

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT82: 19 – 22 July 1915 (July 5)

General Situation

The Venezelist faction in Greece had been growing increasingly concerned about the Serbians present in their territory. This anxiety worsened when it became clear that the Serbians were not going to sit quietly in Macedonia and await the end of the war. They actually proposed to use Greece as a base for attacks into occupied Serbia. This would surely provoke some kind of response from the Central Powers which could lead to the fighting spreading into northern Greece.

To prevent this, the Venezelists had been asking the British and French if they would supply a force which could guarantee the defence of northern Greece and also would subordinate the Serbians into an Allied coalition in which they could not pursue their undiminished national goals unchecked and at the expense of Greece. The Italians had already shown some appreciation of this reasoning but their small force in Albania was not a factor of sufficient magnitude and Italian ambitions in the Balkans were almost as problematic as those of the Serbians.

The negotiation of this proposal had been very delicate but the British had confirmed in mid-July that they would rest some of the forces used at Gallipoli at Salonika. The Venezelists had confirmed that the Royal Army would not intervene to prevent this but the Greek soldiers loyalty remained with the King who still leaned towards the Central Powers. To build up a counter to this the Venezelists had to agree to build a national defence force that would not be answerable to the monarchy but instead to the people.

The Balkans



Figure 1: The Serbian attack on Monastir and the first Allied landing at Salonika, 21 - 22 July 1915.

Following their own independent star, the Serbian 2nd Corps made an attack on the Bulgarian Brigade defending Monastir on 21 July. This was not much more than a skirmish, but legally it was a mess and has ever since confronted generations of international law students as a tricky exam question. Clearly, the attack had been partially prepared on Greek territory but the Serbians mostly attacked from the direction of Bač (7-6.1413) an enclave of Serbian territory which they already held.

The landing of troops from the New Zealand and Australian Division at Salonika on 22 July caused vociferous protests from Central Powers' ambassadors but there didn't seem to be anything the government in Athens could do about it. The allied soldiers who landed at Salonika were presented to the world as gritty veterans of the fighting on the Dardanelles. That was true to some extent, but actually most of the force was made up by the rear support service units which had never left Lemnos until now. Nevertheless, these were well equipped to set up an Allied base in the South Balkans.

The Near East

Across the whole of the Turkish theatre of war, the Allies were stalemated. Gallipoli, Sinai, Ali Gharbi, Erzerum, Bitlis and Rize, all of them defied Allied efforts to move forward and the Turkish forces had simply not succumbed to the efforts made on the Near Eastern Fronts over the previous nine months.

Two conclusions offered themselves. Either the Allies were wasting their resources in a region which did not offer the quick conclusion to the war that they had imagined, or they had invested insufficient resources into this part of the war and they needed to redouble their efforts. Lloyd George and Yudenitch were separately advocating the second of these alternatives but the demands of the Western and Eastern Fronts and now a new front in the Balkans did not seem to allow a very rapid increase in the Allied commitments to the Near East. There were some reinforcements (or more strictly replacements) in train for these fronts. The Russians had dispatched the 2nd Grenadier and 10th Division by rail from Vinnitsa to the Caucasus and these would arrive there during August. The 2nd Australian Division was starting to debark at the Dardanelles. Finally the Lahore Division, which had fought on the Western Front, was *en route* to Basra where it would reinforce Nixon's and Townsend's forces in Mesopotamia.

The Western Front

Stalemate was a word increasingly on the lips of everyone in discussion of the Western Front. More and more it was an expression of military failure or at least a reference to success that had not yet occurred as in, "*When will the stalemate be broken?*"

Allied commanders were increasingly concerned that their intelligence reports spoke of additional divisions and artillery arriving in the West from the East. There was a lot of debate about the morale of the Germans. The Allied hope was that the enemy had been so worn out by the heavy fighting in the East and by the repeated Allied attacks in the West that they would not be able to stand a further supreme effort by the Allies. There were many grounds for dismissing such optimism but hope is an essential ingredient in any enterprise and the Allies had to believe their efforts would be rewarded.

The Eastern Front



Figure 2: The German 10th Army digging in around Riga, mid-July 1915.

