

## Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT73: 10 – 14 June 1915 (June 3)

### General Situation

For some days after the Russians announced their victory at Tarnopol (5-5.4309), there was silence in response from Vienna. The Russian government put great store on the reaction by the enemy as they feared that the French and British would not recognise it either. By 13 June, a few grudging acknowledgements that the Russians had enjoyed some local successes despite being forced to retreat 350 kilometres could be found in official announcements. More particularly, St Petersburg had telegrams from Vienna, routed through neutral countries, enquiring about the health of the most prominent prisoners.

Encouraging though it was, this success was not enough on its own to decide the war which was still going badly for the Russians. The loss of Vilna on 10 June was the final trigger for the Tsar to move to take direct command of the Russian Army. Tarnopol had encouraged this decision as it suggested, perhaps falsely, that there was still a lot of fight left in the Russian Army. The Grand-Duke packed his bags and headed to the Caucasus. Tsar Nicholas headed towards the front in a railway carriage that became his headquarters.

### The Eastern Front



Figure 1: The situation on the North West Front, showing part of the so-called Mother Russia line, 10 - 14 June 1915.

The situation on the Eastern Front was still very much in the balance when the Tsar took command. The Russian 1<sup>st</sup> Army and German 10<sup>th</sup> Army were engaged in sporadic actions along the Venta River,

but it was unclear whether the Germans intended a further push on to Riga. In the south, the Austrians had been forced to halt their advance on Luck in order to re-orientate themselves after the “check” at Tarnopol as Conrad described it. The Austrian 7<sup>th</sup> Army attack at Siret-on-the-Siret (5-5.4617) was still continuing and the Germans were pursuing the Russians deep into the Pripet Marshes fighting a rear guard for bridges over the Stochod River (4-5E.0127 on 12 June. However, there was no further fighting for the present around Stanislaw or on the Sereth River as the Central Powers were resupplying.

When the Tsar arrived at the front, he discovered that the fortress city at Luck was being abandoned on 12 June. It was too late for him to stop this retreat but his first priority was to prevent other retreats. Taking military advice from STAVKA, the Tsar drew a line on the map beyond which he declared no further retreat would be tolerated. This was the Mother Russia Line as it became known. It did not suggest the Tsar was well acquainted with the details of geography. If the Russian fought on that line they would have to endure very wet conditions for it was predominantly located in swampy terrain. Although, it declared an intention to protect, Daugavpils, Vitebsk, Minsk, Vinnitsa and Odessa, it also surrendered Riga and the whole of Moldova<sup>1</sup>. In defence of the Tsar, this was really a last resort line. When the plans for this defence came into German hands, shockingly only a few days later, Falkenhayn was sceptical that they represented true Russian intentions. In any event, he declared that in no circumstances were the German Armies to advance past the Mother Russia Line. It would, he said, provoke rather than destroy Russia’s capacity to resist.

### The Balkans



Figure 2: The Austro-Hungarians occupy Tirane and Durres, 11 June 1915.

<sup>1</sup> A subsequent amendment protected Moldova.

The Austro-Hungarian 6<sup>th</sup> Army announced on 11 June that it had occupied Tirane and Durres. The remnants of the Montenegrin Corps was said to be fleeing further south. Meanwhile the Austro-Hungarian 5<sup>th</sup> Army was working its way around the western side of Lake Ohrid without encountering any serious opposition.

### **The Near East**

The Indian 2<sup>nd</sup> Division occupied Al-Amarah on 14 June. This was the second time the inhabitants had watched the British Empire march into their town since the start of the war.

The Turkish Summer offensive in the Caucasus was not over and its effects spread eastwards as the Turkish XI Corps joined in the efforts of the IX and X Corps. The heaviest fighting was now to gain a high pass known as the Varto Gap (6-8.2619) defended by a Russian brigade of the 66<sup>th</sup> Division. The Varto Gap was a short cut to the higher Murat Valley and the Russians were badly outnumbered. They held the Turks off until 12 June when they could no longer avoid retreating. Their pull back meant that other Russian forces in the Murat Valley had to retreat also or else the Turks would get into their rear.

### **The Western Front**

Three more British Divisions had landed in France since the beginning of June. There were now 13 British Infantry Divisions on the Continent plus a Canadian and an Indian Division. In contrast, the French counted 90 Infantry Divisions plus a number of independent Brigades in their active forces. The best intelligence of the Allies gave an estimate of 77 German Divisions on the Western Front on 12 June though they failed to pick up smaller independent units. With this superiority in numbers dependent on the, perhaps temporary, German concentration on the Eastern Front, the Allies were forced to consider yet further offensives.

