Morgen's attacks on the Italian perimeter at Cattaro, 14 - 18 October 1916.

Allied intelligence in the Balkans was predicting an increase in enemy activity and the Serbian/Montenegrin IV Corps was reporting worrying movements on their front and preparations were being made for retrograde movements in mid-October. Part of the concern was focused on the eastern frontiers of Greece where a reinforcement of the Turkish 1st Army was detected.

On 15 October, the German General Morgen ordered attacks on the Italian perimeter surrounding Cattaro. The key point was at Risan (6-5.1019) at the corner of the Bay of Kotor. The Germans and Austrians struggled for several days to cross the limestone plateau which divided them from their objective. The Italian 6th Alpine Brigade made a fierce resistance and bought time for the 8th Alpine Brigade to prepare a last ditch defence of Risan on 18 October. The Italians hoped to hold out long enough for Serbian reinforcements to arrive but these Allied troops were still 48 hours march away.

The Near East

There was stalemate now on all the Near Eastern fronts.

The Western Front

The French were returning some of their forces from Lorraine back to Picardy. The British were also building up their strength again after the heavy losses of August. Haig had ordered all leave to be cancelled on 17 October and some suggested that this is what forced Marshal Joffre to return to duty.

The Italian Front

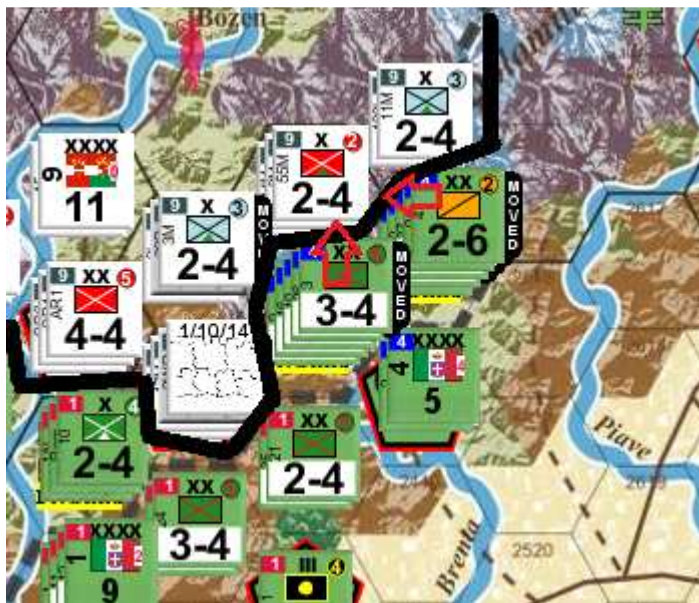


Figure 3: Italian 4th Army attacks in the Southern Dolomites, 17 - 18 October 1916.

The Italian 4th Army still fresh from the fighting around Lavarone (6-4.2218) was redirected to attempt to push over the Dolomites before the weather started to close in. The Austrian line was stretched taught across the peaks but a strong point at Kamauz (6-4.2317) proved to be an insurmountable obstacle and the Italian infantry could find no way around it. Nobody could criticise the fighting capabilities of the Austrian mountain troops who fought, as always, vastly outnumbered but making good use of the natural defences of their country.

DM Summary – October 1916

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total	Morale
Germany	19	5	-	2				12	38	1470	Good
Austria-Hungary	6	12	-	1				-	19	615	Economic Collapse
Ottoman	-	6	-	-				NA	6	103	Good
Bulgaria	-	-	-	-				-	-	28	Good
Central Powers	25	23	-	3				12	63	2204	
France	12	5	-	-				-	17	826	Good
Great Britain	3	1	-	-				-	4	405	Good
Russia	-	4	-	-				NA	4	858	Shaken
Italy	7	8	-	4				-	19	135	Good
Romania	15*	5	-	-				-	20	233	Good *Galatz lost
Belgium	-	-	-	-				NA	-	(105)	NA
Serbia	-	-	-	-				NA	-	(40)	NA
Entente	37	23	-	4				-	64	2434	

Player Notes

CP:

- *East: No combat again in the east as I shift supply to the Romanian front. It is a very slow process but I have several positions from which I can attack him in the open and he can stack to his heart's content but Romanians retreat after 1/3 losses in combat and the terrain will give him no option. I want to try and finish with Romania before winter sets in. I am also massing artillery on this front which will enhance my combat power.*
- *Balkans: Quiet.*
- *Caucasus: Still smarting from my misreading of rules and the resultant losses I suffered, I begin to solidify my line whilst quietly sulking!*
- *Mesopotamia: Quiet.*
- *Palestine: A new div arrives by rail which allows me to try and better distribute my forces along the line to prepare for the next Commonwealth attack.*
- *Italy: Nothing much happens but I do throw an overdue (and probably now fruitless) attack at some of the forces besieging Cattaro.*
- *West. I used this turn to start deploying the last of my newly re-organised divisions made up from RPLs. All I can do now is sit and wait for the next attack. The initiative lies firmly with Robert on the WF. His forces are setting the tempo and choosing where they wish to attack and when.*

AP: There is still a chance that the Cattaro siege will be relieved, but the CP will have to attack next turn unsupplied. In the scheme of things this is not very important, but as a sideshow it has been pretty interesting. I have benefitted from my opponent giving more attention to other fronts.

The big move for me this turn was to abandon the Prut line which was compromised by the Bulgarian crossing of the Danube at Izmail (6-6.2609). I will now have to pull back to the Dniester and the question is whether I will be let go without a fight. I suspect there will be a pursuit but I have got far enough away to ensure that the full CP force will not keep up to start with.

Apart from that I am just back from a holiday and finding my feet again.