

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT56: 28 – 31 March 1915 (March 7)

General Situation

March had been in Roman times the month in which the legions had mustered before a campaign. Now in the 20th Century the same cycle could be observed. The war had not entirely stopped during the winter but the pace of events was quickening as the weather warmed and the days lengthened.

It was certainly apparent that 1915 had not yet shown the full horror of what the belligerent powers were capable of. The French and British were preparing for further blows in the West and in the Aegean. The Bulgarians were about to march from their barracks and the Italians were making plans. OberOst and the Austrian Chief-of-Staff, Conrad, were telling all who needed to know that the operations in the East so far were mere preliminaries for a bigger offensive which would drive the Russians from Poland and into Russia proper.

The Western Front

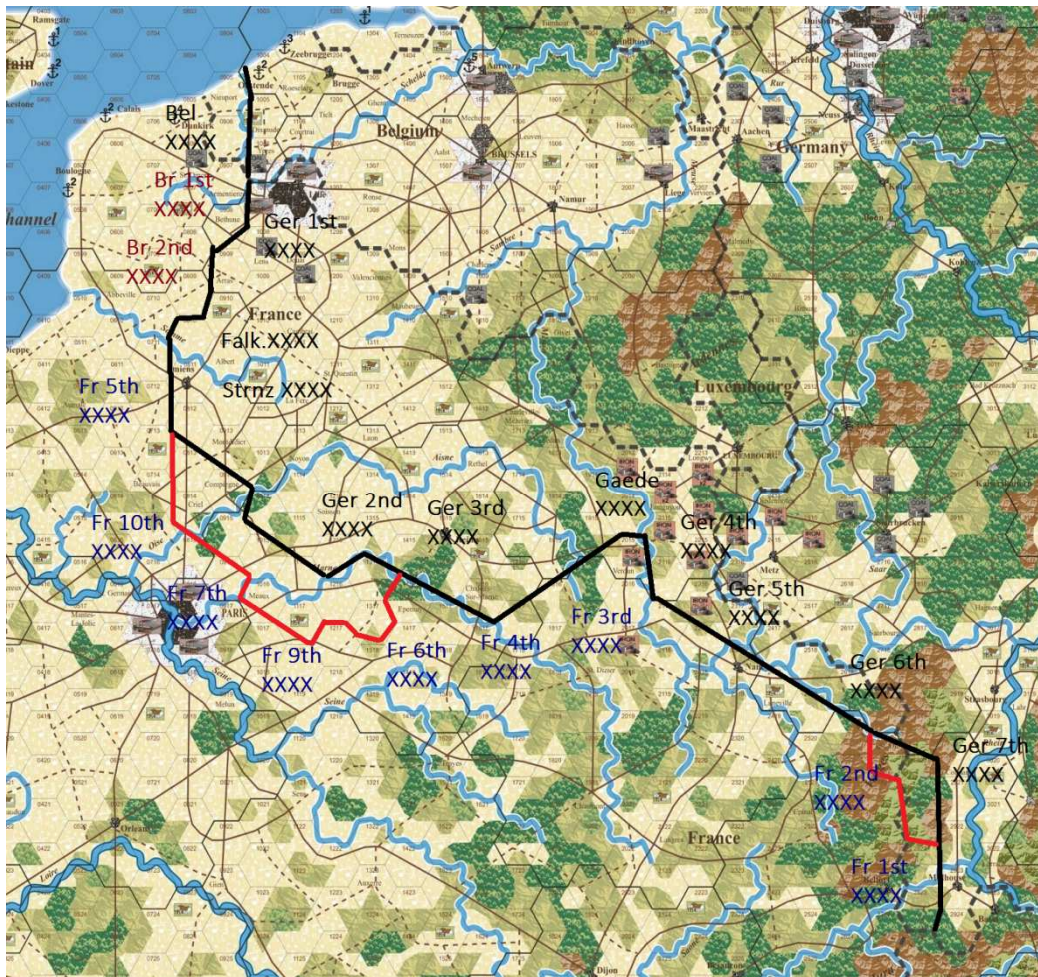


Figure 1: Western Front showing the movement of the front in between January 1st (red) and 31st March (black) 1915.

On 30 March, the French 10th Army finally began to move forward along the north side of the Oise to conform to the advance already made by the 7th Army on its right. The French

marched unopposed through Criel and Compiègne. From Compiègne, the new French line stretched northwest past St-Just-en-Chausée (5-3.0813). Following this movement, the French front was at last closed up against the whole length of the Falkenhayn Line.

