

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT76: 23 – 26 June 1915 (June 6)

General Situation

Nearly a year had passed since Archduke Franz Ferdinand had made his fatal visit to Sarajevo. The Austro-Hungarian Empire was still tied up in the consequences of the assassination and still not in control of the maelstrom of events. Ironically there was no shortage of military success. What were lacking, were military solutions.

Serbia had been overrun, but Serbia was still fighting. All the Balkan minor powers, whichever side they were leaning to, were demanding advantages which Austria could ill-afford to agree and on which Germany demanded the last word even though not one single Pomeranian Grenadier had been seen in the region.

The first main Italian attack had been repelled, but the Italians would keep attacking and were already nibbling away at the Austrian defences in the Trentino.

Most difficult of all was the war against Russia. The campaign there was enjoying new successes but this was thanks to the Germans. When they returned to focus on their Western enemies would not Austria have to hold out against a resurgent Russia alone?

The Eastern Front

The honeymoon of the Tsar's period of command was short and it was over. The Battle of Tarnopol (5-5.4309) had not been the Tsar's plan, but he had enjoyed some of the resulting short-lived prestige. Unfortunately, the decision there had been of only temporary significance. The German Sud Army had redeployed to support the recovering Austro-Hungarian 4th Army on the Sereth River. On 23 June, an attack at Trembowla (5-5.4311) had sent the Russian reeling back with heavy losses. To the north of Tarnopol, the Austro-Hungarian 2nd Army had assisted the 4th Army make a similar breakthrough at Zbaraz (5-5.4308).

Within hours, three Russian Armies (3rd, 8th and 11th) were in rapid retreat. Stanislaw was abandoned. On the road leading east from that city, the Russians left a trail of discarded equipment including most of the heavy howitzers of the 8th Artillery Brigade.

Things were little better for the Russians further north. The Russian 5th, 4th and 9th Armies had given up Dubno (5-5.4204) and were preparing to leave Rovno. Once again, the reason for the Russian retreats was fear of the Germans. The Russians on the South West Front had had little experience of fighting Germans and now the opposing Austro-Hungarian 1st Army was supported by five German Divisions including two Württemberg Reserve Divisions which had made a rapid dash forwards on 24 June coming within a few kilometres of Rovno. The Russian had concentrated a large reserve of artillery there that was ordered to be evacuated further east next day. Since the roads were crowded, and there were few bridges over the Goryn River, it was uncertain whether this order had been given in time.

With the Germans arriving on the south bank of the Dvina River opposite Daugavpils on 24 June and being barely 70 kilometres from Riga on the same day, the Tsar's problems seemed to be

multiplying. The Army and populace could see that his taking command had been no panacea at all and the challenges facing the Russian Army at this stage of the war would have perhaps defeated many more experienced commanders.

