

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT59: 10 – 14 April 1915 (April 3)

General Situation

The war was not only fought between soldiers. There was a growing realisation that there were other dimensions to the struggle. Diplomacy had always been part of warfare and in this sphere the Central Powers were apparently ahead on points following their Bulgarian alliance. However, with Italy almost ready to commit for the Entente, the reality was more balanced. More and more people recognised that industry, agriculture, the trade in raw materials, transport and shipping and other important sectors of the peacetime economy had also been heavily subordinated to the demands of the war.

The way in which cultural factors and in particular propaganda were shaping the conflict was not so clearly understood. The idea that history was written by the victors was not strange to the people of the early 20th Century. What was less obvious was that the first drafts could be completed before it had been determined who the victors would be and that these early efforts might actually influence the outcome.

A small example was given on 10 April when the St Petersburg Chronicle, a newspaper with strong links to the Russian government, published the story that Ludendorff had bet that he would dine in Warsaw on his birthday (which was the 9th). The Chronicle therefore announced that the bet had been lost and ensured that the story was repeated by every major Allied newspaper and most neutral ones also. The story was even repeated in the Polish language Krakow Evening Post which was promptly shut down. The original report was calculated not just to diminish the reputation of a leading enemy general but also to reduce the impact of the loss of Warsaw itself.

When retreat finally came, it would only be remembered that Ludendorff didn't get to Warsaw in time for his birthday. That was the cynical rationalisation devised for this *coupe de la presse* by a cell in the Russian Ministry for Education and Culture. Trotsky revealed this in his writings 15 years later showing a rare trace of admiration of Tsarist bureaucracy. Ludendorff himself was wise enough never to comment on the story. Any attempt at denial would be taken as proof of its truth.

The Western Front

It was a war of snipers and seemingly random mortar bombs on the Western Front. The routines of trench warfare were now well established. These routines would not win the war but they were a necessary undercurrent to the periods between major attacks.

Joffre was in a dangerously positive mood during the spring of 1915. He had come within a whisker of losing his command in the last weeks of 1914 but now the prospects seemed much brighter. That Joffre wanted to attack again and again on the Western Front was well understood in the higher echelons of the French Staff which was collaborating willingly in planning new offensives. The offensive spirit was not the same as in 1914. Now there was a more cautious aggression. What Joffre wanted was meticulously prepared massive attacks and he was prepared to wait until every last resource was gathered to throw at the enemy in order to break the defence at the chosen point. It was not expected that the Germans would grant any more easy victories such as had been gained in Alsace. The tough defence they had put up in Picardy in February was recognised to be the more likely answer to the next French offensive. This was what forced Joffre and his colleagues to envisage unprecedentedly larger scale attacks.

The Eastern Front

The war on the Russian Front had some similarity with the war in the West at this time. There were trenches but they were not so densely populated and were consequently less well fitted out with small comforts.

The leading commanders in the East (or some of them) were also displaying a bit more of the caution which had been adopted in the West. On the Russian side all thought of a major offensive had been knocked out of both the Stavka and the Grand-Duke's headquarters due to the battering the Imperial Russian Army had suffered in recent weeks. Such operations would need a strategic reserve but there was none. Every unit the Russians had found itself quickly dispatched to the most vulnerable sectors.

The Germans and Austrians were also taking more time in deliberating their next moves. Expectations in the Central Powers were running high as both Hindenburg and Conrad had represented to their respective Courts that they would break Russia. It was not possible to scale back these promises which would have to be fulfilled in the next few months. Accordingly, the next attacks on the Russians would perhaps be the most critical of the campaign so far.



Figure 1: The Second attack at Kut, 12 April 1915.

The distant General Kovess did not move to the same rhythms as the other commanders on this front. After a period of preparation since late-March, Kovess ordered a second attack at Kut (5-5.4317) on 12 April. The Russians saved the situation when their 47th Division arrived on 14 April but this was not before Kovess had ground the remnants of the Russian 65th Reserve Division into fragments in a bitter struggle for control of the rough wooded ridges above the unfortunate Bukhovinian town.

The Balkans

The 3rd Balkan War engendered a new class of victim between 10 – 12 April at Vranje (7-6.1304). There the Bulgarians suffered their first significant casualties as their 3rd Division crossed the Southern Morava in Eastern Serbia. The Serbians sacrificed a whole regiment to delay the enemy but the momentum of the Bulgarian advance was not checked at all.

