

## Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT72: 6 – 9 June 1915 (June 2)

### General Situation

Criticism of the Allied war effort was becoming more pronounced in France and especially in Britain. The Allied attacks in the West had been generally endorsed in a glow of pride and hope and the modest successes gained had been considered satisfactory steps towards greater things. Now in the early summer some discordant voices began to be heard. In general, this stemmed from a growing appreciation that things were going badly on the Eastern Front and from the fact that nothing had been done to help Serbia from being defeated. The chief critics largely accused the Allied leadership of complacency and lack of urgency. The French and British campaigns in the West were all very well but they now looked ponderous and unimpressive compared to the sweeping movements which the Central Powers' had achieved against the supposedly mighty Russia. Neither did the news from the Dardanelles suggest that the Allies were doing much better there.

These points hit home and hurt the political leadership in France and Britain. It certainly did not help for it to be said in defence that the French and British Armies were constrained by limited munitions and in the French case a concern about casualties which had been carried on from the hideous losses of the 1914 campaign. What the Allies now needed was a palpable and popular victory. That might not be easy to come by and it could lead them into worse error.

### The Italian Front

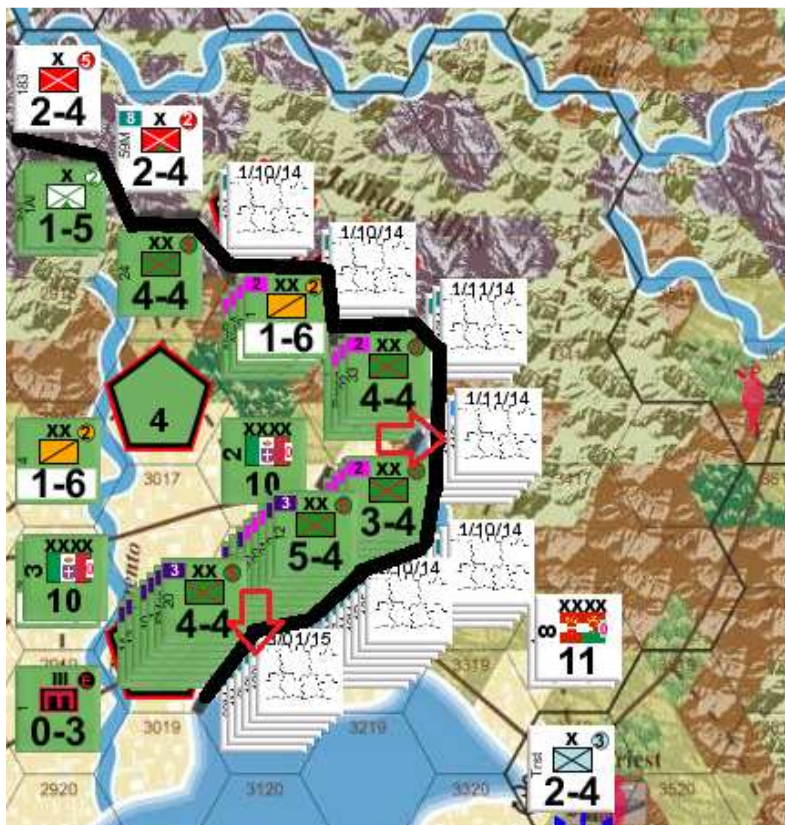


Figure 1: 1st Battle of the Isonzo, 8 - 9 June 1915.

The delayed Italian offensive on the Isonzo finally began at 0600 hours on 8 June. Both the Italian 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Armies advanced at the same moment. The chief advantage the Italians had was numbers as fourteen infantry divisions were committed to action within less than forty eight hours. The Italians also had the Austrian lines under artillery fire and the initial fire was very costly to the defenders.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Army attack was concentrated around Cervignan del Friuli (6-4.3119) while the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army attempted to push across the river between Canali and Tolmein (6-4.3317). Very soon, however, the advancing troops were up against very firm defences and were starting to take large numbers of casualties. The defending Austro-Hungarian 8<sup>th</sup> Army was also enduring the shock of first combat and the Italians could have been driven back if there had been a display of initiative. During most of 9 June, the commanders of the defending brigades were looking up the chain of command asking when and where they should counterattack. No clear response came back. The 8<sup>th</sup> Army was undecided and the Austrian field artillery was not properly supplied for extended action. The Italians were pinned down after making very short advances, but they were allowed to hold the little ground they gained.

