

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT193: 15 – 18 November 1916 (4 November)

General Situation

"The SS Moonshine was already 15 hours out from Southampton when the crew found me in my hiding place under a pile of tarpaulin in the storeroom. I was given away by deep snoring induced by the three bottles of whiskey I had drunk shortly after boarding to keep warm. This was also part of the reason I would give to explain how I got on the wrong ship.¹

I had been supposed to get on the cross-channel ferry and re-join my regiment in France and hopefully get myself killed for democracy and for my aunt's financial gain. However, it occurred to me that anyone could make a mistake in boarding a ship. They all looked more or less the same. So it was that I accidentally-on-purpose went up the wrong gangway and made myself disappear into the bowels of the Moonshine. Before doing so I verified her itinerary and was satisfied to see she was heading for New York and was flying the American flag. I didn't stop to think about passports or funds. I was in such a funk about France I had no practical thought about sustaining myself in the Land of the Free.

When I was roused and sober, I was interviewed by the Master of the Vessel. He turned out to be a decent old cove. He recognised me instantly.



Figure 1: Le Havre, Major Flashman was posted missing, suspected of deserting, by the Army Establishments Administration on 17 November 1916.

"You are Cap'n 'Arry Flashman are you not...the Hero of H'Arras, captured single 'anded an hall?"

¹ The following first person narrative from the war at sea is taken from *Flashman the Second on Broadway* (2015), Peahen Press, London. This is the fourth volume of the recently published memoirs of Sir Harry Flashman, MC, Kt, the son of the Victorian soldier and adventurer of the same name.

I was actually now a Major, thanks to my Russian service, but I let that pass, and also I did not mention his inconsistent use of the eighth letter of the alphabet. Instead I apologised for getting on the wrong boat and being such a trouble.

"Do not worry Sir. We will get you to France so you can get on with fighting the 'un...'"

I began to go pale as I thought the old sea dog meant to turn his ship around.

"...but I am chartered to go to New York to collect a cargo of special metals. They are vital for the war effort. So we will have to drop you off at Le Havre on the way back. You can have a couple of days on shore while we are loading."

I let out a sigh of relief. Then the Master spoke again.

"You have been to New York before Sir haven't you? I remember it was in the papers when the Titanic went down. Didn't you save those Girl Scouts?"

I had to admit that it was a night to remember. But I really didn't like anyone mentioning it. Fortunately, the false Girl Scout story had stuck. The gentlemen of the press never found out about Miss Fortescue's Finishing School for Poor Girls.

Miss Fortescue had long since passed away before I became involved in the "school" as a silent business partner. I had been, incidentally, one of the most loyal supporters of her learning system. It was not dissimilar to what Rugby had instilled in me. Physical exercise was more valued than any kind of book work. The "school trip" on the Titanic had been a clever bid to get more recognition for our methods among the better class of passengers. I also had plans that we would gain some presence in the New York system. I had brought with me enough capital to pay off the in situ controllers of the 5th Avenue operation who were charging punitive fees. My correspondents had told me that their standards were slipping and the old gang would have to give way to new blood.

When we hit the iceberg, I had been conducting an examination of Daisy Buchanan, the Head Girl. She had put everything into this test but I insisted on a re-take as I didn't think she had achieved her full potential.

Despite being interrupted in such an unexpected manner, the commotion on the ship immediately transmitted to a special Flashy sense I have when events take a nasty turn. I am at my magnificent best when it comes to saving my own skin. Soon my mind was racing at double speed on a plan. I knew the Birkenhead Drill and that was the problem on which I focussed.

Daisy was sent to round up the rest of the girls. They were supposed to be studying in their own cabins, but several were out doing extra-curricular activities with their tutors. It was pretty late for this kind of thing and normally they would be disciplined.² Daisy lost valuable time while she found the whole class. While Daisy was away, I found one of her spare uniforms and put it on. So I didn't look quite as ridiculous, I shaved my moustache clean off and put on one of Daisy's bigger hats so that my face was half concealed. The sideburns should have been a give-away, but I was beginning to get agitated as I waited for Daisy and I kept thinking I should just make a break for it. Already the ship was listing at a sickening angle. However, I had just enough self-control. I even found a little

² The tutors, of course, not the students.

card which I pinned to myself and wrote "Miss Fortescue" on it in a very shaky hand as the terror of my situation started to unman me.

