

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT48: 21 – 24 February 1915 (February 6)

General Situation

The fall of Belgrade on 21 February sent a shockwave around Europe. The Entente had failed to protect Serbia, just as it had allowed Belgium to be overrun. Russia was both furious and embarrassed. It was furious, because the French and British had done nothing to help Serbia. It was embarrassed, because Serbia was supposed to be Russia's client and *casus belli*.

The bells of Vienna and Budapest rang out to celebrate a much longed for reckoning for their unruly southern neighbour. Equally significant, was a meeting of diplomats in Berlin (rather than Vienna). A delegation from Bulgaria signed a treaty with German, Austro-Hungarian and Turkish representatives in which they committed their country to enter the war not later than 1 April 1915. Sofia believed the Central Powers had practically won the war and they had to be on the right side of it.

Serbia



Figure 1: The Fall of Belgrade, 21 February 1915.

To say that Belgrade gave the Austro-Hungarian 5th Army a sullen welcome would be an understatement. However, there was little time for introductions between the conquerors and conquered. The Austrians passed through swiftly as they were intent on pursuit of the Serbian Army. The only fighting was between officers of the Austrian 1st Landwehr Brigade as they competed for the best rooms in the Hotel Danube.

So far it was unclear how far the Serbians would retreat and in what direction. On 22 February, the Austrians had found no sign of the enemy for at least 20 kilometres south of their former lines on the Danube and the Kolubara. It was thought that the Serbians would most likely put up resistance at the crossings of the West Morava River.

On the German side of the Western Front everything seemed quite static. There was no sign that the Germans were expecting a new French attack so soon after the last one had been repelled.

The Eastern Front



Figure 3: The German 9th Army advances beyond Mszczonów towards Warsaw, 21 - 22 February 1915.

On 21 February (a terrible day for the Entente in many ways), the Germans made two simultaneous attacks on the Russian lines both of which smashed through defences which had held them at bay for several weeks.

In Prussia, the German 8th and 10th Armies cooperated in an attack on Angerburg (4-5.2007). The Russians had held this small Prussian town since the early days of the war but now two Russian Divisions were crushed there in the space of two days fighting. Few Russian survivors escaped the town as they were trapped by German infantry advancing from both sides.

South west of Warsaw, at Mszczonów (5-5.1901), the German 9th Army broke the Russian trench line defended by the 1st Siberian Division. This unit was at less than 50% of its effective strength and, when the Georgian Cossack Division and Russian 6th Cavalry Division attempted to intervene, their men and horses suffered innumerable losses in hopeless counterattacks against well-equipped German infantry. With minimal delay, the Germans were able to move further forward until on 24 February, the German 31st Division stood no more than 28 kilometres from the outer limits of Warsaw.

Kovess' Army continued to wrestle with the Russian 11th Army in the hills south of Stanislaw around Deliatyn (5-5.4015). The Russians had reinforced the beleaguered 3rd Rifle Division, but the Austro-Hungarians kept up a steady pressure on the Russians there. Meanwhile, both Russians and Austrians had thrown out flanking forces into eastern Bukovina in an attempt to get around the far end of each other's lines. The boldest move was by the Hungarian 20th Division which had found the rail line to Radăuți (5-5.4619) intact and advanced along it as far as it could go.

February 1915 DM Summary

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total	Morale
Germany	2	5	5	10	-	3		15	40	638	Good
Austria-Hungary	-	-	-	2	32	1		-	35	271	Good
Ottoman	-	-	-	-	-	-		NA	-	11	Good
Central Powers	2	5	5	12	32	4		15	43	920	
France	-	-	9	5	-	-		-	14	566	Good
Great Britain	-	-	-	6	-	-		-	6	70	Good
Russia	2	2	-	5	1	12		-	22	322	Good
Belgium	-	-	-	-	-	-		NA	-	(95)	NA
Serbia	-	-	-	(1)	(2)	-*		NA	(1)	(15)	NA *Belgrade lost
Entente	2	2	9	16	1	12		-	41	958	

Player Notes

CP:

- *East: It helps to really absorb the rules in detail. I have manoeuvred myself into a strong position along the Masurian Lakes to start clearing trenches and thought I had sufficient artillery to negate his trenches. I don't! I needed another siege arty unit. I still have a strong attack, but it will only clear the trench if he decides it is in his interests to do so. I also attack his trenches SW oh Warsaw. He has relied on cavalry to bolster one of his positions and I have a fair chance of forcing him to either vacate the trench or take losses to his cav.*
- *Galicia: Kovess keeps chipping away by attacking the Russian salient again.*
- *Serbia: The 5th Army occupies Belgrade and starts to exploit beyond it deeper into Serbia. The unexpected evacuation of the city has me rethinking my options and several divisions entrained for Serbia find themselves turned around and sent back to the Galician front. I send a Mt Bde to Italy where it gains an extra strength point for being there.*
- *West: No offensive action and I dispatch some siege artillery eastwards.*
- *Caucasus: Quiet.*
- *Mesopotamia: Another area where I had paid insufficient attention to rules nuances. I have been static at Kut in preparation for the floods, but missed the use of the Tigris and Euphrates as LoCs for the Turks. With this in mind, I start to edge forward from my defences.*
- *Palestine: Quiet.*

AP: I was a little downhearted after I saw the results of the German attacks on the Eastern Front which included the loss of two cavalry divisions – a sure sign of pressure. I have lost Belgrade and now Warsaw looks in danger again. When I review the different fronts, I cannot say there is one in which I am truly happy about the situation. I have hardly laid a finger on the Turks. The CP advances in the East and the Balkans are well ahead of their historical schedules. The Western Front is at least under control, and I would say I have the initiative there, but I have to recognise that the 1914 campaign left France is a decidedly fragile state. I cannot attack there with complete abandon. Nevertheless, I am planning something. I will strike again sooner than expected.

I will explain my retreat from Belgrade. It surprised me too. The surprise was in the speed of the Austrian build-up on that front. As the trenches become more prevalent railways, are crucial in order to deliver the troop concentrations needed at the point of attack. Ideally they need to arrive with such suddenness that the enemy has no time to make an adequate response. The CP concentrated on Serbia and Serbia has nothing in its armoury with which to respond.

Once Ivor was able to make attacks which could inflict at least 2 losses on the Serbian defenders and not deplete his supply too rapidly the writing was on the wall. The Serbians have no replacements to speak of. If I had stood and fought for Belgrade I would have seen a very quick diminishment of the strength of the Serbian Army and when they cracked after a few turns then the pursuit would have been more dangerous. At least this way, I should be able to fall back more slowly and draw the Austrians down to the south where their rail mobility will be poor and that should even the score a bit. One of the failures of my Balkan campaign so far is that the Germans have not had to send anyone there. However, it is an advantage also for me to only have to deal with Austrians whose inferior movement rates will mean I am under less pressure of infiltration moves.