

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT83: 23 – 27 July 1915 (July 6)

General Situation

As the anniversary of the outbreak of war approached the two sides were taking stock. The awful conclusion was that the war remained in the balance and it was hard to believe that victory was very near. This applied to both camps. Despite the euphoria accompanying the victories the Central Powers had won in the East and the Balkans there had been nothing to suggest that the Western Powers were at all shaken by these events.

It was true that the Tsar had shown some weakness, but that had been fleeting and the Russians were now loudly rededicating themselves to the Allied cause. Falkenhayn had meanwhile been insisting on redeployments of German forces to the West and had been steadily improving the strength of the Western Front. This had reached the point where it was widely speculated that the next offensive in the West would be a German one.

The Western Front

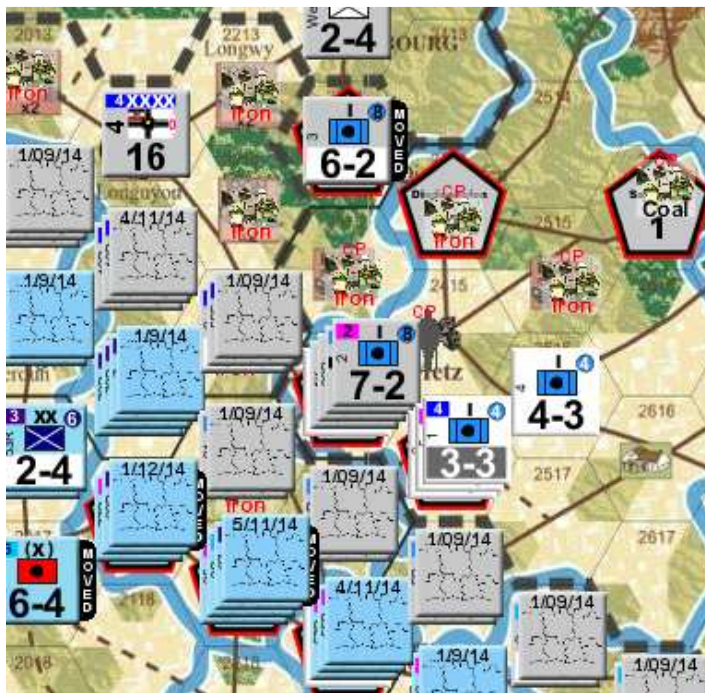


Figure 1: German and Austrian Siege Artillery concentrated around Metz, 23 – 27 July 1915.

Despite all the rumours of a possible German offensive, the intelligence picture available to the Allies was unclear. A network of sympathisers in Lorraine had used carrier pigeons to convey to the French Army a warning of the presence of large numbers of German and Austrian heavy siege guns near Metz. This had caused the French to consider the adequacy of their defences along their fortified lines between Lionville and Nancy. Despite this there was no other sign that the Germans were planning to attack along this sector which had been quiet since September 1914.

Another piece of intelligence was the count of German Divisions on the Western Front. According to the GQG assessment of 24 July these only numbered 74. This was less than before the West Champagne Offensive. Even so, the French were concerned that most of these German Divisions had rested and taken on replacements whereas many of the French units had not been refitted after the recent attacks.

The Italian Front

The Army of Tyrol had managed to reinforce Riva del Garda with the 50th Mountain Brigade. The strengthening of the Austrian positions around this outpost persuaded the Italian 1st Army that the time was not yet ripe to capture this town. The fighting around the resort died down after 23 July as the Italians pulled back to reorganise themselves and reposition.

In fact the whole Italian Army needed to resupply and re-orientate. The munition stocks with which the Italians had gone to war barely two months previously had been practically exhausted and fresh efforts to advance without the support of artillery would be costly. The gains which had been made in the Trentino had been easy ones which took advantage of the Austrians' limited preparations for war on this front. Now the limits of the Italian preparations were exposed and the situation would be more balanced for a time.

The Eastern Front



Figure 2: The German 2nd and 15th Armies digging in Belorussia, 23 – 27 July 1915.

