

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT66: 10 – 14 May 1915 (May 3)

General Situation

As the parlous state of situation of the Russian Army became more apparent, France and Britain were forced to give more urgency to their own plans for attack. Since the retreat of the Russians was on top of the overrun of Serbia, the Western Powers were now under pressure to prove they could go forwards as well as backwards. If it was impossible to contemplate a timely peace treaty, then the stakes would inevitably rise.

The Eastern Front



Figure 1: Russian Cavalry deployments delaying the German 15th and 12th Armies advancing towards the Bug River, 10 - 12 May 1915.

The pattern of combat now on the Eastern Front was characteristically one of infantry against cavalry. Across the plains of Lithuania and Poland columns of German and Austrian infantry snaked towards the horizon. Regularly there was an alarm and the leading units had to deploy to force small detachments of cavalrymen to give way and allow the procession to continue.

The Russian cavalry had distinguished itself as much the most impressive arm in the Tsar's Army during the winter but by May 1915 it was tired and understrength. Were it not for the fact that the Germans were almost completely denuded of cavalry on this front (they only had one Cavalry Division – the 3rd - still operating in the East) then the Russian cavalry could not have been so bold. In this, the Austrians could also outperform the Germans as their cavalry was instrumental in helping the Austro-Hungarian 4th Army surround and receive the capitulation of the Russian 8th Cavalry

Division at Jaroslaw (5-5.3209). This incident on 11 May was a result of the Russians being too reluctant to abandon their prized conquest, the city of Przemysl, which was liberated by two Polish dominated Hapsburg Divisions (2nd and 12th) on 12 May.

The Balkans

The Bulgarians cornered another Serbian force, the 2nd Bregalnicu Regiment close to the Greek border on the northern flanks of the Kožuf Mountains (7-6.1611). Rather than retreat the Serbians fought it out on 10 May despite being outnumbered by more than ten to one. A few survivors escaped across the hills into Greece but no longer as an organised military unit.

On 11 May, the Austro-Hungarian 6th Army crossed the Albanian frontier. For once there was no international outrage. Given that the Austrians were pursuing the Montenegrins and the Serbians who had already pulled back into Albania and as the idea of an Albanian state was only very tentatively established, nobody was very offended.

The Near East

The military situation in Sinai and Iraq remained stalemated. Neither side seemed interested in closing with the enemy. The daytime heat was now quite oppressive and further induced lethargy. The British commanders in both theatres were in any event under orders not to attempt anything overambitious. All the supplies and men which could be spared from Europe would be going to the Dardanelles for the foreseeable future.



Figure 2: The Gallipoli Campaign, showing the two separate bridgeheads, 10 - 14 May 1915.

The fighting at the Dardanelles started up again fairly quickly. The chief ambition of Hamilton at this stage of the operation was just to unite the British and French bridgeheads. This would require a movement of the front no more than two or three miles but the Turks had reinforced Kemal's 19th Division with levies of local security and frontier troops. These men were literally defending their homes.

The men of the ANZAC Corps could not have been further from their homes. Hamilton needed to use them to spearhead the next attack which began on 12 May and continued on and off for 3 days. The New Zealanders were pushed forward into a ravine/gully known as "Chicken Valley" (7-6.3812). This gave them access to the centre of the Turkish position and if the heights around it could have been entirely secured the Allies could have claimed a victory. Kemal forced his local levies back onto the heights repeatedly despite the fact that naval guns were sweeping them periodically doing terrible execution. It was questionable whether the valley or the hills were the most dangerous. By 14 May, there was hardly any infantry in the New Zealand Division (it was at least half Australian) who were unwounded or at least had not had an unlucky escape. The Division had to be pulled out that evening and it would have to be completely rebuilt before it could go into action again.

The legend of Chicken Valley looms so large in histories of the First World War that the almost equal losses the French 26th Division suffered in a parallel action three valleys to the south is almost entirely forgotten. How the Turks hung on against so many brave attacks is another story which is a good part of the Ataturk legend.

