

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT77: 27 – 30 June 1915 (June 7)

General Situation

In late June, the Tsar wrote a series of famous letters to American friends. He knew Teddy Roosevelt from the negotiations to end the Russo-Japanese War. Historians have noted how self-sorry these communications were. The Tsar talked of abdicating. He suggested the world and all its new conventions were against him. He wished he could lead a great war of national resistance against the invaders, but his advisers would not let him for fear of unleashing popular forces they could not control. Ultimately this correspondence was an appeal for American help, which the Tsar knew he could not receive.

The Eastern Front

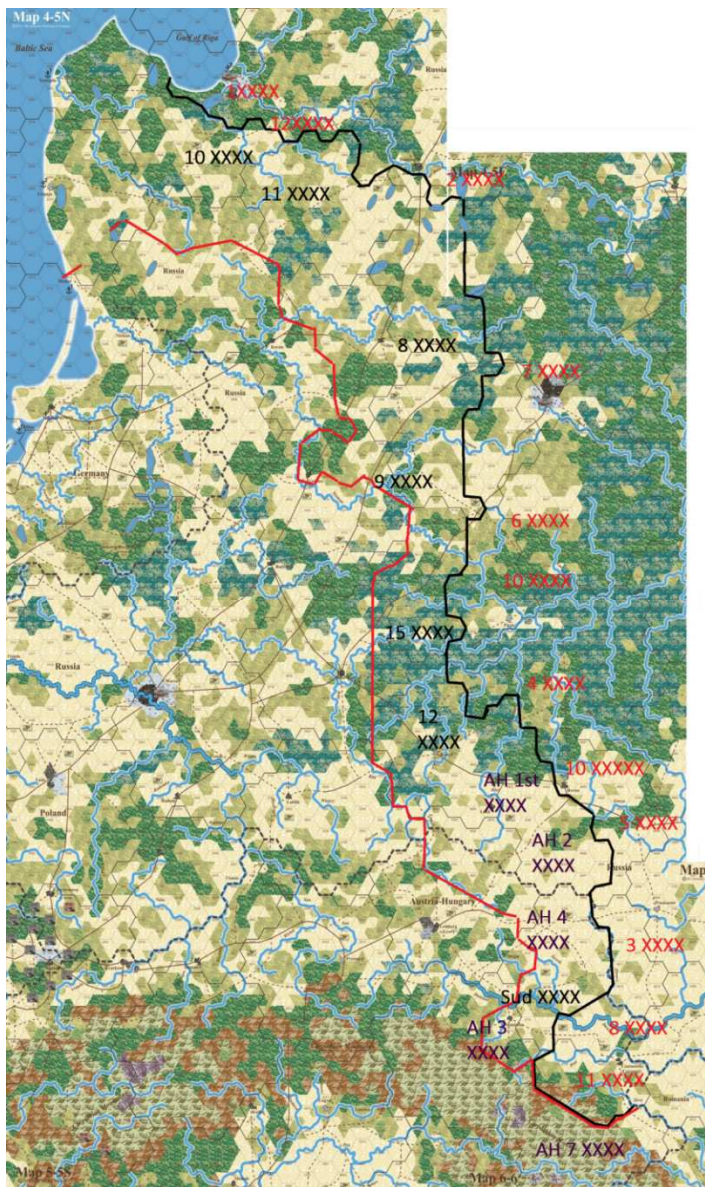


Figure 1: Central Powers' Gains on the Eastern Front, June 1915.

The state of the Russian Armies on the Eastern Front was now parlous. There was practically no position that could confidently be held anymore.

In Galicia, the Russian 3rd, 8th and 11th Armies adopted the tactic of rapid retreat rushing back towards Czernowitz. The Austrian 3rd Army re-captured Stanislaw on 27 June and moving swiftly east they found the roads littered with the equipment the Russians had left behind including many artillery pieces.

Further north, the Russian 4th, 5th and 9th Armies were also giving up Rovno. Their retreats involved a difficult crossing of the Goryn River which had barely enough bridges to cope with the equipment being evacuated. The Russian 3rd Artillery Brigade only crossed the river by working through two consecutive nights to maintain pontoons which threatened to collapse into the water whenever the current increased.

