

## Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg - Centenary Game

GT86: 6 – 9 August 1915 (August 2)

### General Situation

The movement known as the Ludendorff-Hoffmann trick continued to unfold on the Eastern Front. It was only part of a wider shift by the Central Powers to adopt a strategic defensive posture and in this the German commanders on the Eastern Front were fully aligned with Falkenhayn's thinking. Conrad was a more reluctant convert and had to be reassured that the more solid defences that were being constructed would make excellent bases from which counter-offensives and pre-emptive attacks could be launched once the Entente had been exhausted by their efforts to break lines which should be practically impenetrable.

The strategy was not purely military either. In Lithuania, Ludendorff has ordered Mackensen's 11<sup>th</sup> Army to abandon Vilna. It was thought the Poles would be more willing to accept German occupation if they thought the Russians might really be coming back.

### The Eastern Front

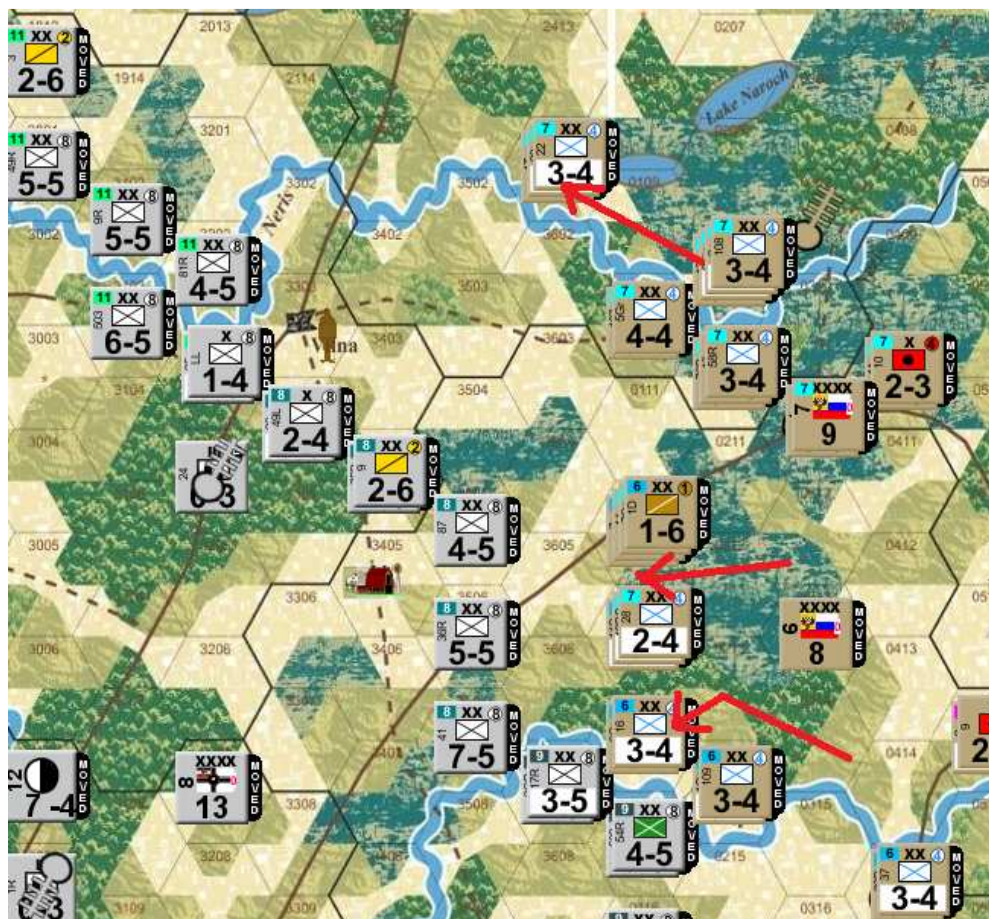


Figure 1: The Russian 6th and 7th Armies move forward, 6 - 9 August 1915.

The Russian pursuit of the Germans and Austrians in the East was best described as slow and chaotic. Part of the reason was the impact of the Russian Calendar which was out of synchrony with the rest of Europe. At the end of July, the Russian Army had tried to implement a reform so that

coordination with the Western Allies was less prone to error. Unfortunately in the old Russian calendar July was as short as February is in the modern calendar. Since this detail could not be avoided, the reform resulted in three unacknowledged "lost days". This meant that it was a matter of chance whether Russian units moving forward in early August got started at the same time as their neighbours. This lack of synchrony even impacted some actions of the Western Allies as Russian and Greek seamen and dock workers were confused by changes which were not recognised when bills of lading had been completed for voyages that had commenced several weeks previously.

