

## Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT144: 15 – 18 April 1916 (April 4)

### General Situation

A case report of the Slough Magistrates recorded one of the small social tragedies of the war. A maid of Mrs Lyttleton residing in Eton, of German birth, but naturalised in Britain for more than two decades, had not heard from her sister in Germany since the outbreak of hostilities. She composed a short letter to her only living relative letting her know she was well and entrusted it to a friend who was about to travel to a neutral destination from where the letter might be posted to Germany. The maid was charged under the Defence of the Realm Act specifically the provisions relating to communications with the enemy. The Magistrates concluded that the letter did not contain any intelligence that might be of assistance to the enemy and in mitigation they noted that the maid had references to her good character and that she had made slippers for wounded British soldiers. It was submitted that the Defendant should be discharged, but the Magistrates found an offense had been committed and, while recognising that no harm had been intended, considered they were bound to impose a £5 fine.<sup>1</sup>

### The Western Front

The shelling in the Argonne began again in earnest on 15 April. The German 17th Army had been commanded by von Hutier since the end of February when he was transferred from the Eastern Front as part of Falkenhayn's settlement with OberOst at Brest-Litovsk. Von Hutier had accumulated an unprecedented concentration of artillery on his front including nearly five brigades of the bigger German howitzers. The incessant gunfire forced the French to keep out of sight and in their deepest dugouts.

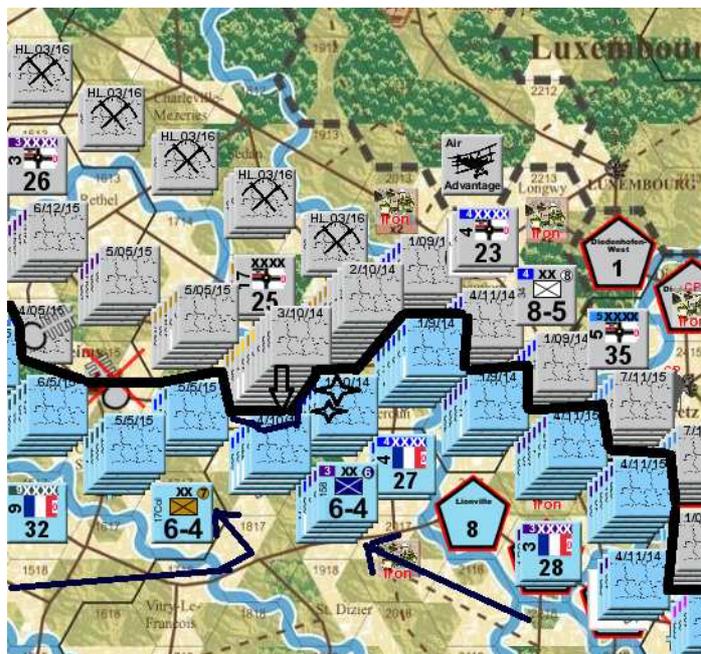


Figure 1: German 17th Army attacks in and around the Argonne Forest, 15 - 18 April.

<sup>1</sup> Based on a report in the Daily Telegraph from February 1916.



The Germans became more aggressive along the line of the Neiman River between Kovno and Grodno. The German 9th Army crossed to the eastern bank on 16 April and next day four divisions struck the Russians who were completely surprised in unprepared positions north of Daugai (4-5.3004). The Russian 24th Division lost half its strength in a hurried retreat which spread by further Russian withdrawals to the north.

Even more significant movements were beginning in Volhynia. On 17 April, the Russian 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Armies began a coordinated thrust forward aiming to move into contact with the main Austro-Hungarian defences 40 – 60 kilometres ahead. Altogether, nearly forty Russian Divisions were involved and this was one of the biggest Russian operations since 1914. This took the Russian front back to the Styr River.

### The Balkans

The Bulgarian 2nd Army kept up the pressure on the eastern extremity of the Allied line. On 15 – 16 April, they began a series of attacks across the Struma River which exposed the thinness of the Allied defence there and might recover Bulgarian territory that had previously been lost. The focus was on the French Marine Brigade which had concentrated to defend the villages of Mitino and Rupite (7-6.2109). The French had few field guns and hardly any shells so they were forced to defend themselves at short range from the more numerous Bulgarians. After holding off several close assaults, the situation of the French stabilised but remained precarious.

