

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT53: 15 – 18 March 1915 (March 4)

General Situation

In mid-March, the government in London suddenly became animated by thought of the fearful consequences for the Empire if the Suez Canal were lost. In days, it became received wisdom that this event would mean the loss of the support of the whole Empire in and east of the Indian Ocean. India and Australia would not be actually cut off, but it was difficult to see how they would contribute to the war in Europe if the loss of Egypt posed a much more direct threat to their interests.

It was now asserted that the government, nay the Prime Minister, had culpably neglected to prepare for this danger which also threatened to derail the preparations for a landing in the Aegean. Political panic had ensured that additional forces from Iraq and France were on their way to Egypt to repair the omissions of the past. This was over-insurance as military advice was consistently that Egypt was not in great danger and the Turks were unlikely to cross the Canal. Nevertheless, the reinforcements were on their way regardless.

The Near East



Figure 1: The Turks encamped east of the Suez Canal, mid-March 1915.

In Egypt itself, there had been anxious waiting for the Turkish blow to fall. Armchair Generals in the European Clubs in Cairo and Alexandria were all sure that it would fall at Ismailia. By 16 March, some were suggesting that maybe the Turks were taking an unwarranted time about it and the nervous tension peaked. By the following day, the British commander had let it be known that the Turks had settled into tented encampments a day's march east of the

Canal and they were showing no signs of coming any further forward. No one had expected this.

The water had risen in Mesopotamia, 15 March was the first official flood day at Ali Gharbi. Townsend, had a discussion with his staff on whether to hold on at Al Amarah. Up until 17 March, it had been thought that the Mesopotamian Corps would defend that town. Any further retreat was likely to terminate at Qurna and the whole campaign since December would be shown to have been a waste. Townsend hesitated but the alarming reports of the size of the pursuing Turkish Army was enough to make the decision for retreat. Historians have often questioned this lack of resolution and many have argued that Townsend should have replicated his exploits on the North West Frontier and defended Al Amarah, if necessary through a siege. They have persuasively shown that this would have broken the momentum of the Turkish advance. Hypotheticals aside, even Townsend's best friends murmured that he might be losing his touch.

The Turks also had forward momentum in their operations east of Lake Van. By 16 March, the van of the Van Corps was no more than 20 kilometres from the Persian frontier.

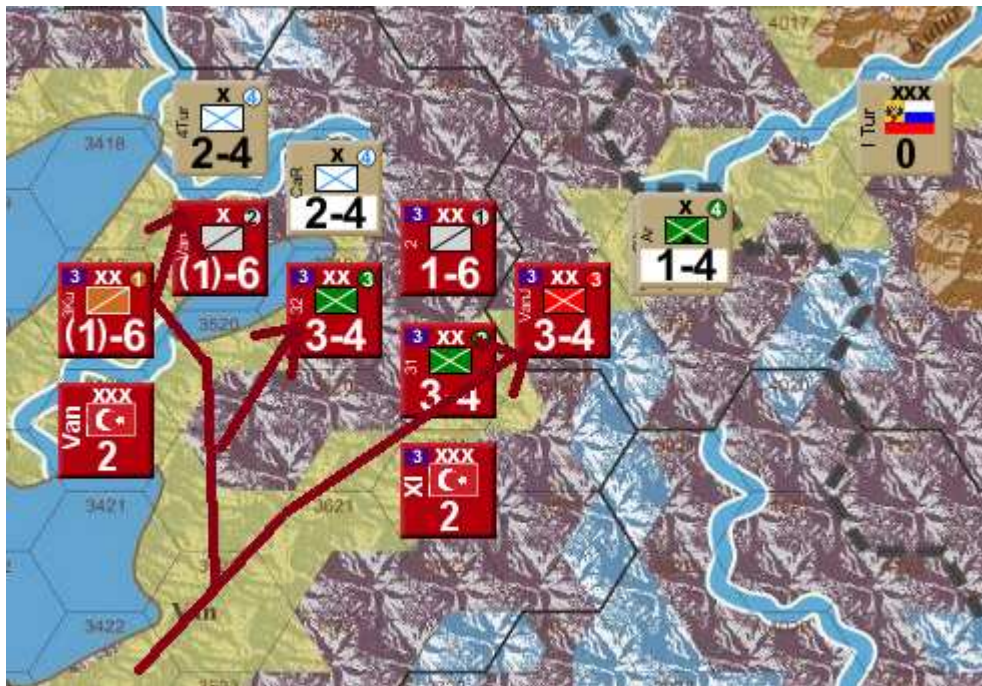


Figure 2: Turkish advances to the east of Lake Van, 1 - 16 March 1915.

