

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT199: 10 – 14 December 1916 (3 December)

General Situation

Vienna, 10 December 1916, was the scene for the funeral of Kaiser Franz-Josef. What was perhaps most remarkable was how unremarked his death had been. In fact, one should say the Emperor's passing was almost forgotten. The wheels of Hapsburg protocol moved slowly and the Emperor had expired over three weeks previously with no official announcement. The circumstances of wartime and the fact that it had been so long since there had been any precedent meant that the ceremonies leading up to the service in St Stephen's Cathedral had been decidedly low key and verging on the private.

The new Emperor Karl also kept mostly out of sight and had spent the period prior to the funeral in formal mourning interrupted by a tour to the Armies in Galicia which meant he was away from Vienna.

The funeral itself was poorly attended. Half the Archduke's were kept at their posts at the fronts and the lesser nobility had much the same problem. There was also a lack of appetite for a spectacle which so obviously expressed the spirit of an age which was rapidly passing.

Near East



Figure 1: The Back Road to Baghdad, 10 - 14 December 1916.

The battle developing north east of Baghdad, later known as the Battle of the Dilaya, was fast moving. The Turkish 6th Army was now fully alert to the threat that Maude was creating on their left flank and the possibility of the British reaching Baghdad by the back road through Ba Qubah was recognised.

On 11 and 12 December, the Turks attacked at Al Wajhiya hoping to recover Miqdadiyah (7-9.3018). The terrain here was as flat as a pancake and the road to Miqdadiyah ran through the positions of the Indian 4th Division. The Arab Firat Division and the Turkish 113th Regiment launched repeated attacks assisted by field guns which did some damage to the Indian infantry positions. Nevertheless, the attackers came under sustained bursts of machine gun fire and without cover this proved enough to break down their brave attacks.

Under cover of this sterling defence, Maude kept extending his right wing. By 13 December, he had four Indian Brigades astride the Diyala River and these were ordered to move down the river. Apart from some low hills which broke the level terrain, this was a rural region of small villages and fields (7-9.2818). The inhabitants were busy with agricultural activities with which they doggedly persisted despite the disturbing sounds of gunfire which increasingly shook the bucolic peace. This would have to be a pure infantry operation because Maude had not got sufficient artillery ammunition with the leading troops. On 13 and 14 December, the Indian forces were opposed by nothing more than a brigade of Arab Cavalry raised in Baghdad but the infantry were much baffled by the rapid movements of this cavalry which threw up dust clouds wherever they went and frequently threatened to charge. One Indian Battalion was even ordered to form square, the last recorded use of this formation in the annals of warfare.

After two days, the advance had been disappointingly slow. The Turkish cordon was still intact. Maude was furious to have been held up by weak enemy forces.

Western Front

General Nivelle was settling in to his new responsibilities and visiting each of the French Army Headquarters in the Central Sector of the Western Front between the Aisne and Lorraine. This was preparation for the Grand Inter-Allied Conference which was to begin at Chantilly (the Second Chantilly Conference) later that month. Nivelle exuded optimism. He assured all listeners that German morale would soon crack and he made it plain that he had plans to take the offensive. Some of those who knew the intelligence reports very well tried to bring him to discuss the signs that the Germans were very well prepared to meet further attacks. They pointed especially to the evidence of huge German supply dumps that had been spotted from the air, but the new commander brushed these facts aside.

