

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT52: 10 – 14 March 1915 (March 3)

General Situation

One neutral power which was showing no interest of directly intervening in the war was the United States. Although, the political elite of both major parties condemned Prussian militarism whenever there was an outrage or other pre-text, they equally disdained militarism of all stripes. If Germany was considered more culpable in American eyes, it was only by degree and the whole of the Old World had done wrong in unleashing such a terrible conflict. Even so it would take a lot more by way of direct provocation to push the United States away from neutrality.

On the other hand business was business and, in that regard, the Entente was the favoured client by a long margin. The dependence of Britain and France on purchases of raw materials and food from American markets (including Canada) was enormous. The East Coast ports of America were full to capacity with Allied and neutral ships serving this trade. The war was also disrupting the trade of other European neutrals and they too became more dependent on America. When the Italian government realised that the spreading war in the Balkans was causing food prices to escalate early in 1915 they did a deal on the Chicago exchange. Salami manufacturers which had hitherto depended on special breeds of Serbian mountain pigs were now supplied by Mid-West pork bellies.

The United States also produced an appreciable amount of artillery shells. The Russians were the most desperate buyers though not the most creditworthy. It required a degree of self-denial from British and French producers to leave this market open to the Russians which they were prepared to do in March 1915.

The Eastern Front

The Central Powers' attacks on the Eastern Front steadily ground down the Russian defence.

On 11 March, the Russian lines at Insterberg (4-5.2006) faced a second major attack by the German 8th Army. This time they crumbled within twelve hours. This caused the Russians to pull back to the north side of the Pregel River and also to abandon all their positions between Wehlau and Norlitten (4-5.1906).

The Russians were also losing ground around Warsaw. The Germans now moved to clear the south western approaches to the city. On 10 – 14 March, the Russians were driven out of Tarczyn (4-5.2020) from where they fell back to the east. Thereafter, the Russians were pinned back to the city limits with an entrenched line extending south east toward Gora Kalwaria (4-5.2120).

The Austro-Hungarian 1st Army was still in action against the Russian 4th Army. On 10 – 11 March there was an attack near Koprznica (5-5.2407) not far from the Vistula. Two strong Austrian Divisions suffered losses amounting to a quarter of their strength in this attack. The Russian defences were slowly weakening but even powerful blows such as this could not yet break them.

It was the same story in the Eastern Caparthians where the third Austrian attack on the Prislop Pass (5-5.4217) failed to dislodge the Russians. Despite this frustration of their efforts to reach the Upper Siret Valley, the Hungarian 20th Division and no less than five Austro-Hungarian Cavalry Divisions had succeeded in extending their line almost to the Romanian frontier and thus prevented the Russians from entering southern Bukovihna.



Figure 1: The German 8th Army re-captures Insterberg, 11 March 1915.

Serbia

The Serbian Army remained largely in position in the east and centre of the country. The line of the Nisava River was held in the northeast although there the risk of a Bulgarian intervention was most acute and to stay north of Nish for much longer would risk the eruption of a hostile force into the Serbian rear.

The principal fighting continued to be along the Moravica River in the west where the Austro-Hungarian 6th Army sought to capture Prilike and Ivanjica (6-5.1514) by attacks on 11 and 12 March. The Serbian 2nd Shumadia Division put up a brave resistance at Ivanjica on 12 March before withdrawing next day. The Austrians had heavy losses in their 132nd Brigade and the Croat 13th Brigade had to be disbanded because of terrible casualties. Even if the Serbians were retreating, they still had the capacity to inflict sharp punishment on their pursuers.

The Near East

The Turkish advance towards the Suez Canal was continued. By 12 March, the Turks had passed Romana (8-8.1237) and their patrols, often camel mounted, had been sighted from the western side of the canal. The British defence had concentrated to defend the eastern delta and Ismailia. The short term goal of the British was to stop the Turks crossing the canal

at any point. By 14 March, the whole area between Port Said and Ismailia was on high alert. Aircraft reconnaissance had suggested that the enemy had approximately three Infantry Divisions present (a remarkably accurate assessment in fact). If the Turks were going to attack, they would do it in the next 48 hours.



Figure 2: The Turkish XX Corps approaches the Suez Canal, 10 - 14 March 1915.

In Mesopotamia, the 22nd and 28th Indian Brigades were belatedly digging in at Al Amarah. Townsend was obsessively monitoring the rise in water levels, which was relatively late that year, hoping that the flood would slow down the Turkish advance from Ali Gharbi. His intelligence was that there were five full strength Turkish Divisions below Ali Gharbi and enough additional troops to make two more Divisions. Nixon at Basra thought that Townsend was too willing to retreat and these assessments were figments of a panicky disposition. Nevertheless post-war studies proved them to be correct.

In the Eastern Caucasus, the Russian I Turkmen Corps was on the point of collapse. The Turkish advance had been placed in the hands of the XI Corps and on 11 March, the Turkish 2nd Cavalry Corps had advanced boldly to Özalp in the Khadar Valley (6-8.3720) and cut the road which the 2nd Caucasian Cossack Division had been intending to retreat along. The Cossack cavalry then completely fell apart and most ended up surrendering at Boyaldi (6-8.3721) as they discovered that the paths over the mountains were still blocked. Since this was the second Cossack Division to surrender since the start of March, the Tsar was forced to question for the very first time the loyalty of these irregulars. Actually, there should have

been no doubts. Both instances could be explained by poor deployments by the higher commands.

