

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT81: 15 – 18 July 1915 (July 4)

General Situation

Among the documents on the Tsar's desk on the morning of 17 July was a devastating report which was a compilation of assessments by the chief intelligence officers of each Russian Army and of all the military and civilian governors of all the districts of Western Russia including Moscow and Petrograd. The military view was that the ordinary soldiers were not comparable to those which had marched under the Imperial banners the previous year. The cavalry and artillery were more or less still technically capable, though the cavalry had discovered that it could only rarely make a mounted attack, and the artillery had always suffered from ammunition shortages. The infantry, however, no longer had the same spirit and a common opinion repeated in the Tsar's report was that there was widespread reluctance to engage the enemy aggressively unless officers could assure the men that there would be close artillery support. Attacks were regarded as so wasteful of life that the infantry units could not be trusted to cooperate with any offensive plans which did not assure them of combined arms assistance.

The situation on the home front was perhaps even more dangerous for the Tsar as the initial patriotic support for the war was wearing off fast. Strikes at industrial enterprises were beginning to have a noticeable impact on Russian war production and credit was drying up as confidence in the successful outcome of the war had fallen dramatically as a result of the recent defeats in Poland. This had an international dimension too because the British had curtailed some Russian lines of credit in the United States and this helped promote the thought that Russia was serving the interests of the Western Powers and not following its own national interest in continuing its participation in the war.

It would have been difficult for the Tsar to avoid recognising that the morale of Russia and the Imperial Army had been shaken by the 1915 campaign which had taken away all the gains that had been made in the first months of the war. It was evident that Russia could only prevail if it could outlast the Central Powers in a long war of attrition but Russia's ability to stay such a course was seriously in doubt.

The Western Front

Joffre also had difficult reading material to work through in mid-July 1915. Sober assessments of the recent West Champagne Offensive had dwelt on the increasing depth and strength of the German defences and it was not possible to pretend that the French had come anywhere close to breaking through at any time during the recent fighting.

In the aftermath of their attack, the French looked in vain for any sign that their enemy was weakening in the main central sector of the Western Front between Amiens and Reims. On the contrary, it seemed that the Germans were steadily building up more and more formidable defences with stronger and stronger garrisons. In fact on 17 July, GQG military intelligence suggested that there was a 25% chance of a small scale German offensive within the next few days. All French Army commanders within the central sector were ordered to more fully man their own trenches and ensure reserves were ready to be moved to any threatened area.



Figure 1: The Central Section of the Western Front, mid-July 1915.

The Italian Front

Riva del Garda now became the focus of the Italian 1st Army which hoped to further exploit the advance it had made in the Adige Valley. As everywhere on this front, the terrain was challenging as there was a swift flowing river and several high wooded ridges to cross to reach the next Italian objective which was Arco (6-4.2018). Arco was held by the Austrian 54th Mountain Brigade which was stretched to cover the whole road between Riva and Trent. This defence was now critical for the whole Austrian position in south west Trentino. The Italians made several small attacks on 17 and 18 July in which their 11th and 35th Divisions suffered heavily from the high quality marksmanship of the defending brigade. The Austrians were still hard pressed to hold on and had already been obliged to abandon some of their positions on the frontier in the Upper Chiese Valley.

The Eastern Front

The Central Powers were now digging in for defence on long sections of the Eastern Front. The Russian line covering Riga had now stabilised and the German 10th Army had been ordered by Hindenburg to defer any assault on the city to a later date.

There was still heavy fighting going on in the southern Pripet Marches where the Russian 47th Division was cornered by the advancing combined German 12th and Austrian 1st Armies and

destroyed on 16 July as it covered the retreat of other Russian units escaping through the watery terrain.

The situation was more balanced on the front west of Minsk. On 15 – 16 July, a significant attack by the German 8th Army on the southern end of the Russian 7th Army front (4-5E.0313) was parried. This showed the Russians were still capable of effective defensive operations.

The Russian 7th and 6th Armies were also advancing their lines where the Germans were showing no resistance. However, when Nikotin proposed an attack against a small German force west of Vilyeka (4-5E.0210) his chief-of-staff argued against it claiming it would be a waste of scarce ammunition. This was a well-known incident in early Russian histories of the war though many of these were suppressed in the 1920s. Trotsky, however, commented on it when claiming that the first soldier Soviet had been formed by the Opolchenie 104th Division on 17 July 1915. Significantly, this unit was newly formed and had never been in major attack. Trotsky claimed that the “bad attitude” of the 104th Division was the reason why Nikotin’s attack never materialised.