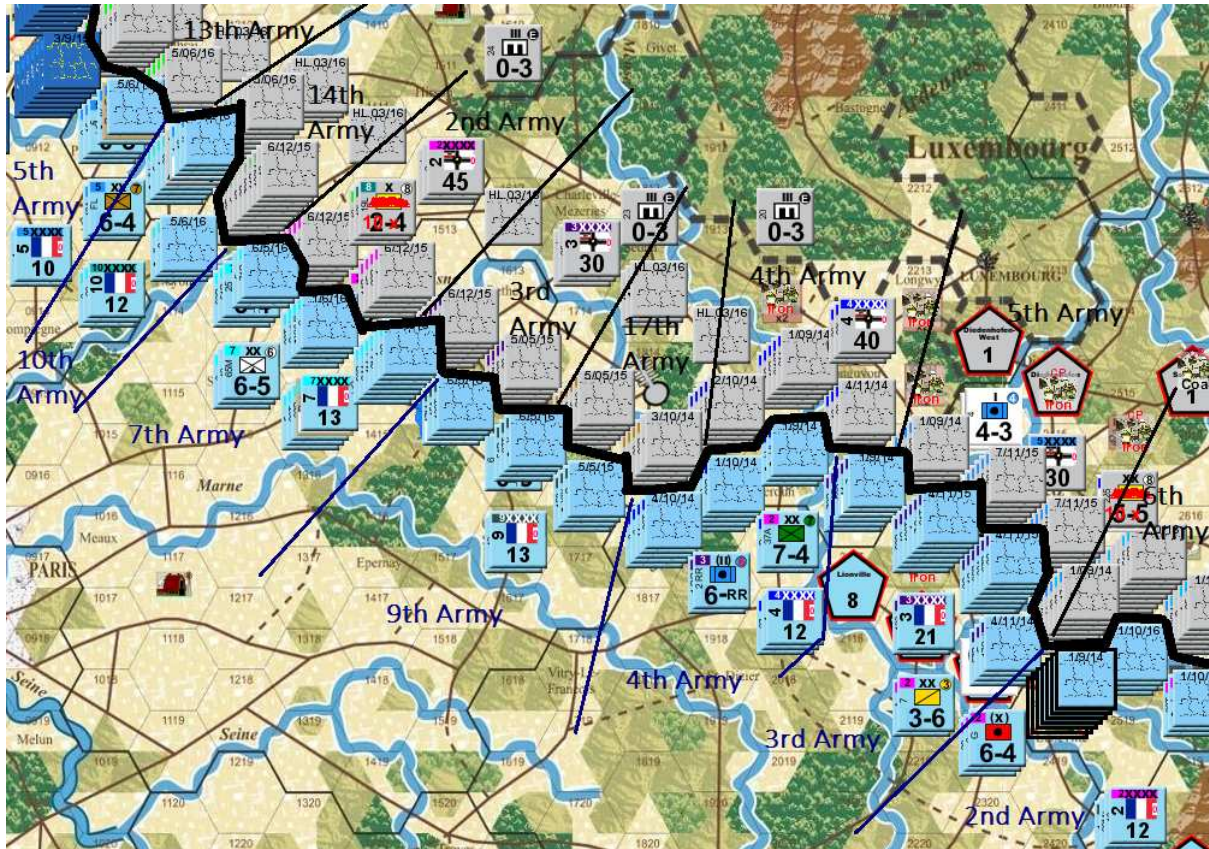


Figure 2: The Central Sector of the Western Front, 10 - 14 December 1916.

Italian Front

In normal times, General Cadorna would have given Nivelle a run for his money in any competition to be the most optimistic. However, in the last days before his departure to France for the Chantilly Conference, the Italian Chief-of-Staff was getting decidedly nervous about the increasing evidence that the enemy was planning something. On 14 December, Cadorna looked at a report which claimed there were at least twelve German Divisions on the Italian front, most in reserve, and most behind the Isonzo and Julian Alps sectors. This was on top of the evidence that heavy German siege guns had been moved to the theatre and other supplies were on their way.

Cadorna looked out the windows of his headquarters and, as his memoirs recorded, he looked at the rain streaming down the window panes as the light faded. He knew also that this meant it was snowing in the mountains. He knew the Italian 2nd Army was particularly jumpy and had been predicting an enemy offensive. This had meant reinforcements had been dispatched to this part of the front. With these precautions, Cadorna decided it was safe for him to go to France. All military sense spoke against an enemy attack at this time of year. The Austrians were supposed to be mourning the late Emperor so this apparent preparation for an attack was probably a bluff or perhaps some strange tribute to Franz Josef. Either way, Italy needed to be at Chantilly with their highest representatives and Cadorna would have to go.

