

## Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT192: 10 – 14 November 1916 (3 November)

### General Situation

The first half of November 1916 was one of the quietest periods of the whole war. It has sometimes been alleged that there was not a single casualty on the 13 November despite it being a Friday. This idea is easily demonstrable nonsense and it is the kind of meme that gets promulgated these days on the Internet. A simple fact check would show that the day in question was actually a Monday.

More reliable facts about this time include that on 13 November the last Romanian unit on the Eastern Front was disbanded and, in Australia, Prime Minister Billy Hughes was expelled from the Labor Party over the question of conscription. He favoured it because the rate of recruitment had dried up. His opponents pointed to the fact that Australia and New Zealand had provided enough men to form more than six Divisions and if the 5<sup>th</sup> Division was currently inactive and reduced to cadre status that was because General Murray had used Australian units with little regard for losses during the Battle of Ramala in September.

### The Western front



Figure 1: The Front in Alsace, 10 - 14 November 1916.

The legend that nobody died on 13 November originated in a grain of truth in that the casualty returns for the French 1<sup>st</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Armies for November were published and the record showed that these two small Armies had no losses that day on a very inactive front in Alsace. It was then assumed without further evidence that the same must be true for the opposing German 7<sup>th</sup> Army. A priest in

Belfort thought the occasion deserved some kind of thanksgiving service and this was reported as if it related to the whole Western Front. By the time, any serious historians got around to recounting this period of the war several popular amateur accounts of the conflict had already extended this imaginary statistic to every other front.

### The Italian Front

It was very plausible to suggest that on the Italian Front there were no fatalities on the 13 November but it is not true. It is possible that more of the Italian casualties were shot by Cadorna than by the Austrians.

### The Eastern front



Figure 2: The Front in Lithuania, 10 - 14 November 1916.

Similarly, it was commonly understood that the war on the Eastern Front was closing down for the winter and that the two sides had withdrawn safely out of range of each other to enjoy winter quarters. One of the places this was not so was around Kovno which the Russians then held. The German 8<sup>th</sup> Army had been recently reinforced and this was picked up by Russian intelligence and

contributed to some tension in this sector where the Germans and Russians eyeballed each other across the Nieman River.

Winter was indeed coming. In Bessarabia, the Austrian 8<sup>th</sup> Engineering Regiment had been tasked with converting a length of rail around Kishinev to standard European Gauge. However, on 11 November, they reported that the works could not be completed because of unfavourable ground conditions and a sudden drop in temperature. The unit took shelter instead in the town as an early blizzard blanketed the countryside.

On 14 November, the Romanian Government in Exile announce that hostilities with the Central Powers were suspended and the Army was fully disbanded. They nevertheless declared that there had been no surrender and they invited the Central Powers to propose terms though they said nothing would be agreed in the manner of a final settlement until the duress of the occupation of their country was ended. For the time being, the Central Powers would ignore this Government in Exile and they instead installed pliant puppets in Bucharest.

### **The Balkans**

It is not possible to say what the casualties were on a daily basis in the Balkans as nobody was keeping an exact count. One might suggest that if the manslaughter ceased it would have been unprecedented given how many ancestral enemies had been armed against each other. It is hard to discern the detail of the action on this front since the sources are not generous with their explanations. It seems that in mid-November the Austro-Hungarian 5<sup>th</sup> Army was consolidating newly acquired positions along the Brvenica Valley after the Serbians had pulled back south of the river there.

### **The Near East**

When the first proponents of the idea of the “miraculous 13<sup>th</sup> November” promulgated their bogus discovery they undoubtedly forgot to check the Near Eastern Fronts.

It would be unfair to say they were completely forgotten but the Tsar was not losing sleep over what was happening, or not happening, in the Caucasus. Germany could only be prevailed on to remember her Turkish ally with difficulty and it was hard for Turkey to win attention when the Austro-Hungarian corpse needed every bit of support Germany could spare. Even so, the Turkish soldiers manning the far-flung Ottoman fronts could reasonably say they were forgotten in Istanbul judging by the miserly rate at which replacement and supplies filtered across Anatolia towards them.

