

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT54: 19 – 22 March 1915 (March 5)

General Situation

A gloomy mood was discernible in Entente capitals which some fine spring weather did nothing to dispel. The elation in France for the apparent success of the Alsace attack had not lasted very long. There was a widespread recognition instead of how very far away victory might be. The news from Serbia was never very good. The Entente plans for major offensives seemed a long way off and the Russian offensive had never materialised. Grumbling between the allies always began at times of frustration. The British were accused of inactivity. The French were accused of meddling in the Near East. The Russians were accused of hiding their intentions, though the truth was they had no firm plans at all.

Serbia

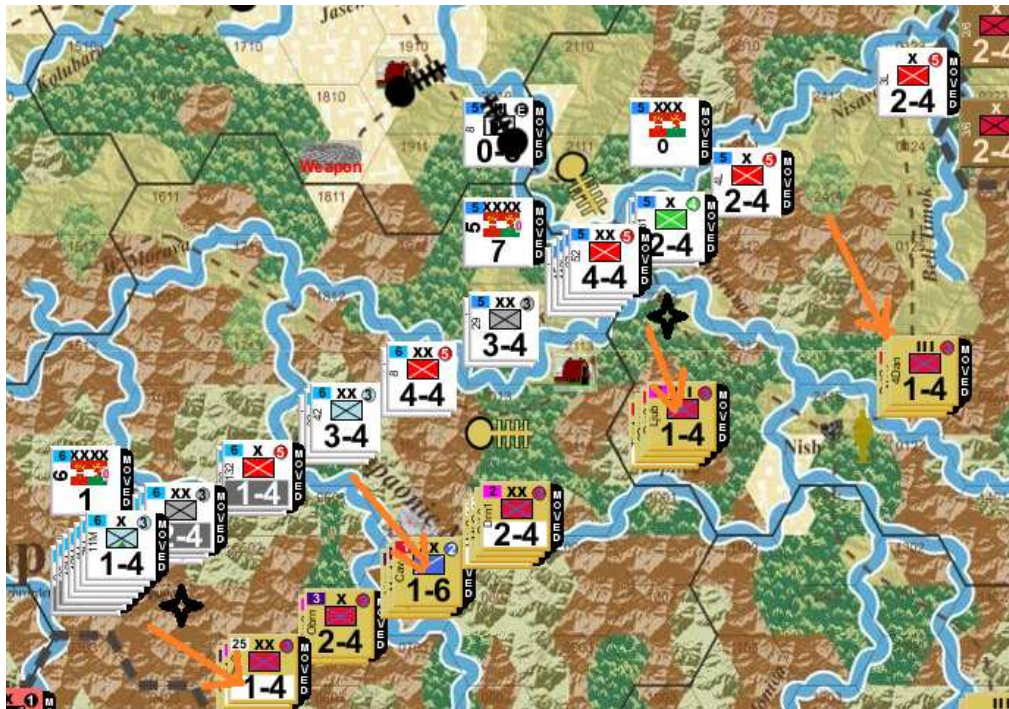


Figure 1: The Austrian 5th and 6th Armies in Central Serbia, 19 - 22 March 1915.

The Serbian retreat had been interrupted and the Austro-Hungarians were forced to prepare attacks between 19 – 20 March to recover their forward progress. The Austrian 6th Army was engaged in heavy fighting in rough country around Sjenica (7-6.0402). The Serbian defence was very tough and the attacking forces suffered heavy losses every time they tried to dislodge Serbian units. The Uzice Brigade simply refused to retreat until destroyed and they stopped every Austrian advance for more than 72 hours.

There was a not dissimilar story at Stalač (6-5.2212) where a more powerful attack by the Austrian 5th Army struggled to gain the confluence of the different branches of the Morava River. The Serbians repelled every attack until, on 22 March, they started to withdraw of their own volition.

Despite their difficulties, the Austro-Hungarians had shown that they could still be determined in their own attacks and this revealed the inability of the Serbians to keep up a firm defence indefinitely. The invasion of Serbia might be slow, but it was fairly sure.

The Near East

No sooner had the British force in Egypt decided that the Turks were too intimidated by the defences of the Canal to carry through any kind of attack, when suddenly the enemy moved forwards. At dawn on 20 March, the Turkish 27th Division and the Jerusalem (Al-Quds) Militia lined up on the eastern side opposite Port Said and at Al Qantara Sharq (8-8.1038). Though there was still no move to cross the Canal, the threat was getting very real. The Indian 18th Brigade was detailed to provide a defence of Port Said while the 128th Brigade and Imperial Cavalry Brigade kept open communications to the south.

The Turkish offensive was intended to dissuade the British from commencing any landings at the Turkish Straights, but it would be difficult to divert the Allied plans there which had been in preparation for many weeks. The French contribution to the effort in the Aegean was underlined by the designation, on 22 March, of the new French Orient Army on Lemnos which commanded two French Infantry Divisions and a Marine Brigade.



Figure 2: The Turkish XX Corps advances to the Canal, 19 - 22 March 1915.

In Iraq, the Mesopotamian Corps gave up further ground as it drifted south seeking a secure logistical base that was not prone to being washed away by the river.

