

## **Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game**

**GT69: 23 – 27 May 1915 (May 6)**

### **General Situation**

Events of great drama seemed to be unfolding every day. May 1915 had already seen the sinking of the *Lusitania* which had demonstrated that the ceaseless violence in Europe could overspill and directly hurt at least those Americans who got too close to the seat of the conflict. The cost of the war was mostly felt by those who were properly participating. Ten months of sanguinary battles were starting to take a toll on the morale of the nations involved.

Russia was now experiencing what France had suffered in 1914 and finding that it was not so easy to obtain respite because even a fighting withdrawal had its costs and there was a price to pay for the offensives in the distant Caucasus. Britain also had only limited exposure to the war in 1914 but the attacks on the *Kluck Stellung* had been a warning of greater losses to come and had to be borne at the same time as the Turkish defence at the Dardanelles was demonstrating there would be no easy victory in the Near East.

Neither were the Central Powers immune to the bitter consequences of their aggressive campaigns. Territorial gains had been secured only in the face of powerful defences. The Russians had held their front against attacks for six months before they started to retreat. The Serbians had contested every hill and ridge through the whole length of their country and now they seemed ready to continue this pattern in other peoples' countries as well. For the Germans, the two front dilemma was still unsolved and Falkenhayn had warned Hindenburg that the focus on the Eastern Front could not last for ever or else the German Army in the West would be reduced to a punch bag for the French.

Against this backdrop, it was surprising to some that Italy would volunteer to join the carnage when there was no compulsion to do so. However, the impulsion of the Italians was little understood outside Italy except there were some pessimists in Vienna who had understood the situation right. For centuries Italy had been invaded by all comers. The young Italian state had to demonstrate that those days had gone and it was time to turn the tables.

### **The Eastern Front**

The Germans were starting to suffer from a number of logistical difficulties as they tried to advance further into Lithuania and Belorussia. Engineers had only managed to repair the rail network up to the Prussian border and as far as Warsaw due to the challenges of converting Russian gauge railway to European standard gauge.

The roads were not always in a good condition. The German 8<sup>th</sup> Army attempted to concentrate heavy guns at Grodno which the Russians were still defending fiercely on 23 May. Some guns in the 1st Artillery Regiment opened fire on the Grodno outer works next day, but most of the weapons intended for this operation were still trying to negotiate their way through the back areas of the new 11th Army which was struggling to bring the rest of its equipment forward and competed for the road space. Movements of this type were also hampered by patrols of Russian cavalry which caused delays and confusion before they withdrew from areas west of the Niemen in late-May.



Figure 1: Battle of the Bug, 23 - 27 May 1915.

Another problem for the Germans was a shortage of maps. The German 1<sup>st</sup> Division in 10<sup>th</sup> Army moved 40 kilometres ahead of its neighbours on 23 – 25 May due to its commander relying on an inaccurate sketch and due to the systematic destruction of road signs by the Russians. The 1<sup>st</sup> Division was forced to stage a hasty retreat when it appeared that no other units would come to support it and strong Russian forces remained in the vicinity.

The German 15<sup>th</sup> Army captured Brest-Litovsk on 23 May 1915. Advanced German units were fighting further east at Kobryn (4-5.3317) within the western margins of the Pripet Marshes. This was at or beyond the limits of the German Army to sustain its formations properly and it became clear that for the time being further advances would risk outrunning supply.

With the capture of Brest, the Germans had crossed the Bug River but four Russian Armies were defending the river line to the south east. The most northerly, the Russian 9<sup>th</sup> Army, was withdrawing but this was a slow movement through a marshy region with only one good road between Brest and Kowel. This forced the other Russian Armies to hold firm to give the 9<sup>th</sup> Army time to escape. If the Russians were not particularly keen to fight on the Bug, neither were the Austro-Hungarians. On 24 May, the Austrian 2<sup>nd</sup> Army made an exploratory attack hoping to get across the river and advance to Novovolynsk (5-5.3505) but they could not get a proper foothold on the eastern bank. The Russians were not passive defenders either. The Austrian 11<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Division guarding the left flank of the Austrian 4<sup>th</sup> Army was surprised by a Russian attack to the west of Bus'k (5-5.3808) which was launched in the early hours of 26 May. The Austrian cavalry fought bravely and

dispersed a bold attack of the Russian 15<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Division before they were overrun by massed Russian infantry (many of whom were sent in to attack with no ammunition for their rifles).

The Austrian effort on the Bug was in competition with their commitment to recover Eastern Galicia and Bukovina. The Austro-Hungarian 4<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Armies were moving forward east of Lemberg. The German Sud Army, which was now made up of five Jaeger Divisions including the Alpenkorps, was committed to the Dniester Valley while Kovess' old command was now designated the Austro-Hungarian 7<sup>th</sup> Army and remained threatening the southern flank of the Russian Army.

