

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT190: 1- 5 November 1916 (1 November)

General Situation

On 3 November 1916, Captain Kurt Schleper of UB-40 sat on the quayside at Ostend indifferent to the spray thrown up by a sea that was growing restless with the threat of a storm. The last stores were being loaded on his boat and they would cast off within the hour. As Schleper took a last drag on his cigarette, he was hailed by a young liaison officer of the naval staff who then almost collided with him as he brought his bicycle to a sudden halt and jumped off.

“New orders”, shouted the staff officer, handing Schleper a sealed envelope. “What is it then?” the U-boat captain asked. “Sink anything”, replied the staff officer, “*uneigesschränkt*, sink the British, sink the Americans, sink the Samoans if they send one of their canoes to England!”

Schleper had been expecting this, but he had one question. “What about the American election? This will help the Republican.” “Don’t worry. It is too late for him. Besides we are reading their telegrams. The President will never join the war. He never actually says that ships are sunk by German submarines. He says that the attacks are caused by Imperialism, Militarism or Aggression. The Allies are as guilty as we are. Besides, they are starving us are they not?”



Figure 1: The U-Boats unleashed on the Western Approaches of Great Britain, November 1916.

The Western Front

As it became increasingly clear that the Allied offensives were sputtering to their end, and may have even ended, it was undeniable that the Germans had held most of their positions. The incessant activity of the Western Front, patrolling, rotating, raiding, shelling, and digging went on. To change the situation both sides would have to do some deeper thinking. The difficulty of altering the fundamental stalemate which afflicted the struggle was one of the reasons for the German decision to instigate unrestricted submarine warfare. Less acknowledged was the need to respond to the steady sapping of German morale on the Home Front which sensed that their soldiers were being very sorely used.

The Italian Front

The Italian Front was also in the midst of a rigid stalemate. Cadorna was close to admitting that his options were closing for any further operations in 1916.