The Eastern Front

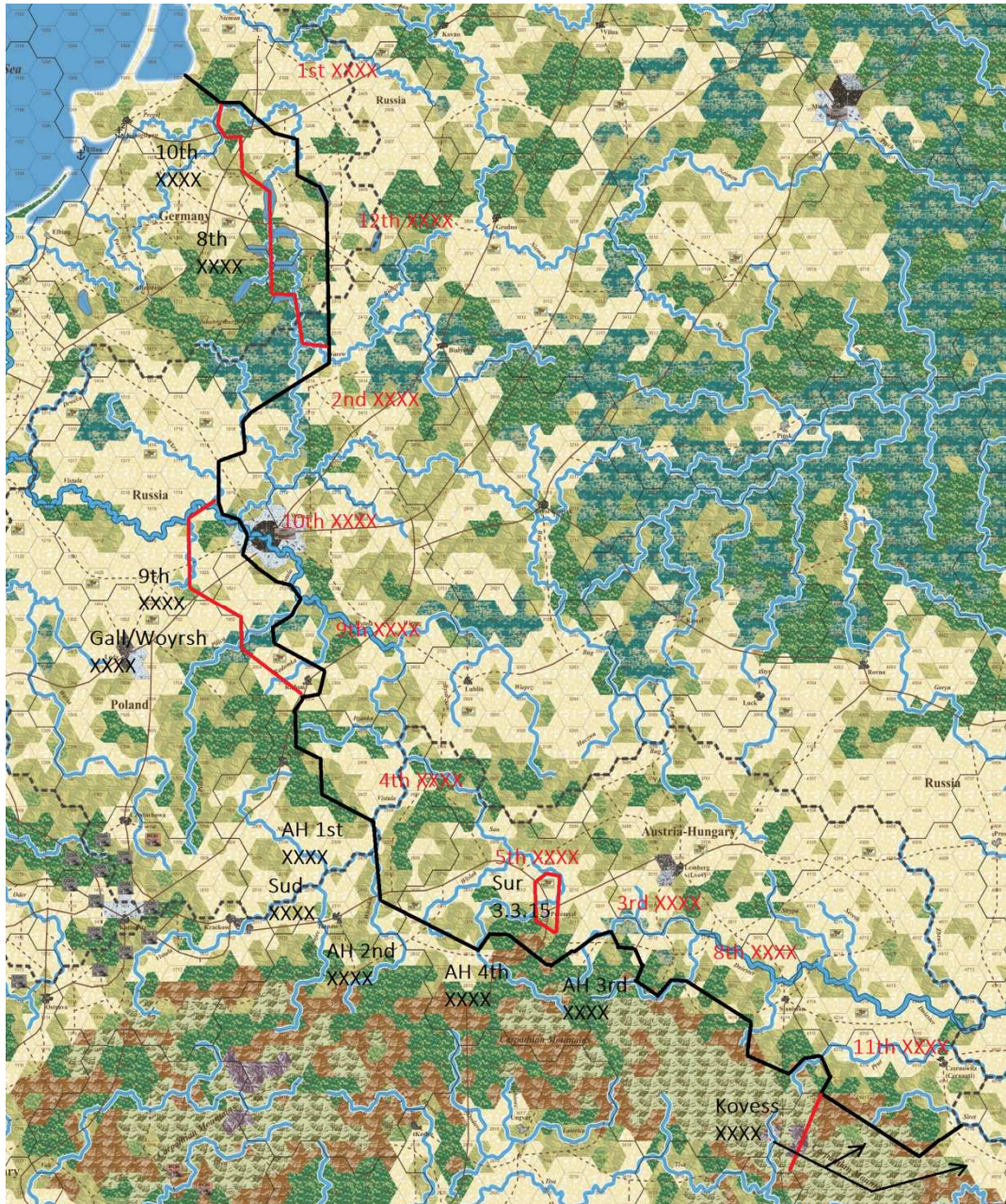


Figure 2: Central Powers advances on the Eastern Front between 1 January (red) and 31 March 1915 (black), and the loss of Przemyśl.

The war on the Eastern Front remained very active, which means it was conducted with great violence and even brutality, as the soldiers of the Central Powers were urged forward to make attack after attack.