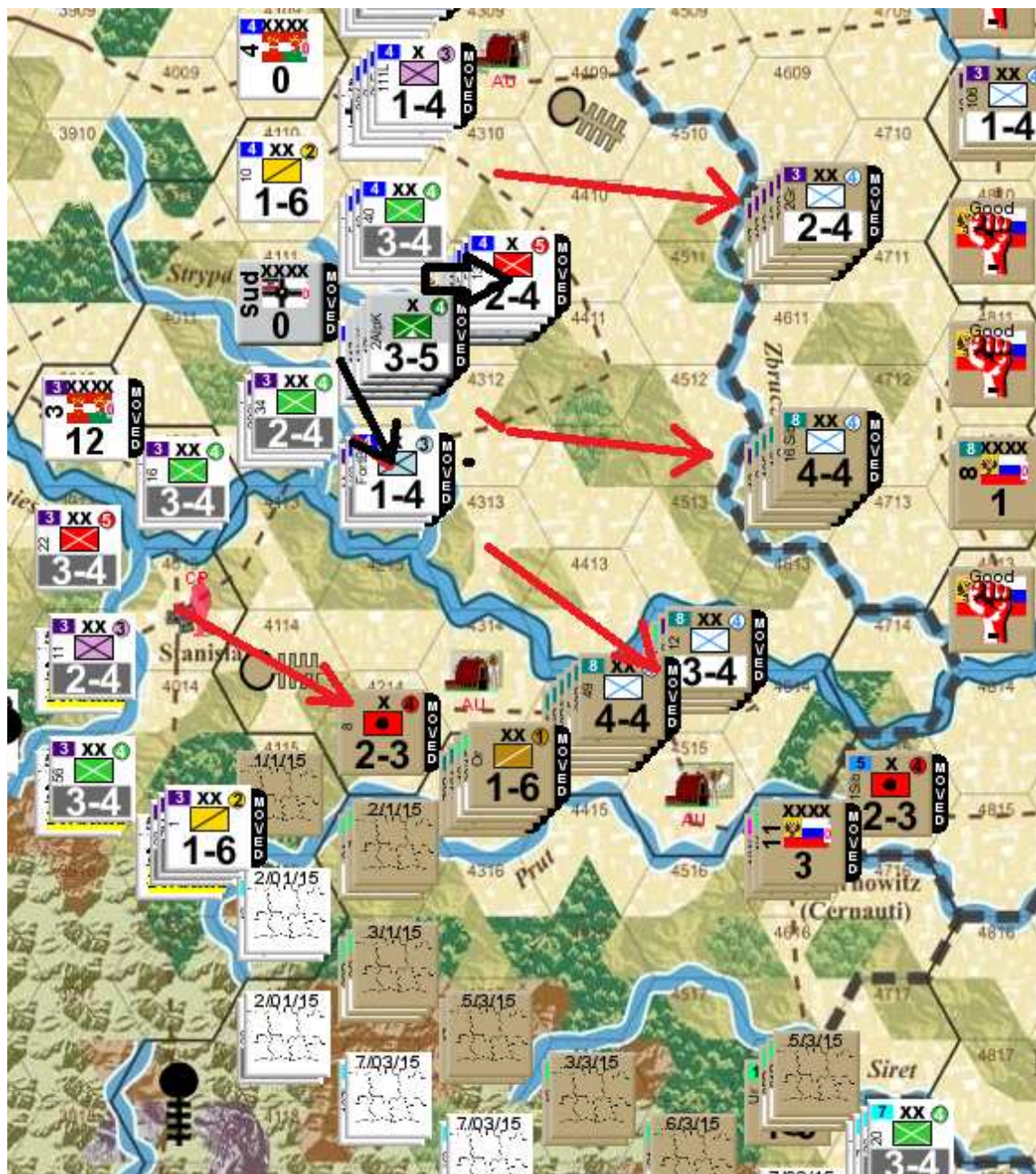


Figure 1: The Sud Army helps break the Russian South West Front, 23 - 26 June 1915.

The Balkans

The long summer days brought a more relaxed mood to the Balkan theatre of operations. After months of conflict and marching, the two sides were tired and welcomed a chance to rest. The Bulgarians and Austro-Hungarians were digging in to new lines and it did not seem probable that they would continue the advance further south. Indeed, the Austrians were withdrawing a significant proportion of their force which was marching back towards Cattaro where it expected to entrain for the Italian Front (mistakenly as it happened because there were no trains there).

The Near East

The Allied forces at Gallipoli raced to replenish their ranks following recent losses. The Turks were of course doing the same and the probability was that by the time Hamilton was ready to attack again, the Turkish defences would be as strong as ever.



Figure 2: The Second March up the Tigris, 23 – 26 June 1915.

The British Imperial advance in Iraq was stalled some distance below Ali Gharbi as the Indian Corps awaited replacements for the losses it had suffered due to attrition and disease during their latest advance. Townsend did not think his force was in a condition in which it might take on the Turkish 6th Army which was massed in front of Kut on 24 June.

There was no significant action in Caucasus where there was a stand-off following the Turkish failure to break the Russian line at Haci Ömer (6-8.2518).

The Western Front

The French were ready to make a major attack in Western Champagne. Foch had organised it with the French 9th and 6th Armies playing the leading parts. This was not planned to be the main strategic offensive which Joffre did not think could happen until August or September. Instead it was, like the recent British 1st Army attack in Flanders, intended more to harass the Germans and disrupt their defensive arrangements. Foch nevertheless wanted it to begin with a concentrated infantry and artillery attack that would shock the German 3rd Army, the right wing of which, would receive Foch's blow. As it happened, this battle sucked the French into greater efforts than they intended.

The first attacks took place on 25 – 26 June and the heaviest fight was around Neuilly St-Front (5-3.1215). The French infantry were well equipped and amply supported by artillery (at least by the standards of the period). The Colonial Division and the IV Corps which led the attacks were considered excellent formations in the French Army. Their opponents were entrenched, but had little benefit of terrain or commanding ground. Even so, the French attacks uniformly failed. Interestingly the Germans were not very satisfied with their performance either as the 3rd Army report noted that few effective counterattacks had been made in the two days of fighting. All perceptive officers on both sides realised the enthusiasm of 1914 was little in evidence now.

Experienced soldiers were taking fewer risks, especially when they saw the battle was likely to have no more than tactical significance. The French gained about half a kilometre by 26 June, but they then lost almost all their gains in small actions during the next few days.



Figure 3: The Attack at Neuilly St-Front, 25 - 26 June 1915.

