

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg - Centenary Game

GT62: 23 – 26 April 1915 (April 6)

General Situation

The world's press and news agencies were all primed to report the dramatic landings on the Dardanelles peninsula as soon as they occurred on 25 April. The whole history of the war to date had seen nothing like this. In the first days, no hint of criticism emerged and no shortcomings were heard of. It seemed as if the Allies had pulled off the greatest strategic coup since Caesar had crossed the Rubicon. When it transpired that this operation coincided with a big British attack in France the greatest of hopes were raised.

The contemporaneous events in Poland and Prussia were outside the gaze of the Western public and in fact not immediately reported even in Russia and Germany. Nevertheless, the retrograde moves of the Russians were the beginning of a change in the war situation which might have been expected to be more momentous than anything that would be achieved at the Turkish Straights. The whole Russian Empire was starting to totter on its heels and if it was not to fall over it would have to step back from the flurry of punches which the Central Powers were giving out daily.

The Eastern Front

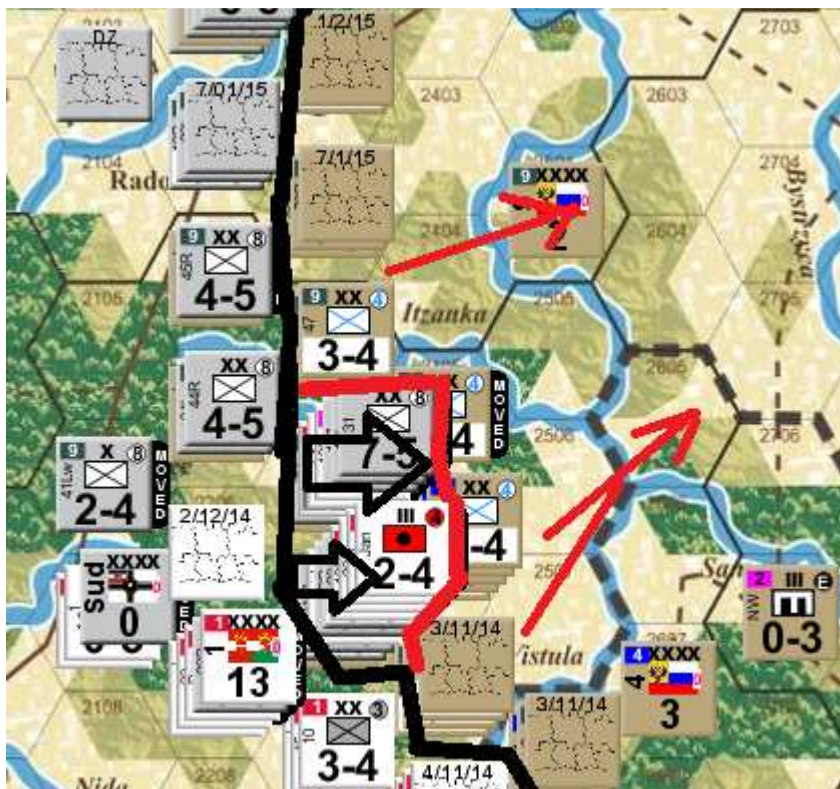


Figure 1: The Breakthrough at Laków-Nowa Słupia and the initial Russian retreat, 19 – 26 April 1915.

Historians have dubbed the Sud Army offensive which broke the back of the Russian defences in 1915 as the Battle of Kielce. The Austrian 1st Army shared in the credit. After an initial advance of the Austrian 54th Division at Laków (5-5.2307), this unit joined three strong German Divisions which expelled the Russians violently from Nowa Słupia on 23 April. Next day this force advanced towards

the Itzanka River against only light opposition and it became clear that the Russians were pulling out. In fact a widespread retreat was beginning in which the Russian 4th and 9th Armies withdrew behind the Vistula during the next 48 hours often falling back over 40 kilometres.

This was by no means the only Central Powers' success during this period. Both the Austrian 2nd and 4th Armies were pressing against the Russian lines in the south west again and were picking off isolated Russian units in a series of successful raids and limited attacks in the upper valleys of the Wislok and San Rivers. The Russian defenders here had been little reinforced and their front was long compared to the manpower they had available. On 26 April, the commander of the Russian 5th Army learned that the 75th Reserve Division had abandoned a section of the front at Jasienica Rosielna (5-5.2811) in an unauthorised movement. There was gap of at least 20 kilometres in the Russian front as a result. The whole senior tier of officers of this Division were dismissed from the service or reduced to the ranks within days.

In Prussia, the German 10th Army made a smashing attack on the Russian 43rd Division close to the sea, east of Labiau (4-5.1804). Here the Russians did not flee and as a result they were all slaughtered in their shallow trenches. By 26 April, there was not much left ahead of the German infantry on the coast. The Russian Opolchenie and Cavalry which had been supporting the regular infantry had seen enough to know that they would not survive long if they were foolish enough to try and defend the reserve lines.