### **The Eastern Front**

The Germans pushed forwards on the Eastern Front wherever they could. The Russian 1<sup>st</sup> Army was still barring the passage of the River Venta on the borders of Lithuania and Latvia. The Germans had brought up cavalry to this part of the front and with their 9<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Division they were finally able to exact revenge on the Russian 2<sup>nd</sup> Guards Cavalry Division at Skrunđa (4-5N.0507). The captured commander of the Russian cavalry was charged with war crimes connected with the vandalism of the port of Memel which was alleged to be cultural property. By this time, 7 June, the Germans had also secured the Russian port of Leipāja.

Despite the defeat of the Guards cavalry, the rest of the Russian cavalry were still very active screening the Russian withdrawal along the whole front north of the Pripet marshes. Nevertheless by 7 June, the Germans had approached within a few kilometres of Vilna and were less than 150 kilometres from Minsk. On 9 June, the Russian STAVKA ordered the 7<sup>th</sup> Army to form a reserve at Minsk and any attempt by the Germans to push so far would be regarded as a grave threat to Mother Russia.

In the south, the fighting reached a new intensity as three battles were fought at once. Unfortunately for the Austrians the third one was a significant defeat. The first major action was focussed on Luck where the Russians had a fortress. The Austro-Hungarian 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Armies were pushing the Russian 9<sup>th</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Armies back towards the Pripet Marshes. The 1<sup>st</sup> Army occupied Kowel on 7 June, while the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army defeated three Russian Infantry Divisions as it advanced up the right bank of the River Styr to Mlynów (5-5.4004). This placed the Russian 4<sup>th</sup> Army in jeopardy as the Austrians were getting behind their left flank and this forced them to withdraw everything except a rear guard from Luck on 8 June. Despite this, the Russians maintained a strong defence between the Styr and Dubno and also did not immediately surrender the fortress of Luck. The Southwest Front was receiving reinforcements and Russian resistance was becoming more firm.

The second battle was around the Stanislau salient. The Austro-Hungarians had three Armies engaged, from north to south 4<sup>th</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> with the German Sud Army supporting the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army. The Central Powers struck from three different directions on 6 June. The 7<sup>th</sup> Army fought at the



extreme eastern end of the front near Siret-on-the-Siret (5-5.4017). The 4<sup>th</sup> Army continued the battle which had previously begun with the Russian counterattack at Budzanow (5-5.4312) which two Hungarian Divisions tried to recapture from the Russian 105<sup>th</sup> Division. Finally, the Sud Army and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army made a major effort to turn the southern flank of the defences near Stanislau itself (5-5.4014). Although each of these attacks was skilfully and bravely made, the Russian defenders in each case held on and inflicted many losses on the attacking forces. If the performance of the Russian Army had been lacking in some respects in recent weeks there were some new signs of determination on the South West Front.

