

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT50: 1 – 5 March 1915 (March 1)

General Situation

The Tsar had ordered the bells to be rung from all the churches of Russia to celebrate the fall of Przemyśl on 3 March. Every nation involved in the war was hungry for some tangible success. While the essence of the war was the struggle of army against army, and territorial gains were not necessarily very significant, the populations of the belligerent powers did not see it like that. They wanted to see success on the map.

Przemyśl offset the Austrian victory at Belgrade. Perhaps the Germans would trump Przemyśl with winning Warsaw. The French were about to strike into Alsace-Lorraine, their most desired territorial objective. The French and British were also massing in the Aegean and Istanbul was perhaps the greatest prize of them all.

The Western Front



Figure 1: The Germans retreat to the Falkenhayn Line; the French occupy Chateau Thierry, 1 - 5 March 1915.

On 1 March, the German 2nd Army began executing a planned retreat to the Falkenhayn Line. The new German front ran from Breteuil (5-3.0812), south of Amiens, to Ribécourt (5-3.1013) on the Oise. South of this river, it ran to Villers-Cotterêts (5-3.1014) and then south east towards Dormans (5-3.1316) which was the last German bridgehead south of the Marne. To cover this retreat the Germans undertook their first major attack on the Western Front since December when, on 2 March they struck at the French 30th Division occupying a section of the front east of Conty (5-5.0712). The French infantry were surprised at this assault and the plight of the Division was fairly bad with many men lost due to packing too

many troops in the most vulnerable forward trenches. For the Germans, this was just a big raid and the attack was over by 3 March allowing the French 42nd Division to replace its shattered predecessor.

As in previous German retreats on the Western Front, the French did not rapidly follow up through the abandoned territory. Nevertheless, on 3 March, the French secured Chateau Thierry (5-3.1216) toward which place they had been cautiously probing for more than a week.

The French General Staff were more concerned about the start of their offensive in Alsace which began at 0700 hours on 3 March. The French attack deployed overwhelming strength against two German Landwehr Brigades (25th and 45th) who guarded 40 kilometres of front between Haut Koenigbourg (5-3.2820) and the Col du Bussang (5-3.2821). There could be little doubt about the initial success of the operation as the Germans had barely 48 hours warning and were rushing reinforcements to Neu Breisach. These only started to arrive on 2 March, too late.

The French 2nd Army attack was led by two cavalry Divisions. The 4th Cavalry made a mounted attack on the Chateau St Ulrich (5-3.2820) on 4 March which succeeded at the cost of many brave horsemen. The Landwehr realised they had to retreat if they were to have any chance of survival. The French therefore met no determined resistance until 5 March by which time they had gone forward 20 kilometres and reached the eastern edge of the Vosges along a line from Turckheim (5-3.2820) to Rouffach (5-3.2821).



Figure 2: The French Offensive in the Vosges, 3 - 5 March 1915.

The Eastern Front

The Central Powers maintained their broad front offensive threatening the Russians in the north, centre and south of their line.

In the north, the battle was now focussed on Insterberg (4-5.2006). The Prussian town was ringed by Russian trenches which the German 8th Army attacked from three directions

between 1 and 3 March. The Russians refused to give an inch and, as the Germans started to run short of ammunition, the defences still retained their integrity.

In the far south, Kovess' Army tried to force the Prislop Pass (5-5.4217) on 2 March. Again, the Russian defences frustrated this first attempt by which the Austrians hoped to descend the valley towards the upper reaches of the Siret River.

The attack in the centre was directed straight at Warsaw. General Woysch was directed to lead a strong column led by the German 15th and 41st Divisions which punched forwards on 2 March to Brwinów (5-5.1920). This was less than 25 kilometres from the centre of the Polish capital. The Russian 10th Army was ordered to vigorously counterattack and the 9th and 12th Artillery Brigades were deployed inside the city to provide fire support. The Russians fired off nearly half a month's supply in shells during their attacks on 4 and 5 March. Woysch reported that the Russian infantry attacks were being repelled with tremendous losses. Although the Germans overestimated their successes, the Russian casualty figures were very grim reading for the Grand Duke.



Figure 3: Woysch's thrust towards Warsaw and the Russian Counterattack, 1 - 5 March 1915.

Serbia

The Serbians guarded the crossings of the Western Morava in early March. The Austrians on the northern bank looked for a suitable place to make an assault for three days before the Serbians began to move away on 5 March.

The Near East

The French 26th Division had unloaded at Mudros, and the transports carrying the 22nd Division were accumulating in the roads of the port awaiting their turn at a berth. The French were also sending a high level headquarters composed of staff that had experience of the recent Picardy Offensive. They were determined that the British should not have this theatre to themselves.