The Eastern Front

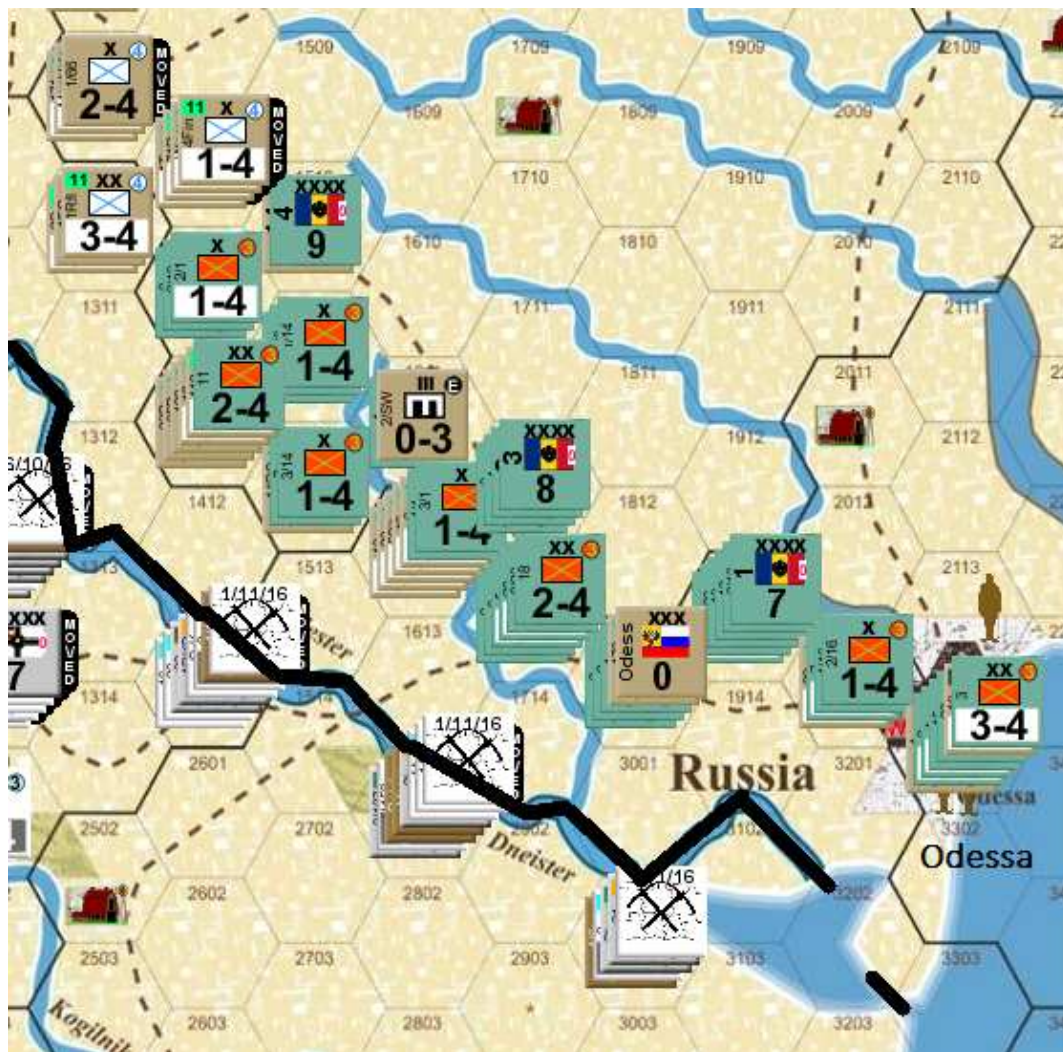


Figure 2: The Romanian Army in exile, early November 1916.

The Eastern Front was fairly quiet with no major operations taking place in early November.

Some of the consequences of the Romanian campaign had yet to fully play out. The situation of the Romanian Army on Russian soil now came into focus. At the beginning of the month, none of the Romanian soldiers received their pay which was hardly surprising given the fact that their national treasury was then being emptied by the conquering powers.

As significant as the lack of pay was the lack of food. The Romanians had evidently been living off the land and from Russian charity since they had withdrawn across the Prut. After the end of the active military operations this charity was no longer so active and the Romanian staff realised they had no means to sustain the Army which was spread out over a front 150 kilometres long inland from Odessa. It would be only a few days before this crisis would become unmanageable because the troops were rapidly consuming their remaining portable supplies and the local peasants were resisting looting.¹

The Balkans

On the Adriatic coast the Allies remained in a position threatening to advance on Dubrovnik. In that city, the citizens were surprised to note that the soldiers who were supposed to defend them were withdrawing to the west. On 3 October, there were distressing scenes in the city as the populace pleaded with the men of the 28th Landwehr Gebirge Brigade to stay. Since this unit was made up mostly of Croats, it seemed perverse that they would willingly abandon the town to an enemy force which was thought to consist mainly of Italians. Despite this appeal, military discipline held and the Gebirgers disappeared over the horizon.

On the main front, the Austrians were moving forward. The Austrian 5th Army, with Bulgarian allies in support, moved forward into the hills south of the Morava and Toplica Rivers. There were for several days steady gains reported. Progress was not particularly fast despite the fact that the Serbians and Montenegrins which were opposing the advance were rarely seen and in fact were willing to give up ground.

The Near East

There was a definite change in the atmosphere in the Near East in early November. Egypt was abuzz with troop and supply movements. Another ANZAC Division (New Zealand) landed at Suez on 4 October. Murray was clearly preparing for another push on Jerusalem in the near future.

Maude in Iraq did not enjoy such a generous level of resourcing. However, the 11th Indian Division had orders to move north from the vicinity of Qurna and the British were counting on this reinforcement to tip the advantage around Baghdad.

If Murray and Maude coordinated their efforts, the Turks might soon be facing their most severe challenge in the Arabian parts of their empire.

No such challenge seemed imminent in the Caucasus where both sides lapsed into inactivity. Logistical problems were multiplying as the second year of the war in the East ended. The

¹ This represents a belated recognition that Romania is not one of the countries (Belgium, Serbia, Switzerland) which allows sustainment other than from the home country.

commander of the Turkish 3rd Army advised the government in Istanbul that desertions were increasing in advance of the onset of winter and units which could not feed their full complement were actually encouraging it.

DM Summary – November 1916

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit #	Month	Total	Morale
Germany	-							11	11	1501	Good
Austria-Hungary	-							-	-	619	Economic Collapse
Ottoman	-							1	1	104	Good
Bulgaria	-							-	-	28	Good
Central Powers	-							12	12	2240	
France	-							-	-	826	Good
Great Britain	-							18	18	442	Good
Russia	-							-	-	862	Shaken
Italy	-							-	-	139	Good
Romania	-							-	-	233	Good
Belgium	-							-	-	(105)	NA
Serbia	-							-	-	(40)	NA
Entente	-							18	18	2479	

This includes the effects of submarine warfare and other monthly DM losses.