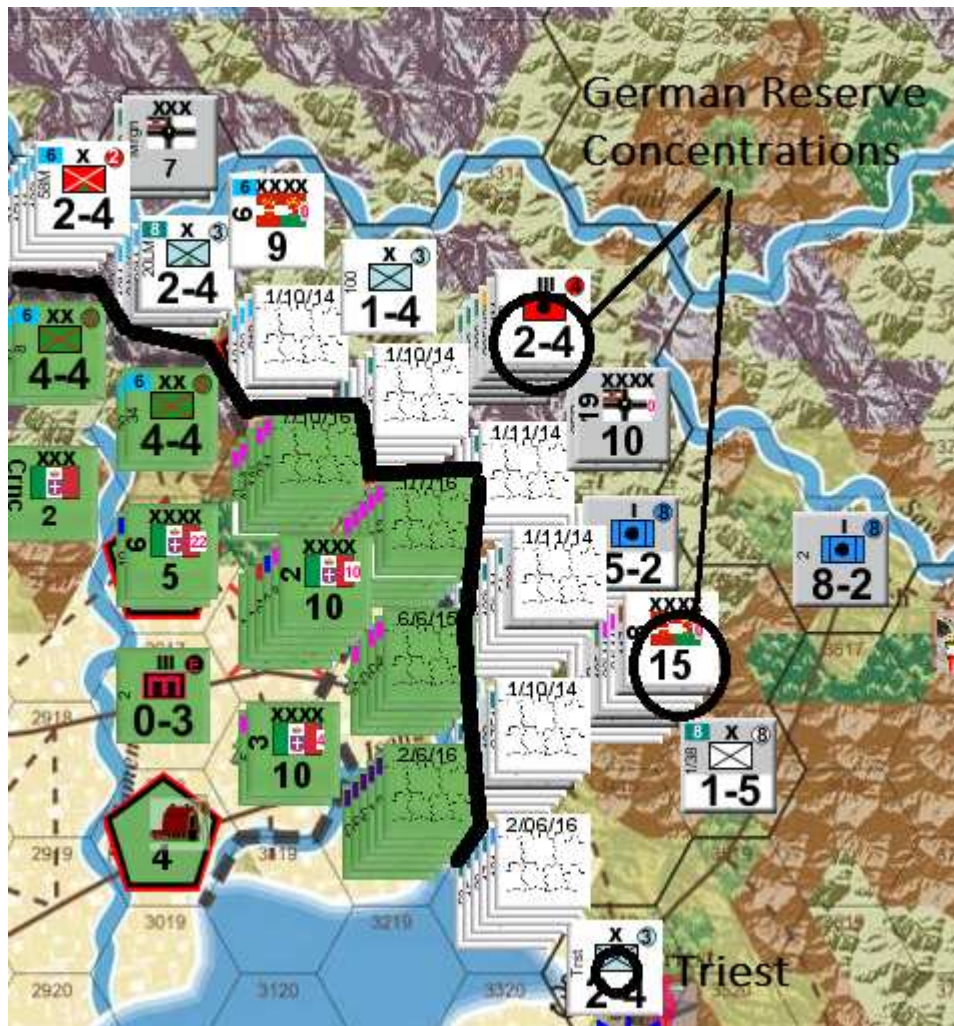


Figure 3: The Isonzo Front in mid-December 1916.

Eastern Front

The Russians were digging in along the lines gained in Poland as a result of the Tsar's Winter Offensive. The ground was of course very hard and it took days of labour to produce even shallow trenches. The work was hated by the infantry. However, the spirit was most mutinous in the so-called Strengthened Cavalry Divisions. It had been a point of pride for the Cavalry in the early part of the war that they were never required to construct trenches or earthworks. However, the newer Cavalry Divisions were treated interchangeably as if infantry by their officers and they were expected to work the spade also.

One of the bad features of the Tsar's Winter Offensive was that it led to no serious fighting with the enemy, but it further exacerbated the poor relations between officers and soldiers in the Imperial Army.

Balkans

The Austrians returned to Montenegro on 11 December as the 28th Gebirge Landwehr worked their way up towards the headwaters of the Ibar River in the mountains near Korita (7-6.0504). This was an infiltration designed to stretch the Allied defences along the Ibar. The French 72nd Reserve

Division was watching bridging points further downstream but was forced to head into the remote Northern Albanian Alps as they tried to keep pace with the nimble Austrian mountaineers.