The British Imperial Fronts in Iraq and Palestine were perhaps a little more confident that they had a proper place in the national strategy of Great Britain but securing this was a constant battle against the almost unlimited demands of Haig and the Western Front. The winter, however, would provide Murray and Maude with a chance to prove the worth of their respective theatres in that the conditions for action had improved while the looming winter was a disincentive to further action in Europe during the next few months.

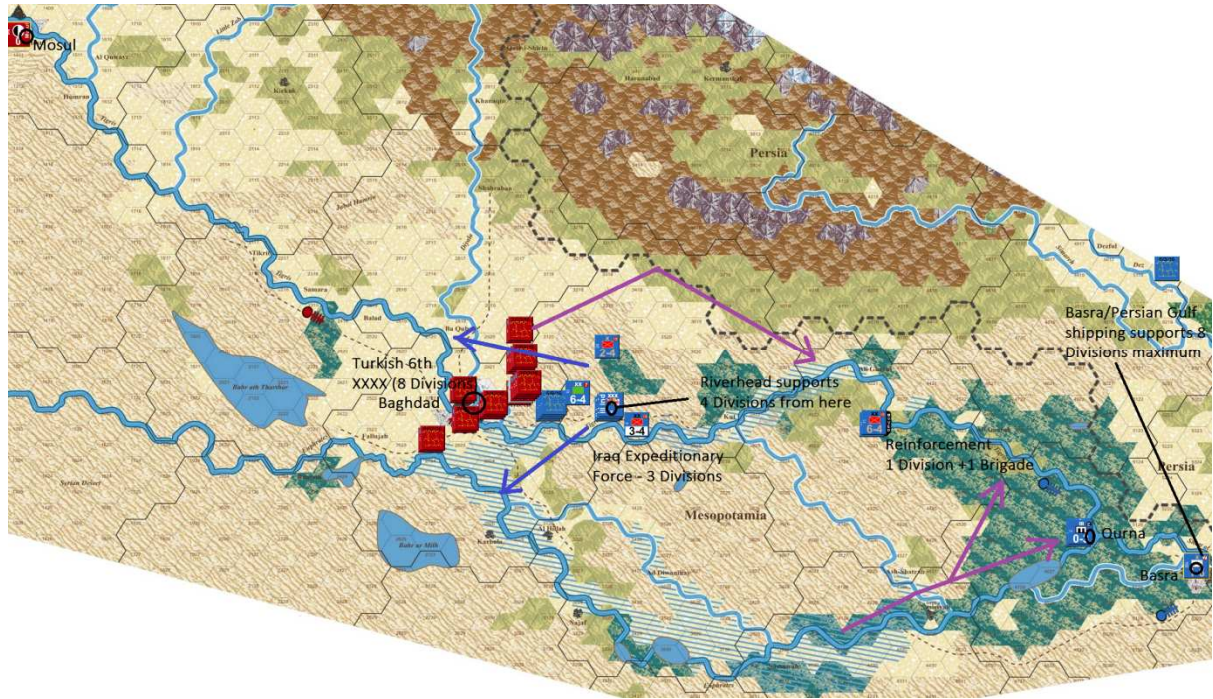


Figure 3: General Situation on the Mesopotamian Front, mid-November 1916. The arrows mark possible attacks against the opposing Army's line of communication. A Turkish attack based on the Euphrates was not realistic once the Allies had advanced close to Baghdad and were therefore within easy reach of the Euphrates further upriver. A map based on Allied sketch-plans.

#### 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: East: The east is definitely going into Sitzkrieg mode. I am curious as to how Robert is applying rules interpretations to the Romanians. I did think they would likely have surrendered once they had lost the last of their cities and perhaps the rules need to reflect this. Perhaps even they should surrender if their capital is lost, which would force them to approach the fight in a very different way and no doubt inflict greater losses on me in the process. I just feel the Romania surrender rules could be tidier than just being based on DMs lost. Either way, they are no longer a threat to me and Robert's approach appears to be a gradual disbandment of the Romanians in Russia; perhaps they are getting homesick. I have no appetite to attack his trenches on the other side of rivers and I can't see him attacking again until summer to assist his TE allies.*
- *Balkans: I will continue to push my line forward as he relinquishes territory so long as I can still maintain a rail link to my right flank. To do this, I need to rail some Engrs into the Balkans to lay track.*
- *Caucasus: Quiet. Turkey has no need to attack yet but may have to soon to expend supply. I need to check my stockpile again.*
- *Mesopotamia: The battle for Baghdad is pending. He will want to extend more supply forward first.*
- *Palestine: Quiet.*
- *Italy: Nothing of any note. I have more troops and artillery moving slowly forward. I made another error though in moving out of Dubrovnik and do not wish to yield this to him so looks like I have to fight to take it back. Very stupid of me – unforgivably careless.*
- *West. More rebuilding and redeployment. I wish to discourage him attacking whilst he has such overwhelming air superiority.*

