

## Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT196: 27 – 30 November 1916 (7 November)

### General Situation

It was time to change the French government. A reshuffle of leading ministers produced a new administration which needed to impose fresh impetus on the war effort. That meant, Joffre was time expired and he was kicked upstairs to an honourable retirement. His recent “vacation” was brought up again and now was proof than more energetic men were needed at the top.

The new blood at the head of the French Army was General Nivelle, a surprise appointment who had risen through the ranks as the artillery commander at Péronne and under Pétain in the Lorraine Offensive. He was therefore associated with the most visible French successes of 1916. In his first meeting with the new French cabinet, Nivelle disclosed that the campaign in 1917 would be fought under different conditions. The new CRT1917 high explosive would be introduced throughout the Allied Armies and, with this, a breakthrough was a realistic goal.

In London, the Tory Party was restive. They had no problem with Haig. He was one of theirs. Instead the Liberal Government was under strain and a consensus was emerging that Lloyd-George would be an acceptable figure with which to displace the Prime Minister and institute a Coalition Government.

### Eastern Front



Figure 1: The Tsar's Winter Offensive, 28 - 30 November 1916

The argument between STAVKA and the Tsar was resolved when the latter issued unmistakable orders on 28 November to make a general advance in Poland and Lithuania.

For the Tsar, the situation demanded action. Reports showed the enemy had weakened their front and would not resist a forward movement of the Russian Armies. Nicolas did not require an immediate move on Warsaw, but it seemed to him a disgrace to be deterred by such a flimsy defence.

STAVKA had to comply and the Russian 6th, 10th, 4th and 9th Armies all advanced in Eastern Poland. The 6th Army secured Bialystok which had been held only by light patrols prior to this. A subsidiary advance by the Russian 2nd Army reduced the length of the front held between the 12th Army on the Nieman and the 1st Army on the Venta River.

STAVKA's objection to this campaign, which became known as the Tsar's Winter Offensive, was that it firstly had no immediate military necessity. Second, the troops were tired and poorly supplied. They were forced to leave trench lines they had occupied since the summer with moderate comfort and head out across icy plains with little cover. The morale of these men was fragile at best and the Tsar was using up much of his remaining authority in requiring the Army to perform a dubious operation on the eve of winter. When, a few weeks later, the Tsar would need the support of the Imperial Army, he would find that the reserves of loyalty were drained away.

### The Balkan Front



Figure 2: Central Serbia, attacks on the Brvenica Front, 27 November 1916.

In mountain hugging mists a desperate struggle took place on 27 November at crossings of the Brvenica River between Pantinë and Vërnicë (7-6.0804). Two Bulgarian Brigades were badly shot up as Serbian and Montenegrin sharp shooters rained fire on the river bank. By the following morning, the local Serbian IV Corps commander was reporting the enemy had been repulsed. He nevertheless



requested urgent reinforcement as a 20 kilometre stretch of the river had only one Montenegrin Brigade holding the line until reinforcements could arrive.

### The Near East



Figure 3: The attack on the Jaffa Road, 29 - 30 November 1916.

The Allied offensive against the Jaffa-Jerusalem line was not over. Murray's next move was to switch the attack from the inland region to the coastal road. The Turkish front here was held by their 26<sup>th</sup> Division which also had a further regiment (the regiment of Damascus) in reserve.

The attack which was made on 29 November was led by the Indian 5<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Divisions. They were ordered to advance up the main coast road (8-8.2029) toward Jaffa. Support was provided by the British 3<sup>rd</sup> Division but Murray had wanted to commit the 28<sup>th</sup> Division also to this decisive blow. However, that unit was held up during the transfer of troops to the coast because of the threat of a Turkish move against British communications in the centre where the key movements were taking place. This was itself the result of the difficulties of re-orientating the logistical hub of the Expeditionary Force back to the coast.