The Western Front

The French and British were supposed to launch simultaneous attacks to begin their main spring offensive on 12 May. Everything prior to this was now perceived to be a preliminary effort. However, not everything went to plan. The French intended to attack with their 3rd and 4th Armies in Eastern Champagne. This sector had been quiet since the previous autumn and the German defences there were not as strong as places further west.

As it happened, the French offensive was delayed. The railway junction at Troyes was the critical link between Paris and the intended battle zone but was overloaded in the first two weeks of May. There was heavy rain for several days and General Sarrail, who was to command the operation, asked for a postponement of five days to complete the necessary concentrations. Joffre granted this as the air force was also grounded.

While it was raining in the Champagne, there was fine weather in Artois. The British wanted to press ahead with their next attack and Sir John French required that it start on schedule at dawn on 12 May. The British objective was a small German salient around the small town of Beaumont (5-3.0909). It was not ambitious but that was part of the point. The British were starting to recognise that there was going to be no sweeping advance while the German Army was still so strong.

The Beaumont Salient was held by the German 16th Division with the 11th Division in contact on the right and the 40th (Saxon) Division in reserve. The British plan was for the I Corps (3rd Army) to smash into the salient while the II Corps kept the neighbouring German 11th Division busy. The French 5th Army would contribute heavy artillery that the British still lacked and the Canadian Division and a

French Reserve Division (67th Reserve) would join the attack on 13 May after the German reserves were committed, it was assumed.



Figure 3: The Beaumetz Salient, 12 - 14 May 1915.

The attack on Beaumetz is usually regarded as a minor British victory most noted for the first appearance of large scale organised air operations which became the genesis of the Royal Flying Corps. A German Hauptmann captured on 13 May gave his interrogators this account:

“Our sector was on high alert. Some of the men put up signs in no man’s land telling the English that “Hindenburg was coming”. For several days there had been an unusual number of Allied aircraft overflying our lines....

I experienced the British bombardment in a dug out in our reserve positions. It did little to harm us. The British guns are too light and are only dangerous to men caught in the open. The first day of the battle was tense as reports came in. We knew the front line trenches were under attack and some positions had been lost. Everything depended on the Kluck Stellung which blocked all attempts to get into our rear areas. On the 13th there were new attacks on the left....

The outcome of our counterattack seemed to be disastrous. My battalion was suddenly caught by artillery fire in the open and by the time we had reached the Kluck Stellung we were terribly reduced. One of my men was convinced the British planes had signalled the start of our movement but I do not think that can have been possible. It was just bad luck....

I had been ordered to report on the situation in Beaumetz. I had nobody left I could send so I went forward myself to get a better point of observation. I had not gone forward more than 150 metres when I turned into a trench which I thought I knew well from before. Suddenly I was staring at a man with a rifle aimed at me who asked me where I was from in English. I

blurted out that I came from Hannover and he told me he was from Winnipeg. As he had twenty friends with him I had to give him my weapon."

By 14 May, the Allies had pinched off the Beaumetz Salient, but it had required three days of intensive fighting. The whole area captured amounted to no more than three square miles which was hardly discernible on a small scale map. The German 16th Division was shattered to pieces in battle, but the 40th Division had held the *Kluck Stellung* against the final British attacks on 14 May.

The Italian Front

The Italian Lakes were a popular destination for the pensioner class of Central Europe and the spring was always a lovely season there. At Riva del Garda the hotels were less populated than usual in May 1915. However, there were many elderly residents who stayed long term and by mid-May things were starting to take a troubling turn. Most of the Italian cooks, waiters and servants in the hotels had disappeared having returned to their homeland because of the rumours of war or because of the progressive call up of reservists. Outside the resort, barricades were being deployed on the roads, there was barbed wire across one of the favourite promenades along the lake side and some of the motor boats on the lake were painted grey and one or two were mounted with machine guns. The commander of the local garrison, the 96th Austrian Brigade, displayed calm confidence suggesting that residents had nothing to fear, but he seemed to be turning the genteel watering hole into a mini-fortress.