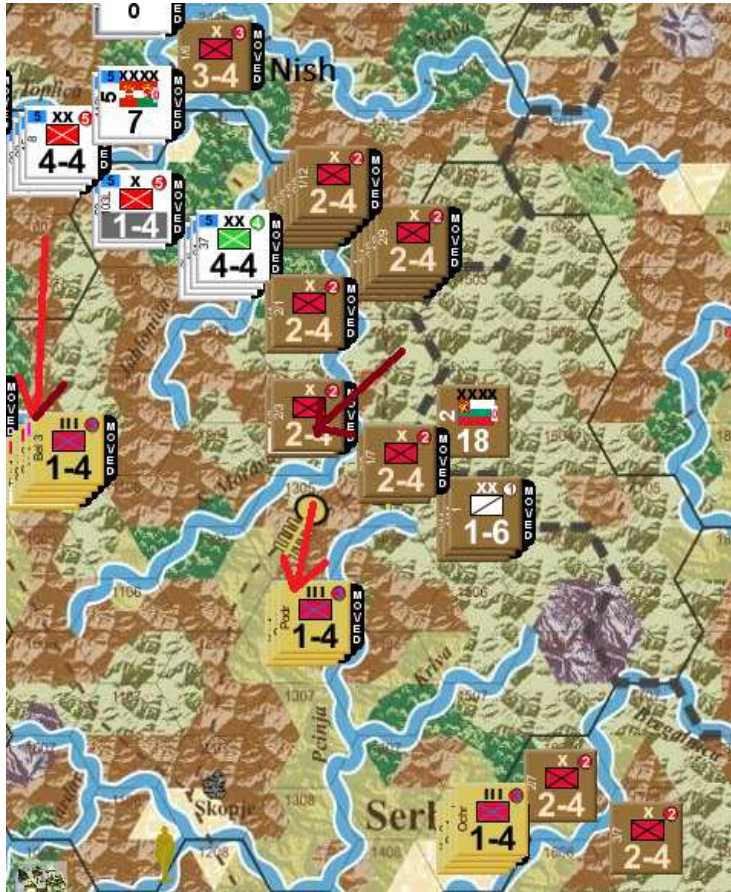


Figure 2: The war in Serbia between Nish and Skopje, 10 - 14 April 1915

The Near East

The Turkish defenders of the Straights were fully aware of the quickening pace of Allied preparations in the Aegean. There was also a raging debate in the Turkish 5th Army on the best way in which to meet an invasion if it came. The wisdom of the German advisers present in the Turkish Headquarters led by Liman van Sanders was that the Turks should keep their forces inland from the coast and then move to seal any landings as soon as they were located. On 10 and 11 April, the young commanders of the Gallipoli Jandarma and the 3rd Frontier Regiment participated in a serious act of insubordination disguised as a recreational trip in which several companies were allowed to go swimming off the beaches on the western coast of the Dardanelles peninsula. The two responsible Colonels thereby communicated their opposition to the existing plan and sought to demonstrate there were easily enough men to defend all of the beaches at which any landing was possible. Such disunity in the face of an imminent enemy attack could not be countenanced. Both regiments were ordered back to their barracks leaving only small patrols watching the beaches. Both Colonels were punished under section 43-9 of the Turkish Military Code (OH), lost rank, and were transferred to small garrisons in the furthest reaches of Arabia.



Figure 3: In Allied military plans prepared in April 1915, Beach Zones N and S were often marked No Swimming.

In contrast, the commanders of the Turkish forces in Iraq seemed more worthy of reward having chased the British back to Qurna. On 10 April, the Turkish 6th Army was newly designated and its creation ensured rapid promotion for favoured officers in that theatre.

In the Caucasus, the Russian I Turkestan Corps moved forwards rapidly to within 30 kilometres of Van by 14 April. The Turks nevertheless seemed determined to prevent the loss of this town (badly damaged though it already was) and covered it with a full-strength Infantry Division (33rd) and no less than three regular and irregular Cavalry Divisions.

Player Notes

CP: *Not this time.*

AP: *I was half expecting the storm to break this turn but no nothing much happened. The Russians improved their defences in a couple of locations under threat but I had very few moves to do. These were practically my last available reserves moving into position.*

Iraq and Egypt are likely to remain quiet for a while. I am in the third turn of loading my invasion force at Mudros.

I have calculated in which month the next French offensive becomes mandatory due to GCR rule 22. If no supply is spent before, then I will have to attack before the end of May. I may attack sooner of course and it is likely to be a bigger attack than the one in February because the French now have more of everything, especially Artillery and fresh Infantry. Both the British and French have been building Artillery as a significant priority since production began though with a nine-month

production cycle I will only see the fruits of this arriving during the late-summer and afterwards. I will have to keep this up if I want to gain superiority over the Germans later in the war.

April 1915 DM Summary

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total	Morale
Germany	2	-	-					15	17	715	Good
Austria-Hungary	-	-	1					-	1	339	Good
Ottoman	-	-	-					NA	-	15	Good
Bulgaria	-	-	1					-	1	1	Good
Central Powers	2	-	2						19	1060	
France	-	-	-						-	582	Good
Great Britain	-	-	-						-	72	Good
Russia	2	-	1					NA	3	389	Good
Belgium	-	-	-					NA	-	(95)	NA
Serbia	-*	-	(1)					NA	(1)	(20)	NA * Nish lost
Entente	2	-	1					-	3	1043	