In all these actions during the last week of April, the Russian infantry showed that it had lost the stubborn determination to hold ground which had been its mainstay during the previous months. Morale was still good on the surface but under pressure it was proving more fragile.

The Grand-Duke inspected the defences of Warsaw on 25 – 26 April and apparently declared himself satisfied in all but one particular. In that he ordered the fortress at Zegreze (4-5.2017) to be abandoned. He declared that if two Siberian Divisions could not stop the Germans reaching the northern gates of Warsaw that pile of bricks would do nothing to help.

The Balkans

By 25 April, the Serbians had begun to abandon all territory east of the Vardar River. Since Skopje was on the eastern bank, its imminent loss to the land hungry Bulgarians could not be long delayed.

The Near East

The Allied landings on the Gallipoli Peninsula began at dawn on 25 April. There were three groups of beaches.

The French Corps Expéditionnaire de L'orient ("CEO") was to land at Cape Hellas (7-6.3713) at the entrance to the Dardanelles. The initial landings were conducted by the French 22nd Division. The beaches here had been long swept with naval gunfire and the Turkish 9th Division had been obliged to shelter in unobserved positions some distance from the coast. By the time the Turks became aware that the French were landing in strength at this promontory it was too late to dislodge them.

In any event, the Turkish 9th Division was distracted by reports of the British XII Corps landing on Beach 3712. This was in a small cove where the Royal Marine Brigade came ashore firing from the

hip. This operation was fortunate in that although there were several Turkish units in the vicinity none had clearly identified this beach as being in their exclusive zone of control. The Marines therefore secured their bridgehead chasing away several Turkish patrols and a good number of shepherds whose flocks roamed the hills inland.



Figure 2: The Allied Landings at the Dardanelles and on the Gallipoli Peninsula, 25 April 1915.

The final part of the Allied invasion was the ANZAC landing at Sulva Bay (7-6.3711). Whereas the British only got a Brigade ashore in the first 48 hours at Beach 3712, the ANZAC Corps claimed that it landed both its Divisions on the first day. This was not the whole of the matter for both Divisions were rather small by British standards but what was significant was that by nightfall on 25 April Australian and New Zealand troops were in contact with the enemy for the first time in the war. Kemal Ataturk's (commanding the Turkish 19th Division) memoirs told that that evening he advanced to a position from which he could observe the troops on the beach at Sulva Bay. He recalled the smell of the barbeques which had been lit by the sea and conceded that the savours compared favourably with that of the shish kebab which was waiting for him at his own headquarters thanks to some of the shepherds who had sought refuge there.

There was little other action on the other Near East Fronts. There may have been a certain amount of fluctuation of the positions of the armies in the Caucasus but the sources on this conflict are few

and difficult to access. The Western Allies simply hoped that the Russians were preparing to attack in this distant theatre but they had few grounds for confidence that it was so.

The Western Front



Figure 3: The French move in to Mulhouse, 25 April 1915.

The Germans made a further withdrawal on the Western Front when they left Mulhouse on 24 April and pulled back across the Rhine which then formed the line of the front for the last 15 kilometres to the Swiss border. The French 61st Reserve Division moved into Mulhouse on 25 April hoping that this second liberation of the capital of Upper Alsace would be more permanent than the first.



Figure 4: The British prepare to go over the top in the Battle of Arras, 25 - 26 April 1915.

The retaking of Mulhouse was much publicised and celebrated in France, but the main action in late April was the British attack in Artois on 25 April, starting the Battle of Arras. The German 1st Army held an arc of territory around Arras which was defended by the excellent 25th and 40th (Saxon)

Divisions supported by an understrength 53rd (Saxon) Reserve Division. The British opposite these units liked to pretend they had a good relationship with the Saxons but on 25 April the gloves had to come off as a major attack was to be executed.

The operation was put together at short notice. Sir John French had been expecting that his force would not participate in any major attacks until May. On 19 April he had been curtly told by Lord Kitchener that he must move forward in no less than 6 days. Kitchener had already been to Paris and secured Joffre's assistance in providing the support of a French infantry division (12th) and a regiment of heavy artillery (5th). Kitchener told French about the Dardanelles landing for the first time and claimed it was necessary to attack at the same time so the Germans would not think of sending help to the Turks. The real reason of course was Kitchener's anxiety about the growing plight of the Russians. He had failed in his effort to get the French to bring forward their offensive.

Sir John French never expected that the attack on Arras would actually get close to the city which was about 10 kilometres from the British front. Instead, the British commander would have been satisfied to capture the German trench system over an appreciable distance. It was thought this could best be achieved by having each of the British Armies make a lodgement in their sector which could then join up. For the troops on the ground such conceptions had little meaning. Their whole perspective was on getting through the German wire and into the enemy trenches. What would happen after was not thought of much.