### **The Italian Front**

As the Italian 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Armies recovered from the shock of the first attack on the Isonzo, Cadorna was anxious to keep his other forces active. On 13 June the Italian 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Armies were ordered to break into the Trentino by advancing up the Brenta (1<sup>st</sup> Army) and crossing the southern Dolomites (4<sup>th</sup> Army). The situation should have been favourable as the frontier was not strongly defended there. The 1<sup>st</sup> Army sent the Padua Brigade forward at great speed into the Brenta Valley where it was massacred in frontal attacks on Austrian positions. Meanwhile the 4<sup>th</sup> Army was stopped by a single Austrian Mountain Brigade (51<sup>st</sup>) at Castel Tesino (6-4.2417). This was the first high altitude fighting on the Italian Front and the Italian Army command was criticised for not arranging a supply chain to allow the field artillery to operate in this type of campaign. As a result, the Austrian Jaegers were only confronted by unsupported infantrymen. Despite all this the Italians had numbers on their side and the Austrian defences would have quickly crumbled after 14 June if reinforcements were not quickly available.



## Player Notes

CP:

- *East: Another period of consolidating the armies and extending railheads. Only the 10<sup>th</sup> Army along the borders of Latvia is in any position to attack and conducts two along the Venta River. 12<sup>th</sup> Army, supported by the AH 1<sup>st</sup> Army, also attacks north of Kowel into the marshes to clear away a Russian brigade and understrength division. Much of the artillery is now headed westwards while there are more engineer regiments en route eastwards to help with rail construction.*
- *Galicja: I was complacent last turn and allowed 4<sup>th</sup> Army to have divisions isolated and forced into surrender. AH cannot afford such losses and it reminds me that, just because Russia has been on the retreat since the launch of the Gorlice-Tarnow offensive, it doesn't mean they don't still possess fearsome teeth. A salutary reminder of my opponent's skill at punishing my every error. The 4<sup>th</sup> Army does launch a small counterattack and 7<sup>th</sup> Army (previously the Kovess Group) applies further pressure in the Carpathians along the Romanian border. This attack will either force him to lose an infantry regiment thus leaving two cavalry divisions and the loss of the trenches here; or force him to take a cav loss. I would prefer he gives up the trenches which will open the way for me to hopefully start clearing up towards Czernowitz and turning the left of the Russian line.*
- *Serbia: Uneventful advances of another 20km and the clearing of the port of Durres in Albania.*
- *West: Relatively static. I feed some reserve divisions into weaker points of the line. I am just waiting for him to strike.*
- *Caucasus: I succeeded in pushing the Russian forces back from the Erzerum-Mus valley and now have freed up LoCs there; which is a big relief as further Turkish divisions are moving to the front and will be needed to rebalance the situation along the western shores of Lake Van. Emboldened by this, I attack again in the mountains. Losses here may force him to shift forces westwards from Lake Van and thus take the pressure off there. Intelligence reports a large inload of Russian supply into the Caucasus; enough to sustain a prolonged offensive. I have to keep him spread thinly enough to make offensives too costly and supply in the Caucasus means less supply on the eastern front. Given that he is trading space for time, though, this is not really being missed by him along this front.*
- *Mesopotamia: Quiet.*
- *Palestine: Quiet.*
- *Gallipoli: Quiet - surprisingly.*
- *Italy: The Italian attacks broke along the Isonzo. Robert chose his points of attack well; knowing no breakthrough could be made but with a view to minimising his own casualties.*

*AP: I have really cheered up as a result of my turning the tables on Austria last turn. This is despite the fact that I have lately realised Shaken Morale for the Russians is worse than I thought as it will hit their production. Also I am still unsure how this Russian campaign is going to end. I have missed the chance to escape behind the Grave Threat line before Shaken Morale (which I cannot completely do according to the revised rule which David circulated earlier this year). The Russians are also having a bad time in the Caucasus at the moment so I have that to worry about too.*

*Despite this, the situation of Austria is grim too. The Italian attack in the Trentino should reveal that the Austrians are understrength there with few reserves. I will threaten to take Bozen if this is not rectified soon. I do not think the Austrians can continue to attack in the Balkans or Russia without playing into my hands. There are some incentives to continue such offensives but the cost has now to be very carefully assessed and this means calculating what it takes for Austria to survive in the long term (very low casualties).*