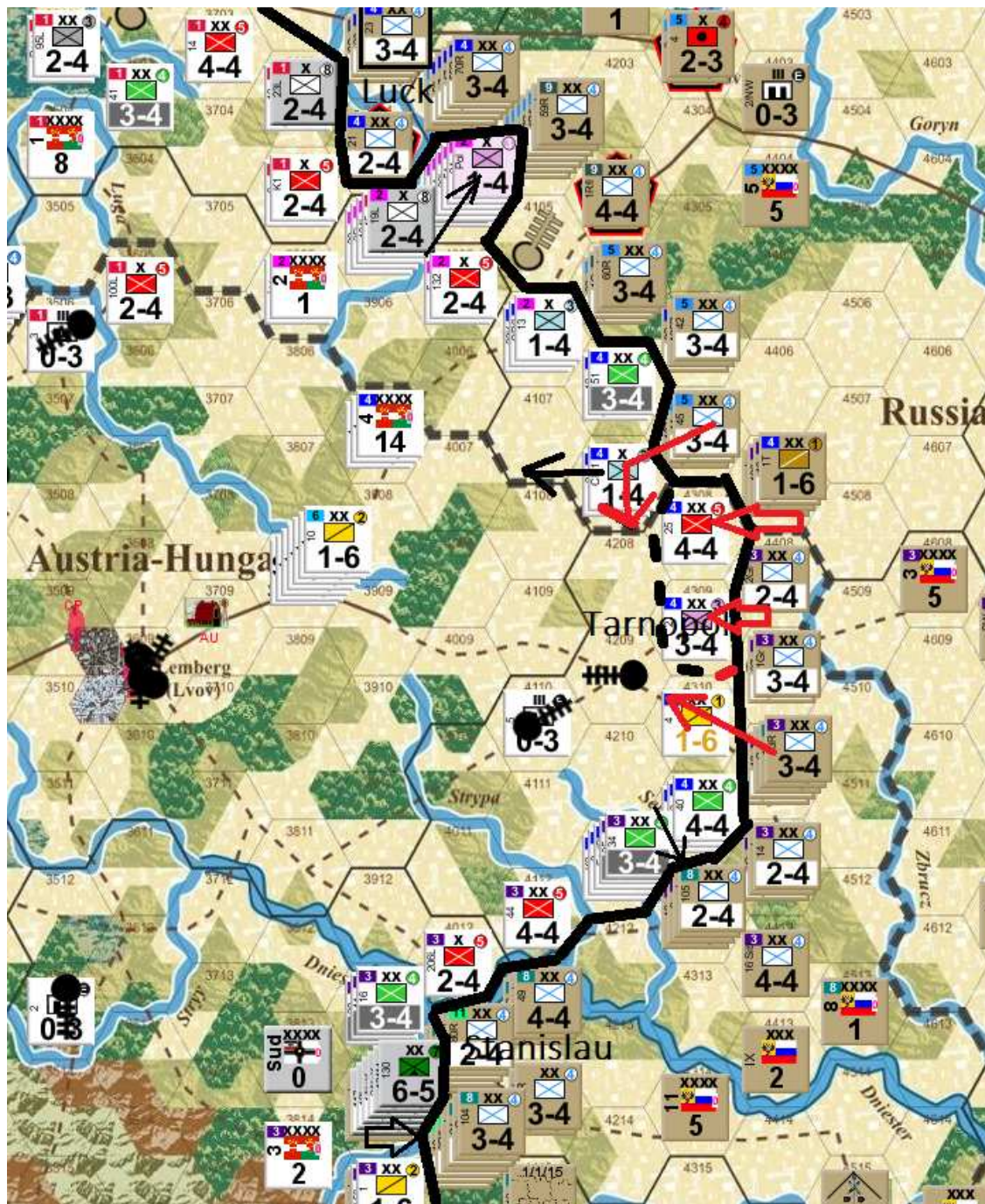


Figure 2: The Southern Campaign in the East, including the Russian Victory at Tarnopol, 6-9 June 1915.

There was also a greater desire to resist. Ivanov, still commanding the Russian South West Front had managed to secure agreement for a plan of attack despite the feuding which had plagued the Russian higher commands. Reinforcements were coming from the north and the Russian 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Armies shared an interest in securing their northern flank. Brusilov's 8<sup>th</sup> Army had sent some units to assist the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army defending on the Sereth. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Army (General Lesh commanding) was also being better supported in the north due to the retreat of the Armies further north which brought the 5<sup>th</sup> Army closer to the 3<sup>rd</sup>. By 8 June, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army was resupplied and ready to contest Tarnopol (5-5.4309) which the Austrians had re-captured the previous day.

The opportunity which presented itself was that the Austrians had been primarily drawn into the actions further north and south by their own offensive. Part of the Austro-Hungarian 4th Army had moved due east to Tarnopol (25<sup>th</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Divisions) but with poor support on their flanks. On 8 June, the Russians attacked on both sides. First, they defeated the 1<sup>st</sup> Croat Reserve Brigade at Nowo Poczajew (5-5.4207) and then the Hungarian 4<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Division at Myshkovichi (5-54310). That night, the commanders of the 25<sup>th</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Divisions realised that the Russians were moving on their lines of communications and they had no means to respond in time to save their units. A last hope had been the Austrian 2<sup>nd</sup> Cavalry Division, which had been supposed to support the Croat Brigade but had withdrawn west during the day and could not be contacted.

The news of their plight spread fast among the Austrian infantry. Germans in the 25<sup>th</sup> Division thought (unfairly) that they had been betrayed by Poles in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division. This was untrue and the blame ought to have fallen on the cavalry which had failed to protect the flanks. The Russian 3<sup>rd</sup> Army attacked at dawn on 9 June and resistance rapidly crumbled. By noon, Lesh had received the surrender of both trapped Divisions and Tarnopol was back in Russian hands.