Thankfully, Daisy bustled in with all the girls many of them remarkably cheerful and flushed with excitement. Once they had finished laughing at my poor state we formed a little scrum and started down the corridor aiming for the lifeboat decks with me in the middle. I should not have said anything. The girls knew what to do. Even so, every now and then my nervous state would burst out of me at the top of a constricted voice, "Women and children first!"

When we got up top there was at first mayhem. The kilter of the ship had risen to a truly alarming angle. I really could not see a way out. I almost gave up. I remembered how at school I had got double prep once for saying trigonometry would be the death of me and now I realised this must have been a horribly true prophesy. However, although in my self-pity I almost missed it, there was a moment when the waves of humanity parted as the Red Sea for Moses. All the gentlemen standing there with their womenfolk recoiled at little from the sight of our party. If one of the girls smiled in a particular direction some fellow would shrink back into the crowd and by this device we cleared our way and advanced towards the side of the ship.

After a minute or two we found ourselves by one of the few lifeboats still on the ship. Several ladies hurriedly jumped out at our approach announcing they did not wish to share it with crumpets.³ They left it free to load the entire class. As this was going on, and I started to congratulate myself on my unparalleled survival instinct, I was roughly grasped by one of the ship's officers who suddenly challenged me with an "Excuse me one moment, Sir."

Well this could have been the end of Flashy and all I could do to defend myself was to give out a high pitched squeak and somewhat desperately pointed to Miss Fortescue writ on my badge. Honestly, I doubt this would have done any good but at that moment there was a gun shot and a sudden commotion. Someone shouted, "Rose...Rose..." and the increasingly frightened crowd lurched in a different direction. My captor lost his grip momentarily and I fell into the last lifeboat and buried myself under the ample skirts of my best pupils.

Five minutes later there was me and the whole class of 1912 bobbing about the North Atlantic in a half filled lifeboat. I cannot say I watched the last moments of the Titanic. I don't like death. Someone else's death is preferable, but I liked it best in the bottom of our blessed vessel all curled up and with my eyes tightly shut – pre-birth like.

At this memory, I had closed my eyes again with a certain satisfaction when the Master of the Moonshine told me that Germany had just announced the resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare.

"Well," I said cheerily, "It's good this is an American ship then."

³ Editor's Note: In English usage "crumpet" refers to a thick flat savoury cake with a soft, porous texture made from a yeast mixture eaten toasted and buttered. In British usage, it has also informally and sometimes affectionately been used of people, especially women, regarded as objects of sexual desire. In this context, it is surprising Flashman did not admit that it is more likely his companions were declared to be "strumpets" but perhaps there was euphemism in the speech of the respectable Edwardian ladies who did not survive to give their own account.

"No Sir, you don't understand," said the Master, "The Germans will sink American ships now – unrestricted like. In any case, that there is just a flag of convenience. We lost six ships in these waters last week. It didn't matter what flag they were flying. They even sank a merchantman flying the flag of the Kaiser's Imperial Paddle Steamer."

I inwardly groaned and wondered if I could have been safer in France. "What about a convoy?" I suggested, "Wouldn't it be better if we sailed in a convoy?"

"Nah Sir, convoys are useless. You is always sailing at the speed of the slowest. We are best on our own."

I tentatively asked what the drill was if we were attacked by a submarine.

"Oh don't you mind Sir, we can outrun them."

This didn't seem beyond argument as I had seen enough of the Moonshine to know she was not a slick racing yacht and the tin bucket's engines started to scream every time the ship rose a little against the ocean waves.

Turning back to the Titanic, I replied:

"Well, I suppose it would have been different if Captain Smith could have outrun his iceberg. Still lessons learned...eh...no doubt the Shipping Board made you increase the number of lifeboats?"

