

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT74: 15 – 18 June 1915 (June 4)

General Situation

The mood in the Hapsburg capitals darkened. For several days it had been difficult for government ministers and well connected people (Archdukes even) to get a firm understanding of what had happened at Tarnopol. In place of firm facts, wild rumours circulated about exactly how many losses there had been and in what circumstances. The Russian news service was claiming that 28,000 Austrian troops had been captured and although there were perfunctory denials from Conrad's headquarters they were not enough to suppress the speculation.

Conrad was fighting an internal battle with critics on his own staff and with rivals within high military circles who were insisting that Austria was overstretching itself. Their prime argument was the opening of action on the Italian Front. This they said had to be Austria's top priority and further offensive action against Russia or in the Balkans would be futile if they could not adequately protect their rear. They also added that the Russian war in particular was not popular and could not enthuse the Army whereas there were already signs that the Italian attack was motivating the Empire's Slavic soldiers to much greater patriotism than they had hitherto shown.

Conrad was not impressed with these dangerous sentiments, as he saw them. Yes, he accepted that the Tarnopol defeat had been a bad blow, but that he saw as the fault of the 4th Army commander, Auffenburg (a survivor of the 1914 campaign which had seen many Army commanders sacked). Auffenburg was now swiftly replaced by Archduke Joseph Ferdinand. In Conrad's eyes, the Russians were on the brink of a major defeat and Tarnopol was but a small adverse detail of this soon to occur victory. He therefore was urging the Austrian forces in Galicia to further efforts which he expected would drive the Austrians completely out of Hapsburg territory and ensure that Austria had a full share of the credit for Russia's final defeat.

The Western Front

At the recent Inter-Allied Military Conference at Amiens, the French and British had agreed that their main effort in 1915 would be no sooner than the late summer. The French did not want to strike until the British were fully ready and the British didn't think they were going to be fully ready until their heavy guns started to arrive in sufficient numbers. In the meantime, Joffre and Sir John French agreed minor opportunistic attacks should be made to keep the Germans on their toes and take advantage of the German distractions with the Eastern Front. This policy also allowed for the continued sustainment of the operation in the Dardanelles which required a diversion of some Allied resources from the Western Front.

The first minor operation which the British considered was the brain child of Sir Douglas Haig, commanding the 1st British Army. Haig had enjoyed a fairly quiet war to date. Most of the fighting in early 1915 had been in the sectors of the British 2nd and 3rd Armies and in cooperation with the French. Haig had developed a good relationship with the King of Belgium and persuaded him to participate in an attack across the Yser towards Dixmunde that Haig intended to make with the new III Corps late on 17 June. The Belgian Army therefore covered Haig's preparations. Part of the diversionary plan of the Allies was to spread stories that the King and Haig would both be busy with

a large celebration of the centenary of the Battle of Waterloo on 18 June. Haig had even been quoted as saying it wouldn't be cricket to attack the Prussians on that day. Instead, he began the night before.



Figure 1: The Dixmunde Attack in Flanders: 17 - 18 June 1915.

The German 16th Army which was responsible for the defence of the Yser was not well prepared. Only two German Divisions defended the Yser from Dixmunde to the sea and the 2nd Marine Division held a front of 20 kilometres alone. Haig had also used aircraft well to identify where the ground was dried out and this defined the most promising lines of advance. Unfortunately the weather did not cooperate because when the Belgian 5th Division moved forward on the evening of 17 June it had started raining and continued through the night. The III Corps attack therefore encountered very soft ground where it had been hoped the conditions would be better. As a result, the German Marines were able to contain the British attack almost before it got started and the action petered out within a few hours.

The Italian Front

The fighting in the mountains above Castel Tesino (6-4.2417) flared up more violently on 17 – 18 June as the Italians renewed their efforts to cross into Trentino. The Austrians had sent their 52nd Mountain Brigade to support the beleaguered 51st Brigade. Neither side found it easy to get equipment and supplies up to the front line which was often at over 3000 metres altitude.

The Eastern Front

The Germans finally could claim they had won the Battle of the Venta by 16 June as the Russian 1st Army responded to further attacks in the previous 48 hours by retreating. It was unclear how far the Russians were prepared to withdraw in Latvia. Litvinov, commanding the 1st Army, had stated he would not give up Riga when he heard that that at STAVKA they had merely shrugged their shoulders at this possibility.