Player Notes:

CP: *A somewhat gloomy administrative phase as the realisation hits that Germany has hit the bottom of the manpower pool. Time to disband the navy? Not all of it though, as submarine warfare has now been declared unrestricted and the UK lost 18 DM due to shipping losses. This is the first such phase after AH's economic collapse and they are now reliant on Germany for weapons manufacture and supplies. I receive no gas developments and, even worse, the TE gain double air supremacy – again – on the WF. I enjoyed one month of air supremacy sometime back in 1915 but then I seemed to run out of aces and aircraft. The TE have, on the other hand, had almost continual supremacy and double supremacy several times. Clearly their ability to produce superior aircraft and pilots is unsurpassed. I expect Robert to capitalise in that this month before winter sets in. On the plus, next turn I will have completed the Hindenburg Line defences as a fallback line should it be necessary.*

- *East: I am reconciled to a long Sitzkrieg evolving in the east. Romanians and Russians alike are cowering east of the GTL. I will maintain sufficient strength, reserves and supply in the east to keep him at bay and be able to threaten him should he become bold. The rest of the forces amassed to eliminate Romania as a threat will be redeployed to areas of greater need.*

- *Balkans: I have created another 20km advance along a front of about 100km on the northern edge of the frontline. I will probably stop there to dig in and let him come to me.*
- *Caucasus: Nothing.*
- *Mesopotamia: Now that summer is ended, I expect a strong drive will be made on Baghdad.*
- *Palestine: I also expect him to set Jerusalem as an objective in short order.*
- *Italy: Cattaro has surrendered. This is no great loss as he cannot use it as a port. Along the rest of the Italian front, I continue to inload fresh troops, including more Germans.*
- *West. I withstood his last attempts to dislodge me in Belgium and for now am railing through large quantities of manpower and supply. This month will be his last opportunity to batter away at me before winter and I fully expect Robert to do so.*

AP: *I am doing a tour of the fronts for an end of year assessment. This time I will look at the Balkans.*

Generally, the Balkans is one of the hardest fronts to read at the moment. It is the most multinational front and it will get more so if the Turks and Greeks get involved in the coming months.

From the Allied point of view, it is a place to hurt the Austrians but far less effectively than on the Italian and Eastern Fronts. I also have an important strategic goal of defeating Bulgaria which would be as important as defeating Turkey. However, since Bulgaria joined the war in early 1915 I have inflicted only 27 DM on that nation leaving another 98 DM to go. Bulgaria surrenders when it has 125 DM or Germany has 2450 DM. Unless there is a very significant increase in my rate of attrition against the Bulgarians they will be safe into the 1920s.