In Prussia, the fighting around Damerau and Taplaken (5-3.1905) flared up again on 28 March after a brief pause of forty eight hours. The Russians had reinforced here and the Caucasian Grenadiers proved to be tough opponents to the German Reservists who led

most of the German attacks. Hidden in thick forests, the Russian lines were still holding firm when the German 10th Army called another halt to their operations.

The German 9th Army had a more definite success on 29 March when it captured Magierowa Wola and Warka (5-5.2121). This advance, south of Warsaw, forced three Russian Divisions to retreat across the Vistula and in the following two days, the Russians pulled back in the Pilica Valley. These operations allowed the Germans to increase the space they controlled around Warsaw and extended it south of the fortified zones.

A larger set-piece attack was also conducted between 28 – 29 March by the Austro-Hungarian 1st Army at Staszów (5-5.2407). The 1st Army was supported by the Sud Armee which contributed three German Divisions to follow up attacks on 29 March which came within an ace of smashing through the Russian trenches. The opportunity was missed by the usual events of bad fortune which attend any battle. In this case, the attack stalled in front of a reserve line held by the Russian 67th Reserve Division. This unit was so understrength that the slightest further attack would have swept it aside but the Austrian commander had thought it was a fresh formation and decided further preparation would be needed before new attacks could be made. This gave the Russian 4th Army time to fill the gaps which the Central Powers attacks had created so that by 1 April the defences at Staszów were stronger than before the initial Austrian attack.

The fighting in the Eastern Carpathians hardly ever ceased and Kovess' Army made a sharp attack on positions held by the Russian 3rd Grenadier Division near Kutuy in the Upper Prut Valley (5-5.4317). The Russian 11th Army had been on the defensive since 1914, but on 31 March it made a rare attack at Siret (5-5.4718) by the Romanian border. It was a textbook combined arms operation whereby the Austrian 3rd Cavalry Division was forced to fight in isolation of any help thanks to a push forward by the Ural Cossack Brigade. The supporting Russian infantry managed to corner and destroy one of the oldest Hussar regiments in the Imperial and Royal Army.

Serbia

There was a flourish of feverish diplomatic activity as the Allied powers received indisputable intelligence demonstrating that Bulgaria was mobilising for war. No final warning or threat would now be able to deflect the blow being planned in Sofia. The Serbian Army ordered the evacuation of Nish on 30 March. Regardless of the attitude of Bulgaria, the second city of Serbia was already deemed indefensible with the Austrians only two days march away.

The Near East



Figure 3: The aftermath of the Battle of Ismailia, 28 - 31 March 1915.

After parading up and down the eastern shore of the Suez Canal for two weeks, the Turkish XX Corps unleashed an attack on 28 March near Ismailia. The Canal was of course a difficult obstacle but the Turkish infantry had gathered inflatables, many small boats, and had even found in a dock an old Nile cruiser which the British had overlooked on the basis that they didn't think it could float for more than half an hour. The Turks managed to keep it above water for three hours and in that time it helped get half a regiment of the 25th Division across the Canal to secure some bridgeheads.

By noon on the 28 March, the situation was very critical for the British in Ismailia. Only the most vigorous counterattacks, conducted under the crossfire of Turkish guns providing fire support from the opposite side, were able to drive the Turkish landing parties back into the water. The Egyptian Frontier Brigade suffered severe losses in combats in which neither side sought or gave quarter. After the fighting died down on 30 March, the Frontier Brigade was so depleted in strength that the survivors were distributed to other units.

The commander of the British 125th Brigade reported that there were still three enemy Divisions opposite Ismailia at 2300 hours on 31 March and there was great anxiety that a fresh attack might be made. In fact, the situation of the Turks was deteriorating rapidly as the XX Corps was short of everything and had consumed most of its remaining supplies in the battle. After a desert storm had blown through on the last day of March everything was caked in dust and there was no water spare with which to clean men or equipment.

Similar hardship, but of a wetter kind, was being suffered by the retreating Mesopotamian Corps in Iraq. In the Indian Brigades falling back towards Qurna, sickness and exhaustion had taken about a third of the men out of the ranks by the end of March. Even so, the situation could have been worse but for the fact that the Turks did not come more than 20 kilometres south of Al Amarah. The lack of a close pursuit made the plight of the Indian infantry a little less bad than it might have been.

