

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT195: 23 – 26 November 1916 (6 November)

General Situation

Another great storm, the remnants of a hurricane, hit the Eastern Seaboard of the United States on 23 November. Several miles off the coast of Long Island a German U-boat sat out the tempest. Inside the vessel, a captive British officer spent the night throwing up his guts and imagining that his only means of escape would be to endure one or several alternative painful deaths. However, he would yet live to play a part in one of the oddest diplomatic episodes of the 20th Century.

The Near East



Figure 1: The Turkish 3rd Army strikes on the eve of winter, 23 - 26 November 1916.

The fighting south and east of Jerusalem had stopped in the last week of November. Murray had realised that the Holy City was now well defended and he did not have the supplies just yet to bludgeon his way through. There was a need therefore to stop and stockpile for a few days before considering further options.

The snows were already falling steadily on the high ground in the Caucasus. However, the Turkish 3rd Army began a significant attack on 24 November and took Karayazi (6-8.2617) from a Cossack Brigade (2nd) which was caught napping and forced to withdraw towards the Eliskirt Valley (6-8.2716). The Turkish Divisions which attacked had done so with a certain fanaticism and disregard for losses, but the town they took was a key point and their action forced the Russian 1st Turkestan Corps to pull back its right wing giving up ground which had been gained here after Yudenitch's last offensive success at Dibilek (6-8.2718) in early October. This showed the Russian Army in the Caucasus was not in such good shape. The cavalry, in particular, was suffering from lack of forage.

The Western Front



Figure 2: Balance of Forces on the Western Front, November 1916.

In the evening of 23 November, Ludendorff sat in his office, his memoirs say, poring over the German Army returns and intelligence estimates to try and distil from them a true picture of the balance of forces on the Western Front.¹ Ludendorff took some satisfaction from the fact that despite the Allied offensives, the strength of the Western Front had not diminished in the period since he and Hindenburg had assumed control of the German General Staff. It was likely that the situation would further improve in the winter and the Allies would face fearsome obstacles when they renewed their attacks. It was true that this was a consequence of a very determined conscription of remaining German manpower and this could not be continued at the same rate.

¹ Player Note: It should perhaps be noted that the CP has kept a large number of Divisions at 8 SP whereas historically (and as promoted by GCR 46-1 reorganisation rules) the Germans in fact reduced most of their Divisions, so 5 SP would be more typical. If that had occurred, the number of German Infantry Divisions in the West would have been much closer to the Allied total.

Ludendorff worried therefore that the Allies might attack before the manpower situation had eased a bit.

When he considered the Cavalry, Ludendorff had to recognise the Allies were far ahead now in this arm but, on the Western Front, that could be dismissed with a little shrug. More concerning, was the realisation that the Allies had outpaced the Germans in artillery production despite the superiority of heavy weapons which the Germans had enjoyed when the conflict was started.

The Italian Front

As the 1916 campaign appeared to be over, Cadorna also reviewed the state of the Italian Army. He had some reason to be concerned. Many units had still not been replenished after the Trentino attacks in October, others were mere cadres. On the information he had, Cadorna could not envisage getting the Army back to full strength and fully re-supplied until spring 1917. Reports kept coming in of new German units on the Italian front and the possibility of an enemy offensive started to concern the Italian Staff. Largely, it discounted this threat, especially because it was surely the wrong time of year to begin something and also because the poor state of Austrian morale was taken as a fact. The conclusion was that the Germans were only helping strengthen the Austro-Hungarian defence (which was worrying enough). Nevertheless, there was enough nagging doubt to encourage the Italians to speed some reinforcements to the Isonzo lines.

The Eastern Front



Figure 3: Russian reconnaissance in force in Central Poland, 23 – 26 November 1916.

The Tsar was not completely satisfied with the advice he was receiving from STAVKA, which was essentially to sit tight throughout the winter. STAVKA also tended to take the strategic view that whatever the outcome of the war, Poland was already lost to the Russian Empire. In contrast, the

Tsar saw that the German hold on Central Poland was very loose (the German General Staff were equally doubtful about their post-war ability to subjugate Poland). Therefore, to appease the Tsar, STAVKA agreed that there should be at least a reconnaissance west of the lines covering Brest-Litovsk in the direction of Warsaw. This was carried out in late-November by three Russian Cavalry Divisions (including a so-called Polish Cavalry Division) and the 36th Infantry Division. These advanced forces confirmed that the Germans hardly patrolled the region east of Siedlce (4-5.2519). The Tsar then began to insist more might be done to recover Poland.

The Balkans

On 23 November, Dubrovnik fell once more, this time liberated by the Austrian 185th Brigade. The Croat population were not sure if they welcomed this. General Morgen, the Corps Commander responsible, was German and he perhaps failed to appreciate the advantage of sending a more "Croat" unit in (which he had available) to re-occupy the historic town.

There was little to report on the rest of the South Balkan Front. The Italian 20th Division was now positioned on the front lines supporting the French Orient Army. On 20 November, it took over a sector near Marovac (7-6.1104) on the Kosovan border.

