

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT71: 1 – 5 June 1915 (June 1)

General Situation

The Committee of the Friends of Serbia (“CFS”) was not very talented at making friends in high places in the British Government. It was adept, however, at making a nuisance of itself and tugging at the conscience of influential people. The priority of the British State at this time was to devote itself to the raising and equipping of the New Armies. It had ships and aeroplanes to build and above all was committed to a massive programme of production of heavy artillery and the shells that it would have to fire.

A great strategic debate was going on regarding the relative importance of the Western Front against the campaign at the Dardanelles. Neither the Westerners nor the Easterners, as the two factions were called, were at all interested in the fate of Serbia which was regarded as a defeated country out of the war. Indeed the Easterners were if anything less willing to discuss going to the assistance of the Serbians in case such lack of focus discredited the Gallipoli campaign.

The French also disappointed supporters of Serbia in the West as they dithered over making an intervention in Greece. They had sent another division to the Near East and there had been rumours it was headed to Salonika but this did not happen as it was directed to the Dardanelles.

The CFS was something of a prototype for a modern non-governmental organisation. It was strong on letter writing and its members included journalists able to embarrass governments. Eventually they made such a fuss about lack of support to Serbia that Lord Kitchener caved in and on 3 June made an executive order allowing the shipment of small arms; clothes and other supplies which would help the Serbian Army start rebuilding on Greek and Albanian territory.

The Eastern Front

The situation on the Russian Front remained very fluid as June began. In the Baltic region, the German 10th Army had come up to the Venta River which marks, for part of its length, the border between Lithuania and Latvia. Meanwhile, the German 11th and 8th Armies were within 35 kilometres of Vilna. After 5 June, the Russians did not dare send their supply trains through this important junction any more. Grodno had been finally occupied by the Germans on 2 June.

The Russians had retreated further east hiding behind screens of cavalry or, further south, withdrawing into the swampy Pripet region. The Germans could not follow too closely as the terrain and their own extended supply lines discouraged pursuit.

South of the Pripet Marshes, the Austrian 1st, 2nd and 4th Armies had crossed the Bug River and were moving northeast as the Russians fell back toward their fortresses at Luck and Dubno. The Austrian 4th Army on the right of this move was spread out on a long front as it was also participating in the clearing of north eastern Galicia which the Russians had begun to abandon. Not entirely, however, because the Austrian 8th Cavalry Division and two Brigades of low quality Croatian frontier guards and ersatz march battalions were obliged to fight off a Russian attack on 3 – 4 June at Budzanov (5-

5.4312). Despite a brave resistance, the Austrian cavalry was obliged to cover the retreat of the infantry back over the River Sereth on 5 June. The Russian attack had been a combined effort of their 8th and 3rd Armies. They had been ordered by the South West Front to strengthen the right flank of the forces defending Stanislau. The German Sud Army was established on the front opposite this city and its peril was emphasised by the salient formed by its defenders.



Figure 1: The Stanislaw Salient and the Russian Counterattack at Budzanov, 3 - 5 June 1915.

The Balkans

The Serbian and Montenegrin retreat passed through central Albania. Tirane was not considered worth defending and the port of Durrës was considered indefensible. The Serbians looked for help from Italy but this new ally was no keener to rush to Serbia's aid than any of the others. Since the CFS was known to be influenced by Yugoslav ideals, Italy was wary of a potential competitor to its own ambitions in the Littoral, Istria and Dalmatia.

The Bulgarian 1st Army commander had concentrated a very large force at Ohrid (7-6.1012) such that the narrow streets of the small lakeside town were often blocked by stacks of military equipment. It was thought that an attack might be made soon on the Serbians who had a strong force defending the isthmus between the two Lakes Ohrid and Prespansko a short distance to the south. This was the only sizeable piece of Serbian territory still in friendly hands and the Serbian line was less than 20 kilometres from the Greek frontier.

The Near East

At the beginning of June, the Allied bridgeheads on the Gallipoli peninsula were as ever in close contact with the enemy but there was little of note beyond the incessant sniping and occasional

harassment fire. Soldiers on both sides were fully aware that sooner or later the Allied forces would make another big push but it did not seem imminent.

In Iraq, the Indian Corps marched on up the Tigris. The Turks were known to have withdrawn as far as Ali Gharbi. At the rate the Indian troops were marching it was unlikely they would get to Ali Gharbi in much less than three weeks.

The Russians in the Caucasus were closely engaged with the Turks. Their campaign on the western shores of Lake Van had forced some Turkish retreats in the Murat Valley and now Yudenitch aimed to capture Bitlis. By 3 June, he had concentrated a large force of six brigades which ought to have been sufficient for this task. The only force blocking the road to Bitlis was the Turkish 144th Regiment which was supported by the irregular 3rd Kurdish Cavalry Division. Having already defeated one Kurdish Division at the start of this campaign, Yudenitch was not too concerned to encounter another one.

The difficulty of the attack on 3 June was that the Turkish infantry had placed themselves on the sides of the rocky defiles which cut through the mountains which came down to the lake edge. Advancing down the road, the Russians exposed themselves to fire which was hard to return effectively. It proved very time consuming to drive the Turks off their inaccessible firing positions and so long as the Russians were pinned down the Kurdish cavalry (dismounted) staged hit and run attacks which were surprisingly effective. After 72 hours, the Turkish infantry had mostly been flushed out but the Kurds still held Kiyidüzü (6-8.3022) keeping the Russians some distance from Bitlis.



