

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT189: 28 – 31 October 1916 (7 October)

General Situation

The Atlantic Ocean was a wild place in the autumn of 1916. Already it had thrown a couple of devastating hurricanes at the coast of the United States and stripped a few Caribbean islands of their least sturdy structures. A train of depressions headed in the opposite direction following the still undiscovered jet stream and Britain and Western Europe were soaked in an endless succession of downpours starting in the last week of October. The trees lost their last leaves and the skies became leaden. It was depressing.

The Western Front

At the foot of Vimy Ridge (5-3.1008) the British were trying to keep their trenches drained despite the torrents of water flowing from the high ground. Some of the recent gains had to be abandoned as the shallow and damaged trenches flooded and the cover was too sparse. Haig pressed Plumer and Allenby to continue their attacks but they both pointed to the bad state of the artillery which was sliding around the wet countryside and simply had too little reserves of ammunition to sustain any kind of serious effort. Haig was determined not to close down the offensive prematurely and indicated that he would review the situation in the first week of November and the Army commanders would have to be ready to go again then if he required it.

The Italian Front



Figure 1: The Italian Front, end of October 1916.

On 28 October, Cadorna wrote to the King of Italy confirming that the last attacks in the Dolomites had been suspended. Cadorna was also reluctant to stop before the winter definitively precluded further efforts convinced the Austrian defenses were weaker than in the recent past. By his calculation there were still 4 weeks of acceptable weather. Nevertheless, the commander of the Italian 4th Army (General di Robilant) had amply proved that his command was completely exhausted and he was actually considering disbanding some of his Divisions.

The Eastern Front



Figure 2: The Eastern Front after the end of the Romanian Campaign, end of October 1916.

The two sides were now disengaged on the whole Eastern Front. They had parted most recently on opposite sides of the Dniester River after the Russian-Romanian withdrawal. The biggest concern for the Allied commanders on the Dniester sector was finding shelter for the vast horde that had abandoned Bessarabia now the winds from the East were more chilling.

The Russians had very little fight in them now. The officers increasingly knew they could command only with the consent of the men and this was more and more doubtful. The winter was an opportunity to rebuild trust a little because STAVKA had few offensive plans and everyone could agree with a strategy of holding positions for a few months.

The Balkans



Figure 3: The Adriatic Coast after the fall of Cattaro, 29 - 31 October 1916.

On 29 October, Rear Admiral Hansa had the white flag run up the flagpole of the naval headquarters in Cattaro. The withdrawal of Morgen's Corps to Dubrovnik was the last straw. Hansa's naval force was reduced to two destroyers and an unseaworthy submarine. The Allied forces controlled most of the terrain surrounding the waterways which connected Cattaro with the open sea. Morgen's withdrawal meant the Serbians were marching towards Hercig Novi (6-5.1020) which would mean they controlled both sides of the outer entrance of the Bay of Cattaro. Escape had been increasingly hazardous but it was now impossible as Hansa recognised.

The fall of Cattaro was a pleasant minor victory which buoyed the Italian population as the results of the campaign in the Alps continued to be disappointing. Cadorna had little credit of it as the Albanian Corps had been created against his wishes. By the end of the month, it was speculated in Rome that the fall of Dubrovnik could then be anticipated. Italian mountain troops were at Cavtat (6-5.0920) on 31 October only 15 kilometres short of the historic port.

Not everything was going well for the Allies in the Balkans. On the main front, the Montenegrins and Serbians were feeling increasing pressure from the Austrian 5th Army and small withdrawals were being made as the Sarrail and Mišić looked for ways to shorten their front. Fresh forces and supplies,

including an Italian Division (20th) were arriving at Salonika at the end of October but it would take some time before these could reach the front line and help stabilise it.

The Near East

While the weather was worsening in Western Europe it was improving in the Near East and Maude's command noted that the Season of Flies was over. This amelioration did not apply in the Caucasus where the troops on both sides were also starting to prepare for winter.

DM Summary – October 1916

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total [% SM]	Morale
Germany	19	5	-	2	12	8	-	12	58	1490 [93.13]	Good
Austria-Hungary	6	12	-	1	1	1	2	-	23	619 [112.5]	Economic Collapse
Ottoman	-	6	-	-	-	-	-	NA	6	103 [29.43]	Good
Bulgaria	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	28	Good
Central Powers	25	23	-	3	13	9	2	12	87	2228	
France	12	5	-	-	-	-	-	-	17	826 [91.78]	Good
Great Britain	3	1	-	-	6	13	-	-	23	424 [33.25]	Good
Russia	-	4	-	-	4*	-	-	NA	8	862 [143.7]	Shaken *Kishinev lost
Italy	7	8	-	4	2	2	-	-	23	139 [46.33]	Good
Romania	15*	5	-	-	-	-	-	-	20	233	Good *Galatz lost
Belgium	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	NA	-	(105)	NA
Serbia	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	NA	-	(40)	NA
Entente	37	23	-	4	12	15	-	-	91	2461	

Player Notes:

- *East: I could have launched attacks against combined Russo-Romanian forces last turn, but all would have lacked strength and risked losses from effective counterattacks. I'm afraid those opportunities are now lost as everything has crossed the Dniester and hence the GTL. I am not going to engage in offensive action across this river barrier just to inflict small snippets of damage. I had hoped to compel a Romanian surrender before the end of the year, but that is not to be. It seems that the Romanians, too, benefit from the GTL. Still, I can more easily defend along this line, Romania is a spent force, Russia*

has concentrated a lot of force and supply in the south and I can release forces to perhaps find another point to apply pressure on Russia.