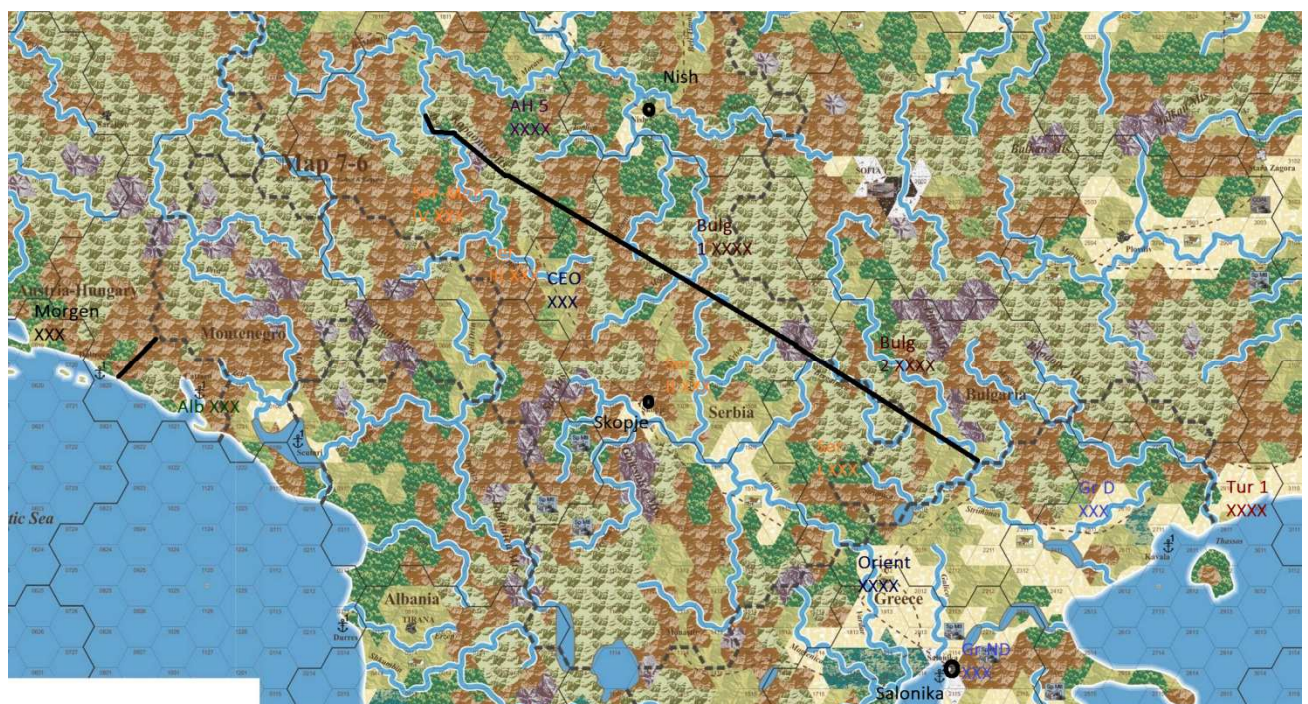


Figure 3: General Situation of the South Balkan Front, early November 1918.

In terms of territorial gains, the Allies have impressively liberated half of Serbia, all of Albania, Montenegro (as far as one can tell), and I have even pulled off a small victory at Cattaro in

Herzegovina. In 1916, the Balkan front has moved up to 15 hexes north of the Greek border and I only need to go another 6 hexes to reach Sofia.

Despite this, the situation is not especially favourable to the Allies. The territorial gains were cheap arising from voluntary retreats and an admittedly slick manoeuvre around an undefended flank. None of this however represented a real defeat of the CP forces and in my over-extended state I am in a poor position to now inflict damage at the rate required. All my strength is needed just to hold an over-long front which is still thinly spread.

What the Allies clearly need is some degree of re-concentration, reinforcement, and resupply so I can set up a more sustained attack. There is sense in waiting now until 1917 for actual attacks so I get the better CRT. I have been trying to build up the front slowly but this front is subject to the Entente Front Restrictions (GCR 35) and it is in competition for British resources with the Near East taking the vast majority of what is available. In fact, I moved my one battle ready British Division on this front to Egypt recently so I went backwards a bit there. At some point I will have to bring the British back into this front as the Serbian-French-Italian build up is rather slow and subject to severe limits. For instance, I can only send 3 French supply points here per month. Accordingly, I have low expectations of this front even into the first half of 1917.

The CP has also been treating this front with a very low priority as demonstrated by the half-hearted relief effort for Cattaro which never got off the ground. It may prove this low priority is fully justified and the CP really have nothing much to regret about this front overall.

I can only speculate what strategic goals Ivor might set himself on this front. He is rightly wary of mixing it too much with the Serbians but their forces are finite even if their morale is not. If 125 DM destroys the Bulgarian's morale, 125 hits would eliminate the Serbians as a military factor. Attacking the British and the French in the Balkans makes little sense. They are far easier to hit on the Western Front. There is a lot to say for continuing a defensive strategy and forcing the Allies to carry the burden of attack.

Despite this, the CP might consider that the Allies have been allowed further north than comfort should allow and that might become more dangerous in 1918. The CP could now easily gain a victory over the Allied forces in the Balkans enough to drive them back to Greece if only enough force and supply were transferred to the front. There are no restrictions now due to the extinction of the Austrian Sphere of Influence. Romania has just proved what can be done and although the French would be tougher than the Russians even their morale is not in a very good place at the moment. The Serbians would also rather fight another day than sacrifice themselves in unequal fights with a few big German stacks. It is even possible now for the CP to pursue the Allies into Greece (as Romania is belligerent).

As with the Romanian campaign and a possible Caporetto type operation in Italy, such CP offensives now need to be very violent and very short or it will overstrain their own morale. A problem with the Balkans and some other fronts is that the Allies can evade a final decisive encounter in which their weaker forces can be completely crushed. As ever, the CP will need to be careful that any push in the Balkans does not become a long term diversion of resources from more critical fronts.