

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT55: 23 – 27 March 1915 (March 6)

General Situation

The Kaiser visited Falkenhayn's headquarters in Belgium after spending a week witnessing the training of new conscripts. Wilhelm had been put in a very optimistic mood by the good spirit of the recruits and the reports of developments in the Balkans and in the Near East. He was well aware that Bulgaria was just a few days from joining the Central Powers. The Kaiser also took at face value, Hindenburg's and Ludendorff's confident predictions that Russia was losing its capability of resisting further German offensives. Ludendorff was said to have bet that he would eat doughnuts at the Blikle Café in Warsaw on his birthday (9th April). The Kaiser also considered that the Turkish alliance, for which he imagined he deserved full credit, had been fully vindicated. The signs were that the Turks would push the Russians and British back into Persia and (with no evidence at all) that was held to mean the imminent demise of the Central Asian and Indian Empires as Muslim revolts spread across Asia.

Falkenhayn humoured the Kaiser on most of these points while cautioning that the situation might still develop in unexpected ways. Falkenhayn was himself much more concerned with how the war might develop in the West and how Austria would cope with an Italian attack for which no diplomatic solution seemed available. Nevertheless, it would have served little purpose to break the Kaiser's happy mood and Falkenhayn left this for another occasion.

Serbia

The Serbians continue to fall back, crossing the Toplica and Nisavu Rivers on their way. Nish witnessed the arrival of columns of Serbian infantry tired after their many marches. Everyone wanted to know how far away the Austrians might be. On 26 March, they were said to be at Kaonic (6-5.2212) which was less than 40 kilometres northwest of the city. The Serbian government had already gone on to Skopje and Nish was under martial law and strict curfews. Anyone suspected of being a Bulgarian could expect rough treatment. This did not help those Serbian refugees who thought to head towards Sofia.

The Near East

The Allied concentration on Lemnos was approaching completion as the British 3rd Division started to arrive in transports on 26 March. These would unload slowly at the small port of Mudros during the remainder of the month. Nobody was supposed to know where exactly the forces gathered on Lemnos would be going. Hamilton's precise plans were known only to a small circle of advisers. However, it was not in doubt that some attempt would soon be made on the Turkish Straights. The land forces had been waiting for the British and French navies to open the sea passage, but the sea operations had not actually achieved anything. The Turkish defences around the Dardanelles appeared as strong as ever.

The situation at the Suez Canal had remained tense. The British had expected an attack daily, but the Turks had just stood on the eastern shore threatening but not actually crossing. In the Turkish camp concerns were growing about their logistical situation. The supplies

which had been brought with them would start to be used up by the end of the month. Some Turkish officers urged a withdrawal, but the watch on the Canal was maintained.

The Mesopotamian Corps was also now experiencing difficulty with supplies. Much of the country below Al Amarah was flooded. Townsend had resolved that his force would fall back to Qurna but the way was often blocked by high water. Half of his force diverted to retreat though Persian territory where there was dry ground. Three Indian Brigades, however, were struggling down the west bank of the Tigris with four Turkish Divisions in close pursuit. By 27 March, the Indian infantry had lost all their vehicles and had for equipment only what they and their pack animals could carry. The Mesopotamian Corps was therefore on the edge of disintegration.

In the Caucasus, the Turkish 31st Division reported, on 24 March, that it had reached the Persian border near the source of the Kutur River (6-8.3818). The Russians had been sending aid to their I Turkestan Corps and if the Turks wanted to advance into Persia and stir up trouble there they would have to fight their way in.

The Western Front



Figure 1: The advance of the French 7th Army, 21 - 27 March 1915.

The French 7th Army kept up its movement forwards clearing German stragglers and patrols from the south bank of the Oise. The French reached Lacroix-Saint-Ouen (5-3.0915) on 27 March and they were then only a couple of marches short of Compiègne.

The Germans did not challenge the French advance and remained content to labour on improving the defences of the Falkenhayn Line which ran in an arc northeast of Compiègne.

The Eastern Front

The German 10th Army kept up active operations in Prussia where they assaulted and captured trenches occupied by the Russian 27th Division covering Damerau and Taplaken (4-5.1905). After two days of fighting against the Russian infantry, the Germans encountered a reserve line manned by a Russian Cavalry Corps which held them on 25 March. The Germans were not yet ready for a major push here and this allowed the Russians to reinforce with the arrival of the Caucasian Grenadier Division and other units. Nevertheless, they had lost a well-positioned line of entrenchments and their new improvised defences were much weaker.