It was becoming much clearer that the war on the Eastern Front had moved into a new phase. Almost everywhere, the Germans and Austro-Hungarians were digging in. The Russian Army was still in a state of shock following its defeats in recent weeks and the Central Powers' forces were allowed to entrench their positions in peace. Behind the lines, the German and Austrian engineers still had a huge amount of work to do to restore the rail network to its fully functioning state and a programme of engineering was underway which might still not be complete by the time bad weather returned.

The Italian Front

The Austrians were reinforcing the Army of Tyrol and their fortified positions in front of Trent were now fully manned presenting a formidable obstacle to any Italian attacks there and to the east of the ancient capital of the Trentino. There was more weakness further down the Adige Valley and at Riva del Garda. The Austrians still held Arco (6-4.2018) on the road north of Riva. On 19 July, units of the 50th Mountain Brigade had started falling back into the town having given up ground in the Upper Chiese Valley into which the Italians infiltrated in the next few days. This meant that the Austrian foothold on Lake Garda was being squeezed very tight.

On 21 July, the elderly residents of the lakeside *pensiones* woke up to hear (many did not as they were blissfully deaf) the frightening sound of intense small arms fire which mainly came from the hills to the east of the town. The Italian 1st Army was making a serious effort to eliminate the outposts of the Austrian 96th Brigade scattered across the wooded ridges which surrounded Riva.

The Austrians had set up many ambushes and the commander of the garrison in Riva had fortified all the approaches to the town. In trying to accelerate the capture of the resort the Italian losses multiplied. There was little Italian artillery present and the infantry had to attack Austrian positions which they could not suppress with ordinance.



Figure 3: The Italians occupy the Upper Chiese Valley and close in on Riva del Garda, 19 - 22 July 1915.

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 | 1 | | | - | 5 | 404 | Good *Czernowitz Re-captured |
| Ottoman | - | 4 | 2 | - | -2# | | | NA | 4 | 39 | Good |
| Bulgaria | - | - | - | - | 1 | | | - | 1 | 12 | 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 | 2 | | | - | 5 | 17 | Good |
| Belgium | - | - | - | - | - | | | - | - | (96) | NA |
| Serbia | - | - | - | - | (1) | | | - | (1) | (28) | NA |
| Entente | 20 | 12 | 6 | 9 | 2 | | | - | 49 | 1377 | |

#Adjustment to Turkish DM to compensate for past mistakes in overuse of British naval gunnery.

Player Notes

CP:

East: A quiet round for once in the east with no attacks. I have achieved my immediate aim of causing Russian shaken morale. I continue to reposition forces along the front line and extend rail connections into Russian territory whilst also railing some full strength divisions westwards.

- *Serbia: The line continues to thin along the border with Greece. I am not inclined to attack the Serbs again at this stage – there is no advantage in it. I may cause him single hits for no DM penalty while he can cause multiple casualties with counter-attacks requiring no supply expenditure. It would be a lose-lose game for me.*
- *West: More stalemate.*
- *Caucasus: Quiet. I have some reinforcing divisions moving in and also some supply, which should sustain me for a series of operations if feasible.*
- *Mesopotamia: Quiet.*
- *Palestine: Quiet.*
- *Gallipoli: Quiet.*
- *Italy: It is essential that I continue to build a strong northern line. He has no interest in attacking me along the historical Isonzo battle line but has been ruthlessly exploiting my weaknesses in the Alps.*

AP: My attacks on the Italian Front and in the Balkans are not much more than pinpricks. I am fairly satisfied with the progress the Italians have made in the Trentino. It is a difficult area for the Austrians to defend as it is a long front in difficult terrain hard to move about in. The Italian rail mobility is better here. A stronger defence, perhaps 4 SP per hex, might have stopped me but that would have been hard to provide without closing down the Eastern or Balkan fronts sooner. In any event, the result will be a shorter front I will find very difficult to attack. I will, however, also improve the long term security of northern Italy from attack in this direction.

It is a long time since the Serbians made an attack and maybe this one was not the best idea. It is true that the Serbians do not count DM but their offensive power is strictly limited by shortage of manpower and supply. I thought twice about using three supply points to inflict one loss on the Bulgarians but I wanted to serve notice that the Balkan Front is still live.