The fighting in Eastern Galicia and Volhynia remained intense in mid-June. The Austrian 1st Army occupied Luck on 15 June. The Austrian 4th Army was still trying to gain revenge for its defeat at

Tarnopol. The southern wing of the 4th Army cooperated with the Austro-Hungarian 3rd Army to make a further attempt to move beyond the Sereth River. Neither side was entrenched in these engagements but the Russians were stubborn nonetheless. On 15-16 June, they kept the Austrians out of Kopycynce (5-5.4311). To the north of Tarnopol (5-5.4309), the Austro-Hungarians tried to swing round to Wyszogoronok (5-5.4307) in another effort to outflank the Russian defence. However, this was also frustrated as the Russian 5th Army sent assistance to its southern neighbour (3rd Army) there. This move probably contributed to the 5th Army's decision to demobilise the Dubno fortifications on 17 June as its resources were not limitless.

Among the forgotten cavalry actions of World War One was an attempt by the Austrian 9th Cavalry Division to penetrate the trenches surrounding Siret-on-the-Siret (5-5.4517) on 15 June. It was a brave attack, but it was stopped by Cossacks acting as mobile infantry manning the Russian lines.



Figure 2: The Eastern Front north of the Dniestr River.

The Balkans

The Serbians were still holding on to their strong positions around Lake Ohrid and the Bulgarians and Austrians were manoeuvring to the west in Albania. There were no major clashes between the two sides as the Central Powers were advancing into remote regions south and east of Tirane which the Serbians and Montenegrins were not contesting. Albanian shepherds watched the Armies marching through with silent disdain. Stragglers might be robbed or suffer worse indignities, but for the

moment there were few opportunities as the invaders of both sides were keeping together in large numbers.

The Near East



Figure 3: The Battle of Achi Baba, 17 - 18 June 1915

By mid-June, Hamilton was ready to make a further attempt to gain the upper hand on the Gallipoli Peninsula. Once again, the plan was centred on the village of Krithia (7-6.3812) or more accurately around it. The British XII Corps was to advance behind it and seize the heights of Achi Baba while the French were to advance towards the same objective up the dried stream bed of Kereves Dere on the southern side. This was a meticulously prepared attack fully supported by naval guns and field artillery. The British effort was spearheaded by the Marines, the Royal Navy Division and the 28th Division. The French employed elements of three Divisions and their own Marine Brigade. Hamilton had the 3rd Division and 1st Australian Division in reserve.

Nobody had any illusions this would not be a costly battle. Four Turkish Divisions protected Krithia and the slopes of Achi Bacha including Kemal's 19th Division. As it turned out the British advanced through a sector held by the Turkish 5th Division which literally fought to the last man in a bloody irrational struggle with the 28th Division in which fanatical self-sacrifice on both sides became normal. Thinking that the 28th had cleared the way up to Achi Bacha, Hamilton committed the 1st Australian Division into an attack on the summit during the hot afternoon of 18 June. This was supposed to coincide with the arrival of the French who were nevertheless still bogged down in

Kereves Dere. Hoping that the naval guns had cleared the heights of Turkish defenders, the Australians rushed forwards with disastrous results. German advisers had expertly placed machine guns in enfilading positions so that anyone moving forward without cover was cut down. By evening, the Turks were counterattacking downhill and the Allies were concentrating on defending their limited gains.

The Allied cause in the Near East was not prospering. In Egypt, the garrison only had a defensive mission. Townsend's force in Iraq was struck by an outbreak of disease in mid-June which was traced to the unhealthy march from Qurna to Al Amara through the swamps of southern Iraq during the last few weeks. Nearly 40 % of the I Indian Corps had reported sick by 17 June. The whole campaign in Mesopotamia was in jeopardy again. The Russians were also retreating in the Caucasus, giving up ground in the Murat Valley and in the remote mountain ranges on either side.