- *Balkans: His withdrawal has now compelled me to advance in the Balkans in order to open up some of my rail connections around Nish. I am also quite strong in the Balkans and don't need to attack. I am using a mix of AH and Bulgarian troops to fix the Balkan allies and some French and British troops too.*
- *Caucasus: Nothing. Again, I don't need to attack.*
- *Mesopotamia: Quiet. I strengthen my positions just east of Baghdad.*
- *Palestine: I likewise strengthen the most obvious approaches into Jerusalem.*
- *Italy: I have started to withdraw from Cattaro. If I am unable to supply the attackers there to relieve it, I may as well let it wither. It was distracting too many divisions to no effect.*
- *West. A large British attack destroyed the German 6XX in Lens and my counterattack was less effective than I would have liked. Still, I am not too displeased with my situation on the WF as we start approaching winter.*

AP: As the end of 1916 approaches I will do a little summary of how I see things on each front in succession. This turn I will discuss the Italian Front.

The strategic significance of the Italian Front grows more important as the Eastern Front becomes less and less active. The Italians are now my chief weapon in attacking the Austrians. The problem with them to date is that they are a blunt weapon. There is really no alternative to make attacks which kill few Austrians and usually many more Italians. The Italians are badly restricted by terrain as attacks in mountains are only half as effective as attacks in other terrain. This is why I will chose to attack on the Isonzo if there are no other places to attack out of the mountains (Lavarone is practically the only such place). The other constraint on Italian firepower is limited supply. I have been taking more for them from the US than previously (at the expense of Russia) but this is still not enough. The winter is a problem too as I will be disadvantaged in attacking between December and April. One of the consequences of these limits on Italian capabilities is their DM is only 137 still less than half way to shaken morale – arguably they are not getting killed fast enough.

This should change a bit in 1917. The new CRT will benefit Italian attacks. I should be able to increase the Italian supply allocation. I will also be able to attack with a bit more artillery and generally with more abandon (disregard of casualties). To get Austria to surrender in 1917 I now need to inflict 180 DM before the end of 1917. That is likely impossible but if I inflict more than 100 DM then the Austrians will then be weaker in 1918. I doubt the Italians have inflicted as much as 50 – 60 DM on the Austrians in each of 1915 and 1916 so 100 DM would be a big increase in Italian effectiveness. This kind of effort will mean Italian DM will increase rapidly probably between 2 and 3 times as fast and so this effort would ensure Italian Morale becomes Shaken. Of course, the Italians will not be the only threat to Austria and they will also benefit from more German support which will make attacks on Austria much less effective. Unless this support is withdrawn I do not see surrender of Austria in 1917 as very realistic but I must still attack to the full extent possible.

From the Austrian side, 1917 should see increasing concentration of effort on this front. Austria is still burdened by the need to keep forces in the East and Balkans but the more there is on the Italian Front the more costly Italian attacks will be. It is imperative to avoid weakly defending some hexes so that the Italians are just given cheap opportunities to degrade Austrian strength and certainly not at less than 2:1 loss ratios as in my recent Dolomite attacks. The Austrians need to make the Italian choice of attacking in the mountains or the Isonzo equally unpalatable. That does not mean an equal defence but enough to guarantee a near equal loss ratio but slightly worse for the Italians on the Isonzo. The problem with Lavarone is that it currently allows me to chose a non-mountain attack

which is not against the Isonzo defences so it is the best of both worlds for the Italians. Unless it was going to be used as a launch point for a counteroffensive then the Austrians should seriously consider abandoning this salient.

Talking of a counteroffensive, it is worth mentioning why Caparetto in 1917 makes sense in the Grand Campaign. In essence, if the Italians keep having opportunities to attack the Austrians the CP may need (especially late in a year when DM is more critical) to put the Italians on the defensive and using up strength fighting Germans. Further, if the Italians are being as aggressive as they should be, and given the 1917 CRT is also working against them, then the result of their offensives will be Italian Shaken Morale and depleted units because they can only replace at a rate which amounts to an absolute maximum of 168 SP per year. That is too little to keep up their strength with a goal of 100 DM against Austria. Italian Shaken Morale will limit Italian attacks by precluding unsupplied strength from combat but it does potentially bring the French and British into the Italian theatre. The CP also should be looking at the food in north east Italy. If that can be taken then the CP food deficit may be reduced by one or two. Although that would take the front out of the mountains there is the possibility of a shorter front and if based on a river there will be no real terrain disadvantage for entrenched CP forces.

Caparetto should be achievable with a large infusion of German quality combat strength, artillery and supply (at least 150 combat strength, ideally crushable into two hexes, and not in the mountains which will waste half of it). As with the Russians, the Italians will not be able to stand in the face of this. Ideally, the Germans need to be in and out of Italy quickly as they will not be able to keep this concentration of resources in Italy for very long. They have other distractions not least the last twitching of the Russians. Timing is crucial. Such an attack should occur before but not after Italian Shaken Morale as that allows the French and British to bolster the Italians. It may need assault troops to be most effective so some patience will be necessary too as they do not become available until late summer 1917. Consideration should be given to double-tracking the railway to Trieste because otherwise it will not be able to build up the necessary force with any speed.

The other reason why any German strategic intervention in Italy needs to be short is that it is not fighting France directly and it can only be justified as a necessary means of keeping the Austrians in the war.