

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT143: 10 – 14 April 1916 (April 3)

General Situation

The first months of 1916 were also perhaps the last real chance of a negotiated peace before the nations started to finally dismember each other. The tentative discussions between Germany and Russia continued but very episodically and another meeting in Stockholm was not planned for another two weeks. These could easily be derailed by any renewal of the fighting on the Eastern Front. Peace was not part of the agenda of the Western Allies no matter how often President Wilson chided them for their lack of flexibility. The determination in London and Paris to see it through until Germany collapsed was becoming an almost universal opinion.

The only real divergence was on the question of whether the war should always be prosecuted on the Western Front. The Easterners who had suffered a loss of credibility after the end of the Gallipoli campaign and the rebuff at Baghdad were already making their case again. The success of the Allied offensive in the Balkans was the prime exhibit as it seemed to show that the Central Powers had a weak spot. If the Allies could break through in Macedonia it was reasoned then Bulgaria would collapse and the road to Istanbul would be opened and also to the rest of the soft underbelly of the Central Powers.

The Western Front



Figure 1: The British Sector, 10 - 14 April 1916.

Visitors to France and Flanders were always impressed at the scale of the military activity there even when they were nowhere near the front line. The British in particular spread themselves out over the rear areas to a depth of at least 50 kilometres. Reserves and training units were kept well back. Most of the Army level headquarters were between 20 and 40 kilometres from the front. In mid-April, Haig had a large part of the heavy artillery engaged in ranging exercises which needed a lot of

space. The roads were always congested. A column of infantry could get from one end of the British front to the other end in no less than four days. To bring equipment with them suitable for going into the trenches took even longer.

The Italian Front

Watching and waiting; this was the daily routine on the Italian Front. The strange siege of Lavarone (6-4.2218) continued. It was strange because the fortress was not cut off, just surrounded on three sides. Also the Italian artillery which had massed around it was not firing. It was more like an exercise or a simulated siege than anything real.

The Eastern Front



Figure 2: Eastern Front, Central Section, 10 - 14 April 1916.

The war on the Eastern Front was also a lot less lethal than it had been in the previous year. Clashes between the Germans and Russians had become comparatively rare. Recent fighting had been between nationalist militias and Russian units attempting to penetrate the screen which had been deployed along the long front from the Dvina to the Pripet marshes. By mid-April, the Russians thought they had disarmed the larger groups but in fact the menace of these partisans were enough to persuade the Russians to pull back from areas in which they were most numerous. This was also encouraged by the greater support the Germans were giving these allies once their dependency had been thoroughly established.

As had happened before on this front, a wide no-man's land was created in which the partisans operated. There was terrible destruction of buildings and roads in this zone which was patrolled by both sides. The Germans also moved to suppress the pro-Russian partisans of Bialystok on 10 April and historians have tended to cast a veil over what might have happened there.

The Balkans

After the fall of Skopje, there continued to be some minor adjustments of the front in the Balkans.

On 14 April, the British 3rd Division reached the foot of the Velbuzhdki Pass (7-6.1606) in north east Macedonia without serious opposition. The road rose very steeply ahead of them. This was one of the entrance routes into Bulgaria but on the higher slopes the Bulgarian 7th Division was well placed to stop any further advance. While the British were sizing up this door another was closing as at the same time the French Marines and Serbian forces abandoned their holdings on the eastern bank of the Struma River. It had been decided that these were too exposed to Bulgarian counterattacks.

It was a bad time for Allied marines in the Balkans. The Italian San Marco Marine Brigade had been supporting the Montenegrin Corps during the advance on Skopje. However, the Italians were poorly suited to the Montenegrin diet and a severe outbreak of dysentery caused the Italians to be recalled. Subsequently, the Brigade was broken up and the marines spent the rest of the conflict guarding naval installations around the Mediterranean.¹

The Near East

On 12 April, General Murray was in the process of moving his headquarters forward from Port Said to Romani (8-8.1138). This was a clear indication that the British movement into Sinai was gathering pace. When he got down from the train which carried him to Romani, Murray was handed papers which reported that the Turks were evacuating the Gazze-Birussebi line and falling back on Jerusalem and Jaffa. This had not been expected. Murray had not thought he would even reach the Turkish line until mid-summer due to the slow progress on building the pipeline. Murray demanded more intelligence reports on Turkish intentions and blamed his current head of intelligence for failing to predict this.

General Townsend also received unpleasant news on 13 April. He was dismissed for failing to capture Baghdad. A replacement, General Maude, was on his way to Kut.

¹ Player Note: *A loss due to lack of sustainment. The Montenegrins led the Italians more than 10 hexes from their base – Valona.*

In the Caucasus, the Turks gave up more ground on the coastal flank. The Russian 143rd Division claimed to be no more than 30 kilometres from Trabzon.



Figure 3: The Turks withdraw from the Gazze-Birssebi line, 10 - 14 April 1916.

DM Summary – April 1916

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total	Morale
Germany	8	-	-					12	20	1153	Good
Austria-Hungary	2	-	-					1	3	486	Good
Ottoman	-	-	-					-	-	71	Good
Bulgaria	-	1	-					-	1	18	Good
Central Powers	10	1	-					13	24	1708	
France	10	-	-					-	10	691	Good
Great Britain	-	-	-					-	-	252	Good
Russia	-	-*	-					-	-	733	Shaken - *Grodno recaptured
Italy	-	-	-					-	-	62	Good
Belgium	-	-	-					-	-	(105)	NA
Serbia	(1)	(1) *	-					-	-	(33)	NA – *Skopje recaptured
Entente	10	-	-					-	10	1730	

Player Notes

CP: *None this time.*

AP: *Here are some comparisons with the DM levels given in DWK scenarios. I was slightly surprised at some of these figures. They tend to show that the Centenary Game is currently reasonably close to the assumed historical DM save France and Russia may be about 50 DM less and Germany is likely to be higher by the time we pass the date of the start of the Somme Offensive. These figures also show that our 1914 and early 1915 campaigns were more bloody than the designers assessment but that we have reverted closer to the historical pace since then.*

Date/Scenario (at start of turn)	France Scenario	France Centenary Game	Britain Scenario	Britain Centenary Game	Germany Scenario	Germany Centenary Game
6 April 1915 2 nd Ypres/Artois	420	582	62	72	467	716
5 February 1916 Verdun	660	673	205	246	926	1100
4 April 1916 Centenary Game		691		252		1153
6 June 1916 The Somme	750		268		1172	

Date/Scenario	Italy Scenario	Italy Centenary Game	A-H Scenario	Austria Centenary Game
7 May 1915 May 1915	0	0	220	351
4 April 1916 Centenary Game		62		486
4 May 1916 Strafexpedition	60		475	

Date/Scenario	Russia Scenario	Russia Centenary Game	A-H Scenario	A-H Centenary Game
1 May 1915 Gorlice-Tarnow	325	386	220	338
4 April 1916 Centenary Game		733		486
2 June 1916 Brusilov	800		510	