Despite these difficulties by the end of the first week of August the movement of the Russian Armies was becoming a bit more organised even if it was hardly a vigorous pursuit. The Russian West Front was perhaps the most able to get forward in strength having Minsk as a base in its immediate rear. A British liaison officer with the Russian 6<sup>th</sup> Army, Major G. Martin, thought he saw the stirring of the old martial strengths of the Russians as he observed the advance. He had to admit that some of this depended on exotics that were not Russian at all. On 9 August, his diary records an encounter with a striking band of Cossacks.

*"I had a vantage point on an embankment of the railway that ran south-west towards Warsaw and the Germans. To the east was an ocean of grass all yellowed by the summer. Then we finally saw them. The Cossacks emerged from the vegetation riding in single file and began snaking by us. It seemed like a picture from another time or another world. I had expected to see only young men, but this was a whole people, men, women and children, young and old. The silence of the scene was broken by shouts of women who, I was told, were celebrating the birth of a child. The infant was born on horseback while the mother continued riding facing backwards while controlling her mount with the reins in her teeth which she bit on to dispel the pains of labour.*

*I looked for some insignia by which to identify this unit. There were saddlecloths marked "1D" which I took to mean this was the 1<sup>st</sup> Don Cossacks. I was corrected on this by a knight-errant who detached himself from the horde and introduced himself in good English. This was not the smallest surprise of the day. From him I learned this tribe was the Dothraki who originated in unknown lands on the far side of the Caspian Sea. They were in his estimation mostly descended from escaped serfs and were ruled by a Queen. This female Khan he claimed as a friend. She gloried in the title Khan-leesi Denereesi.*

*I asked what they were doing in the Tsar's service and the knight replied that the Dothraki recognised no masters but the Khan-leesi was the true heir to the seven kingdoms of the West. The Dothraki would follow her west whether the Russians came with them or not. My interlocutor pointed out this heiress and even in the distance I could see she was a great beauty, if rather barbarously clothed. Strangely she appeared to have a family of large bats flitting about her shoulders. There are in Asia many who are deluded into thinking they are Queen Victoria's grandchild and therefore, by their own estimation, will one day be masters of the world. This was the first time I had ever seen such madness in the flesh".*

## **The Balkans**

The whole Bulgarian Army was engaged digging extensive lines of trenches, or rather a series of interconnected positions along the length of the Greek frontier. The sound of spade on stone rang

out and was amplified by the sides of the Balkan valleys through which these ditches were cut. Only rarely was this noise interrupted by gun fire for the Serbians kept their distance at this time.

### The Near East

The situation of the Allies in the Dardanelles bridgeheads was not improving. Their commander, Hamilton, was fully aware that further attacks would be exercises in futility. All the exits from the still narrow ground held by the invaders were over-watched by strong Turkish forces which had got the measure of their opponents. Hamilton calculated that in a big attack his own losses could be five or six times that of the Turks and he began thinking seriously of evacuation.

London had, however, put a lot of prestige into this campaign and it was not so simple to draw stumps and call it a day. The first reaction of those statesmen who had sponsored the enterprise was to assume that Hamilton had got cold feet and it began to be suggested that he should be replaced.



Figure 2: The Indian I Corps occupies Ali Gharbi, 8 August 1915.

It took a couple of days for the news of the capture of Ali Gharbi in Iraq to filter back to London. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Indian Division had moved in to the palm fringed town on 9 August and found it stripped of all sources of utility and pleasure by the Turks who had long since gone. The British Empire had gained a name on the map and nothing more.

The Turks were not retreating in the Caucasus. The Turkish X and XIII Corps concentrated for a powerful attack on the Russians covering Pasinler (6-8.2317). The action began on 6 August and seven Turkish Divisions began infiltrating across the heights which looked down on the wide Aras Valley. The Russian defence consisted of the rather poor 161<sup>st</sup> Reserve Infantry Brigade and the Siberian Cossack Brigade which had played a rather undistinguished part in the failed defence of Sarikamis, the previous year. The senior Russian officer present was convinced he was about to be outflanked and he was not wrong that the enemy were heavily outnumbering his force which started to get a lot smaller as casualties and desertions mounted. By the morning of 7 August, the Russians were running down the valley as fast as they could go. Their retreat forced the Kuban Mountain Brigade situated to the right of the 161<sup>st</sup> Reserve Brigade to follow as best they could

while cursing the weakness of the Russians in mountain fighting. The Turkish 34<sup>th</sup> Division moved in to Pasinler that afternoon and began to reconnoitre in the direction of Köprüköy (6-8.2416) which was only 20 kilometres downstream.