The above assessment was made at great length in the Official History and is perhaps hard to follow. What in fact happened is that the attack on 29 November was undoubtedly just too weak. The Indian Corps attacked smartly enough and penetrated the Turkish defences. The Turkish 26<sup>th</sup> Division counterattacked again and again until it was a shell. Djemal Pasha knew this was a decisive moment and the Damascus Regiment was committed on 30 November and helped secure the Turkish second line. By this stage, Murray was losing faith in the ability of the Indians to break through and the failure of the 28<sup>th</sup> Division to arrive was something of an excuse for the ultimate failure of the operation even though there were other units available, including the full strength but inexperienced New Zealand Division which was barely used during the whole operation. Late on 30 November, Murray's quartermaster provided clear reports showing that the attacks had depleted

the Expeditionary Forces supplies and without more ammunition it was hard to see how a breakthrough could occur.



Figure 4: Maude makes a move, 29 - 30 November 1916.

Coincidentally, the Iraq Expeditionary Force also began active operations against Baghdad on 29 November as Maude instigated a concentration against the extreme left of the Turkish defensive perimeter. This resulted in an attack on 30 November by the Irish 10<sup>th</sup> Division and the Indian 4<sup>th</sup> Division near Bald Ruz (7-9.3019). This was only intended to be a test of the enemy defences but the Irish got ambushed by an Arab Division (Firat) and suffered very painful losses before they managed to extract themselves. This was a discouraging start for the new campaign.

### Western Front

On 29 November, Haig was entertained by his Staff and a large number of senior officers in France attended a "party" to celebrate approximately his first year in command. It was a low key affair and was held as a wind down from a conference in which ideas were exchanged for the campaign of 1917 in preparation for inter-Allied meetings in the following weeks. One unfortunate Major-General got a little enthusiastic and told Haig to his face that he should not be disappointed in failing to capture any enemy held hexes because this would surely change next year. At this observation the whole room went quiet. After a pregnant pause someone nervously offered a toast to the Chief and the bustle returned. Two days later, the Major-General got transfer papers appointing him High-Commissioner in a tropical Protectorate situated a long way up river.

### Italian Front

As more and more reports of German reinforcements came in at the end of November, a palpable sense of nervousness permeated the Italian Army commands. The Italian 3rd, 2nd and 6th Armies were warned to be particularly alert. Cadorna was sceptical that any attack was imminent but could not safely dispel the sense of foreboding which at least motivated his subordinates to guard their fronts more carefully.

## DM Summary – November 1916

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit #	Month	Total [% SM]	Morale
Germany	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	11	11	1501 [93.81]	Good
Austria-Hungary	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	619 [112.54]	Economic Collapse
Ottoman	-	-	-	2	1	2	4	1	10	113 [32.29]	Good
Bulgaria	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	2	30	Good
Central Powers	-	-	-	2	1	2	2	12	23	2263	
France	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	826 [91.78]	Good
Great Britain	-	-	-	2	2	-	5	18	27	451 [35.37]	Good
Russia	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	1	863 [143.83]	Shaken
Italy	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	139 [46.33]	Good
Romania	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	233	Good
Belgium	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	(105)	NA
Serbia	-	-	-	-	-	-	(1)	-	(1)	(41)	NA
Entente	-	-	-	2	2	1	5	18	28	2512	

### Player Notes

CP:

- *East: Nothing has caused me to adjust my activities on this front, but a Russian cavalry probe towards Warsaw has prompted me to dispatch two of my reserve divs held on rails to move to the central front to discourage too much adventurousness. The winter months will enable Russia to replenish its strength and probably regain some combativeness. He will, for the most part, have to advance away from his railheads to conduct any offensive activity (except on the border with AH). My spies should be able to give plenty of forewarning of any concentrations of troops or supply. So, as long as I can maintain a few reserve divs able to rapidly redeploy by rail, I should be able to focus my attentions away from the EF to more convincing threats.*
- *Balkans: I know that the Serbs have been slowly and gradually rebuilding RPLs. I don't wish them to regain full strength although suspect I will not be able to stop this. Still, I launch a small reminder that I still have teeth by means of a limited attack across the Brvenica River using a combined AH-Bulgarian force.*
- *Caucasus: I gained a fair bit of ground in the eastern sector of the front. Not sure it actually gains me anything, but it does permit me a degree of breathing space so I can send a few divs off to the Middle East. I hope they get there in time.*
- *Mesopotamia: I strengthen my centre at the expense of my left flank.*

