

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT61: 19 – 22 April 1915 (April 5)

General Situation

The war was approaching a critical moment. Some historians have debated whether there was a sudden crisis of morale in the Russian Army and whether it was as a result of proximate events or the accumulation of hardship throughout the previous winter. Others have focussed on the supposed psychological instability of the Grand-Duke who was both the nominal commander-in-chief and the actual commander of the Western Group of Russian Armies. This consisted of the 9th and 10th Armies and the 6th Army which was in the process of taking over the left wing of the 2nd Army.

The recognition of weakness on the Eastern Front was driving the wider strategy of the Entente. Russian pleas for action from their allies had become ever more urgent. It was hardly possible to improvise any major offensives. The attack on the Dardanelles was only a few days away, but it had taken five months to prepare. The French and British were certain to strike again on the Western Front but Russian requests that they brought forward their planned attacks were not welcomed as premature attacks could end disastrously. An absolute refusal was not possible so the Western Allies promised to reappraise their operations and not delay them a day longer than necessary.

The Eastern Front

The Russians continued to bravely resist the continued efforts of the Central Powers to drive them away from their entrenched lines. Between 19 and 20 April, the Sud Army and the Austrians made a fresh attack towards Lagów (5-5.2306) trying to overcome a stubborn but weakening Russian defence. The Austrians were by no means involved only in a supporting role. One of the most aggressive attacks was made by the Austrian 54th Division at Ocieseki (5-5.2307) where they fought hand to hand against the Russian 48th Division to secure the first break into the Russian defence. These Austrians were actually ahead of the German advance which stalled before it reached Lagów.

Sometimes the outcome of attacks were more one sided. On 19 April, the Austrian 4th Army made a short advance and captured Wygoda (5-5.2811) without suffering any casualties at all after units moved forward unobserved. The following day, a similar operation at Sucevita (5-5.4518) in the Eastern Carpathians resulted in waves of Austrian troops being cut down by accurate Russian rifle as they stumbled into a killing zone while struggling up steep wooded slopes. None reached the top.

Although the fighting was mainly to the south and partly within the purview of the South West Front it did prey on the mind of the Grand-Duke. Having thought the battle for Warsaw was lost before it had begun, it had done nothing for the Grand-Duke's tranquillity that there had been a stay of execution. Instead it had prolonged the period in which he was able to dwell on the awful fact that he would be blamed for the loss of the Polish capital whether it happened sooner or later. These anxieties conflicted with a concern for the

safety of the Army which was increasingly in doubt as the German build-up on the Eastern Front became more and more unmistakable.

Having demanded so many sacrifices to stop earlier German advances, the Grand-Duke was becoming more open to more pragmatic stratagems. Each of the Armies under the Grand-Duke's command held salients which would be exposed in the event of a major attack. On 22 April, permission was given to fall back from these advanced positions to shorten the defended fronts. Among the positions lost by these retreats would be that of the former fortress of Novo Georgievsk (4-5.1915). On that day, the Grand-Duke watched an exhibition game of rugby football organised by British liaison officers (England v Scotland) to popularise sport for training and character building in the Russian Army. It required a nine hour drinking binge before, during and after the game, before the Grand-Duke could bring himself to order these tactical retreats.



Figure 1: The Russian West Front, 19 - 22 April 1915

The Balkans

The Serbians were finding it impossible to hold their ground against the joint advance of the Austrians and the Bulgarians. The next objective of the Central Powers was likely to be Skopje which, on 22 April, lay only 35 kilometres ahead of the most advanced probes of the Bulgarian 2nd Army.