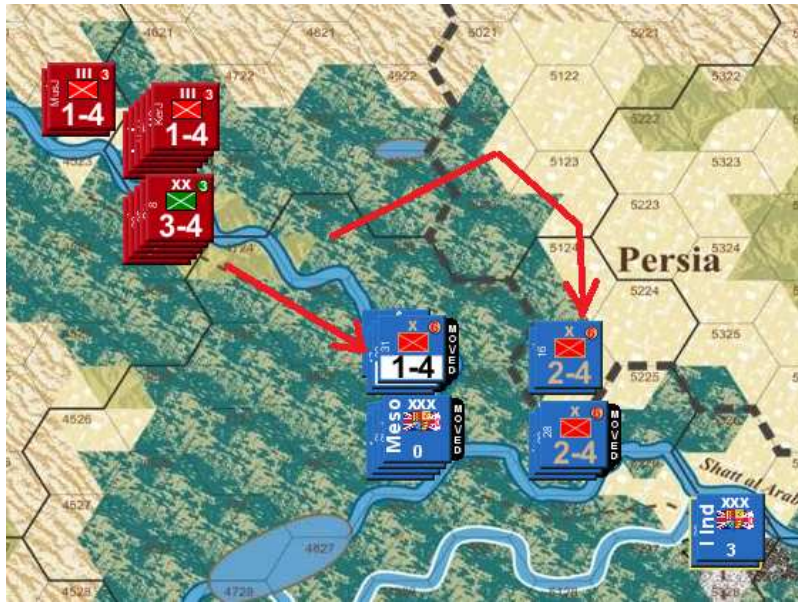


Figure 4: The Mesopotamian Corps' retreat from Al Amarah, 23 - 31 March 1915.

There was little action in the Caucasus at the end of March. The Turkish advance east of Lake Van had now encountered a firm Russian defence and the front was stabilising again.

March 1915 DM Summary

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total [%SM]	Morale
Germany	11	14	3	-	-	4	7	15	54	698 [43.6]	Good
Austria-Hungary	16*	3	5	1	4	1	6	-	36	338 [61.5]	Good *Przemysl lost
Ottoman	-	2	-	-	-	-	2	NA	4	15 [4.3]	Good
Central Powers	27	19	8	1	4	5	15	15	94	1041	
France	10	6	-	-	-	-	-	-	16	582 [64.7]	Good
Great Britain	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	2	72 [5.6]	Good
Russia	12	17	14	1	1	5	8	NA	58	386 [64.3]	Good
Belgium	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	NA	-	(95)	NA
Serbia	-	(1)	(1)	-	(2)	-	-	NA	(4)	(19)	NA
Entente	22	23	14	1	1	5	10	-	76	1040	

Percentage of Shaken Morale shown.

Player Notes

- CP: East: I attack on the bend of the north bank of the Pregel again, which proves to be folly as I take the worst of it. I manage a successful attack 40km SE of Warsaw on

the Vistula to force him back across the river. My only other attack is by Sud Armee in support of AH in southern Poland.

- *Galicja: Kovess makes another attritional attack in eastern Galicja – I am hoping to wear him down here. 1st Army, supported by Sud Armee, reduce a division to a depleted brigade in the upper reaches of the Vistula on the southern Polish border. I am on the cusp of breaking in to his trench lines here.*
- *Serbia: I move to the outskirts of Nish and am now looking expectantly towards Bulgaria to assist me in finally eradicating the Serbian menace.*
- *West: No change.*
- *Caucasus: Quiet.*
- *Mesopotamia: Quiet.*
- *Palestine: I finally launch an attack on Ismailia which succeeds beyond my expectations. The British force here is reduced by 2/3rds; although I suffer equivalent losses in the counter-attack.*
- *Gallipoli: Quiet; still no invasion.*
- *Italy: Nothing to report.*

AP: I cheered up a little this turn. The losses for Russia this month are very bad, but I consider myself forced to hang on as long as possible with them. If it was already June, I might accept these losses and start retreating. Because it is the end of March, I have to keep holding ground even if that is also accelerating my losses. In compensation, two turns of largely unsupplied attacks have kept CP losses high relative to the Russians and my successful attack on the Austrian cavalry was a nice bonus.

I decided I could advance more aggressively in France at the risk of a German counter offensive in April. I do not think this would be so bad or very likely. The German Army needs a rest if it is to build-up its strength so any sudden moves in France should play into my hands. I will not launch the next French offensive if instead there is defensive fighting as my main concern is to keep French losses at a minimum for a period while they are building-up for stronger offensives later in the year.