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	2		1	6	109	Good
Bulgaria	-	-	-	-	-	-		-	-	28	Good
Central Powers	-	-	-	2	1	2		12	17	2245	
France	-	-	-	-	-	-		-	-	826	Good
Great Britain	-	-	-	2	2	-		18	22	446	Good
Russia	-	-	-	-	-	1		-	1	863	Shaken
Italy	-	-	-	-	-	-		-	-	139	Good
Romania	-	-	-	-	-	-		-	-	233	Good
Belgium	-	-	-	-	-	-		-	-	(105)	NA
Serbia	-	-	-	-	-	-		-	-	(40)	NA
Entente	-	-	-	2	2	1		18	21	2484	

Player Notes:

CP:

- *East: I have started to reconfigure my line on the Dniester to make it more efficient and less manpower intensive. Aside from that, very little. The entire central front remains*

static from both sides with mostly marshland in between; along with the bulge that is the vacated city of Warsaw. In response to some probes by the Russian and evidence of reinforcing in the region of Brest-Litovsk, I have dispatched my mobile reserve (on rails) of 4 x divs from the northern front to the central area. I doubt he will try anything this side of winter though. The lull in fighting has suited the Russians as it has settled down any revolutionary fervour that may have been simmering amongst the troops due to losses in combat.

- *Balkans: Nothing much has happened here save a little consolidation of the lines.*
- *Caucasus: I have launched the new Kalfas divs into a limited attack against the 2K Mt Bde. I may be strong enough in this last pre-winter bite to force him to retreat.*
- *Mesopotamia: Quiet.*
- *Palestine: He continues to smash away at my perimeter defences but I think he will now have to pause to re-stock with supplies.*
- *Italy: In a surprise move, he has vacated Dubrovnik, which I then reoccupy without the need to fight; which I had thought I would have to.*
- *West. Again, very little movement. I moved an artillery brigade to reinforce one vulnerable location. Nothing else. I wait with baited breath to see whether there will be an end of year, pre-winter assault.*

AP: As the game progresses, the Western Front should become more and more the focus of the game. In fact, I would argue it always should be a priority though the opportunities to do something decisive are not always there.

For the Allies, once it is accepted that Austrian morale can be protected by German morale then the only way to win becomes a question of defeating Germany (because Germany will not let Austria surrender until Germany is on the point of surrendering itself). Defeating Germany requires the infliction of industrial quantities of DM which only France and Britain have the capability of in 1917.

As the end of 1916 approaches, the Allies can look back on a steadily escalating succession of attacks which have brought Germany to within 100 DM of Shaken Morale and with American entry on the cards. This is a promising position from which to start the 1917 campaign as it should tip Germany over this morale threshold at the first serious attempt. This will be particularly so with the 1917 CRT coming in. The downsides are that Germany is reinforcing and the costs of these attacks will also be endured on the 1917 CRT. France will not be able to stay out of this campaign and must certainly suffer Shaken Morale also. Also, waiting for the Americans would not be possible either, at least not initially, because they take up to 18 months before they are a major force.

My objectives for 1917 will have to be to maximise German DM and at the same time I will want to equalise if possible French and British DM. This second aspect seems quite likely now as the British are suffering submarine losses and the Near East is also warming up. As for German DM a good goal for me would be German Economic Collapse by the end of 1917 which requires 550 DM and would leave another 600 DM to achieve for German surrender in 1918.²

One can see from this that the Germans have an overwhelming requirement to minimise their losses in 1917 and to avoid Economic Collapse (if it is delayed until 1918 then the Germans get another 300 DM to play with before Collapse). This must mean hunkering down and forcing the Allies to take

² I actually think German morale is weaker now than Austrian morale relative to what they will have to face in the remainder of the game. It is certainly finely balanced between them.

every bit of the burden of attack. Assuming the Germans can get a 1:1 loss ratio (which is pessimistic from their point of view) the British and French will have more than 500 DM³ to share out also, which considering other losses, would take them both close to the 1000 DM mark (with French Morale Shaken and only about 200 – 300 away from Economic Collapse). The French will be very frightened of Economic Collapse and this should ensure that the British have to keep up their efforts which could endanger their manpower reserves.

The difficulty the Germans have to confront at some point is that the game does not let them win by staying on the defensive in the West indefinitely. Because no power will voluntarily cross a critical threshold (Economic Collapse and Surrender) the final DM push must involve an offensive by the side bidding to win. Therefore, Germany has to somehow retain an offensive potential that it can use on the Western Front before its own Morale starts to go critical and before the Americans come in large numbers.

In theory the Germans have this potential. They can stack at greater concentrations than the Allies, even more so when assault troops come in, and they should have generous supply stockpiles. They are allowed to keep 850 supply points stockpiled in 1917, though this reduces to 700 in 1918, perhaps forcing a Caparetto or Cambrai counter-stroke. Germany should recognise the advantage of artillery firepower as well – which comes cheap for manpower). If the loss ratio in 1917 is 1:1, I doubt Germany will be able to build this offensive mass. It must therefore do significantly better in the defensive phase and that depends on a Western Front as strong as possible and uniformly so in order not to invite the Allies to attack weak points. It will also require quick reinforcement of attacked hexes because with the 1917 CRT they will be critically weakened in the first attack and they must be repaired before the follow up attacks. However, if the loss ratios are significantly higher than 1:1 then Allied attacks will falter and German losses will be lower. If they then get a chance to attack Allied forces which are depleted and have exhausted their supplies in attack then the German counter-offensive might succeed.

³ Less if you take account of the food deficit.