The Western Front

There was little movement on the Western Front. The most important activity of the French Army was continuing preparations to advance along the Oise River to Compiègne. Joffre was unwilling to authorise this move despite all the signs that the Germans would not seriously oppose it. The French 10th and 7th Armies still needed reinforcement before this operation could begin and it was necessary to gather in experienced troops which had previously been in action in Picardy and Alsace to provide sufficient manpower.

The British sector of the Western Front was also quiet. The outcome of the Picardy Offensive had been sobering to the British Army. The German defences opposite the British

had subsequently been improved and Sir John French was very conscious that he was totally dependent on the French for the employment of the heavier howitzers which were now deemed essential supports for any infantry operation against well entrenched opponents.

The Eastern Front



Figure 3: The Austro-Hungarians reach the Siret River and the Russians give up the Prislop Pass, 15 – 18 March 1915.

The majority of the Central Powers' attacks on the Eastern Front came to an end before mid-March as Ludendorff prescribed a period for rest and reorganisation. General Kovess was far beyond Ludendorff's writ and kept striking the Russians in the Prislop Pass (5-5.4217). The Russian defence there was in the hands of the 69th Reserve Division which was exhausted by over two weeks continuous action for which very little supply had been sent forward. On 18 March, the order to retreat reached the surviving Russian reservists and they started to fall back. By this time, the pass itself was no longer a vital position. The Hungarian 20th Division had crossed the mountains further east and was already at Siret-on-the-Siret (5-5.4718)

Serbia

The Austro-Hungarian advance in Serbia proceeded relatively slowly. The invaders were barred by a main line of defence which ran diagonally south west from the confluence of the Western and Southern Morava Rivers. However, the Serbians were unable to defend their whole front in strength. In the north east, they were forced to give up the defence of the line of the Nisava River. The Serbian Crown Prince wrote to the Queen on 17 March and told her

that Nish would fall within no more than ten days and she would be well advised to leave there as soon as possible.

Further west, the Montenegrins were also giving up ground. They had held the greater part of their country throughout the winter, but now they were being forced into withdrawals in order to keep their line in conformity with that of the Serbians.

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	1				-	25	327	Good *Przemysl lost
Ottoman	-	2	-	-				NA	2	13	Good
Central Powers	27	19	8	1				15	70	1017	
France	10	6	-	-				-	16	582	Good
Great Britain	-	-	-	-				-	-	70	Good
Russia	12	17	14	1				NA	44	372	Good
Belgium	-	-		-				NA	-	(95)	NA
Serbia	-	(1)	(1)	-				NA	(2)	(17)	NA
Entente	22	23	14	1				-	60	1024	

Player Notes

CP:

- *East: I considered several attacking options this turn, but opted instead to start manoeuvring for future operations. There are several vulnerable points in his defence, but I need to concentrate supply to exploit such opportunity.*
- *Galicja: Kovess attacks and is the only one to do so. He has cavalry and an infantry div which are starting to skirt round the southernmost Russian flank.*
- *Serbia: I have formed a solid line closed up against the Serbians now, but no suitable attacking options this time.*
- *West: I think I have finally shored up my position in the Vosges.*
- *Caucasus: I push forward to the E of Lake Van after having forced the surrender of a surrounded Cossack div last turn whilst reinforcing the centre.*
- *Mesopotamia: Quiet.*
- *Palestine: I go firm on the banks of the Suez Canal.*
- *Gallipoli: I maintain a defensive posture on the Gallipoli Peninsula whilst feeding in RPLs in anticipation of an invasion. I suspect it will now come within a month.*

AP: *I attempted nothing bold or remotely brave this turn. I was simply glad to let a turn pass with nothing much happening.*

I was not surprised to find the pressure easing as the CP is running low on supply again. My key decision will come when he next is able to threaten the Russians with big losses. This will not be until the beginning of next month. The previous three to four turns were very hard on the Russians and I have to factor in the fact that Russian DM will be over 450 once I give up Warsaw. This means I am only about three months hard fighting from Shaken Morale. No decision is taken yet. There are also opportunities and options in German DM being fairly high. I am nearly half way to starting the triggers for US entry.

I am trying to sketch out plans for campaigns throughout the rest of the year. Subject to any moves the CP makes I hope to take offensive action on most fronts but I will want to do it in such a way that allows a growing build-up of my overall strength so that each successive attack will be stronger. The Russians and Serbians being on the receiving end of CP attacks will be an exception to this so long as that pressure is maintained. The British, having the lowest DM, will have a lot expected of them but their small army still limits their options.