In Belorussia, the Russian 10th Army was falling back on Pinsk and there were several minor actions along the long front. The most important of these was the capture of the rail junction at Baranovichy (4-5E.0217) by the German 17th Reserve Division on 28 June.

The only place where the Russians were fighting determinedly was on the southern approaches to Riga. Between 27 – 28 June, the German 10th Army fought a bloody action against the Russian 12th Army between Bauska and Code (4-5N.1406). Although both sides suffered many casualties, the Germans steadily and surely forced the Russians to give up their ground. The loss of Riga was finally recognised as a possibility by the Russian North West Front, though the Tsar was not told this directly.

The Balkans

The movement of the Austro-Hungarian 6th Army away from this theatre was now confirmed to the Serbians. There was some relaxation in the defensive lines of the Lakes redoubt. The Italians had confirmed they were sending an Infantry Division (14th) and a Brigade of Marines to Valona. This was not welcomed by the Serbians who recognised the arrival of a rival.

There was certainly no reason for the Austrians to fear this development as the Italians had been sent from Taranto without adequate supplies and there was no clear command structure either. The whole operation had been put together against Cardorna's advice and without his assistance. The Defence Ministry in Rome had enough authority to steal a division from the Army, but did not have the organisational capability to properly support its deployment. The transfer to Albania was only possible because the Italian Navy had an interest in guarding the opposite side of the Straights of Otranto and the Marines were going with the expedition to secure the Navy's objectives. None of this required seeking out the Austrians and fighting them in Albania.

The Near East

There were very few initiatives in the Near East at the end of June. The continuous logistical activity on the Gallipoli peninsula was a matter of some note to journalists who visited the bridgeheads. *The Times* correspondent was impressed with the artificial harbours that had been created and the illumination of the piers and jetties during the night which allowed supplies to be unloaded around the clock.

In Iraq, the British had halted their march some distance south of Ali Gharbi. Townsend wanted to reinforce before he resumed the movement north. The Indian I Corps therefore rested for a few days. In contrast, on 28 June, the Turkish 6th Army had ordered its force of six Divisions to advance and they held positions 35 kilometres downriver of Kut at the end of the month.

It is hard to find any sources for actions in the Caucasus in late-June 1915. There was, as always, a degree of redeployment occurring on both sides. A memoir of the Armenian Brigade places them in the Murat Valley (bathing in the river) at the end of June, suggesting they had been transferred there from the fighting north east of Bitlis earlier in the month.

The Western Front



Figure 2: Allied attacks on the Western Front, June 1915.

Joffre and Foch argued over the continuation of the French attack above the Marne. Joffre favoured saving resources until the big attack he planned in the late summer. Foch, however, insisted that there was a good opportunity to exploit the concentration of artillery the French had in this sector. Although they had not been fully ready for the attack on Neuilly St-Front, Foch now had nearly four brigades of heavy howitzers and other long range guns under his command in the French 9th and 6th Armies. Thinking these could suppress the German guns which had moved to help protect this part of their line, Foch ordered a powerful bombardment to begin on 29 June. The German gunners fought back with their own counter-battery operations and for several days there was a deadly gun duel.

The infantry of both sides watched from their trenches as the shells flew overhead striking valuable targets behind the front lines. At this stage of the war they did not watch for long before seeking their best cover.

The Italian Front

The fighting for control of the Upper Brenta Valley spread as the Italians started to bring their field artillery into play as well as the reinforced strength of the Italian 1st Army. On 29 June there was a fierce battle for Valsugana (6-4.2318). Three Italian Alpine Divisions (26th, 27th and 29th) helped force the Austrian 179th Brigade to give up the town and undertake a difficult retreat over the peaks to the north.

The Italian 4th Army also made a secondary attack in the High Dolomites as they tried to force the Passo Pordoi (6-4.2515) on 30 June. Once again the defending Austrians (56th Mountain Brigade) were badly outnumbered and they had to fight off an assault by three Italian Divisions. To succeed, the Italian would have had to capture positions at over 2200 metres above sea level. The peaks on either side of the pass were over 3300 metres amongst them the magnificent Marmolada from whose summit the Hapsburg Imperial flag was cast down by a small climbing group from the Italian 1st Division.



Figure 3: General Situation on the Italian Front showing initial Italian gains, end of June 1915.