DM Summary – June 1915

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total [%SM]	Morale
Germany	-	2	3	6				8	19	802	Good
Austria-Hungary	1	26	2	6				5	40	393	Good
Ottoman	1	1	1	4				NA	7	33	Good
Bulgaria	-	-	-	-				-	-	11	Good
Central Powers	2	29	6	16				13	66	1218	
France	-	-	-	3				-	3	609	Good
Great Britain	-	-	-	8				-	8	114	Good
Russia	4	16*	6**	9#				NA	35	561	Good - *Kowel lost **Leipaja and Vilna lost # Luck lost.
Italy	-	5	1	1				-	7	7	Good
Belgium	-	-	-	(1)				-	(1)	(96)	NA
Serbia	-	-	-*	-				-	-	(27)	NA*Tirane lost
Entente	4	21	7	20				-	52	1288	

Player Notes:

CP:

- *East: Another two attacks are conducted along the Venta River to keep the pressure up and try and seize a bridgehead. I want to make his position in the Baltics to become untenable and force him back to the river Aa. Along the rest of the front a*

considerable distance is, for the most part, my only option as he uses the vast distances to recover his forces. As most of the AH action is now moving out of Galicia, I'll subsume their movements into the EF narrative. The AH 4th Army lost 2 divisions isolated and forced into surrender last turn. I am more cautious this turn. The 4th Army does launch an attack in support of 2nd Army to try and drive a wedge between the Russian 5th and 3rd armies. Further south along the Sereth River 4th Army leads an attack supported by 3rd Army to prevent the Russian from forming an entrenched line in the open country. He is too strongly embedded around Stanislau for me to attack front on, so I need to persist with a wider turning manoeuvre to try and prise him out. 7th Army to the south of Czernowitz also attacks against two flanking cavalry divisions right on the Rumanian border.

- *Serbia: Uneventful. I considered an attack, but the loss ratio would not have been in my favour. Given that the Serbs lose nothing but manpower and are DM-unconcerned, I cannot afford futile loss of men and materiel against them.*
- *West: Relatively static. I feel an attack is coming between Reims and Verdun so consolidate in this area. I also suspect an impending British effort near Ypres so ensure the HQ responsible here is adequately supplied.*
- *Caucasus: Manoeuvre – nothing of consequence.*
- *Mesopotamia: Quiet. I continue a gradual withdrawal to draw him in and to move away from the marshes.*
- *Palestine: Quiet.*
- *Gallipoli: Quiet – he is building up strength for another attack.*
- *Italy: I had a very unsatisfactory trade-off with the Italians. He launched a surprise attack against me in the Dolomites and is strong here; so I reinforce certain positions slightly. I have more Mt brigades coming to this front from Serbia.*

AP: *Russian losses are mounting so fast I even risk Shaken Morale at the end of this month or next month at the latest. Despite this I held my ground in the southern sections of the Eastern Front because I will always trade equal losses Russians for Austrians. I have alerted Ivor to the risks of letting AH DM run away too fast at this stage of the game now they are engaged on three fronts but how that plays out with an early break of Russian Morale I am not so sure.*

Regarding the other fronts at the moment, here is a quick summary. In the Balkans, I am mainly interested in keeping the Austrian forces there busy. I am delaying sending a force to Salonika as I am not ready to risk triggering Greek entry. In Iraq, I realised belatedly I should have suffered attrition in the monthly turn as I had my forces next to a flooded river hex side. In the Caucasus lack of strength is forcing me backwards and I do not think I am managing this front very well. At the Dardanelles I have made my biggest attack yet against his strongest defences and risked very heavy losses. I can do this, but not very often. The only thing hurrying me is the arrival of Ottoman reinforcements otherwise I am happy with a slow campaign there.

On the Italian Front, I keep up unsupplied attacks in the Dolomites. I will attack his weaker sectors rather than the strong defences on the Isonzo. I want to force Austria to reinforce these defences which will mean less for other fronts/sectors.

I am still content with a slow pace on the Western Front, but I also need to take advantage of opportunities when they arise and I thought my attack on Dixmunde had a small chance of taking the

hex and uncovering Ostende (it probably didn't). At the beginning of the year, I was grateful that the Germans were concentrating in the East (which left the Western Front comparatively weak). There are a few signs of German Divisions being pulled out of the Eastern Front and it will be interesting to see where they go.