The Serbians had not sent any help to the French and the rest of the French Expeditionary Corps was some distance away in the Vardar Valley and quite unable to assist this detachment. Two further nervous days passed for the Marines as the renewal of the Bulgarian attacks was anticipated hourly. There was no question, however, of any retreat for the French position fixed the Allied line to the Greek frontier.



Figure 3: The Bulgarians attack across the Struma, 15 - 18 April 1916.

## The Near East

It was still unclear where the Turkish line of defence for Palestine would be drawn. The war in Iraq seemed to be over until after the flood season.

Only in the Caucasus did there seem to be any imminent prospect of further action in the Near East. However, movement in this theatre remained difficult, and preparations for attacks could take weeks.

### DM Summary – April 1916

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total	Morale
<b>Germany</b>	8	-	-	8				12	28	1161	Good
<b>Austria-Hungary</b>	2	-	-	-				1	3	486	Good
<b>Ottoman</b>	-	-	-	-				-	-	71	Good
<b>Bulgaria</b>	-	1	-	1				-	2	19	Good
<b>Central Powers</b>	10	1	-	9				13	33	1717	
<b>France</b>	10	-	-	7				-	17	698	Good
<b>Great Britain</b>	-	-	-	-				-	-	252	Good
<b>Russia</b>	-	-*	-	2				-	2	735	Shaken - *Grodno recaptured
<b>Italy</b>	-	-	-	-				-	-	62	Good
<b>Belgium</b>	-	-	-	-				-	-	(105)	NA
<b>Serbia</b>	(1)	(1) *	-	-				-	-	(33)	NA – *Skopje recaptured
<b>Entente</b>	10	-	-	9				-	19	1739	

#### Player Notes

CP:

- *East: The Russian tentative advances have been clearing trenches to leave a devastated zone between the bulk of my forces and his. In one location he places a relatively weak force of a Div and a Cav Div within reach and I take the option to attack, even though only with 3 x reserve Divs. I feel that any opportunity to attrition the Russians and cause him to use supply is worthwhile so that, should I be compelled to redeploy some of my eastern forces elsewhere, Russian offensive options remain limited. He is still concentrating force opposite the AH lines and I expect the sword to fall here in the near future. I feel fairly sure Robert will coordinate this with attacks against AH by Italy and the Serb forces beforehand to try and garner himself the Russian artillery surprise once AH reaches the right DM level.*
- *Balkans: A French Mar Bde has been left OOS on the easternmost flank of the allied armies arrayed along the Serbian front. I use this opportunity to launch a Bulgarian*

*assault against the formation. Any opportunity to cause losses to the French I feel are to my benefit and, due to being unsupplied, any counterattack will be blunted.*

- *West: Whilst the WF has consistently been one of poor performance for me, I must still attack the French where and when I can. I am expecting offensive action from him near the Verdun front in conjunction with a British assault soon, so I choose to wear down more French forces where they are weakest; even though it means a single launching point for my attack. He holds a weak defensive location in open ground (albeit entrenched) between Reims and Verdun (no doubt Robert will be able to name the exact location). I choose to attack here with 6 x full strength veteran Divisions and arty in conjunction with an arty attack on the east flank of this assault. My attack is only 62 SP but his counterattack will, at best, muster 42 SP. I have to take such opportunities.*
- *Caucasus: Supply is en route and I should now be strong enough to hold the advance along the coast until it gets to the front.*
- *Mesopotamia: Quiet.*
- *Palestine: Quiet.*
- *Italy: Lavarone will finally be attacked with the spring thaw. There is little I can do but watch and wait.*

*AP: I am facing a few finely balanced decisions at the moment. The closer I get to the moment when I want to unleash the accumulated strength of the Allies the more tempting it is to do so prematurely.*

*I moved forward in Volhynia almost on a whim. I would prefer to hold a line further forward but equally it is to see if I can tempt the Austrians into action. It could be complicated, however, by the Germans coming back at me again.*

*The further attacks in France are disruptive to my plans. Although the French look very solid at present they do have some weaknesses. Their replacement rate can be outpaced in intensive action. Also I cannot be strong on all parts of the Western Front. It currently helps that the Germans are not in contact in the middle section of the front but transferring reserves to replace losses around Verdun will make it harder to create a concentration for an offensive elsewhere. Finally almost any combat result is better for the Germans than no combat results from a proportional point of view because otherwise the food deficit disadvantage is not countered.*