

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT60: 15 – 18 April 1915 (April 4)

General Situation

It was sometimes possible to forget there was a war on. In mid-April, the news from the battlefields slackened a little. The British press found this hard and notwithstanding kept up a steady diet of stirring tales of brave trench raids and heroic defences which were typically based on events which had occurred weeks or months previously. There was some news from the war in Africa. Censorship prevented a full account being given of the preparation for action in the Aegean which was still being reported as a purely naval threat to the Turkish Straights.

With this thin fare the London and Provincial newspapers turned to social controversies such as whether the flat racing season should go ahead. There were arguments that the sport helped maintain the bloodstock upon which the Army depended though critics could say a racing horse did not have much in common with a cavalry or artillery horse. The real problem was the social flummery which surrounded racing, Ladies' Day at Ascot being a particular concern. This was too incongruous to the national emergency. The Church came down hard against it and the Non-Conformists were unforgiving. The Season would have to give way to the greater demands of the war and the need for a serious mood in national life.

The Western Front

The absence of any major action for two months meant that the British Expeditionary Force had been able to absorb new strength and familiarise the new volunteers with the conditions on the Western Front. The British had 12 Infantry Divisions (including one Canadian and one Indian) in France in mid-April. There was also three Cavalry Divisions (one Indian). There was as yet no heavy calibre artillery, an arm in which the Germans still had an undoubted superiority. The growing strength of the BEF necessitated the activation of the British 3rd Army on 17 April which was initially placed between the 1st and 2nd Armies and was first commanded by General Munro.



Figure 1: Sectors of the British Armies, mid-April 1915.

Falkenhayn was conscious that the British and French Armies were preparing for further offensive action and that the next attacks would test the German defences in France. There was some debate as to how deep the German trench lines ought to be. General Stranz inspected the rear areas of the German 2nd Army on 16 April and reported to Falkenhayn on the frenzied trench building which he found south of Peronne. Stranz questioned whether it was really necessary to build trench lines so far (30 kilometres) from the front line. While he praised the dedication of the troops engaged, he pointed out that their efforts might be counter-productive especially in cases where the works threatened to disrupt the road network. He also pointed out that on the front line, the trench systems were very sensitive to the tactical situation and were improved on every day as the presence of the enemy demonstrated what was strong and what was vulnerable. Although some of the rear area trenches looked very neat and well-constructed, Stranz doubted they would withstand the scrutiny of front line conditions and would have to be rebuilt if ever the French approached.

The Eastern Front

There was one major attack in mid-April which was conducted by the German Sud Army supported by elements of the Austro-Hungarian 1st Army. On 15 April, the Germans, led by two Württemberg Reserve Divisions (1st and 2nd), broke through the line of the Russian 48th Division between Raków and Mostki (5-5.2307). This was about mid-way between Kielce and the Vistula at the boundary between the Russian 9th and 4th Armies. Another Russian Rifle Division was pushed aside by the 1st Bavarian Reserve Division next day. The Germans then moved forwards about 15 – 20 kilometres through wooded terrain. They were delayed by Russian efforts to block movement by felling trees and burning habitations which left the countryside from which they withdrew completely devastated.



Figure 2: Sud Army attack at Raków – Mostki, 15 – 16 April 1915.

The Balkans

There was no change in the pattern of the campaign in Serbia. The Austrians and Bulgarians were able to manoeuvre their opponents out of most of their positions. Few frontal assaults were needed to hurry on the steady surrender of Serbian territory to their enemies. One significant advance on 16 April brought the Bulgarian 2nd Division to the Serbian – Greek border at the point where the Vardar River crosses into Greece (7-6.1810). Not far ahead on the other side of the river was the railway which linked Skopje and Salonika which was the main line of communication between Serbia and the outside world. It would not be long before Bulgarian patrols might be able to shut down this route.

The Near East

The preparations for a major operation at Mudros would have been obvious to the most incapable spy. Boat drills were taking place daily. The port areas were crowded with soldiers, sailors and marines from several nations. The big question for all of them was who was “going” and who was not. A spy might have concluded that the arrangements were chaotic particularly if he had witnessed one of the many brawls which occurred over competition between units to secure the best berths and to obtain more generous provisions of space to stow equipment. The French and British Marines fought hard to maintain their shipboard privileges and the ten ANZAC soldiers who had their bones broken or nearly drowned when they were induced to cross a collapsing gangway during a scummage in the docks were the heaviest casualties the Dominion forces had suffered in the Mediterranean up to that date.