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					2	6	119	Good
Bulgaria	-	-	-					-	-	30	Good
Central Powers	2	-	2					13	17	2290	
France	-	-	-					-	-	826	Good
Great Britain	4	-	1					16	21	472	Good
Russia	-	-	-					1	1	864	Shaken
Italy	-	-	-					-	-	139 [46.33]	Good
Romania	-	-	-					-	-	233	Good
Belgium	-	-	-					-	-	(105)	NA
Serbia	-	-	-					-	-	(41)	NA
Entente	4	-	1					17	22	2534	

Player Notes

CP:

- *East: I have now reinforced the central area around Warsaw quite strongly. If Robert's Russians feel frisky, then the Germans are ready for a fight (and may even take it to them). The rest of the front remains largely static from the CP perspective with much trench digging being done in the frozen ground alongside the Dniester.*
- *Balkans: Not as quiet as last turn. I am slowly sneaking out some of my Mt brigades west and risk outflanking him on his left flank. I am also slowly reinforcing the Balkans area with both AH and German troops.*
- *Caucasus: This front will likely remain as it is now through the winter. Neither of us are inclined towards offensive action in such dreadful conditions of weather and terrain.*
- *Mesopotamia: My left flank is in serious danger of being turned so I am compelled to send force elements northwards, thus reducing the Baghdad garrison, to secure my riverine LoC from being interdicted; which would be a disaster. I also risk a limited offensive to further blunt his outflanking manoeuvre.*
- *Palestine: Static with a sense of desperation within the Turkish lines.*
- *Italy: I now have significant strength concentrated on the Italian front and will shortly have two German armies in the region; one of which is made up purely of hardened*

mountain divisions. I will not be seeking a fight over the winter, however, and doubt whether Cadorna will be up for it either.

- *West. Quiet. I have reinforced some of the likely points of attack but am not expecting it yet.*

AP: Continuing the review of the different fronts as they are at the end of 1916 I consider now the Economic Front having already addressed the crucial element of supply production (mostly shells). I will consider food separately in a subsequent AAR instalment.

In DWK production is a function of date, morale, industrial capacity (factories), raw materials, transportation (shipping) and manpower. There is also an element of transfer of weapon production between nations. The consequence of this is that the production system looks complicated and cumbersome. It is certainly an aspect of the game which I have wondered might be simplified. However, I have deferred judgement. I am by no means completely convinced but, as a general rule, I have found that the longer I play this game the better appreciation I have for some of its subtleties. I should also mention that with the Vassal system resource tables in use I find I can do Allied production each month in less than an hour – which is the advantage of having a useful record keeping system (an improvement on the time it takes when you are unfamiliar with it). That might still seem a lot to some people but it is a big game and choices have to be made. Another defence of the production system is that it ought also to work with alternative history conflicts – whether they do or not I do not know.

One feature of the production system is that if the game follows roughly historical lines then I doubt that either side is going to suffer a decisive economic crisis before 1918 and perhaps not even then. This is a good thing in that you do not want the game to spiral out of control for non-military reasons without good reason. However, it is one of the reasons why I wondered if the system could be simplified. The difficulty question then would be what should be the response to events on the ground?

One general feature of the production system is delayed reaction. Because of the possibility of stockpiling weapons, manpower and resources you might find that after a significant change there is a delay of around 3 – 12 months before you feel all of the effects. This is partly because of the production time cycle. Supply production is lost first. Production of new units dries up later.

Date: *The importance of date is that some powers take a time to reach their full potential economically. This is pretty much hard-wired into the game. Germany, France, Britain, Russia and the US all have production increases based purely on time. In 1916, Germany has been enjoying a peak of weapon production which starts relatively late (the effects come through in mid-1916).*

Morale: *Increased DM reduces production of supply, weapons and manpower depending on nationality. The CP is much more vulnerable to this than the AP. Despite everything, the Russian Army is still growing. Its weakness is that it cannot be used now without destroying the Russian will to fight on. The French do not slow weapon production when they suffer Shaken Morale but the Germans do and their 1916 peak will likely terminate sometime in 1917. As Austria-Hungary has already collapsed economically it will soon start to feel its reduced production (units built in the summer are still feeding through).*

Industrial Capacity: *Very few factories have changed hands in this game that are important: Lille; Warsaw; Riga (lost and regained) plus a few in Belgium and Serbia. This is therefore one of the variables which is not likely to vary. The loss of Lille represents a reduction of French weapon production by one sixth and supply by one seventh so it is not an insignificant gain by Germany.*

However, it might be noted that France's actions are now constrained more by morale than by any lack of units so this is perhaps a bearable loss and less important now than it was in 1915 and early 1916 when the French Army was recovering from the initial German invasion.