"Oh no Sir, that would interfere with the extra cargo space. The special metals are critical war resources. We can't have lifeboats. We never needed them."

That just showed that the same bloody fools must be running the Shipping Board as those who had decided parachutes were not suitable for the Air Force. I had seen the special metal stockpiles all over England. That we might have acquired a surplus hadn't occurred to this marine dolt who had probable never gone half a mile inland since he was a nipper. I had a cousin, Shorty Flashman-Braces, who was some kind of commodities broker in the City. Shorty was six foot three tall and got his nickname because he had some confounded knack of making money when prices fell. I was pretty sure he was somewhere behind the special metal swindle. Only some kind of perverse financial genius would have thought the value of raw materials might fall in wartime. Whenever he had tried to explain it to me my head spun.

Some small seaman presented himself to the Master as I was still standing there wondering if there was any way to penetrate the intransigent ignorance of the man.

"Permission to report, Sir...Enemy periscope seen, starboard."

"Very good" said the Master, and, after a pause, "Raise steam, full speed ahead."

As he said "Very good" my stomach turned over three times and emptied over my shoes.

"Begging your pardon Sir," said the seaman, "Torpedo tracks also seen off starboard, two hundred yards and closing."

The word "torpedo" had an immediate effect sending my mind spinning in an uncontrollable way. I cannot be sure of the order of events next. Among the things I screamed at the Master were "evasive action...strike the flag...man the bilge pumps...and everyone for himself!" I then ran off looking for the lifeboats that were not there. I started to remember God in order to negotiate with Him while manically singing the first lines of "For those in Peril on the Sea..." I then pranged my head on a low beam and fell to the deck stone cold unconscious. The last thing I heard was the explosion amidships which tore the Moonshine in two.

The next thing, I heard was the unmistakable cod-German accent, of Max von Bismarck, the illegitimate secret son of the Iron Chancellor, and my fag at Rugby.

"Vot, haf ve heer," he said, "It is not a Fischmann, nein...Zee heer Kapitan Schleper. It is... a Flaschmann. Vot a catch! He made my unhappy schooldays in exile from the Vaterland so much worse than they need have been. The games he played on me.... aagh disgusting. The food I had to eat....aagh disgusting. We shall have some fun in return. He ist zee sole survivor. You can take him on board and introduce him to our showgirls. He vill not live to tell this tale. If only Mata Hari⁴ was still alive, she would slowly tear off his yellow skin and make ladies' accessories out of it. "

With that, still only half conscious, I was pulled from the water and heaved down the submarine's tower to fall in a bruising crash and a puddle inside the enemy U-boat."

Western Front

All sectors of the Western Front remained relatively quiet. The commanding officer of the British tank brigade was ordered to refuse all visits by ranking officers and VIPs no matter how eminent. He was warned that not even the King should be allowed in his compound near Saulty (5-3.0809).

Italian Front

Northern Italy can be quite a miserable place in late autumn. So it was this year. Behind the Austrian 8th Army front, trains were delivering large siege artillery guns for emplacement in the hills. The prospect of getting these massive weapons into firing positions in this terrain was discouraging to the artillerymen responsible and even getting them out of the rail yards was an exhausting proposition made unpleasant by short days and inclement conditions.

⁴ At Mata Hari's trial in Dusseldorf, in July 1916, the most damning evidence produced by the prosecuting German military investigator had been wireless intercepts which had confirmed her intimate communication with Major Flashman. Max von Bismarck's comments, as reported by Flashman, support the theory that he was the female double-agent's German controller and after the war he was recorded protesting her innocence of collusion with the Allies. The forthcoming, *Flashman the Second, Shot at Dawn* (expected 2017) Peahen Press, London, may have some answers when this section of his memoirs is published.



Figure 2: German and Austrian high calibre guns arriving on the Italian Front, 15 - 18 November 1916.