In Iraq, the Turks had reoccupied Ali Gharbi on 2 March. Townsend's Corps had fallen back on its line of supply and was being reinforced at Al Amarah.

The Turkish Van Corps planned to take Van back from the Russians. The orders given required that Turkish and Kurdish cavalry outflank the Russian positions by advancing through the Toroslav Mountains to the south of the Russian line. The commander of the Turkish Van Division saw the cavalry preparing for this move and on his own initiative decided that his infantry which he had been training for mountain warfare throughout the winter were better suited for this operation. He ordered the cavalry to remain in place and on 1 March his unit moved forwards. The Russians held on for three days until they realised that the Turkish advance was unstoppable and then they began to retreat rapidly leaving Van undefended.

Due to the mixture of his insubordination and success, the commander of the Van Division was rapidly recalled to Istanbul. There he would be given a new command in the forces covering the Turkish Straights. History would later know him as Kemal Ataturk. This was his first success in the Great War.



Figure 4: The Turkish Van Corps forces the Russians to withdraw from Van, 1 - 5 March 1915.

March 1915 DM Summary

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total	Morale
Germany	11							15	26	670	Good
Austria-Hungary	16*							-	16	318	Good *Przemysl lost
Ottoman	-							NA	-	11	Good
Central Powers	27							15	32	989	
France	10							-	10	576	Good
Great Britain	-							-	-	70	Good
Russia	12							NA	12	340	Good
Belgium	-							NA		(95)	NA
Serbia	-							NA		(15)	NA
Entente	22							-	22	986	

CP: The CP still suffer a 15 DM penalty for food shortages, which Germany takes on entirely in support of AH. All three meet production requirements to meet full output. Germany produces more of the new army reorganisation divisions with 1 x 7-5 Mtn, 2 x 7-5 Inf and also 20 RPL. AH produces 20 RPL and a Mtn Bde. Turkey takes receipt of the 6 weapons points sent by AH in Feb and produces 10 RPL. [RL: No it will not, RPL cost twice as much with exported weapon points. Transferred weapon points are really for new units.]

- *East: I lack supply in East Germany but am still able to mass sufficient force to make an attack. I must keep applying pressure. Further south I launch another attack SW of Warsaw. This attack worked out better than I had hoped for and forces him to withdraw. I advance 2 strong regular divisions into the gap. I don't think he will be able to muster sufficient strength to drive this salient out. It places my forces adjacent to central Warsaw and also effectively risks cutting off several of his divisions trapped in a narrow sliver.*
- *Galicja: Kovess switches his efforts from the southern salient and stabs at the fringe of the Russian flank in the eastern Carpathians. I have moved a large cavalry force into the region to support Kovess and try and break out of the mountains and turn this flank. The last of the Przemysly garrison surrenders.*
- *Serbia: The 5th and 3rd armies move deep into Serbia but cannot advance as rapidly as the Serbs can retreat.*
- *West: I have dropped my guard in the east and he has noticed and taken advantage by railing substantial forces to Alsace. It is very clear he intends to attack me in the Vosges and may even retake Mulhouse. I suspect he thinks this will throw me completely as I cannot get reinforcements in to Mulhouse or the other likely objectives. Whatever he does is going to be extremely uncomfortable for me. I concentrate supplies, RPLs and some brigades under 7th Army in Neu Breisach. His reinforcing of the Vosges front has forced him to draw off forces from the west. I use this to drop back to my newly completed second trench line and concentrate two corps to attack his weakened defences SW of Amiens. I hope this will have been unexpected and will put him on edge a little.*
- *Caucasus: Quiet. Supply has now been distributed to HQs in the region.*
- *Mesopotamia: I continue to advance cautiously along the flooded banks of the Tigris.*
- *Palestine: He has denuded the defences along the Nile as he builds up at Mudros. I commence a raid across Sinai to make him nervous.*

AP: My main objective this turn was to execute the offensive in Alsace. Using 28 SP for each attack I am guaranteed overrunning the German 2 SP defences. However, I had to use cavalry to support the 2nd Army attack because I had been unable to get more than 26 infantry SP into position prior to this attack.

There was a partial solution for the German defence. If the Landwehr had retreated from the threatened hexes, the trenches would have disappeared and then minimum moves from the sides would have prevented the loss of at least one hex.

My attack near Warsaw was my biggest on the Eastern Front for a long time. It did not go very well, but it made sense as an attack on units in clear terrain with limited remaining supply. I am aiming to make this first turn in the month very painful for the Germans as they also have to absorb the food deficit loss now which always saps the will a bit. German losses are mounting.

In the East, the CP's tactics have sometimes worried me. Both sides face trade-offs between the pace of operations and losses incurred.