Raw Materials: There has been no loss of production by any power due to lack of raw materials. Indeed many have stockpiles to the limits allowed. All CP powers have a 6 month stockpile of special metals. That is important because it means they have a 6 month lifeline in which production can continue after Turkey or Bulgaria surrender. The other potential shortage for the CP is for iron but this is covered by the fact that most of the French iron ore is in German hands. If this changed then CP stocks might slowly run down but this is unlikely in the near term.

The AP also seems comfortable in most respects. Russia never has to worry about raw materials. The Western Allies only have to be concerned to the extent that they might suffer shipping constraints with the US. The demand on shipping is controlled by the amount of resources that the CP has taken from the Allies in Western Europe as each resource or food lost will add one to their resource deficits that must be countered by importing. At present, the Germans are holding or preventing use of the resources of Belgium; plus 2 French coal; 11 French iron ore; 10 French food and one Italian food.¹ Any change in the line of the Western and Italian Fronts could increase or diminish the AP requirements.

Shipping: The AP currently has just 10 resource shipping points spare. US port capacity is also heavily devoted to resource transportation (only 27 points of port capacity are free for moving troops and supply). German U-boats are now attacking AP shipping, but when the US enters the war the shipping crisis may ease so long as the AP do not need to transport large numbers of units (which will probably not be until 1918).² I only have a rough feeling for this aspect of the game but my instinct is that the AP situation will be manageable unless the CP is able to advance their fronts in the West and that is not going to happen until French or Italian morale starts to become more critical. I might add that in 1915 – 1916 the Germans voluntarily retreated such that 4 French food resources were freed for production and I have re-captured one iron ore resource in France since 1914. These small shifts have possibly meant that shortages which otherwise would have occurred were avoided. However, the net effect of that would likely have been a few less healthy stockpiles on the Allied side. It really needs a more radical change in the position of the fronts for the AP production system to really start to sweat.

Manpower: Italy and Turkey are not concerned with manpower at all. Russia is hardly concerned in that its morale will result in surrender long before it runs out of manpower. France is in a more intermediate position particularly as its manpower will fall when its morale becomes shaken. Britain is more vulnerable not because its morale is at risk yet but because it must expect very hard fighting in 1917 and it will be subject to competing requirements to build new units and expand its army further and replace heavy losses. Both France and Britain have manpower stockpiles but these can evaporate quite fast if there is a big need for replacements – both seem to have peaked in that they stopped rising significantly in mid-1916.

The CP does have manpower concerns now. Germany has used up its manpower stockpile. I did question from time to time the fact that Germany did not build many new units at the expense of building lots of replacements. It seems logical to buy replacements if you have dead units and or

¹ I thought two Italian food resources were unusable (proximity to enemy) but that is not the case because the enemy units are on the far side of the International Border which makes a difference so the only Italian food lost is due to a nearby friendly trench.

² The US does not provide any additional resource shipping only naval transport and sustainment transport. These can be converted to resource shipping but only at a disadvantageous conversion rate.

understrength units on the board. However, replacements are the way in which you use up manpower fastest and to do so repeatedly drains the manpower pool and it is a sign that losses are rising too fast. The result for Germany now is that the ranks of its Army are very healthy and it is possible that it is difficult to use the latest replacements. However, the German Army is probably smaller than it could have been with a slower build up/recovery. Manpower will recover a little in the quiet phase of winter. Shortages could start to hurt in mid-1917 once casualties start to mount rapidly again. This will be exacerbated by reduced manpower availability once German morale is Shaken.

AH has similar problems to Germany for manpower but the effects of this are less likely to be felt because the lower intensity of action on the Austrian fronts.

As Germany will have to economise manpower, I would also recommend it deals with one of its other production weaknesses which is shortage of Artillery. Germany has been building more Artillery but even more would be better. Use of Artillery in combat also reduces the need for infantry (in defence) and reduces losses (relative to the defender) in attack. These advantages will be critical in the final stage of the game.

Transfers: *Weapon point transfers are allowed between major and minor powers. This is the key to allowing some minor powers to achieve their full potential. For the CP this means boosting Turkey and Bulgaria. It will become harder to afford this as Germany itself starts to struggle to afford all its requirements. At the moment the AP can only transfer to Serbia and Belgium but Greece will hopefully join in some day. The Belgian and Serbian Armies are still far from being at full strength.*