The Eastern Front

The long front along the Dniester River encouraged the professional armies of the Central Powers to study all kinds of river crossing operations both for offensive and (more likely) defensive purposes. Officers of all ranks attended small study groups and were asked to pore over TEC charts that distinguished rivers ranging from major to minor. The Danube River had its own chapter in the texts studied.

The Balkans

The Balkan front was stabilised again in the Brvenica Valley. The Serbians and French had watched the Central Powers' forces thicken up on the far side but for the moment nothing significant happened.

The Near East

17 November 1916 is a significant date in British and Australian military history for that is when General Murray unleashed his second serious attempt to break the Jaffa - Jerusalem line.

For a week prior to this, Murray had pushed the 2nd Mounted Division forward closer to the Turkish lines between Zeharya and Aderet (8-8.2231). Their orders had been to make demonstrations and keep the Turks focused on this advanced force. They were ordered also to report any movements east by the enemy as such efforts might foil the British plan.

Murray had waited before starting his attack until the new New Zealand Division and the Indian 12th Division had come up to his front. This allowed the bulk of his veterans to redeploy inland during 16 October, stealing a march on the Turks. On the morning of 17 November, a very fine day, the British 36th and Australian 2nd Divisions led a powerful attack on the Turkish front near Surif (8-8.2331). By

evening, the Turkish survivors were falling back having lost nearly two thirds of the strength of the 35th Division. On 18 November, the most forward British and Australian units were reporting that they were clean through the Turkish trenches and only light opposition was expected. They were already on the outskirts of Bethlehem (8-8.2331) and preparing to enter the city of the Nativity. At this point, it became clear that Jerusalem itself was within range of Murray's offensive.

No action was reported at this time on the other Near Eastern fronts.