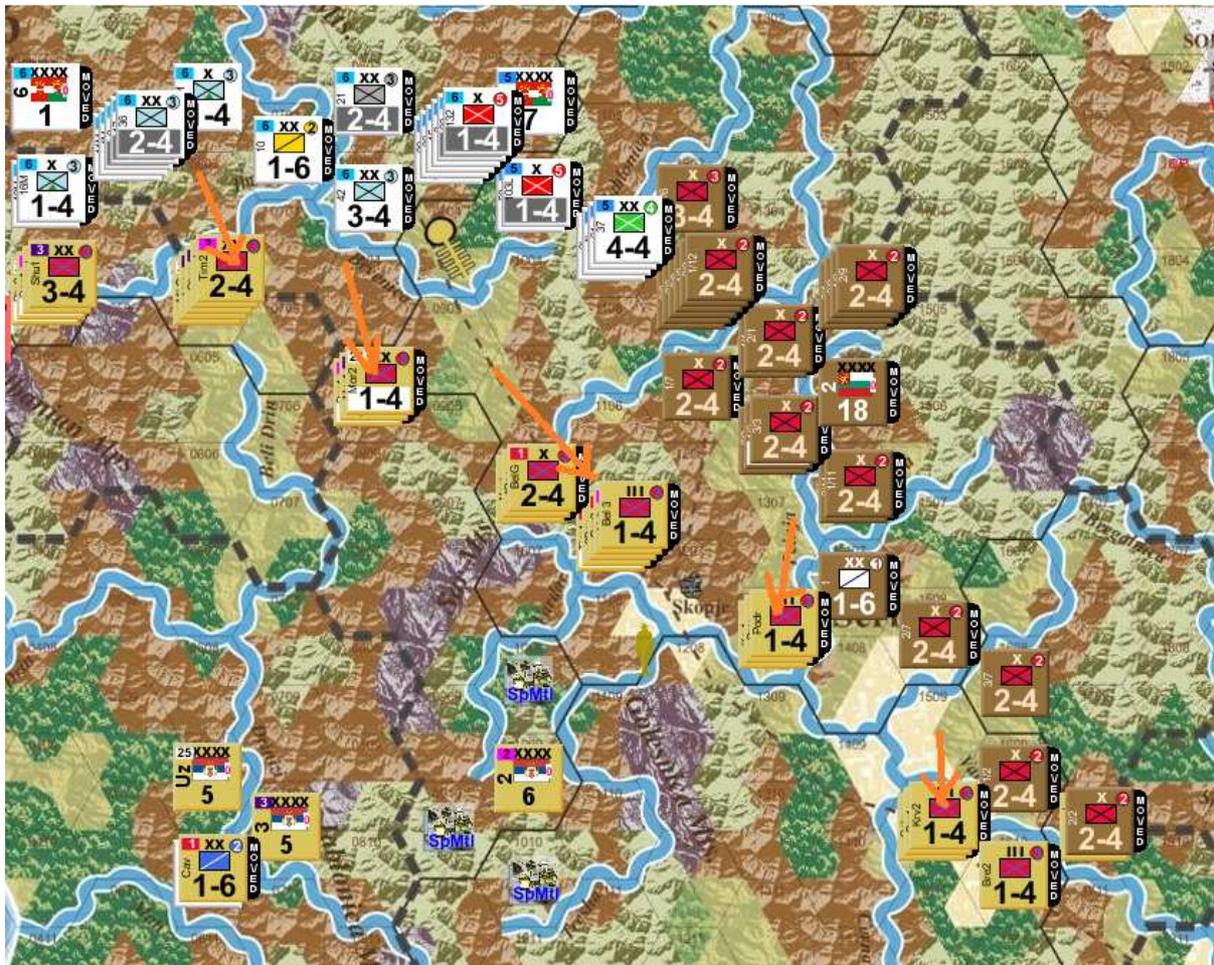


Figure 2: The Serbians pulling back in Macedonia and Kosova, 19 - 22 April 1915.

The Near East

The long expected attack on the Dardanelles was now imminent. On 21 April, the orders for loading the invasion force were finalised. Many troops were already on their allocated vessels and consequentially were going to endure several days at sea before they would go ashore. Such discomfort could not be avoided because it was impossible to load the men, their equipment and supplies, very fast in such a small port as Mudros.

The Dardanelles operation was supposed to coincide with a Russian offensive in the Caucasus, but the Russians were in some disarray after the terrible losses they had suffered in the attack at Gölyala (6-8.2419). Instead of advancing, the Russians were pulling back. The 2nd Kuban Mountain Brigade was at half strength and simply did not like the prospect of a further Turkish counterattack. Since the mountain infantry were supposed to use initiative, they used it to save their skins and forced the III Caucasian Corps to accept the reality of the

situation. The Russian II Turkestan Corps was also falling back in the Murat Valley as strong Turkish forces were spotted concentrating west of Lake Van and the Russians were still too weak on this left flank to hope to stop a serious enemy push forward. In contrast, on the opposite side of the lake, at Van, the Russian I Turkestan Corps was probing in front of the Turkish lines to the west of the ruined town.



Figure 3: Russian retreats in the Caucasus after the Battle of Gölyala, 19 - 22 April 1915.

The Western Front

The French and British were working through their plans for the Spring Offensive proper. The pressure from the Russians to bring forward the intended date of their attacks was exposing some of the difficulties they faced. First, it had been assumed that the next attacks would be coordinated in that the two allies would attack on the same date. Now it appeared that the British were more able and willing to speed their plans whereas the French were still cautious and even undecided as to where their main attack would be. Joffre was still considering two major alternatives and the concentration of the men and materiel needed for a major French attack had hardly begun.