The Italian Front

By sheer force of numbers, the Italian 4th Army forced its way into Castel Tesino (6-4.2417) on 25 June after 12 days fighting in the surrounding mountains. Having gained a foothold thereby on Austrian territory, Cadorno endorsed a continuation of the Trentino offensive. Five Divisions were transferred by rail from the Isonzo Front to the Italian 1st Army sector where they were deployed near the fortifications around Schio (6-4.2320).

Player Notes

CP:

- East: German forces have now largely cleared the Baltic States as the Russians start to anchor their right flank on the Gulf of Riga. I am pretty much at the extent of my ability to sustain myself for now and can only manage a limited attack against a cavalry division to force it back. It will take another two odd turns to get my railheads close enough to force him into Riga and reach the coast myself. Just north of the Dniester within the AH AOR, Sud Armee leads an attack supported by the AH 4th Army to continue to try and outflank Stanislaw. I am surprised he is so bitterly contesting the Stanislaw salient, as by withdrawing he can shorten his line dramatically. In fact, he could reduce his frontage by around 240km. Whilst this salient is also forcing me to counter it along the same area of frontage, he has currently allowed me to fix 20 infantry divisions, 2 brigades and at least 2 cavalry divisions. Also some artillery and 2 army HQs. This is a significant force considering*

the pressure he is facing elsewhere. The AH 2nd and 4th armies also collaborate again to continue to try and force the Russians out of AH territory.

- *Serbia: Quiet. I start to dig in as further advances are now impossible to sustain.*
- *West: Another attack at Dixmude compels me to reinforce it with another brigade.*
- *Caucasus: The Turkish 3rd Army attack in the mountains was a disaster. I was unable to supply one of my divisions but erroneously thought I was. As a result, I lost the best part of a division of troops for no gains. Such losses and supply expenditure takes several turns to recoup in the Caucasus.*
- *Mesopotamia: Quiet.*
- *Palestine: Quiet.*
- *Gallipoli: Quiet.*
- *Italy: Another unsatisfactory trade-off with the Italians.*

DM Summary – June 1915

| Nation | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Food Deficit | Month | Total | Morale |
|-----------------|---|-----|-----|-----|---|----|---|--------------|-------|-------|---|
| Germany | - | 2 | 3 | 6 | 2 | 6 | | 8 | 27 | 810 | Good |
| Austria-Hungary | 1 | 26 | 2 | 6 | 2 | 2 | | 5 | 44 | 397 | Good |
| Ottoman | 1 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 2 | - | | NA | 9 | 35 | Good |
| Bulgaria | - | - | - | - | - | - | | - | - | 11 | Good |
| Central Powers | 2 | 29 | 6 | 16 | 6 | 8 | | 21 | 80 | 1232 | |
| France | - | - | - | 3 | - | 6 | | - | 9 | 615 | Good |
| Great Britain | - | - | - | 8 | 2 | - | | - | 10 | 116 | Good |
| Russia | 4 | 16* | 6** | 9# | 3 | 6 | | NA | 44 | 570 | Good - *Kowel lost **Leipaja and Vilna lost #Luck lost |
| Italy | - | 5 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | | - | 10 | 10 | Good |
| Belgium | - | - | - | (1) | - | - | | - | (1) | (96) | NA |
| Serbia | - | - | -* | - | - | - | | - | - | (27) | NA*Tirane lost |
| Entente | 4 | 21 | 7 | 21 | 7 | 13 | | - | 73 | 1308 | |

AP: This turn really shocked me. I have made a lot of mistakes. First I have underestimated the Central Powers determination to deal with Russia. While I was assuming that the CP would be desperate to redeploy to the West, Italy and Gallipoli (Germans only) they have kept the focus on Russia. Equally while I have thought the CP gains nothing by advancing all the way to the Grave Threat Line in 1915, it looks as if they want to.

Now I have to consider the implications of the errata which require the Russians to keep 150 Strength Points on or in front of the Grave Threat Line. Also I have realised the GTL has a gap between it and the Romanian Border so that a Central Powers advance into Moldavia is possible. This will put them in Romania's rear but also in a precariously exposed position given that this will have to be an Austrian Sphere of Influence Area. The 6 month period of extended German-Austrian cooperation has just 2 months left to run. Riga might also now be another battleground.

Some mistakes were tactical. I have four Russian Artillery Brigades in jeopardy because I didn't anticipate my latest retreats and the one which was defending Stanislau is as good as dead. The Russian have to watch this. Their Artillery can only move one hex if it has to leave a Zone of Control and cross any kind of difficult terrain.

On the positive side, I am making a 92 combat strength attack in France and the Trentino Campaign is about to go up a gear as I redeploy units from the Isonzo. The 1/1 die split in the big French attack was a bit disappointing but it could have been worse.