Player Notes

- *CP: East: The 15th Army occupies Warsaw which is relinquished without bloodshed. It also allows me to release additional forces from some of my fortifications – Breslau, Posnan, Marienburg and Kulm. I already dismantled Thorn in 1914 to free up RPLs so lose out on those forces. The Russian forces are badly fragmented and falling back on their next line of forts, but they continue to do so in good order. At some point they will have to make a stand but they are relinquishing vast tracts of territory and drawing me ever deeper into Russia. All of East Prussia is now liberated. His cavalry continues to effectively screen his withdrawal and I launch numerous attacks against this screen. I don't expect him to stand in any one of them, but it allows me to close up that little bit more by advancing as he withdraws. Looking at Russian dispositions now, I estimate he will gradually start withdrawing in the SE to avoid being completely turned and make his stand by forming a line from Czernowitz, along the Prut River to Stanislau (if he vacates Czernowitz, he opens a corridor into Russia and food producing areas between the Dniester and the Prut), then along the Dniester and north through Lemberg – initially – with a defence along the Bug to Brest-Litovsk and then a line running almost north up to Riga using forest, marsh and river terrain). It will require a lot of manpower to cover it though and will likely serve only to further delay for a while. I am anxious to drive inland to take food production areas and deny Russia her Baltic ports. I have detached a cavalry division from the WF and sent it eastwards where it will add more value and have more cavalry due from production in the coming months.*

May 1915 DM Summary

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total	Morale
Germany	-	3	12					11	26	756	Good
Austria-Hungary	-	-	-*					-	-	347	Good - *Przemysl re-captured
Ottoman	2	-	3					-	5	23	Good
Bulgaria	-	1	1					-	2	6	Good
Central Powers	2	4	16						33	1122	
France	1	-	3					-	4	587	Good
Great Britain	2	-	11					-	13	96	Good
Russia	-	78*	4					NA	82	498	Good - *Warsaw and Lublin lost
Italy	-	-	-					-	-	-	Good
Belgium	-	-	-					NA	-	(95)	NA
Serbia	-*	(1)	(1)					-	(2)	(24)	NA - *Skopje lost
Entente	3	78	18					-	99	1181	

- *Galicja: AH retakes Przemysl and the 2nd and 4th armies operate in concert to isolate the Russian 9th Army's, 8th Cav Div as it screens the withdrawal. I am now just 40km from Lemberg and am starting to turn the right flank of his 8th Army whilst driving a wedge between the Russian 4th and 8th armies. This advance will allow me to get behind the Dniester and deny it to him as a strong barrier. I am surprised at how he is reinforcing his left round Czernowitz.*
- *Serbia: Further slow advances into Serbia and Montenegro; 20km at a time. Bulgaria isolates a Serb regiment along the Greek border. Every Serb regiment destroyed now is worthwhile investment.*
- *West: I start to send reinforcements to the WF. The Anglo-French forces here are gathering in strength and supplies and I expect an imminent offensive.*
- *Caucasus: Quiet.*
- *Mesopotamia: Quiet.*
- *Palestine: I reinforce some of the coastal cities along the Levant to deter any thoughts of invasion.*
- *Gallipoli: I continue to build up strength in my forward positions on the peninsula.*
- *Italy: Quiet; some RPLs arrive to build further strength.*

AP: *Its time to start hitting back and take advantage of the Central Powers' focus on the Eastern Front and the Balkans.*

I have started with the British in order to keep my options open with the French. It will be harder for the Germans to respond to the French threat in Champagne while parrying the British attack. I have

used railways to concentrate suddenly against a relatively weak German sector but the French are unable to mass to their maximum capabilities because they cannot reduce their force in Picardy too much in case the Germans attack my un-entrenched lines there. Since the French have expended supply in supporting the British attack in Artois and also at the Dardanelles the requirement to attack this month will no longer apply and I could delay action a little longer. It is in my general advantage to slow down the pace of events but against that is that the opportunities on the Western Front will diminish if the Germans redeploy units back from the East.

My attack at the Dardanelles risked suffering disproportionate casualties but I have inflicted more Turkish losses there in four turns than on the Iraq and Egyptian fronts combined since the beginning. This is what it is about. The loss ratio in this last attack was 5:3 with my attackers suffering the highest loss but really this is acceptable to me. It could have been worse and the Turks cannot replace very rapidly.