- *Palestine: I have played this front badly. I don't know why I thought a policy of entrenching right on the outskirts of Jerusalem and making him come to me was effective strategy. It would possible be if I had aimed to send a div per month to this front, but I allowed myself to become distracted from most of the other Ottoman fronts by the Caucasus.*
- *Italy: Dubrovnik is reoccupied and this little sideshow is now utterly quiescent. The German Mt divs start arriving on the Italian front.*
- *West. I have a number of new divs and RPLs available in Dec, so I have used this turn to move the three mobile reserve divs I had on rails to help reinforce potentially vulnerable points along the line. Robert does not tend to attack without purpose, but I'm sure he also wouldn't want to waste a double air superiority opportunity.*

AP: This month takes the record so far for the quietest in respect of DM losses, beating August and December 1915 and January 1916.

The following reviews the state of morale of the major powers and some minor ones from the perspective of the end of November each year.

<b>Germany</b>	<b>1 December 1914</b>	<b>1 December 1915</b>	<b>1 December 1916</b>	<b>New Year Morale bonus</b>
Morale (DM spare) EC/Surrender	645/795	470/670	299/549	250/300

<b>Austria-Hungary</b>	<b>1 December 1914</b>	<b>1 December 1915</b>	<b>1 December 1916</b>	<b>New Year Morale bonus</b>
Morale (DM spare) EC/Surrender	165/240	86/161	[-19]/81	100/100

<b>Turkey</b>	<b>1 December 1914</b>	<b>1 December 1915</b>	<b>1 December 1916</b>	<b>New Year Morale bonus</b>
Morale (DM spare) EC/Surrender	290/340	318/368	337/387	50/50

With the CP powers we see that Germany and Austria-Hungary have had sharp declines in Morale steadily each year. The Germans will rely heavily on their New Year bonus. Austria is already sunk below Economic Collapse but its +100 Morale bonus at New Year is likely relatively better than Germany's so there may be some resilience left in the Austrians. Turkey's improving Morale shows that Morale as opposed to DM is not a one way street in DWK.

<b>Great Britain</b>	<b>1 December 1914</b>	<b>1 December 1915</b>	<b>1 December 1916</b>	<b>New Year Morale bonus</b>
Morale (DM spare) EC/Surrender	752/852	873/973	849/999	200/200

France	1 December 1914	1 December 1915	1 December 1916	New Year Morale bonus
Morale (DM spare) EC/Surrender	155/230	204/325	224/374	150/150

Russia	1 December 1914	1 December 1915	1 December 1916	New Year Morale bonus
Morale (DM spare) EC/Surrender	564/714	176/326	37/187	50/50

Italy	1 December 1914	1 December 1915	1 December 1916	New Year Morale bonus
Morale (DM spare) EC/Surrender	NA	227/252	211/261	50/50

*This shows the steep decline in Russian Morale. Italian and French Morale is fairly fragile. British Morale has probably peaked and has started to decline in relation to Economic Collapse (slightly). The key point, however, is that British and French Morale has generally risen during the first half of the game but with the French it is rising out of a calamitous trough that was at its nadir in late 1914.*

*It may be noted that in the last 2 months French DM has been overtaken by German DM as a percentage of Shaken Morale for the first time. This applies also to the more critical thresholds which come afterwards as well. This has happened because German DM has been rising much faster than French DM. That is a function of the initiative the Allies have on the Western Front. I have been in near total control of French loss rates and as such I will not let the French break themselves. It has taken two years of effort also to get them back on an even footing with the Germans.*

*There are only two things which can change this trajectory. Either the French must be forced to attack more frequently and at more disadvantageous odds than they would like. This implies very strong CP lines in the west and the Allies under pressure to inflict German DM more rapidly than they can comfortably manage. Or the CP has to take the initiative in the West and focus it on the French. This suggests either extreme defence or extreme attack will be best for the CP.*

German DM	%	French DM	%
Shaken Morale	93.81	Shaken Morale	91.78
Economic Collapse 1916	83.39	Economic Collapse 1916	78.67
Economic Collapse 1917	73.21	Economic Collapse 1917	68.83
Surrender 1918	56.64	Surrender 1918	55.07