

Centenary Game – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT197: 1 – 5 December 1916 (1 December)

General Situation

On 3 December, in London, Prime Minister Asquith resigned having been completely undermined by the demands for a Coalition Government. Lloyd-George took over as Prime Minister and promised a much more energetic style of leadership with the aim of winning the war as quickly as possible.

Despite that nobody expected the Western Front to spring to life immediately. It appeared that even Haig had recognised there was nothing to be gained from resuming the offensive prematurely.

Public attention had a chance therefore to focus on other fronts. On the alarming side of the equation were the losses being experienced at sea as the German submarine campaign cut into the Merchant Navy. On the hopeful side, was the campaign in the Near East where Murray had been reported as claiming he would have Jerusalem by Christmas. Murray had made no such claim but unfortunately for him the press in London made it a fact.

The Near East

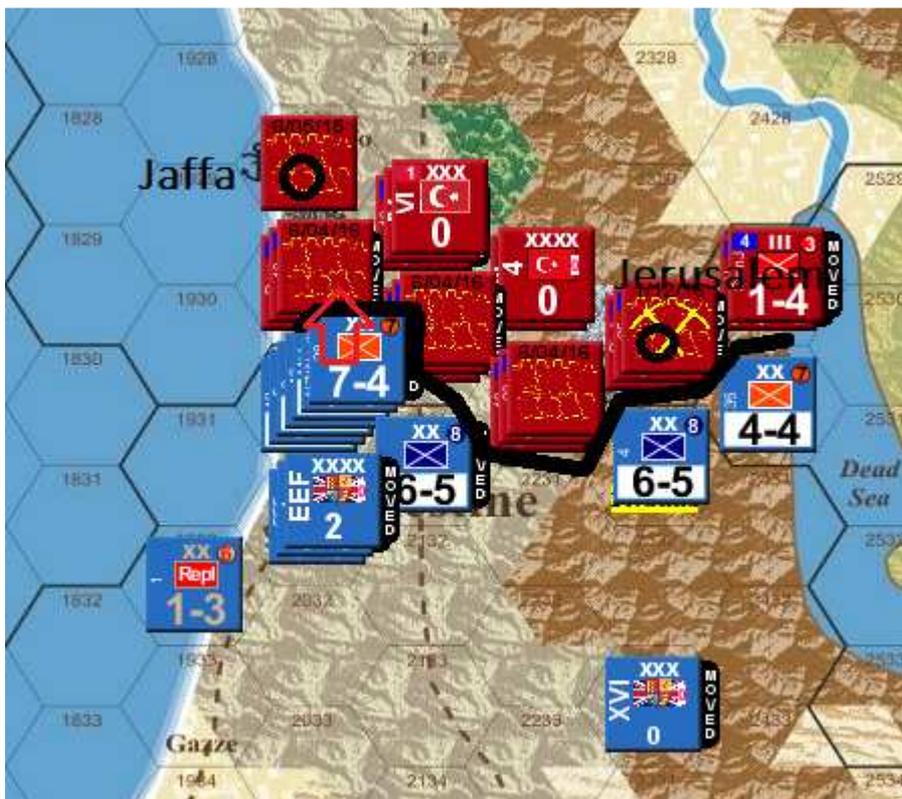


Figure 1: The British take a second strike toward Jaffa, 3 - 5 December 1916.

Murray was actually getting a little desperate in his efforts to break the Jaffa-Jerusalem line, which was by now universally referred to as the J-J line. The attacks by the Indian Corps at the end of November had come close to breaking through. By the time, Murray was organised for a further effort on 3 December, the Turks had reinforced and the Turkish 10th Division sat astride the Gaza-Jaffa road (8-8.2029) which remained Murray's focus. Murray's weakness now was lack of shells but

the Turkish trenches might still be taken by infantry rushes he considered. The British 3rd and 28th Divisions were now available to lead the assault and for two days they tried against a Turkish defence that managed to stop the bravest of assaults. After heavy losses, Murray called the effort off on 5 December and a pause was thus imposed on his plans.