Figure 3: The Turkish 3rd Army advances down the Aras Valley, 7 August 1915.

### The Western Front

The British were anxious to get their new heavy artillery to France in greater numbers. The normal port of entry for most British equipment was Dunkirk but in August 1915, the 12 inch guns had to be routed through Rouen to take advantage of the better dock facilities there.

At the front there was no major action just the routine rotation of units from the front lines, the incorporation of replacements, and the maintenance and improvement of trenches and gun positions.

### The Italian Front

This front also remained very quiet. Cadorna travelled to Milan on 8 August for a meeting with industrialists to discuss what he perceived to be inadequacies in production of military necessities. The factory owners admitted their failings but elaborated their difficulties in changing the situation for the better. In a smaller war they said it would have been possible to import a large part of what was needed but, in the present circumstances, the French and British had got the lion's share of everything and the Italian manufacturers were dependent on their own resources plus some expensive purchases in the United States.

## DM Summary – August 1915

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total	Morale
Germany	-	-						11	11	869	Good
Austria-Hungary	-	-						1	1	405	Good
Ottoman	-	1						-	1	40	Good
Bulgaria	-	-						-	-	12	Good
Central Powers	-	1						12	13	1306	
France	-	-						-	-	637	Good
Great Britain	-	-						-	-	124	Good
Russia	-	1						-	1	603	Shaken
Italy	-	-						-	-	17	Good
Belgium	-	-						-	-	(96)	NA
Serbia	-	-						-	-	(28)	NA
Entente	-	1						-	1	1378	

### Player Notes

- *CP: East: I continue to conduct a gradual withdrawal in Russia to attain a more enduring front line for the Germans whilst building up AH strength around Czernowitz, where I expect the Russian will attack once they are strong enough again. I have some issues with the Grave Threat Line, as it allows Russia to rebuild with impunity and effectively neuters a CP East Front option. Not sure how best to work around it, though. I see the need for such a rule; just wonder if there is a more effective way of achieving it. Perhaps restricting during all seasons the distance the CP can advance from their railheads and reducing the distance too on the EF?*
- *Serbia: No change.*
- *West: I am building up my strength and supply capability on the WF in expectation of forthcoming offensives.*
- *Caucasus: I launch an attack in the mountains NE of Erzerum to try and push the Russians further back up the valley.*
- *Mesopotamia: Quiet; although I am moving back to establish a defence around Kut again.*
- *Palestine: Quiet.*
- *Gallipoli: Quiet.*
- *Italy: Continued build-up. An Italian offensive is unlikely now this month.*

*AP: In the course of this move it was realised that due to a log file error the whole of the Entente July 7 turn was missing in the sense that we had somehow gone from one CP move to another while the intervening Allied turn had been overlooked. While this may have been a disaster in many games, in this instance a few corrections were able to substitute for the "lost days".*

*That is a sign of how inactive the AP is at the moment but I have good reasons to hold back for now. Everywhere, I look any immediate attacks are going to have great difficulty. The weak points on the "ring of iron" that I have been attacking since the beginning of 1915 are disappearing fast. In addition I am often lacking strength to concentrate sufficiently to make successful attacks or lack supply.*

*By way of example, these are my problems on the Near East fronts:*

*Dardanelles: If I repeat the attacks which I have been making up to now I could easily get a 12:2 loss ratio against me that would endanger the security of the bridgeheads. I would prefer to keep them operating a bit longer because they are fixing a large Turkish force so I am forced to slow down my rate of attack.*

*Sinai: Nothing can really happen here until March 1916 when I get some capability to start building railroad across the peninsula.*

*Iraq: My situation is also precarious here because of logistical limits. If the riverhead moves any further up the river my supplied force will drop by a third. This will not improve until the beginning of 1916.*

*Caucasus: The Russians are now outnumbered and I will struggle to hold my positions for the rest of the year. I had hoped that fresh forces now arriving (2 Divisions) would allow for further offensive action but it looks like they will be committed to a defence of my existing front at least to begin with. I would like to use supply in defence but as the Russians are at Shaken Morale I badly need to conserve it so that there is some offensive potential even though I am not sure when I will get the opportunity.*

*Overall the Ottoman Empire has been in the war 9 months and I have only inflicted 40 DM on it which is significantly less than 1 DM per turn. At that rate I cannot get Turkey to surrender before 1926.*

*I note that Ivor has made some comments on the Grave Threat Line rule. I am going to come back on this next time as I believe his point of view is shared by not a few people who are attracted to the more mobile warfare on the Eastern Front. Respectfully I consider this to be wrong. East Front options [read solutions] are unhistorical.*