Figure 2: The Russian Caucasus Army threatens Bitlis, 1 - 5 June 1915.

The Western Front

With no major actions on the Western Front in early June, the men of both sides enjoyed a spell of warm weather and dry conditions which made trench duty a little easier. Needless to say a lack of attacks did not mean a lack of other activity. The improvement of trenches was continued all the time even if this was matched by a growing ability to counter their advantages. For this both the Germans and French relied on heavy calibre artillery. The British and the Belgians as yet had nothing

of this type. The Belgians had no plans to attack. The British were still relying on the smaller guns integral to their Infantry Divisions as well as a greater willingness to risk the lives of their infantry.

Some sectors of the front were quieter than others. A transfer to the German 6th Army in Lorraine was considered a very easy ticket in the German Army. Any soldier shirking a hard duty might be told by his comrades he was only good for the 6th Army.



Figure 3: The Front in Lorraine had seen no significant action since September 1914, early June 1915.

The Italian Front

The Italian Army still held back from making any strike across the Isonzo or across any other part of the Austrian frontier. Cadorna was impatient for action but the Army commanders rightly insisted that the mobilisation procedures be completed before there would be any attack. In the first couple of days of the war many formations had headed towards the front without waiting for their full complement of men or equipment. Some of these movements had to be reversed and in any event a logistical and organisational nightmare persisted for several days as everything was sorted out and put back on its proper track.

Cadorna ordered an investigation into who was to blame for the so called “mobilisation scandal”. Everyone interviewed by his commission ritually blamed their subordinates though it was obvious to any independent outsider that Cadorna was the most blameworthy. In one of Mussolini’s wittier early-war newspaper columns he claimed to have met a captain of the Bersagliari who had arrested a lieutenant who had allowed his dog to eat the only copy of a secret plan to invade Austria on the first day of the war. Thus did Mussolini explain the slow start of the Italian war effort.

DM Summary – June 1915

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total [%SM]	Morale
Germany	-							8	8	791	Good
Austria-Hungary	1							5	6	359	Good
Ottoman	1							NA	1	27	Good
Bulgaria	-									11	Good
Central Powers	2							13	15	1168	
France	-							-	-	606	Good
Great Britain	-							-	-	106	Good
Russia	4							NA	4	530	Good
Italy	-							-	-	-	Good
Belgium	-							-	-	(95)	NA
Serbia	-							-	-	(27)	NA
Entente	4							-	4	1236	

Player Notes

CP. *The food situation for the CP has become worse. The conquering of vast swathes of Russian territory has also brought several heavily populated conurbations into the fold and these have to be fed. Warsaw is a particularly needy beast. The only real dividend is the special metals coming out of Serbia.*

- *East: Further consolidation and extension of railheads. I can do little on this front without extending beyond my ability to sustain myself. Very frustrating, but this is Russia after all and the errors of Napoleon have been taken on board. I am able to start investing Stanislaw with Sud Armee in support of AH, which I am certain he will shortly have to abandon. My aim now is to try and clear the Baltic States over the next 2 months and take me to a line outside Riga.*
- *Galicia: AH also continues a process of consolidation and, with the German Sud Armee, the investment of Stanislaw.*
- *Serbia: No attacking but a build-up of pressure against the Serb 2nd and 3rd armies. Containing the Serbs is another frustrating process. It is fixing forces I can make use of elsewhere. I do release another three Croatian mountain brigades to head off to the Italian front though.*
- *West: Some of my new trenches are now completed as I prepare for further TE attacks over the summer. I send all of my new army divisions and RPLs to the western front this month. They will add nothing to the eastern front so long as the Russians are beyond my reach. I also start preparing to send artillery westwards where it can be used. There are no fortifications left worth bombarding in Russia and no trench lines left there either (except in Galicia). The artillery will find a better use in*

the west. I also dispatch some engineers eastwards where they can assist in extending rail communications. I should have done this in the winter to have them ready for the summer. This has been an error on my part.

- *Caucasus: I am now under severe pressure in the CAU and am frantically sending reinforcements to the region and shifting forces towards Lake Van. Bitlis is under real threat.*
- *Mesopotamia: Quiet.*
- *Palestine: Quiet.*
- *Gallipoli: Quiet – but not for long. He will resume his attack now that he has built up more strength and supplies and his naval assets have returned to add to the offensive capacity.*
- *Italy: I am as strong as I can afford to make myself along the Italian border without diminishing force elements too much in other theatres. Sound intelligence has it that attacks along the Isonzo are imminent.*

AP: For most of this year I have been quite positive about what I am doing. It certainly seemed that I had salvaged something from a pretty poor outcome of the initial campaign in the west. I have had a few victories especially Przemysl and Alsace. I expected I would have to retreat with the Russians and Serbians (perhaps not so soon) and so somewhat discounted these events when they occurred. Also I thought I was doing reasonably well on DM against Germany and Austria.

Now I am not so sure. Ivor has seen my tactics in the West. I doubt I can gain any more easy victories just by doing a railway concentration. The Italians are an initial disappointment and I must attack strong defences. The next attack at Gallipoli will probably see the biggest Allied losses yet. I have perhaps overused the Russians, their morale will sink fast now, and I may be less than three months from Shaken Morale. I had been labouring under a misapprehension that Submarine Warfare needed only German DM of 1250 and the real target (1425) now seems a long way off. As the Russians fade, I will be dependent on using the Italians to attack Austrian DM and that is going to be very costly.

[How quickly was this last sentence proved wrong?]