The Russian Caucasus Army recognised that something needed to be done to bolster its left wing and began preparing units for redeployment. That meant that the attacks which had commenced in the Erzerum sector were suspended and the pressure on the Turks there was lifted.

The Western Front

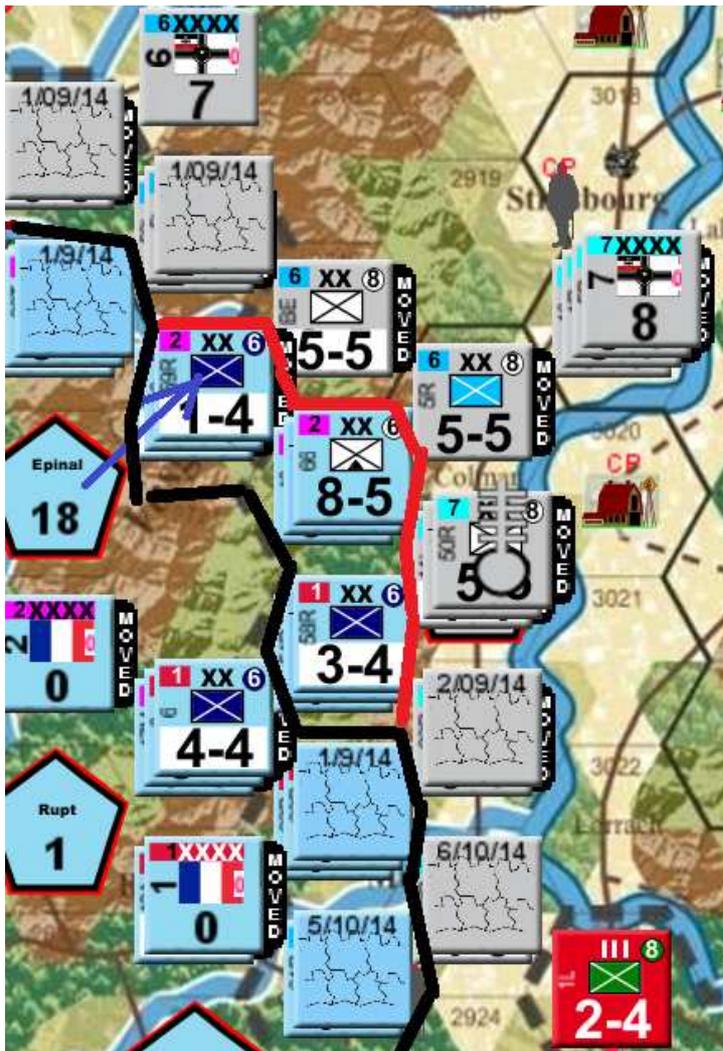


Figure 3: French Gains in the Vosges, 3 - 13 March 1915.

The French offensive in the Vosges was in its last phase. Between 10 – 12 March, the Germans voluntarily abandoned their positions at the Col de Saales and the French advance reaching Villé (5-3.2720) on 13 March. On the same day, the whole offensive was terminated. The French had expended their munitions stockpile and any further attacks would encounter enemy forces who were fully alert and in possession of stiffened defences. The results were in any event satisfactory to Joffre and the French had given notice that they were fully intent on a recovery of Alsace-Lorraine before peace could be made.

The remainder of the Western Front was fairly quiet. The French were busy digging in along the new line straddling the Marne.

March 1915 DM Summary

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total	Morale
Germany	11	14	3					15	43	687	Good
Austria-Hungary	16*	3	5					-	24	326	Good *Przemysl lost
Ottoman	-	2	-					NA	2	13	Good
Central Powers	27	19	8					15	59	1016	
France	10	6	-					-	16	582	Good
Great Britain	-	-	-					-	-	70	Good
Russia	12	17	14					NA	43	371	Good
Belgium	-	-						NA	-	(95)	NA
Serbia	-	(1)	(1)					NA	(2)	(17)	NA
Entente	22	23	14					-	59	1023	

Player Notes

CP: *None this time.*

AP: *As I may have already said, there is a battle of wills on the Eastern Front now. In their own selfish interests the Russians need to get a break from the punishment that they are suffering. I regard 50 DM a month as something which the Russians cannot stand for long, and they now have more than 40 and the month is not half done. I am also unable to replace all my losses, so the average strength of my units is falling.*

A retreat would slow down the DM rise. That would mean abandoning Warsaw, something I have to be ready to do sooner or later. What is causing me difficulty with this is that it is very early in the year to be thinking about this. I almost rushed my move so that I wouldn't succumb to a premature resolution to retreat.

I have to consider the alternative which is to duke it out for longer. Russian DM will end up higher than I want, but Russian DM is a resource the Entente needs to use. Holding on is causing German DM to rise fairly rapidly as well and CP supply is running low. I should be able to last into April without the situation getting critical.

One wider consequence of the difficulties of the Eastern Front is that I did not continue attacking in the Caucasus. I will want to resume the attack there but I cannot afford indiscriminate attacks and I need to contain the Turkish advance east of Lake Van first.

One consequence of the loss of ground in Serbia is that I cannot import so much food from there now. The resource shipping is therefore more under stress. I only have 14 resource

shipping points spare now so further loss of resources in Serbia or elsewhere in Western Europe could cause problems as I will have to import more from the USA.