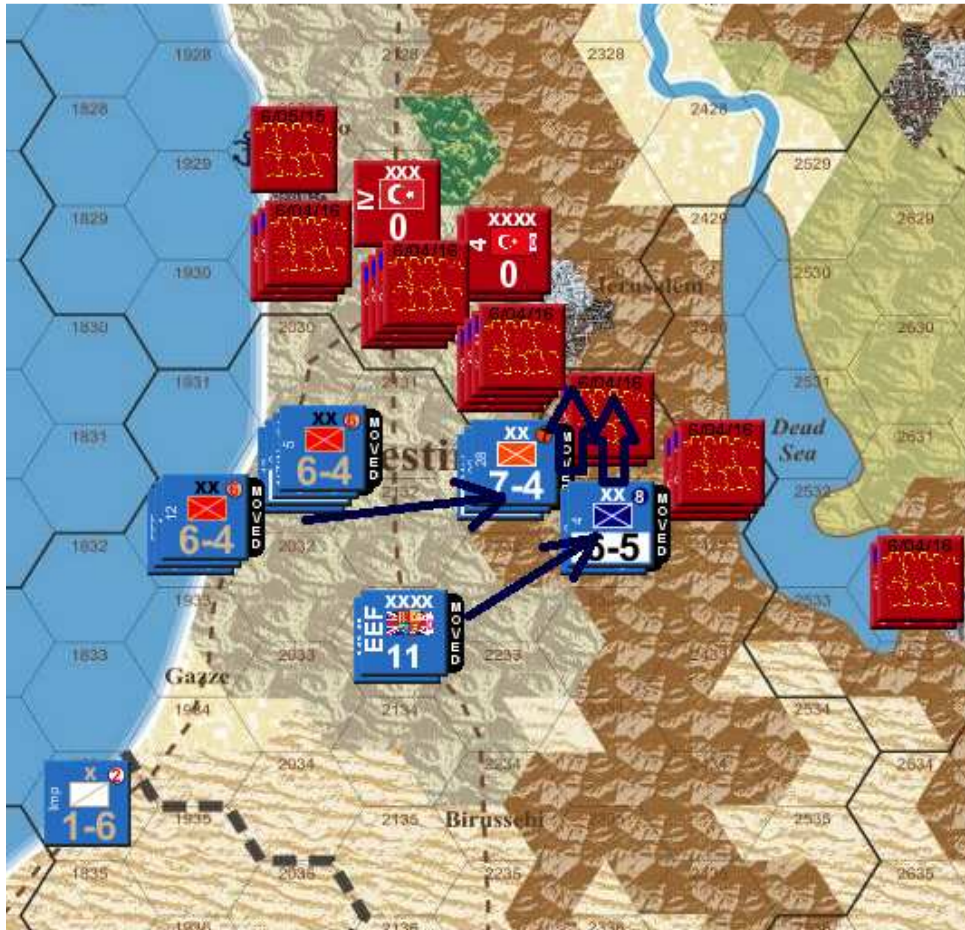


Figure 3: Murray cracks the Jaffa-Jerusalem line at Bethlehem, 16 - 18 November 1916.

Players Notes

- CP: *East: I have nothing really to add – for any of the fronts – this turn. The EF is just about shoring up for the winter. Let him attack my entrenched positions if he wishes. I am also moving two German armies and an AH one to other fronts, but it will take a long time to fully deploy.*
- Balkans: *He has stopped running now and started reinforcing his front line. I can see no reason why he would wish to fall back further and even falling back this far frees up some of the rail lines from enemy ZOCs and allows me to extend it further. I will hold on this line for the winter as we eagerly await Greece's decisions on entering the war.*
- Caucasus: *Quiet.*
- Mesopotamia: *Quiet.*

- *Palestine: Quiet, but I suspect his build-up is about ready for use now and expect an imminent offensive to take Jerusalem. I don't think I am strong enough to hold it for too long.*
- *Italy: Nothing of any note.*
- *West. More longer term preparation for the winter.*

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	-	-	-	2				1	3	106	Good
Bulgaria	-	-	-	-				-	-	28	Good
Central Powers	-	-	-	2				12	14	2242	
France	-	-	-	-				-	-	826	Good
Great Britain	-	-	-	2				18	20	444	Good
Russia	-	-	-	-				-	-	862	Shaken
Italy	-	-	-	-				-	-	139	Good
Romania	-	-	-	-				-	-	233	Good
Belgium	-	-	-	-				-	-	(105)	NA
Serbia	-	-	-	-				-	-	(40)	NA
Entente	-	-	-	2				18	20	2481	

