

## Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT187: 19 – 22 October 1916 (5 October)

### General Situation

The leaves were falling from the trees and the days were appreciably shorter. To suggest that the men at the fronts were tired would be understatement. A lot of them were in a far worse condition.

Joffre, it may be accepted, was back to his old chipper self after his well-timed break, but the French Army as a whole was more sluggardly in its redeployments as the whole body seemed to wish that it was over for another year. The Austrians and Russians were also motivated by a grim determination to hold on and perhaps enjoy some relief in the winter. However, such sentiments were not allowed to take hold and, wherever the special focus of the war alighted, there was more terrible work to be done.

### The Eastern Front

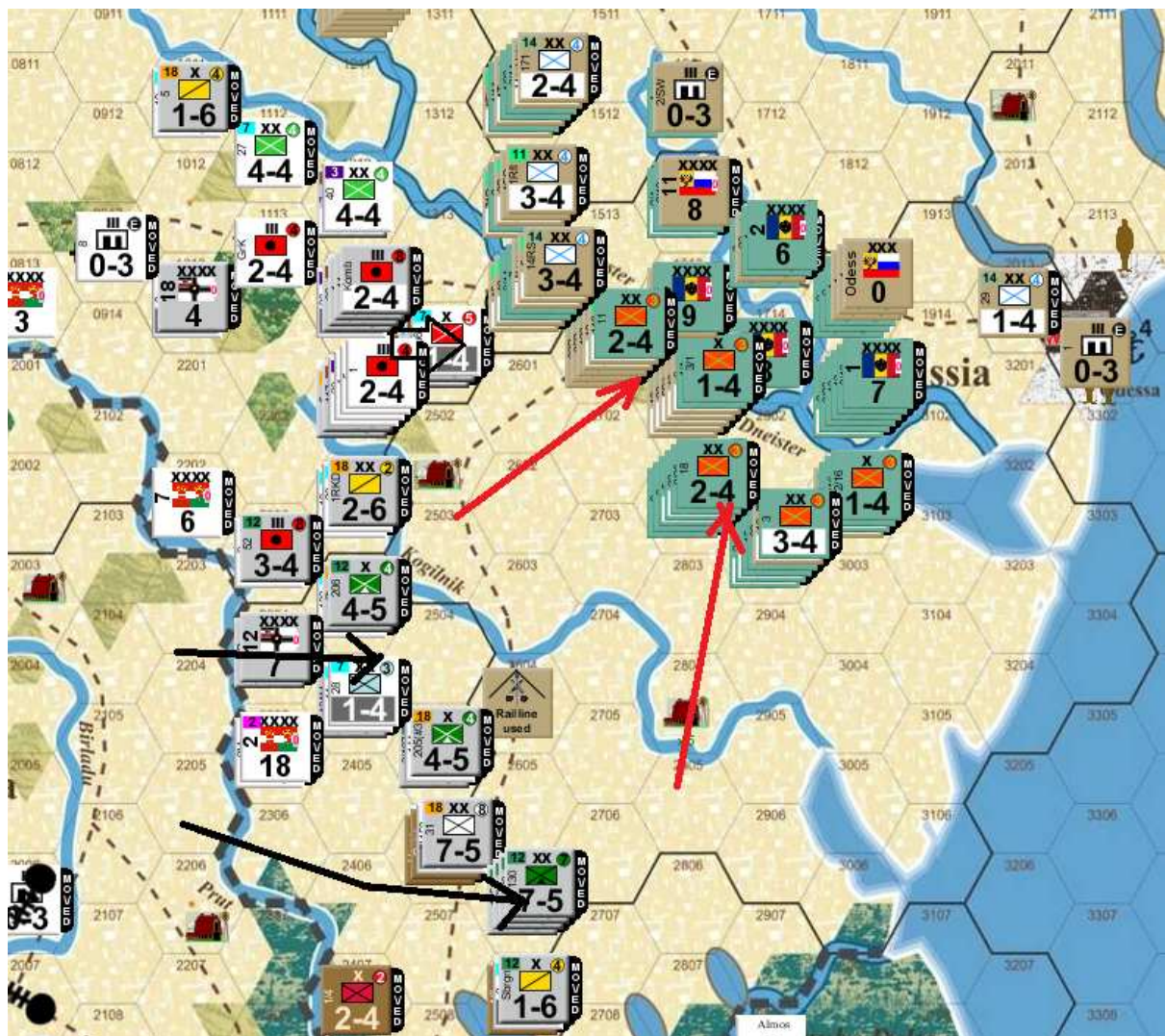


Figure 1: The Retreat to the Dniester, 19 - 22 October 1916.