With the British and French preparing their main effort in the Aegean, there was not much activity in Egypt and Iraq where the defensive posture of the British was maintained.



Figure 3: Turkish and Russian forward movements in the Central Caucasus, 15 - 18 April 1915.

The Turks were moving forwards in the Caucasus towards and to the west of the great volcanic peak of Mount Sufian. There the Turkish XIII Corps had been reinforced by troops

from XI Corps which had come round from Van. On 16 April, the Kurdish 4th Cavalry Division occupied Ahlat (6-8.3020) which had been abandoned by the Russian Frontier Guards only a few hours before.

The Russians were not purely on the defensive. Yudenitch had been frustrated since he had been forced to suspend his earlier attacks towards Erzerum because of the need to respond to the Turkish thrust towards the Persian border in March. The situation to the east of Lake Van had stabilised, and Van was reported recaptured on 17 April. Yudenitch was ready to resume his attacks and had the 10th Siberian and 39th Divisions supported by Kuban Mountain Infantry (this was the III Caucasian Corps) prepared to strike at Gölyala (6-8.2419) where the Turkish 37th Division defended some precipitous heights which stood in the way of a Russian advance to the main road between Erzerum and Mus. A Russian success here would render communication between the Turks at Erzerum and those around Lake Van much more difficult. For two days the Siberians made uphill infantry assaults against the determined Turkish defenders who used every advantage of the terrain and were not afraid to launch their own counterattacks. The Russians almost broke the defence but, on 18 April, an attack by the 2nd Frontier Guards Regiment drew the Russians into a defile where they were overlooked and massacred. As night fell, the victors were unaware of the extent of their success but the Russian casualties left in Gölyala Valley underlined the Turks effectiveness in mountain warfare.

April 1915 DM Summary

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total	Morale
Germany	2	-	-	1				15	18	716	Good
Austria-Hungary	-	-	1	-				-	1	339	Good
Ottoman	-	-	-	1				NA	1	16	Good
Bulgaria	-	-	1	-				-	1	1	Good
Central Powers	2	-	2	2					21	1062	
France	-	-	-	-					-	582	Good
Great Britain	-	-	-	-					-	72	Good
Russia	2	-	1	6				NA	9	395	Good
Belgium	-	-	-	-				NA	-	(95)	NA
Serbia	-*	-	(1)	-				NA	(1)	(20)	NA * Nish lost
Entente	2	-	1	6				-	9	1049	

Player Notes

CP:

- *East: Again, a fairly quiet round less one combined attack with the AH 1st Army in S Poland.*

- *Galicia: AH 1st Army feels strong enough to join in a combined offensive with German Sud Armee. I hope to start pushing the Russians away from the protective terrain of the woods.*
- *Serbia: Both AH and Bulgaria continue to drive in towards central and southern Serbia.*
- *West: Quiet.*
- *Caucasus: Quiet.*
- *Mesopotamia: Quiet.*
- *Palestine: I am back in Turkish territory.*
- *Gallipoli: Quiet.*
- *Italy: Nothing to report.*

AP: I had few decisions to take this turn. The only one of significance was the decision to attack in the Caucasus. It wasn't the most powerful attack (4 combat strength after halving, but with the advantage of the 1917-19 CRT). It had a one sixth chance of allowing me to occupy a hex on the Erzerum to Mus route which would be an awkward situation for the Turks. This plus the attrition on the Turks made the risk seem worthwhile. The 3:1 casualty ratio in favour of the Turks does make this seem like a defeat but I can also reflect that it destroyed 50% of the Turkish monthly replacement capacity against a much lower proportion of the Russian available manpower.

The attack by the Sud Army also had a 3:1 loss ratio in favour of the Germans and more attacks like that would hurt but they are expensive in terms of supply and it required concentration against weakness. A series of such attacks would worry me, but repeating it will be difficult because of supply shortages in that locale. I replaced my losses (with nearby reserves) but I would not be able to do this again and certainly not twice without pulling forces out of more distant sectors.

I think I have the Prussian and Eastern Carpathian sectors stabilised, the CP are going to have to look elsewhere for a break through point if that is what they want. There is a lot of Artillery threatening Warsaw but not much Infantry. Masuria and Western Galicia are also fairly weak for the Russians (the latter having poor rail communication to boot) but the CP is also leaving these areas in peace presently.