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

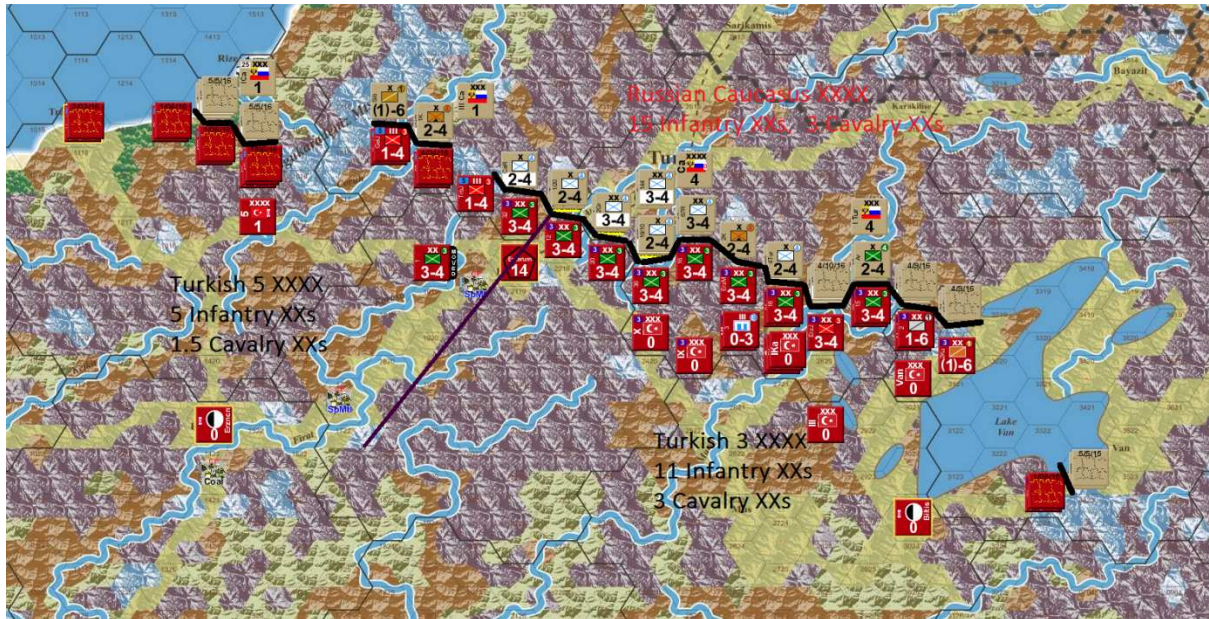


Figure 4: General Situation on the Caucasus Front, November 1916.

AP: The attack south of Jerusalem is the most significant event this turn. However, I will press on with my front by front review which has reached the Caucasus.

The Caucasus front is in a deep stalemate as 1916 approaches its end. It is unlikely to change anytime soon. It might be thought this is due to the mountain terrain. Mountains do provide defenders with considerable advantages and it might simply be said that the attacks are conducted at half the efficiency of attacks in clear terrain with significantly higher losses too. However, the significance of the terrain should not be over-stated. The attacker can overcome the disadvantage by simply increasing the resources committed to offensives. If the defender is weak enough the terrain will not help them avoid collapse. The stalemate is as much due to the fact that both sides have almost identical sized forces on this front (15 Russian versus 16 Turkish Infantry Divisions).

Looking at it from the Russian side first, there were several offensive operations in the first two years of the conflict which gained ground. These normally required increased concentrations of troops and supply. Russian morale was low enough that I was not concerned at sacrificing some of it. If the Russians had not attacked in the Caucasus, the Turkish DM would be significantly less by now (at least 40-50 points, I would estimate) and I might have little prospect of causing a Turkish surrender in future. It is true that the Turks made a number of voluntary withdrawals early in the campaign but they were not all voluntary and Russian aggression has obliged the Turks to deploy 16 Divisions to this front keeping them away from more critical areas. The Russians historically reached Ezerum, but I have not. The reason for this is primarily the Turks historically neglected this front whereas in the game the Turkish Divisions are all full strength and I have never been afforded a real opportunity to achieve the historic results.

There is little prospect now of the Russians going forward again and the stalemate will last probably until the Russians collapse. This is because I no longer need to inflict DM on the Turks with the Russians so much as the British are now gearing up for that. Russian morale is now very precarious and that part which I have left will probably be best spent on the Eastern Front. This will make it hard to justify supply transfers to the Caucasus but I may do some to at least keep up the threat of attacks which cannot occur without supply. I also expect to keep the strength I have on the Caucasus Front in position and even increase it. The Russians have no shortage of strength points.

The Turks have generally been on the defensive on this front and most of the attacks they have conducted have been to fulfil the supply stockpile limitations. These attacks have not usually been successful because the Turks have never had the concentration of force and supply needed to be able to make winning attacks in mountains and could only get this force with significant transfers of supply and weapon points. In general, the Turks would like to mix it up with the Russians in the Caucasus as their DM is far more expendable than German and Austrian DM. However, it is difficult to inflict a lot of losses and will be harder to do so if the Russians stay on the defensive.

The Turks do have a future offensive to bear in mind. When Russia collapses, then the Russian Caucasus Front collapses and the Turkish advance into Russian territory which then becomes possible should accelerate the final surrender of Russia. Some Turkish reserve strength should be preserved for this phase.

Of more concern for the Turks is whether they can really afford a large Army in the Caucasus when the British are threatening to overrun the Arab provinces which are much more valuable than anything at stake at Erzerum.

In any event, the Turks need help from Germany (this is the counterpart of Russian and British investments in the Near East fronts). Certainly some weapon points have already been sent. There are no limits to this. I am not sure how much is enough, but if Turkey collapses early then one would have to say more would have been better.