The roads to the Dniester River were overloaded with humanity on the move. The crush got greater the closer that the retreating Russians and Romanians got to the river. The Central Powers' Armies were on their tails and the situation was most acute from the direction of Kishinev. This city fell to the Germans and Austrians on 19 October and the next day there was heavy fighting on the Moldovan plains further east in the direction of Tintareni and Geamăna (5-6S.1314) where the Russians were forced to put up a rear guard defence.

The Russians were too concerned to get back to the river near Bender (5-6S.1413) to hold their positions for long. The Russian 14th Army was so worried about the danger of the enemy advance that the Russian 172nd and 173rd Divisions were sent the last stocks of field artillery ammunition west of the Dniester and ordered to fight to the last. This they largely did, along with the last of the Serbian Volunteers. This helped other troops escape to the rear, including the Women's Division which was lucky to extract itself from an increasingly difficult position.

By 21 October, the evacuation of the Allied forces across the Dniester was accelerating. However there were very few bridges and every vessel that could navigate the river was impressed for this service as far away as Odessa and Nikopol. On the evening of 22 October, the Russian 14th Army reported that it had sixteen full Divisions still on the western side of the river and that in addition there were about fifteen Romanian Divisions still to withdraw. Even the most optimistic assumptions insisted it would take another five days to extract the rest.

### **The Balkans**

The fighting around Cattaro died down as Morgen's Corps was unable to continue the attempt to capture the key town of Risan (6-5.1019). In any event, on 21 October, the 1<sup>st</sup> Moravan Division marched into Risan bringing relief to the Italian Alpinists. This ended any realistic hope of rescuing Cattaro from the land. The situation in the beleaguered naval base was getting more critical and plans for a breakout by sea were being advanced by Rear Admiral Hansa.

### **The Near East**

The dormancy of Middle Eastern Fronts continued.

### **The Western Front**

On 22 October, there began an intense bombardment on the British 3rd Army front between Arras (5-3.0909) and Hamelincourt (5-3.0910). This was certainly one of the largest bombardments the British had attempted and, as Haig noted, the first time Allenby had been trusted with such a major concentration of artillery. The "Bull" was specifically ordered not to advance his infantry until the guns had done their work. The prime objectives of the guns were enemy artillery concentrations backing the line opposite covering Wancourt and Croisilles which had been contested in the past but were still in German hands for the most part (5-3.1009). However, the main infantry attack was planned a bit further north with the British 3<sup>rd</sup> Army objective, Vimy Ridge (5-3.1008). The British 2<sup>nd</sup> Army was also to be involved with Lens as its target.

The British shelling was impressive for the volume of the shells delivered and for improving standards of accuracy. The German heavy howitzer Brigade "A" was one of the primary targets of this gunfire. Several German batteries were ordered to fire back at the revealed British guns and a long range duel developed during the day shaking the ground along several kilometres of front. Post-war analysis of this exchange suggests that relative to the number of shells fired the Germans were much more effective. However, this conceals the fact that the most important component of success

was the fact that the British fired off over four times the weight of shell (unsurprisingly) compared to the less well prepared defenders. Near mid-night, the sector commander of the German reserve artillery had to confess that half his guns were out of action.

Meanwhile, Haig was putting the finishing touches to what he intended to be the final flourish of the summer campaign. Avoiding the heavily contested battlefields further south, he proposed that Allenby get his Army behind the German 13<sup>th</sup> Army by striking the neighbouring 1<sup>st</sup> Army. Haig had been impressed with what the French had done in Lorraine and it was a matter of British pride that they should end the year with some comparable gains.



Figure 2: British 3rd Army commences a major bombardment, 22 October 1916.

### The Italian Front

The fighting in the Dolomites paused for a couple of days and then resumed on 21 October with a fresh Italian attack on Kamauz (6-4.2317). The Austro-Hungarian mountain troops there had not been reinforced after repelling the last round of attacks, but they still held the commanding ground above Kamauz and repeated Italian infantry attacks could find no way through the gaps between the peaks.

These were also expected to be among the last efforts of the Italian 4<sup>th</sup> Army in 1916 as it was depleting its infantry strength and further reinforcement could not be depended on before the winter. Cadorna was still convinced that the signs of collapse in Austria could still deliver victory in 1916 but the evidence of Kamauz was contrary to this.



Figure 3: The Italian 4th Army keeps attacking in the Dolomites, 19 - 22 October 1916.