*AP: I should comment on the end of the Romanians. It is because they have no capability of sustainment. This has to be drawn from the home country except if the units concerned are Serbian, Belgian or Swiss for which the rules make exception. If I had realised this, I would have put up a stronger fight on Romanian soil. I withdrew from there not for the Romanian's sake but actually for the Russians who could not be drawn into an extensive fight on the Romanian's behalf.*

*This was something of a mistake but I perceive little significance in it for the game as a whole or its balance. The CP gained something of a cheaper victory over Romania than it perhaps should have but the Allies avoided the temptation of over commitment of the Russians.*

*Resuming my review of the different fronts, I have now reached Mesopotamia.*

*This front has been essentially dormant since before the start of the summer season and the failure of the first Allied attempt to take Baghdad. The Allies have, at the start of November, received an upgrade of the capacity of the Basra Depot (the next upgrade is in March 1917). This means that with my river head at 20 hexes extension from Basra I can employ 24 strength points in operations against Baghdad so long as I do not advance the river head at all. I discovered in the first Battle of Baghdad that a direct assault was out of the question and I then lacked the strength to get around it though I momentarily came close to reaching the river above Baghdad – in which case the city is*

*untenable. The extra 6 SP of effective force I can employ may make a difference I hope at least in a few turns when the reinforcing 11<sup>th</sup> Indian Division completes its march up river.*

*The outcome of a further renewal of this campaign is not altogether clear to me. The AP force is not strong and I will use up the 10 supply points I have on this front fairly quickly. I am more confident of breaching the Jaffa-Jerusalem line so there may be an unhistorical sequence of events here. The development of the action is heading towards a roughly coincidental assault on both the Baghdad and Jerusalem fronts so, even if I am unsuccessful in Mesopotamia, the Near East could be shaken up by the Turks not being able to cope with such pressure on two remote fronts at once.*

*The passive CP approach to Mesopotamia has meant that the earlier opportunity to use the Euphrates against the Allies has been missed. Also the Turks have never used their superior ability to avoid attrition (unlike Allied units they only check attrition losses once a month) and swing out away from the river. Either using the Euphrates or breaking free of the Line of Communication ("LOC") allows the Turks to threaten to get adjacent to the river below the Allied force and therefore force them to protect their extended LOC and potentially cause a catastrophic lack of supply. Being pinned back in Baghdad makes these moves difficult to pull off and in fact the Euphrates is really not open to the Turks once the Allies get close to Baghdad because they can pull off the same trick and close the Euphrates to the Turks by getting between them and Baghdad relying on their Tigris LOC. Also, as mentioned, Baghdad is potentially vulnerable to Allied forces getting north of it so operations against the LOC are on the Allied agenda as the 1915-16 campaign against the city showed.*

*The CP strategy on this front has been to hedgehog down in Baghdad and dare the Allies to come at them. The original defence at the beginning of 1916 was too weak and was saved by reinforcement which arrived just in the nick of time. This remoteness from assistance is the principle weakness of the situation of Baghdad though it is tempered a little by the similar situation of the Allies who are at the end of an equally long LOC. The CP has to send help here before the losses are incurred or they arrive too late (the same applies in Palestine). To date, however, the hedgehog strategy has worked quite nicely and has kept Turkish losses on this front very low. It may be fair also for the CP to give the Mesopotamian front less priority than the Palestinian as the loss of Baghdad alone may be bearable and the Allies pushing beyond Baghdad are further weakened logistically. However, I do not have experience of this phase of the game now so there is an element of extrapolation in these thoughts.*