In general history has been kind to the outcome of the British attack (the French contribution being largely forgotten in English language histories). Most famous was the brave advance of the Manchester Volunteer Brigade. It was famous because the unit was half wiped-out. Despite this the British field artillery did excellent work and indeed the whole ordinance firepower of the British Army was concentrated into this attack and helped the infantry forwards. Losses on both sides were horrendous but for the Germans these were concentrated in just the 25th and 53rd Divisions, neither of which was fit for anything by the end of the first day. A counterattack by the German 40th Division on 26 April stopped any possibility of a British breakthrough and sealed the front. After 48 hours of intense combat both sides collapsed into an exhausted heap sniping at each other from captured or improvised positions. The British had only advanced less than a kilometre towards Arras but they had shown some good qualities in the fighting.

Player Notes:

CP

- *East: The Russian line is very long and rather thinly held. I think he is holding out for too long before doing the traditional Russian "trade space for time" approach. So, I opt to launch a flurry of probing attacks against his lines running from S Poland northwards. I may take more damage than the Russian, but every bite makes it more likely that he will start to withdraw. Most of the attacks are very low in supply usage, less one large attack right on the Baltic coast. If I can force him out of here, then I can start to turn his right flank. I believe success here will compel him to retreat across the Niemen River, allowing me to start the process of regaining E Prussian occupied territory. The other attacks will likely cause only brigade level losses on Russia, but they will thin out his lines further and somewhere he will have to give.*

- *Galicia: AH combines with German forces for another strong blow near Kielce. Elsewhere, two separate attacks are launched on AH soil to contribute to the same effect Germany is attempting. Serbia: Both AH and Bulgaria continue to drive in towards central and southern*
- *Serbia. It is enormously frustrating with the Serbs keeping just out of reach as my forces advance 20km at a time. Soon he will have to stop running and I will have sufficient concentration to attack.*
- *West: I relinquish my hold on Mulhouse. I am loathe to abandon a German town, but it will incur no DM penalty having previously been taken by the French and it will be one less town to feed,*
- *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.*
- *Palestine: Quiet.*
- *Gallipoli: The invasion is coming.*
- *Italy: I have lost track of the Italian readiness levels – not sure when they will enter the war.*

April 1915 DM Summary

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total	Morale
Germany	2	-	-	1	-	14*		15	32	730	Good - *Mulhouse lost (2 nd time)
Austria-Hungary	-	-	1	-	4	1		-	6	344	Good
Ottoman	-	-	-	1	-	-		NA	1	16	Good
Bulgaria	-	-	1	-	-	-		-	1	1	Good
Central Powers	2	-	2	2	4	15			40	1081	
France	-	-	-	-	-	-			-	582	Good
Great Britain	-	-	-	-	-	9			9	81	Good
Russia	2	-	1	6	4	10		NA	23	409	Good
Belgium	-	-	-	-	-	-		NA	-	(95)	NA
Serbia	-*	-	(1)	-	-	-		NA	(1)	(20)	NA * Nish lost
Entente	2	-	1	6	4	19		-	32	1072	

AP: *You cannot suggest this game lacks action.*

*To continue a little on the application of the rules in the Dardanelles attack. I believe this is probably the largest amphibious operation the game allows at this juncture. I have 50 sustainment shipping involved from Marseilles and Southampton. This allows for 5 French and 8 British Divisions though I do not think I have the port capacity for so much. There are 35 strength points and supply points with the invasion force. This is at 4-6 hex range from Mudros and so I get 80% of my capacity, this requires 7 Amphibious transport points and uses $(35 * 1.25)$ 44 amphibious capacity. At the landing sites I have unloaded 3 SP in each space and will unload 3 SP or supply in subsequent turns on each beach. They should be safe from a Turkish counterattack as the terrain allows a stiffened defence and two of the beaches benefit from the protection of naval gunnery. Despite some doubts at the rules I am playing I am allowed to sustain up to 2 Divisions on each beach plus a Corps HQ.*

[At the time I wrote this I had overlooked GCR 55-25 which allows sustainment of 6 half-divisions. It was also shortly before I saw draft errata from David Schroeder which may refine this area of the rules. However, I do not think I will be very wrong on this point]

The Central Powers forced a significant retreat on the Russian Front. I am not yet in a mad rout but I am losing control fast as I will not want to stick around for much more punishment.

The British attack in Artois was a direct response to this. I would have preferred to wait a few more weeks in the West but I could not let the Russians go down with no attempt to provide a diversion. I was not expecting to reoccupy Mulhouse. The Germans have abandoned it to relieve themselves of half of the food deficit consequences of my offensive in the Vosges last month. By withdrawing now they will save over 40 DM by late 1918. They will however lose a similar amount of manpower. On balance, Ivor has done what I would have done.