### DM Summary – October 1916

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total	Morale
Germany	19	5	-	2	12			12	50	1482	Good
Austria-Hungary	6	12	-	1	1			-	20	616	Economic Collapse
Ottoman	-	6	-	-	-			NA	6	103	Good
Bulgaria	-	-	-	-	-			-	-	28	Good
Central Powers	25	23	-	3	13			12	76	2217	
France	12	5	-	-	-			-	17	826	Good
Great Britain	3	1	-	-	6			-	10	411	Good
Russia	-	4	-	-	4*			NA	8	862	Shaken *Kishinev lost
Italy	7	8	-	4	2			-	21	137	Good
Romania	15*	5	-	-	-			-	20	233	Good *Galatz lost
Belgium	-	-	-	-	-			NA	-	(105)	NA
Serbia	-	-	-	-	-			NA	-	(40)	NA
Entente	37	23	-	4	12			-	76	2446	

## Player Notes

CP:

- *East: The Romanians have made a massive withdrawal into Russian territory. They now hold no Romanian territory at all and I am questioning the rules here. Would Romania keep fighting if their whole country was under occupation? Given that their surrender was prompted in reality by Russia's October Revolution, it seems the threat of being isolated and occupied pushed them towards surrender. Currently they need to reach 250DM; but would they behave like the Serbs and be happy to just withdraw beyond their boundaries and hold on? I don't know, but it seems there is nothing to stop them from also just sitting on the Russian GTL – that catch-all safety mechanism for any forces under pressure on the EF. Would it not make sense to force them to fight it out on Romanian soil rather than lose the whole country? Anyway, we are where we are. I occupy the whole of Romania and this turn, with supply starting to trickle through, am able to launch an assault against Russian forces after occupying Kishinev.*
- *Balkans: The TE forces have fallen back slightly on the NW part of the front. I suspect this may be a ruse to draw me out of my defences so have opted to sit tight and watch his distant manoeuvres through the mountain passes. My troops are comfortable – why go chasing hares that add nothing to my objectives?*
- *Caucasus: Nothing of any note. Some supply arrives but I lack any concentrated strength for offensive action.*
- *Mesopotamia: Quiet.*
- *Palestine: There is a stretch of no man's land now between my troops and the Commonwealth forces. I suspect he will use time now to build up more strength and then have another crack at me. I have no operational flexibility here at all.*
- *Italy: The attack on Italian Mt troops besieging Cattaro did fail. As with most of my recent attacks, even given how weak he was, I took more losses than I inflicted. What is wrong with my soldiers? I may have to start the old Italian method of decimation.*
- *West. There is a build-up of British strength in the Ypres sector, starting with some heavy artillery concentrations in the area. I suspect an attack is coming with perhaps a French attack in conjunction closer to the Lorraine front to fix any reserves I might feel inclined to release. As it is, I opt to despatch the Div I have as an entrained reserve off to the Ypres area.*

AP: *My retreat to the Dniester is carefully calculated. I think I will get away with it but the margin between escape and disaster is not great. If I had any more units on the left side of the river I doubt I would have been able to evacuate them in the next turn. Any who are left after that will surely be doomed?*

*If the CP could get units on the riverbank in the middle of my concentration some crossings of the river would be prohibited and some units effectively trapped on the wrong side. That is likely too difficult for the CP now but I had to choose my positions carefully to avoid it. I also have to avoid over stacking in case of retreats and, because there is a shortage of riverside hexes, I have had to keep the forces in the south east further from the river to ensure they have room to move without enemy interference next turn. If I have got this wrong in any way the CP might be able to force Romanian surrender.*

*I love the way this game throws up unexpected situations like this. I had not expected the fall back from Romania to be so tricky and neither did I really anticipate the scale of it. With both sides' forces counted we are looking at around 80 Divisions engaged on a hitherto obscure corner of the map. This is what helps make DWK so absorbing despite our being caught up in the long mid-game of WW1, the heart of the stalemate. Not only does the action jump around the fronts keeping the interest fresh but at this level of detail there is always some movement and even where there is stasis the gradual hollowing out of the morale of the forces exerts its own fascination and forces reactions from the players and impacts long term planning.*

*As brief response to Ivor's comments on the Romanian withdrawal my understanding is that Romania surrendered to the Central Powers in May 1918 (Treaty of Bucharest) after the conclusion of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. Historically the Romanians and Russians maintained a front which covered a portion of northeast Romania including Jassy.*

*The CP held the Romanian front as a defensive front in 1917 and there were a few Romanian attacks during that year loosely connected to the Kerensky Offensive further north. As the Russians collapsed the Romanians got drawn in to Bessarabia (which they subsequently added to their country). The situation in early 1918 was clearly confused. Despite surrendering, the Romanians kept something of a military force together, re-joined the Allies in November 1918 and invaded Hungary in 1919 which helped them win Transylvania their prime territorial objective.*

*With that history and that of other minor powers in WWI, DWK depicts the Romanians as quite resilient and they need to be able to bend like reeds in a storm when faced with unanswerable military force. A Romania driven completely off its national territory will have no more than 60 DM less any losses it has taken. I have 17 DM left with the Romanians. They are good for one modest raid.*

[This last part is not entirely correct as it relates to DWK. I subsequently realised the sustainment rules are a little harsher on the Romanians than some of the other minor powers – so a correction will come up soon - RL.]