The second difficulty for the Western powers was that they had a growing awareness that the German defences were stronger than ever and it was hard to believe that there would not be the most sanguinary struggle to get through the German defences. The French commanders had a good understanding of how their heavy artillery might be needed to support their infantry but there was still a shortage of these weapons and the French were also expecting to have to loan guns to help the British attack.

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	-	4			-	5	343	Good
Ottoman	-	-	-	1	-			NA	1	16	Good
Bulgaria	-	-	1	-	-			-	1	1	Good
Central Powers	2	-	2	2	4				25	1066	
France	-	-	-	-	-				-	582	Good
Great Britain	-	-	-	-	-				-	72	Good
Russia	2	-	1	6	4			NA	13	399	Good
Belgium	-	-	-	-	-			NA	-	(95)	NA
Serbia	-*	-	(1)	-	-			NA	(1)	(20)	NA * Nish lost
Entente	2	-	1	6	4			-	13	1053	

Player Notes:

CP

- *East: Having read Robert's last AAR thoughts, I think he is trying to psyche me out of attacking now by hinting I should hold back. Or it could be a double-bluff, hoping I will think that and therefore definitely attack. Either way I am not to be swayed and muster an attack for which I require no supply but which will cause him 50% losses if he stays and potentially eliminate him on the next attack in that location. It is made by Sud Armee in conjunction with the AH 1st Army east of Kielce.*
- *Galicia: AH ups the pressure again with an attack by Kovess, requiring a single supply, and another by a combined 4th and 2nd armies requiring no supply. They will take no ground, but the thinly spread Russians can afford the losses less than the re-energised AH forces.*
- *Serbia: Both AH and Bulgaria continue to drive in towards central and southern Serbia.*
- *West: I bolster up some of the forward positions. We are both building strength and supply. Something dreadful is no doubt in the offing.*
- *Caucasus: I survived his last attack by the skin of my teeth, but he takes terrible losses; almost a division to my regiment.*
- *Mesopotamia: Quiet. My Turks are indulging in some ornithological curiosity by recording the various bird species flocking to the inundated marshlands.*
- *Palestine: I am back in Turkish territory and start to dig in; not that I expect a follow-up to my raid.*
- *Gallipoli: Spies report that the Franco-British forces on Mudros have started embarking. I expect an imminent invasion; although cannot persuade the Turkish*

commander of the Gallipoli defences to establish delaying forces on the identified landing locations.

- *Italy: Nothing to report.*

AP: *I think my morale finally started to crack for the Russians this turn even though I was pleased to get an even exchange of losses in combat with the Austrians which is a good trade for the Russians.*

Before the start of this game I would have suggested that the Russian retreat might best begin at about DM 325 so that the Russians had 200 DM in hand after giving up Warsaw. However, the Russians will go over 400 DM next turn and the Germans have only partly committed themselves so far this month. Small increments of DM will have an increasing proportionate effect reducing the remaining distance to Shaken Morale which is now only 126 DM away taking into account the inevitable loss of Warsaw. I have held my lines longer than I was expecting during March 1915 but the comparative lull in action this month has been only a brief reprieve. The situation of the Russians is not getting any better. (Note how a threshold of morale such as Russian Shaken Morale at 600 DM starts to effect player decisions at much lower DM levels as you must adjust your strategy in anticipation of them).

I should say something about the forthcoming attack on the Dardanelles. The rules on amphibious invasions are not the clearest but I hope I am doing this approximately right. To recap, in January 1915, I increased the capacity of the port of Mudros. This took a month and was essential to allow for the movement of troops and supplies to Lemnos. I also set up a sustainment pipeline from Britain and France to allow for the sustainment of the invasion force. When the invasion actually occurs half this sustainment capability will move to the invasion beaches.

Among the forces landed at Mudros is an Army HQ with 10 supply (actually there is a British and a French HQ there). There is errata from David increasing the stacking limits of an invasion staging area. This has allowed me, I judged, to accumulate at Mudros, 2 French Divisions, 2 British Divisions, 2 ANZAC Divisions and 2 Marine Brigades. It took me until the end of March to get this force unloaded at Mudros. Possibly I could have done this faster but not by much.

Since, the April I turn I declared the staging area (secretly designated the landing beaches) and I have been loading the invasion force which took 5 turns. Only half of each non-marine division can join the invasion force. Next turn I will reveal the destination and will also move in the Allied naval support counters which will be needed to help defend the beaches. I will also deduct my amphibious troop capacity at this time. It is about a big an invasion as I think possible.

At one point Ivor thought of occupying the landing hexes. I had to refer him to rule OH 43-9. Without this rule (Turkish units on map 7-6 cannot move until May 1915) there would be no amphibious attacks in the game as it would be trivially easy to stop any invasion before there is any landing. The rule also forces the Entente to get on with it to invade before the window closes and the Turks complete their defences.