### **The Balkans**

The Austrian 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Armies marched on through Albania heading towards the capital Tirane and the port Durres. The Serbians had no intention of fighting for these places and on 9 June most of the Montenegrin Corps had withdrawn south of the Shkumbin River covered by Serbian Cavalry. The Serbian Army meanwhile was strongly concentrated at the southern end of Lake Ohrid where they had a small foothold still in their national territory.

### **The Near East**

There was still no major attack in progress at the Dardanelles as Hamilton intended to be meticulous in his preparations for the next Allied attack as he was fully aware of the strengthening of the Turkish lines opposing the Allied Army.

Townsend was taking advantage of his second chance of a campaign on the Tigris and as previously was finding his way north was unopposed for the moment.

In the Caucasus, Yudenitch had suspended the attacks aimed at Bitlis in recognition of the high price the Russians were paying to remove the Turks from the strong positions they occupied. Instead, it was the Turks' turn to attack.

The Turkish plan was to drive the Russians from positions from which they threatened to interdict the main road between Erzerum and Mus. This was achieved by a well prepared attack conducted by



the Turkish IX and X Corps at Beşdere (6-8.2519). On 6 and 7 June, the Turkish 24<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> Divisions forced the Russian 39<sup>th</sup> Division back across the bleak Beşdere Plateau more than 15 kilometres. This was the first major offensive operation by the Turks since Sarikamis and it was greeted with enormous enthusiasm in Istanbul where it was thought to mean the Russian tide was being turned just as had happened on the Eastern Front.

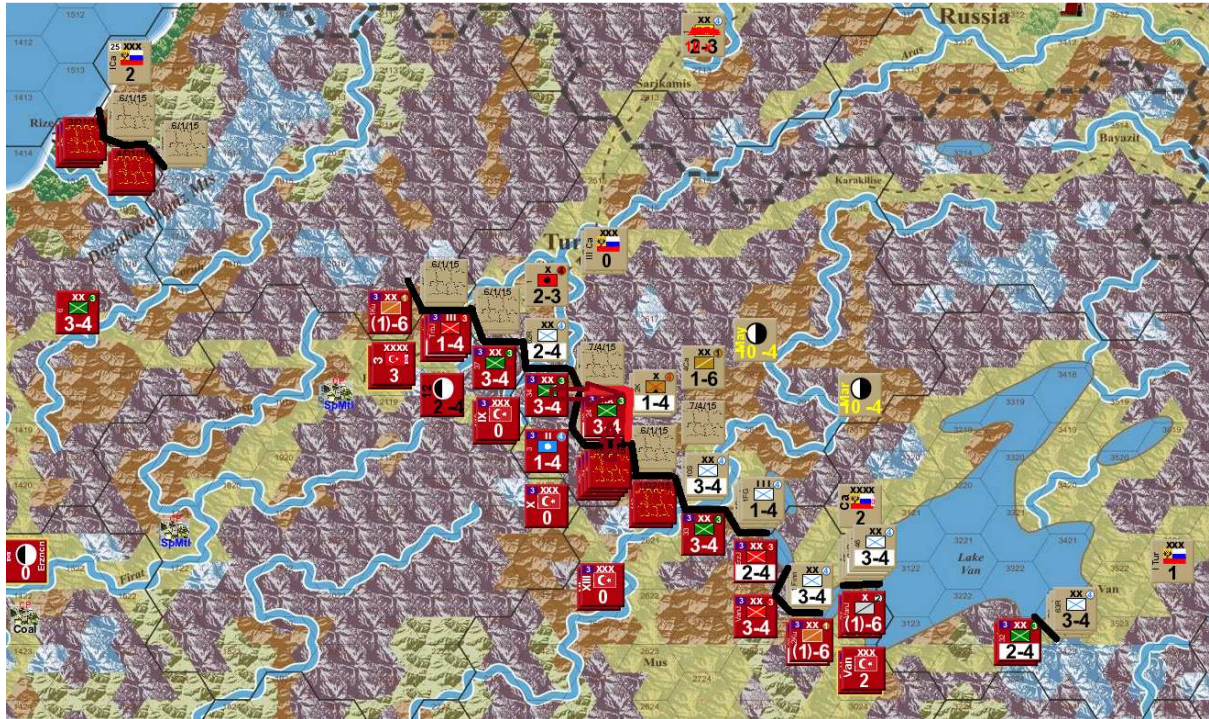


Figure 3: General Situation in the Caucasus and the Turkish attack at Besdere, 6-9 June 1915.