There was also limited activity on the Eastern Front. Late July 1915, was always remembered in the German Army as the *Schaufelzeit* (shovel time). For the most part, the Russian Army kept its distance from the German and Austro-Hungarian forces who were allowed to choose whatever lines of defence might suit them.

The Tsar had recovered some of his confidence and was trying to use his authority to force the Russian Armies forward again. STAVKA and the Army Commanders frustrated the Emperor's wishes and even his orders. In each case, there was an argument that such moves were impossible until the units involved had been resupplied and reinforced. There were many Russian Divisions which had only nominal strength and it would be months before the gaps in the ranks could be repaired. This would be all the more so because desertion rates were starting to become a problem.

The Balkans

The Serbian attack on Monastir was not continued for the defenders were reinforced on 24 July by a brigade of the Bulgarian 11th Division. The Bulgarians and Austrians were also digging in along the front from the Vardar River to the Adriatic Coast. Apart from the Serbian Lakes Redoubt (7-6.1013) and the Serbian held enclave at Bač (7-6.1413) the whole of Serbia was under the occupation of the Central Powers.

This anonymous medieval Serbian verse had never been more true:

"The ferocious Turk will steal your pig and your child but will never eat them. The pious Tsar {meaning the Holy Roman Emperor} will make kobasica {sausage} out of both."

The Near East



Figure 3: The Turkish line covering Gaza, 23 - 27 July 1915.

The daily cycle of landing supplies and fresh troops at the Dardanelles continued even as Hamilton began to lose confidence in the ability of the forces under his command to break out of the narrow bridgeheads they had gained. Relations between the naval forces and the land forces had deteriorated as the naval officers spelled out the limits of the assistance they could afford. It was naturally hard on the infantry to watch the great ships cruising out on the brilliant blue sea. It wasn't difficult to work out which was the more comfortable situation.

There were few more uncomfortable situations than that of the Turkish XX Corps on the Palestinian border as the summer heat reached its high point. Hot blasts of air from Sinai enervated the whole force and it might have been thought that this alone, rather than any action of the enemy, could be

enough to drive the Turks back from their frontier. Nevertheless, it was endured though the common soldiers had their inevitable gripes. In this case the chief scandal was that the headquarters troops were rarely seen out of Gaza and that town afforded a few ancient bath houses which helped make the posting a bit more bearable.

For the Turkish and Indian forces around Ali Gharbi in Iraq there was only one way to cool off which was to take a swim in the river. It was reported to Townsend on 26 July that the 69th Punjabi battalion of the Indian 2nd Division had inadvertently swum in amongst a crowd of Turkish bathers (35th Division according to their caps) downstream of Ali Gharbi. There were no casualties as a result of this melee but it was, at the time, the subject of anxious enquiry from British commanders who suspected any fraternisation with the enemy (naked fraternisation being even worse) that went beyond the odd Christmas kick-about. For a while, after this, the Punjabis were watched very closely and they were not allowed back to the river for the rest of the summer.

If the ferocious Turks were not showing particular aggression on most of the Near Eastern Fronts in this part of the summer, there were fears in the Russian Caucasus Army that the Turkish attacks would resume on their front before very long. Yudenitch now reported to the Grand-Duke. The old man had taken over nominal command in this theatre after being pushed aside by the Tsar on the main Eastern Front. Yudenitch confessed his fears that his right flank might come under attack from the direction of Erzerum. The 161st Reserve Brigade had been sending alarming indications of a build-up of Turkish strength at the head of the Aras Valley since 24 July. There was little the Grand-Duke could do about it and he just advised Yudenitch to carry on.

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	

Player Notes

CP: *None this time.*

AP: *No attacks this turn anywhere. I can sense that the next round of Allied offensives will be very hard going indeed and cannot really begin until I have accumulated supply and replaced strength. It may be a few turns or several before there is much action.*

I mentioned Russian desertions. There is no actual desertion rule in the game but the effect of it is reflected presumably in the drop in Russian manpower production which falls from 80 to 50 monthly when morale is shaken.