Figure 2: Maude's movements east of Baghdad, 1 - 5 December 1916.

While Murray elected frontal attack, Maude was attempting manoeuvre against Baghdad. The Turks had reacted to the probe by the 10th Irish Division at Bald Ruz (7-9.3019) and strengthened that position. Now Maude attempted extending his right wing further to Delli Abbas (7-9.3018) where the 24th Indian Division reported observing a thin enemy cavalry screen covering the road towards La Wajhiya (7-9.2919) on 5 December. These moves stretched Maude's line of communication but the Turkish 6th Army still had a tight grip on Baghdad and something other than a direct attack would be needed to prise it out of its defensive shell.

While the campaigning conditions in the Arab regions were about as good as they ever got, the situation in the Caucasus was much more unpleasant. Heavy snowfalls and blocked roads meant more isolated units could actually starve. It was hardest on the Turks whose logistical arrangements were weakest. In early December, the Turkish III Corps was pulled out of the Caucasus altogether. This was partly to provide a reserve which might go to Palestine or Baghdad but it was also to spare these men a winter in the mountains.

Western Front

Conditions on the Western Front were not always pleasant either. A German soldier of the 14th Army wrote to his family on 2 December complaining in a manner which got him into trouble with the censor:

“...the French lines in the direction of Noyon always seem to have a few enemy aircraft patrolling above them. It is a long time since any of our fighters have driven them off.

The guns have been mostly quiet, according to our standards, for the last month. The worst thing about life in the trenches at the moment is the overcrowding. I thought defence in depth was the coming thing, but you do not see much of that here. Moving back and forward from the reserve line takes an age as you have to spend hours waiting for other units to go by. Yesterday, our Leutnant went berserk when we returned to the line. Some ridiculous Landwehr, who are supposed to keep the lines of communication open, allowed the Guards Cavalry to stack their equipment along one of the main communications trenches. It was so over-stacked that their things had toppled over and completely blocked the way. We had to cut across open country. If the French had not been sleeping on the job, that could have been a very serious situation for us.

It is not so easy to rationally plan things at the front. The rumours are that new more extensive trench lines have been completed to the rear.¹ If we should ever occupy them, I do not think we would suffer from these same problems...”

Italian Front

A strong build up by the Central Powers continued on the Italian Front. This had not yet shown itself in any fighting as the whole front was currently quiet. Snow was starting to fall more thickly in the mountains and those who could ski were waxing their equipment.

Eastern Front

The Tsar’s Winter Offensive had pushed the Russian West Front up to 80 kilometres further forward. In doing so little contact had been made with the German 15th Army which was mostly concentrated on the Vistula which was still another 60 kilometres ahead of the Russian spearheads. There was closer contact between the Russian 4th Army and the German 11th Army along the Wieprz River to the east of Lublin but no major fighting worthy of report.

Balkans

There was no significant action on the Balkan Front in early December and it seemed that this was also settling down for winter.

Player Notes

CP: So winter weather settles in again and I think I need this winter to somewhat re-cock and reassess overall strategy. AH is in crisis but I think the greatest threat at the moment resides with the Turks; particularly in the Middle East. I played the Turks with a strategy of making the enemy come to them after initial forays deep into the Caucasus proved impossible to sustain and likewise dipping my toes in the Suez Canal was a waste of time. Turkey was incapable of maintaining long supply lines, and so I opted to draw back into main defensive areas. In the Middle East these centred on Jerusalem and Baghdad. The drawback to this is that when the enemy finally sorts out his own supply lines and concentrates his force, and is then capable of getting at the defences, they are right on critical strategic infrastructure. This

¹ An allusion to the completion of the Hindenburg Line in all probability.

is what I am now facing outside Jerusalem and, to a lesser extent, Baghdad. He is clearly fighting a war of attrition on these fronts and he can afford to do so as it takes so long for any replacements to reach the Turkish fronts.