He is trying to keep me off balance and accelerate the defeat of the Russians. However, I can afford to lose any number of single hexes and still keep my line intact. It is not possible to break through blitzkrieg style (unless you get very serious with column attacks). I will only give up when the attrition rate is intolerable to me or I perceive that if I stay longer then I will face intolerable losses. The Russians will crack sooner or later but not because of any one attack but because of the totality of them. The Entente is choosing a balance between extending the duration of the Russian forward defence and the DM cost of doing so.

The very urgent CP campaign may persuade me to retreat in advance of the historical Great Retreat (which I do not want to do). However, the rapid rate of CP attacks also ensures that they have no accumulation of supply and so cannot keep going for more than two or three turns on the same sector. The attacker's combat strength is also lower as a result and I get more counterattacks so that the loss ratio does not favour the CP so much. A slower rate of attack would ensure that the CP could attack with better odds and use Artillery more which would reduce their losses relative to mine. I would have more entrenched defences in that case but this is a two-edged sword for me because trenches tempt me to hold in place which increases my losses also.

March Production Totals

Supply

Date	Ge	AH	Ot	Bul	CP	Fr	Br	Rus	Be	Se	It	Rom	Gr	US	Ent
Oct 14	77	18	-	-	95	20	18	10	-	-	-	-	-	10	58
Nov 14	77	18	-	-	95	20	18	10	-	-	-	-	-	10	58
Dec 14	77	18	2	-	97	20	18	10	-	-	-	-	-	10	58
Jan 15	77	26	2	-	105	30	18	20	-	-	-	-	-	10	78
Feb 15	77	26	2	-	105	30	18	20	-	-	-	-	-	10	78
Mar 15	77	26	2	-	105	30	18	20	-	-	-	-	-	10	78

Weapon Production (+drawdown on pre-war stockpiles)

Date	Ge	AH	Ot	Bul	CP	Fr	Br	Rus	Be	Se	It	Rom	Gr	US	Ent
Oct 14	42 +43	23	-	-	108	27 +70	50 +20	50	-	-	-	-	-	-	217
Nov 14	42 +26	23	-	-	91	27 +70	50 +20	50	-	1	-	-	-	-	218
Dec 14	42 +7	23	2	-	74	28 +30	50 +20	50	-	-	-	-	-	-	178
Jan 15	42	23	2	-	67	27	50 +20	50	-	1	-	-	-	-	148
Feb 15	42	23	2	-	67	27	50 +20	50	-	-	-	-	-	-	147
Mar 15	42	23	2	-	67	27	50 +20	50	-	-	-	-	-	-	147

Manpower (Colonial)

Date	Ge	AH	Ot	Bul	CP	Fr	Br	Rus	Be	Se	It	Rom	Gr	US	Ent
Oct 14	69	36	NA	-	105	41 (+8)	59 (+13)	80	2	6	-	-	-	-	209
Nov 14	70	37	NA	-	107	39 (+8)	59 (+13)	80	1	6	-	-	-	-	206
Dec 14	70	37	NA	-	107	39 (+8)	59 (+13)	80	1	6	-	-	-	-	206
Jan 15	70	37	NA	-	107	39 (+8)	59 (+13)	80	1	6	-	-	-	-	206
Feb 15	70	37	NA	-	107	39 (+8)	59 (+13)	80	1	6	-	-	-	-	206
Mar 15	70	37	NA	-	107	39 (+8)	59 (+13)	80	1	2	-	-	-	-	202

Food Deficits

Date	Ge	AH	Ot	Bul	CP	Fr	Br	Rus	Be	Se	It	Rom	Gr	US	Ent
Oct 14	12	1	NA	-	13	-	-	NA	NA	NA	-	-	-	NA	-
Nov 14	9	5	NA	-	14	-	-	NA	NA	NA	-	-	-	NA	-
Dec 14	10	6	NA	-	16	-	-	NA	NA	NA	-	-	-	NA	-
Jan 15	9	5	NA	-	14	-	-	NA	NA	NA	-	-	-	NA	-
Feb 15	15	-	NA	-	15	-	-	NA	NA	NA	-	-	-	NA	-
Mar 15	15	-	NA	-	15	-	-	NA	NA	NA	-	-	-	NA	-

Calculation of Food Deficit – March 1915

Germany			Austria		
Needs	83	PCs	Needs	29	PCs
Less			Less	-4 = 25	Galician PCs
Food	68	Germany	Food	24	Austria
Less	-2 = 66	Prussia	Less	-7 = 17	Galicia
Plus	4	Romania	Plus	2	Hungary
Plus	1	France	Plus	6	Germany
Plus	3	Hungary			
Less	6	Austria			
	68	Total Food		25	Total Food
Deficit	15			-	