Player Notes

- CP: East: Lithuania and Latvia are now pretty much clear of Russian forces and there is opportunity for a large scale attack on the approaches to Riga. I have to keep up this pressure on the Russians for now and push them over the Shaken Morale line. That combined with them being across the Grave Threat line will allow me the breathing space to reinforce the WF and also reduce some of the pressure on AH. I only wish I had thrown a German Army – in addition to Sud Armee – in to assist my AH ally around the Stanislau salient sooner. I left it too late. I imagine he will use the Grave Threat line to fall behind and start rebuilding the Russian forces.

- *Serbia: I am at the limit of what I can achieve here as I cannot progress any further and sustain my forces. Losses to Robert here are also pretty much free DMs; whereas AH feels every hit. I notice he has prepared to reinforce the Serbs with Italian divisions too.*
- *West: He has massed artillery to use against me in my own salient south of Soissons. I am going to have to be careful now as he gains artillery supremacy on the WF.*
- *Caucasus: Quiet – after my last losses I am having to rebuild.*
- *Mesopotamia: Quiet.*
- *Palestine: Quiet.*
- *Gallipoli: Quiet.*
- *Italy: Another unsatisfactory trade-off with the Italians.*

DM Summary – June 1915 (showing percentage of Shaken Morale)

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total [% of SM]	Morale
Germany	-	2	3	6	2	6	12	8	39	822 [51.4]	Good
Austria-Hungary	1	26	2	6	2	2	2*	5	44	399 [72.5]	Good - *Stanislau recovered
Ottoman	1	1	1	4	2	-	-	NA	9	35 [10.0]	Good
Bulgaria	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	11	Good
Central Powers	2	29	6	16	6	8	14	21	94	1246	
France	-	-	-	3	-	6	6	-	15	621 [69.0]	Good
Great Britain	-	-	-	8	2	-	-	-	10	116 [9.1]	Good
Russia	4	16*	6**	9#	3	6	12	NA	56	582 [97.0]	Good - *Kowel **Leipaja and Vilna #Luck lost
Italy	-	5	1	1	2	1	2	-	12	12 [4.0]	Good
Belgium	-	-	-	(1)	-	-	-	-	(1)	(96)	NA
Serbia	-	-	_*	-	-	-	-	-	-	(27)	NA*Tirane lost
Entente	4	21	7	21	7	13	20	-	93	1331	

AP: This turn some scales fell from my eyes. I had been increasingly worried that the Grave Threat Line (new version rule) was going to crucify the Russians. I realised the CP were not going to redeploy away from the Eastern Front. The new version of the rule forces the Russians to stand and fight. However, once their defences are broken in Poland they have no extra capability which would help turn the tide on any line. I realised I had been anticipating that Ivor would respond to the incentives to redeploy that existed in the original rule. With that the fact that the Russians can escape means that it doesn't make sense to keep the offensive reserves of the Germans on the Eastern Front and the initiative then naturally falls back to the Russians after a period of recovery. In the new version rule the CP can just fight a battle of attrition on the GTL until the Russians collapse – and that will not take so long as their strength starts to drain away.

I had to propose that we reverted to the original rule (which is how the game started) otherwise I might be forced to resign in the near future. The early collapse of the Russians would also mean that the Near East and Balkan campaigns became rather empty and pointless and the game would just be a West Front slugfest. I also think the new version rule was a mistake historically. It required the Russians to fight on an arbitrary line of no especial defensive merit or political significance. The game does not give the Russians the space to retreat to or the extra resources that would be triggered by a greater penetration of the Russian heartland. Since that is the case, it was my view that the game ought to revert to the rule reflecting the Falkenhayn limited strategy in the East. This is much more attuned to the victory conditions and it forces the Russians to return to the offensive if they wish to have significance later in the war.

In other news, the French undertook the first large counterbattery bombardment in the game. This resulted in an even trade of 3 Artillery SP each. The motives here are that Germans put an 8-4 Artillery Brigade in the front line. That would improve German defence by 4 combat strength points so long as they supplied the Artillery at least. The exposure of the German Artillery gave me a chance to hit high value assets by risking my own and with 24 Artillery factors firing against 8 defenders in a trench the result was likely to be even. By making an Artillery only attack I have incurred the obligation to attack again next turn or the turn after with my infantry. I will need to spend at least 12 supply points more on Infantry than Artillery within a two hex radius of the attack I just made (this is from the errata).