On the development front, I fail to attain air parity even but his superiority in the air has lessened slightly. There are no advances in gas development. Germany takes all the food losses (11 DM) which are somewhat alleviated by the occupation of Romania. Manpower is critical for Germany so Germany sends weapons to both AH² and Turkey. I may opt to also build the Bulgarian armed forces into something more effective with arms shipments to them in future. They could use an injection of RPLs.³ I hope to do some consolidation over the winter and can largely discount offensive activity from the Italians, who will be reluctant to attack in the mountains. They may attack along the Isonzo but I almost hope they will.

- East: In the centre the Russians have probed forward somewhat and I may have to slap them down with some small scale raiding into Russian territory. As a result, I send several newly formed divisions to the east. I may also try and discourage him along the front with AH.*
- Balkans: I suspect the lines here will remain static for the next few months.*
- Caucasus: I have thinned the troop concentrations in the Caucasus to allow for some reinforcements to be dispatched to the Iraqi front. It is quicker to do so from the Caucasus than by sending along the Ottoman rail lines.*
- Mesopotamia: The northernmost trenches have been attacked to I have tried to better protect that flank which is critical to sustaining Baghdad.*
- Palestine: All I can do here is hope for some respite while he restocks his supplies. Rather ridiculously, he can get troops and supply to this theatre quicker than I can rail them to my own forces. The Turks are regretting their lack of investment in transport infrastructure. Some H2S would be enormously valued right now!*
- Italy: I am building up an entire mountain army by the Germans on the Italian front.*
- West. The Hindenburg Line is completed. This frees up my engineers and I have sent most of them off to co-locate with HQs in the event they have to withdraw at some stage into these defences. For now, this line of defences allows me to fall back to a buffer zone should that become expedient. I have some plans but cannot disclose them in this format until they have been executed. I suspect the enemy is monitoring my despatches!*

AP: I am very disappointed with the failure of my attack south of Jaffa last turn. It had a 50% chance of success and would have seriously impaired the viability of the J-J line. Now I am much less optimistic than I was in November as I am down on supply and the Turks will have a chance to reinforce. All this is partly my fault in that I miscalculated the switch of units before making the attack. I assumed I would have an extra British Division in the attack and this would have guaranteed complete success. The reason I couldn't do this was because my HQ was immobile and needed to be protected from a possible Turkish attack and the spare British Division was the only unit that could

² RL note: Actually I do not think that is allowed. GCR 47-5 allows weapon transfers between major and minor powers with major defined as Germany, Austria-Hungary, Great Britain, France, Russia, and Italy. Thus Germany cannot give to Austria and Britain cannot give to Italy. Supply transfers have different rules as to what is allowed (GCR 21).

³ RL note: GCR 47-5 also requires that REPL purchases with weapon transfers cost double. This is to prevent SPs becoming interchangeable between nations. Ordinary new units do not suffer this penalty. REPL purchases with transferred weapon points should be for emergencies because they are inefficient.

block it at the expense of participating in the attack. My instinct was to protect the HQ but I am now wondering if that was wrong. I could have recovered from that whereas getting through this Turkish front would be a very big win for the Allies.

DM Summary – December 1916

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit #	Month	Total	Morale
Germany	-							11	11	1512	Good
Austria-Hungary	-							-	-	619	Economic Collapse
Ottoman	2							2	4	117	Good
Bulgaria	-							-	-	30	Good
Central Powers	2							13	15	2288	
France	-							-	-	826	Good
Great Britain	4							16	20	471	Good
Russia	-							1	1	864	Shaken
Italy	-							-	-	139 [46.33]	Good
Romania	-							-	-	233	Good
Belgium	-							-	-	(105)	NA
Serbia	-							-	-	(41)	NA
Entente	4							17	21	2533	