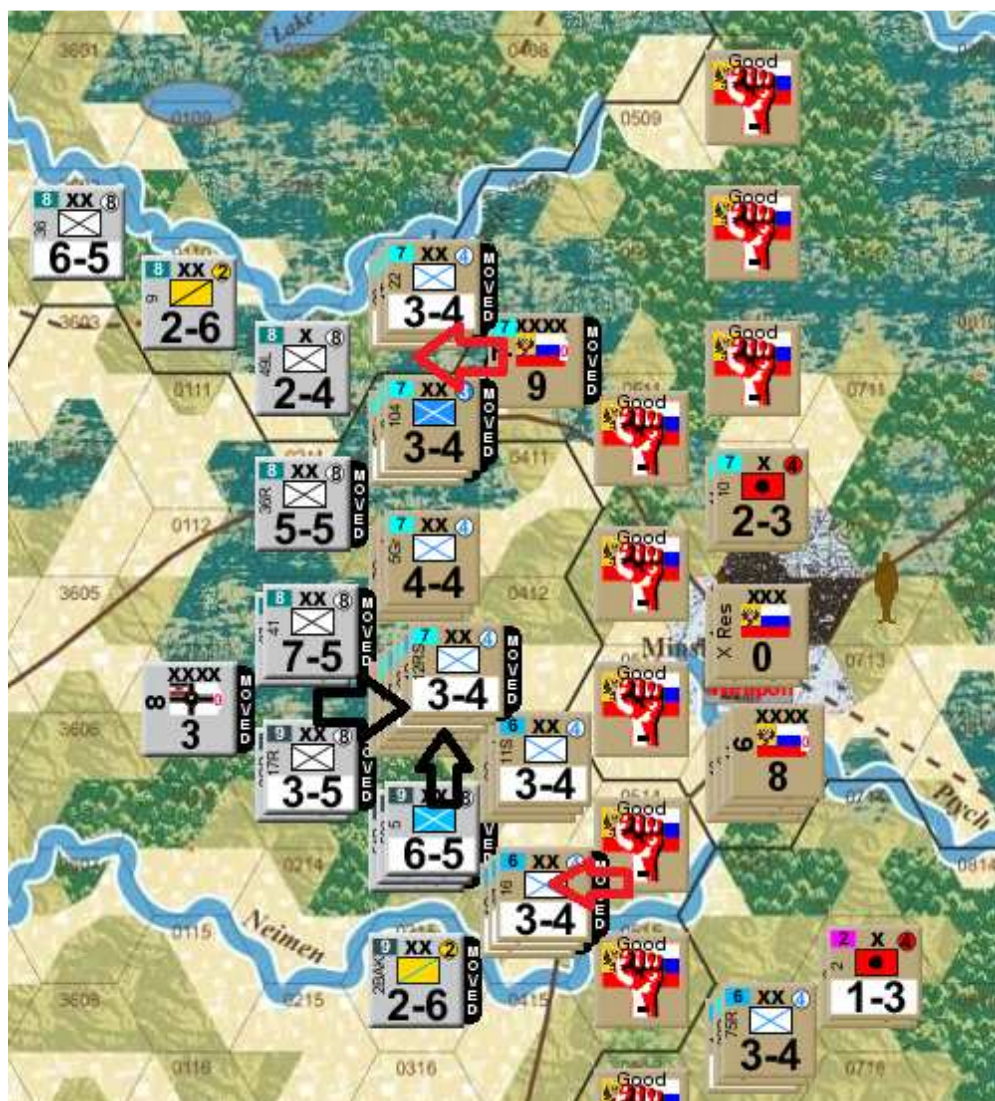


Figure 2: The Russian Front covering Minsk, 14 - 18 July 1915.

The Balkans

There was little activity on the Balkan Front where a live and let live mentality was taking hold. The Serbians continued to manoeuvre along the Greek frontier and ignored all the attempts of the Greek government to exact some compensation for the supposed expenses of their presence on Greek soil.

The Greek economy was nevertheless in a very healthy condition. There were considerable profits to be made exporting raw materials, especially metals to the Central Powers. This was in defiance of the Allied blockade but the political situation was too delicate for the French and British to make too particular a point about this. Greek shipping interests were buoyed by the high demand for merchant vessels especially in the Aegean sustaining the Allied operations at the Dardanelles. The drachma soared on the exchanges and, on 15 July, the Reich's Economics Minister, Walter Rathenau, was forced to sell some of Germany's last gold reserves acquiring an ample stock of Greek chromium and mercury.