### The Balkans

For a few days there was a distinct lull in the action on the Balkan Front. The Central Powers forces had been advancing for many weeks and were now tired. There had been little opportunity to replace losses and though these had not been excessive some units had been re-deployed from the Balkans particularly to the Italian frontier.

Both the Austrians and Bulgarian commanders wished to keep up the pursuit of the Serbians but they were held up waiting for the outcome of reconnaissance of the enemy positions. These were now on a fairly short front which ran along the rivers Mati and Drin i Zi in Albania and then covered Lakes Ohrid and Prespansko in a last corner of free Serbia. These Serbian positions were discovered to be quite strong and on 24 May the Bulgarian 2<sup>nd</sup> Army and Austro-Hungarian 5<sup>th</sup> Army cancelled attacks in their sectors in order to plan more thoroughly.



Figure 2: The Albanian-Ohrid Front, 23 - 27 May 1915.

## The Near East

Hamilton was pleased to receive confirmation of the arrival of the Royal Navy Division in the Aegean theatre on 21 May, though it would be some days before these reinforcements could be unloaded into the bridgeheads. Another French division was also expected soon. An expansion of the Allied force was desperately needed if any progress was to be made at the Dardanelles. There was good intelligence that the Turks had seven divisions ringing the Allied positions and further reinforcements would be on their way from Istanbul.

The Turkish 5<sup>th</sup> Army had also put in work to improve their road communications on the Gallipoli peninsula as reserve troops were relieved of trench building responsibilities. This would help the Turks move supplies forward in future though it had been remarked by Liman van Sanders that the Turkish infantrymen seemed to subsist on a daily diet of “*one old chicken bone and 10 bullets*”.

The Allies were now making some moves on the more distant Near East Fronts. The Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force had been reorganised into an Indian Corps (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Indian Divisions plus some other miscellaneous units). It had been discovered that the Turks were pulling back from Al Amarah. That town was located in a drier spot in a malarial swamp and, with the mercury rising, the Turkish commander wanted to spare his force unnecessary hardship. Nixon considered that the Indian troops in his command could take the heat and on 26 May they were ordered forward from Qurna though permitted to move at a comparatively slow pace in consideration of the torrid conditions.

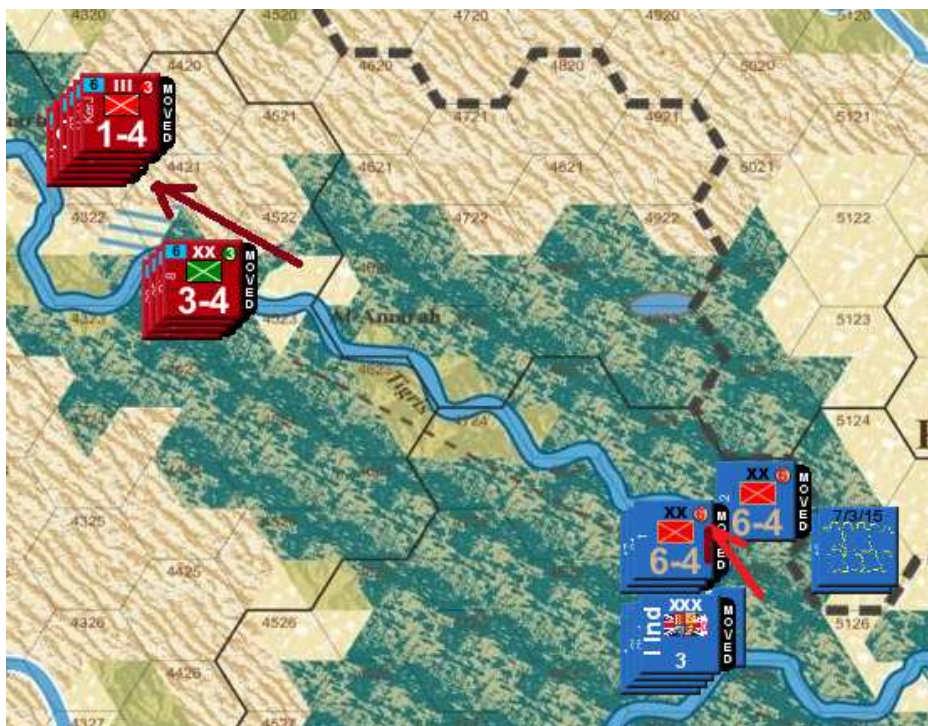


Figure 3: First Indian Corps moves up the Tigris, 25 - 27 May 1915.

The Russians also were able to make forward progress following their victory over the Kurds at the Murat Cliff (6-8.2920). The Turks were forced to give up positions on the western side of Lake Van and on 22 May, the Russians were only about 50 kilometres from Bitlis.