The Turkish XI Corps and Van Corps kept up the pursuit of the Russians to the east of Lake Van. The Russians had, however, retreated into difficult country. The Caucasian Rifle Brigade had fallen back into the mountains around Beydađı (6-8.3618). The Turkish 2nd Cavalry Division was sent on a mission across the high ranges with the intention of getting into the Russians' rear. However, the Russians had patrols out across a wide zone of mountainous terrain and the Turkish cavalry had to return and report that the Russians had sufficient control of the hills to make even mounted movements too difficult.

The Western Front

The single action of note on this front occurred on 21 March when the French 7th Army began moving forwards on the left flank of the 9th Army. Led by the XXVII Corps, the French crept into Crépy-en-Valois (5-3.1015) late at night chasing out a few German patrols who had been scavenging the remains of a town which had not been securely occupied by either side for nearly three weeks. Next day, the French were cautiously reconnoitring the first outposts of the Falkenhayn Line which lay ahead of them. They had no plan to attack this very soon.

The Eastern Front

In a letter to the Tsarina, dated 22 March 1915, Tsar Nicholas described the fighting in the Carpathians as a long endured toothache that was never quite sore enough to cause you to go to the dentist, but yet it still sapped your energy and prevented any proper enjoyment of life. The Tsar had been reading reports from the Russian 11th Army which recounted yet another attack of the Kovess Army which had caused alarm in the hills around Mikiderka (5-5.4216) between the Prut and Siret.



Figure 3: The German concentration outside Warsaw, 19 - 22 March 1915.

The Russian Stavka nevertheless, and rightly, considered the actions in the Carpathians to be a side-show. The focus of all attention was on Warsaw, though Rennenkampf kept up a stream of warnings about the situation in Prussia which he naturally regarded as equally critical.

The fortifications around Warsaw, including the great fortress of Novo Georgievsk, were all still intact. The Russian 10th Army had been reinforced and was supported by the Russian 2nd Army which covered the northern approaches of the city. There were many reasons to think the Russians could

put up a fierce resistance should the Germans dare to make a frontal assault. However, in fact the battle was lost already in the mind of the Grand-Duke.

The Grand-Duke was quite aware that the Germans were accumulating a huge body of heavy guns in the vicinity of Warsaw. Not everyone believed the Germans would be so ruthless as to open fire on the city. A letter from the Archbishop of Warsaw reached the German General Gallwitz on 20 March which tried to argue that artillery alone could not capture the city and there would have to be costly infantry assaults as well. Gallwitz didn't need a lecture on military tactics from a cleric still in the enemy camp and he had no intention of proceeding in the inflexible manner suggested by the Archbishop.

In contrast, the Grand-Duke did not suffer from illusions about what the Germans were capable of. He knew he could not fight German fire with any fire in return. The Russians had only three artillery Brigades in and around Warsaw and it was too late to gather many more. In any event, the Russian artillery arm would be no match for the larger German and Austrian guns as their training and ammunition didn't allow any confidence that the Russian guns would present the enemy with anything other than valuable targets. In fact, on 21 March, the bigger Russian guns were ordered out of the city and were not expected to play any role in its defence.

The Grand-Duke had little more confidence in the infantry and cavalry. Most of the infantry units were understrength. The city itself was not defended by any proper scheme of entrenchments and morale had been reduced by the wearing fighting in western and central Poland which had exhausted the Russian Army since the previous autumn. Surveying these facts all but the wilfully blind could see the defence of Warsaw was now almost futile. The inhabitants sensed it and willed the Russians to leave even when they were unsure if the Germans would be any better masters there. Still, the Grand-Duke hesitated to order a retreat. The question was would the Russians go of their own accord or did the Germans need to give them another push?

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	4			-	29	331	Good *Przemysl lost
Ottoman	-	2	-	-	-			NA	2	13	Good
Central Powers	27	19	8	1	4			15	74	1021	
France	10	6	-	-	-			-	16	582	Good
Great Britain	-	-	-	-	-			-	-	70	Good
Russia	12	17	14	1	1			NA	45	373	Good
Belgium	-	-	-	-	-			NA	-	(95)	NA
Serbia	-	(1)	(1)	-	(2)			NA	(4)	(19)	NA
Entente	22	23	14	1	1			-	61	1025	

Player Notes

CP: *Not this time.*

AP: *Now I am getting quite pessimistic and it is Russia's fault. The more I look at the position on the Eastern Front, the more it looks as if it will collapse at the slightest touch. It is quite possible the Germans will open a bombardment on Warsaw next turn which will be the beginning of the end because I will not tolerate unanswered losses to Artillery. I may have to submit to this just to buy a few more turns and I will not mind too much if the losses are moderate and he uses a lot of supply. The problem is that it isn't only Warsaw. He is well placed to make other strong attacks in Prussia and Southern Poland and the constant attacks by Kovess are like some form of torture dependent on a dripping tap.*

To really spread the gloom, I can reflect that the poor situation in the East will have consequences for a lot of other fronts. I really do not want the Germans to be in a position where they can pick between an intervention in the Balkans, Italy or France around about mid-1915 when I would rather they had still a lot of business to complete in the East.