The Near East

The situation at the Dardanelles was quiet and the Allied troops alternated between front line duty and beach bathing *en masse*. Hamilton's staff were trying to work out how they could break the deadlock. However, as they studied the latest aerial photographs they were looking at evidence which showed that the naval bombardments had not been half as effective as they had expected. All too often it appeared that the Turkish defences had survived a weight of ordinance that ought to have pulverised everything. It looked as if a high proportion of the naval shells were duds.

The Turkish 6th Army had begun digging in around Ali Gharbi. Townsend was still intent of provoking a Turkish attack and sent the Indian 1st Division forward on 18 July to try and discomfort the Turkish forces on the western side of the Tigris. The divisional commander had wanted to launch a full scale attack but Townsend insisted it should be a feint only. Accordingly, the Indians were advanced to within a mile of the Turkish outposts and told to halt and wait a see what would happen. That evening the Turkish encampments were closely observed through binoculars. Townsend was informed that the Turks had cooked dinner, posted sentries, and gone to sleep.



Figure 3: The Turkish and British (Indian) forces positioned around Ali Gharbi, 14 - 18 July 1915.

After the Russian retreat from Otlukkapi (6-8.2417), Yudenitch had expected the Turks to make a general advance. A number of Russian positions in the mountains had been abandoned including the entrenchments which had protected Hacı Ömer (6-4.2518). However, the Turks made no moves in that direction and on 17 July the Russians had rallied sufficiently to allow Yudenitch to order these defences to be reoccupied.

DM Summary – July 1915

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total	Morale
Germany	17	1	2	5				11	36	858	Good
Austria-Hungary	1	-*	2	1				-	4	403	Good *Czernowitz re-captured
Ottoman	-	4	2	-				NA	6	41	Good
Bulgaria	-	-	-	-				-	-	11	Good
Central Powers	18	5	6	6				11	46	1293	
France	14	2	-	-				-	16	637	Good
Great Britain	-	8	-	-				-	8	124	Good
Russia	*6	2	5	7				NA	20	602	Shaken - *Rovno lost
Italy	-	-	1	2				-	3	15	Good
Belgium	-	-	-	-				-	-	(96)	NA
Serbia	-	-	-	-				-	-	(27)	NA
Entente	20	12	6	9				-	47	1375	

Player Notes

CP:

- *East: I have started preparing for the longer haul now on the EF. I expect there will be a long-ish period of standoff as he makes use of the GTL to rebuild and gather strength and supply; probably with the odd small scale offensive against AH if opportunity presents. I am still determined to leave his morale shaken so make a further two attacks in the east. The first is a combined AH 1st Army and German 12th Army attack in the marshes 80km NE of Rovno. It is one of his weaker concentrations to which he cannot provide supply, thus limiting the damage he can do with any counter-attacks. The other is by the German 8th Army on the western approaches to Minsk; also in marshland and with not great odds but hopefully the combination should tip his morale.*
- *Serbia: More digging. Robert has thinned his forces out in some locations. I believe he is trying to entice me into an attack.*
- *West: No offensive action. I have gas but am reluctant to use it – it has great potential to backfire.*
- *Caucasus: Quiet. About one attack per month is all that is realistic in the mountains.*

- *Mesopotamia: Quiet.*
- *Palestine: Quiet.*
- *Gallipoli: Quiet – just some rebuilding of defences.*
- *Italy: More inroads into the Dolomites.*

AP: I have to acknowledge disappointment that the Russians are at Shaken Morale much earlier than I would have liked. I will not now be able to use the Russians to distract attention from the French at least not to the same amount. I already cancelled one attack near Minsk which might otherwise have been a good prospect because it would have used up 3 supply points I would rather keep.

I am half expecting the Germans to launch some kind of early offensive in the West. French DM is still only about 220 below German DM. Clearly, if that happened the British will have to step up to the plate and ease the pressure on France. Alternatively, the Germans will build up reserves and counter-punch after I have exhausted further efforts against their positions in the West. Either way, I will need to be more cautious and keep something in reserve myself (supply especially) in order to be ready for moves not of my making.

I realised this turn I had breached GCR 57-2 two or three times by using more than one naval gunfire counter in my most recent attacks at Gallipoli. I am going to have to compensate Ivor for that once I work out what unjust advantage I gained from it.