### The Western Front

The French offensive in Eastern Champagne was over. As there were some territorial gains, Joffre and Sarrail were able to say it was a success. Since the success could be repeated in the future then it was suggested that the French strategy was on the right track. This really overlooked the fact that at the rate they were going, it would be several years before the Germans were evicted from France. In addition, almost all the ground gained in this attack and other Allied attacks in the West (save the Alsace operation) had been ground which the Germans gave up voluntarily before each offensive had started.

### The Italian Front

The Austro-Hungarian 8<sup>th</sup> Army was under no illusions about the diplomatic situation and the whole Italian frontier was on a 48 hour alert for war. On 23 - 25 May, the Austrian defences in the high altitude Dolomites and western Carnic ranges were fully manned so they would be ready in their lonely outposts for whatever might come.

### May 1915 DM Summary

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total	Morale
Germany	-	3	12	15	7	2		11	50	780	Good
Austria-Hungary	-	-	_*	-	_***	4		-	4	351	Good - *Przemysl **Lemberg re-captured.
Ottoman	2	-	3	-	2	-		-	7	25	Good
Bulgaria	-	1	1	3	2	-		-	7	11	Good
Central Powers	2	4	16	18	11	6			68	1146	
France	1	-	3	7	8	-		-	19	606	Good
Great Britain	2	-	11	10	-	-		-	23	106	Good
Russia	-	78*	4	6	6**	8 #		NA	102	518	Good - *Warsaw, Lublin, **Bialystok # Brest lost
Italy	-	-	-	-	-	-		-	-	-	Good
Belgium	-	-	-	-	-	-		NA	-	(95)	NA
Serbia	_*	(1)	(1)	(1)	(1)	-		NA	(4)	(26)	NA - *Skopje lost
Entente	3	78	18	23	14	8		-	144	1224	

## Player Notes

- *CP: East: I am now having to be very cautious about where I advance as the sustainment of my forces is becoming an issue in certain areas. Robert has been trading the space to allow his own forces time to rebuild and reorganize and my logistics train is at full stretch. I do make several attacks; but again, most of those will only serve to drive his cavalry screen a little further back and I am unable to get to grips with him to fight any sort of decisive battle. I'm sensing how Napoleon felt in 1812! I do manage to bring some artillery to bear against Grodno; but only from one location and I've no doubt he'll collapse this fortress immediately and continue to move east.*
- *Galicia: AH is the only one of my alliance really able to get to grips with Russia, but lacks sufficient strength to tackle opposing forces across rivers or dug in yet. I am concentrating slowly, though, and should be able to pick my moment within the next weeks. 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> armies do collaborate to attack elements of his 4<sup>th</sup> Army trying to entrench between the Bug and the Luga rivers.*
- *Serbia: Both AH and Bulgaria thought they were strong enough to launch attacks this time around, but in both instances bottled it as they assessed possible casualties which could ensue due to the awful terrain and tenacity of the Serb opposition. There is a bit of a Mexican standoff developing.*
- *West: I am being used as a punch bag on the WF and there is little I can do about it but shift forces laterally. Starting in June it will be time to start bolstering the WF again. I made one small attack against an isolated French regiment which had cheekily advanced ahead of the main body last turn, but such actions will not make for victory.*
- *Caucasus: He attacked me on the western shores of Lake Van last turn and forced the dissolution of some irregular cavalry. I have had to fall back in this area. It is a painful process for the Turks to reinforce and supply the Caucasus. I can only believe it would be much worse for me had I remained at Sarikamis.*
- *Mesopotamia: Quiet. Too hot to do anything but lie in the shade and swat at flies.*
- *Palestine: Quiet.*
- *Gallipoli: Quiet. .*
- *Italy: Quiet.*

*AP: I did not continue the French offensive in the West. I have captured three hexes (could have taken four if I wanted to fight for it) but otherwise this has not been a total success due to my difficulty in getting units in position after the Germans left their front line trenches and adopted a defence in depth. However, the British attack this month was more successful and the combined effort had encouraging results.*

*The fighting on the Russian front is more costly than I would like but I am more relaxed than I was about Russia approaching Shaken Morale even though this month I have made two partly unsupplied attacks which will not be possible once DM reaches 600.*

*It is not yet clear to me how far I will have to retreat. The defence of the Bug is not sustainable and my position in Eastern Galicia is not very strong. However, I can see the Central Powers are going to*

*have difficulties with their advance especially in the north. They are already outrunning their rail lines and will have to spread out to cover a long front. I would also suggest German morale has to be considered. The German Army has never rested for more than a few turns since the start of the game.*

*High German DM is the game's proxy for novel and radical forms of violence which took it beyond the restraints of cabinet warfare. As Germany suffers more DM it is presumed to retaliate with submarine warfare and other acts which bring the Americans into the war. The same process puts Austria-Hungary into a state of passivity/despond. My most proximate DM targets are not Shaken Morale, but submarine warfare (German DM 1425) and Russian Artillery Surprise (AH 475).*