Figure 2: The German 10th Army fighting near Damerau and Taplaken, 23 - 25 March 1915.

The Russian front was also under pressure elsewhere, indeed along almost its whole length there were signs of overstretch as inadequate Russian forces were required to defend a front which was in all 1140 kilometres from the Baltic to Romania.

Around Warsaw, the situation remained especially tense as the Russian defenders awaited what they were sure would be a powerful blow. Aircraft had dropped leaflets over the city warning that the Germans were planning a tremendous artillery barrage and encouraging everyone to get away. As it happened, the lull in action outside Warsaw only intensified the fear of the battle which was expected to commence any day.

Further south, the German 45th Reserve Division made a local attack, on 24 March, against the Russian lines near Wiezbzica (5-5.2204), south of Radom. The Russian 47th Division which held this section of the front was expected to guard over 30 kilometres without support. This was not untypical though it was unusual that the 47th Division was at full strength and contained the enemy attack without particular difficulty.

There was a similar probing attack next day by the Austro-Hungarian 1st Army at Mielec (5-5.2509). This was also against a Russian Division (33rd) which had been in good positions established since the end of 1914. By these testing attacks, the Central Powers were gauging the ability of the Russians to resist full scale assaults which were then being

planned. The Germans had sent three Infantry Divisions (20th, 31st and 22nd Reserve) to this part of the front which would certainly help any major effort to push forward in southern Poland.



Figure 3: The front in Southern Poland, 23 - 27 March 1915.

Player Notes

- CP: East: Main focus remains continued manoeuvre for position and husbanding of supply. Germany launches two unsupplied attacks. The 1st to cause attrition south of Radom; the 2nd to either attrit the Russian trench position on the bend of the north bank of the Pregel (to force him to start falling back here) or to even evict him from this location (unlikely). I am in a strong position now in East Prussia and able to move numerous strong divisions laterally to force a decision at a point of my choosing. I just need supply here now – it is coming.
- Galicia: Kovess does not attack but moves divisions laterally eastwards. 1st Army attacks along the Vistula to cause attrition. The Sud Armee is nearly ready to start attacking in support in this area.
- Serbia: I close in deeper into Serbia and am now 20km from Nish. Once I get adjacent, Bulgaria should be convinced to join the war effort.
- West: Pretty static.
- Caucasus: Manoeuvre – no combat.
- Mesopotamia: Quiet.

- *Palestine: I am firm on the banks of the Suez Canal. I have planned this raid badly as I failed to attack at Ismailia earlier in the month and will now undergo attrition at the start of April.*
- *Gallipoli: Quiet; still no invasion.*
- *Italy: I have created strong positions in anticipation of imminent hostility from Italy. It has dragged forces away from the east, though.*

March 1915 DM Summary

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total	Morale
Germany	11	14	3	-	-	4		15	47	691	Good
Austria-Hungary	16*	3	5	1	4	1		-	30	332	Good *Przemysl lost
Ottoman	-	2	-	-	-	-		NA	2	13	Good
Central Powers	27	19	8	1	4	5		15	79	1026	
France	10	6	-	-	-	-		-	16	582	Good
Great Britain	-	-	-	-	-	-		-	-	70	Good
Russia	12	17	14	1	1	5		NA	50	378	Good
Belgium	-	-	-	-	-	-		NA	-	(95)	NA
Serbia	-	(1)	(1)	-	(2)	-		NA	(4)	(19)	NA
Entente	22	23	14	1	1	5		-	66	1030	

AP: Another turn, and another 5 DM on Russia despite the fact that the CP did not expend a single supply point. I am fighting the urge to run. At least, the attrition on the Germans and Austrians is as bad which is what you might expect when they are unsupplied. Nevertheless doing my move on the Russian front underlined how little spare strength I have anywhere. Only a few units were able to move to the threatened areas. I have quite generous reinforcements next month but they are likely to arrive as the situation deteriorates.

I have tried to engineer my withdrawal in Iraq without suffering attrition but it is just not possible to get all the way to Qurna without getting caught up in extensive flooded terrain so I will be paying a penalty there next turn and I will go from fearing for my situation in Egypt (which has now passed the danger point) to something similar in Iraq, although the flood which causes me loss should impede his pursuit too.