### The Western Front

Joffre and French met for a conference at Amiens to discuss plans for the summer and beyond. Both favoured long preparation for further large offensives which might not occur until the end of the season or even in the autumn. By that time more heavy artillery would be available.

They both knew that waiting this long was not entirely realistic. The plight of Russia meant they would have to conduct operations at a faster tempo than that. Also there was a concern that when the Germans were finished with Russia they might redeploy large forces back to the West and this would make Allied attacks more difficult.

### Player Notes

CP:

- *East: There are parts of Russia – around the Pripyet Marshes – that I now just cannot reach. It is also taking some time now for supply to get to my HQs. In those areas where I can close with Russian forces, I try to maximise opportunity to cause him casualties. The Sud Armee takes the lead in attacking to the south of Stanislau to try and invest the city whilst in the north the 10<sup>th</sup> Army tries to start outflanking the line along the Venta River. There is not much in between. The Baltic States is the only area in which I have sustainable reach for now.*

- *Galicja: AH forces assist the Sud Armee in its attacks around Stanislau. In the east, Kovess, now commanding the new 7<sup>th</sup> Army, attacks the Russian trenches south of Czernowitz along the Romanian frontier. 2<sup>nd</sup> Army concentrates for an attack in open ground SE of Luck.*
- *Serbia: Another slow push forward without any meaningful combat.*
- *West: I use this time to build up some fresh Reserve divisions from new replacements and to try and shore up potential vulnerable points.*
- *Caucasus: I am shifting forces eastwards to support the fighting near Bitlis. He lost a division's worth of troops in his last attack towards Bitlis against the shores of Lake Van and I think lacks the strength for another immediate offensive against my forces in the mountainous terrain along the lake shore. I take the opportunity for a spoiling attack of my own in the central portion of the valley between Erzerum and Mus. This position was poorly thought out by me when I drew back to defend the mountainous approaches to the valley. The valley is my critical lateral line of communication and I should have put in a blocking position 20km further north. The position he holds allows him to exert a ZOC into the valley and therefore slows down all of my lateral movement. If I can shift him from this location then it will help to secure my LoC and allow me to more rapidly reinforce Bitlis.*
- *Mesopotamia: Quiet.*
- *Palestine: Quiet.*
- *Gallipoli: Quiet.*
- *Italy: I continue to feed fresh formations into the border zones in anticipation of Italian offensives.*
- **DM Summary – June 1915**

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total [%SM]	Morale
Germany	-	2						8	10	793	Good
Austria-Hungary	1	26						5	32	385	Good
Ottoman	1	1						NA	2	28	Good
Bulgaria	-	-						-	-	11	Good
Central Powers	2	29						13	44	1197	
France	-	-						-	-	606	Good
Great Britain	-	-						-	-	106	Good
Russia	4	16*						NA	20	546	Good - *Kowel, Leipaja lost
Italy	-	5						-	5/8	5	Good
Belgium	-	-						-	-	(95)	NA
Serbia	-	-						-	-	(27)	NA
Entente	4	21						-	25/28	1261	

*AP: The changes in fortune are coming through very fast. I was genuinely very pessimistic last turn thinking I had really mismanaged the Russians. However, recognising that they are going to have Shaken Morale soon has been a little liberating as I do not care about it so much now. This turn I had an opportunity to surround two Austrian Divisions and I took it.*

*Again this was not just a lucky accident. I had been shifting Russian forces south for a few turns to hold the line at Stanislau and prevent an Austrian move across the Zbrucz. With the Central Powers drawn into the battles at Luck and Stanislau, there was weakness in their front at Tarnopol. It is also quite relevant that due to the loss of cities, the Russians no longer have to retreat with 33% losses as SR 41-3 is now in effect.*

*Part of my pessimism last turn was from the realisation that it is hard to hurt the Austrians when they are on the defensive and in trenches due to Russian and Italian supply limitations.*

*I was expecting it would take many months to get the Austrians to 485 DM which is the trigger for a Brusilov type effort for the Russians. However, the Austrians are still coming at the Russians and this turn they suffered 7 losses in their own attacks. This was a big encouragement for me to be aggressive in turn. I wanted to hurt AH so much that they will think twice about continuing attrition battles against the Russians. It is also focussing on the Austrians' weak point, Morale. They just cannot take a lot of hard fighting. They are well over a third of the way to surrender in 1918 and they simply cannot have more than a few turns like this one.*