

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

DWK145: 19 – 22 April 1916 (April 5)

General Situation

There were some scandalous rumours emerging from Russia that the Tsar and Tsarina were at odds on strategy. The scandal was of course that the Tsarina (a German born princess) should have had no input into strategy at all. However, this was the explanation given for the strange fact that the Russian armies were retreating on many fronts (the Tsarina's baleful influence) while at the same time the Tsar was directing advances in the south west and in the Caucasus.

The Western Front

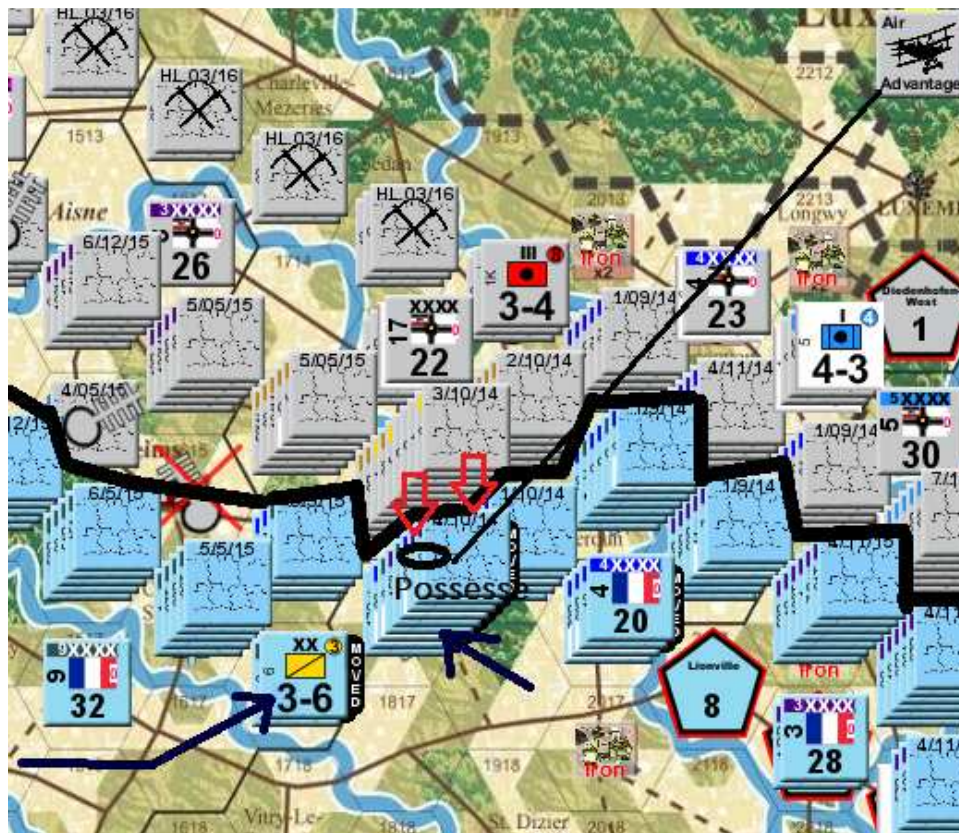


Figure 1: The Battle of Possesse, 19 - 22 April 1916.

The fighting around the French village of Possesse (5-3.1816) was intensified by several degrees. Von Hutier's 17th Army pounded the environs of the settlement with heavy shellfire. In the typical combats on this front at this time no more than a quarter of casualties were inflicted by infantry weapons. The accuracy of the artillery barrage was enhanced by the assistance of the German Air Service which was at this time an innovator in artillery spotting from the air.

Although the campaign around Verdun and the Argonne had been building slowly, the struggle to possess Possesse started to gain attention. *The Times* of London recognised that the French were facing a critical struggle but reported developments in confident tones. However, somewhat inaccurately it thought Verdun was the focus of the German effort when it wrote:

"Further afield from the town into the midst of the confused hills of the Hauts de Meuse and the Argonne, each one of which has become a vast fortress in itself and part of a vast and intricate system of fortifications, against which even the fine troops of the Crown Prince are likely once again to storm in vain.

The French have been bringing up reserves to the region, and possess an amply sufficient supply of men and artillery and a general of great talent, who has at his disposal enormous reserve stocks of shells. All that is feared is some fresh scientific devilry, such as a gas attack.

In this offensive there are indications which lead to the theory that the war is reacting against the stagnation imposed on it by the trench. Artillery fire it is argued has become so terrific that the trench becomes of no value as a defence, and consequentially there has been a partial return for a moment to a war of movement.

After all is said and done, the object, even of trench war, is not to hold every foot of ground, but to inflict the maximum loss upon the enemy while giving him the minimum profit for his effort. From this point of view the Germans have so far accomplished nothing. Even should the unexpected happen and the Germans take possession of Possesse and the whole first line, the enemy would be confronted by a second and even more powerful line, and behind that third, fourth and even fifth positions, increasing in strength...."

Even Joffre might be expected to regard such reporting as a little complacent and no poilus clinging to the ground under German shellfire would have been quite so sure that the trench was redundant. Nor had the Germans been entirely lacking in success. On the evening of 20 April, Possesse was in German hands and the French had abandoned not just their first line of defence but also their second and third and there wasn't really anything behind that. Gouraud, commanding the French 4th Army was obliged to take firm control on the morning of 21 April to repair the defences which the Germans had broken. He led in person a number of units back to the front and directed counterattacks later that day. These were fairly feeble affairs but they were just enough to keep the Germans on their toes and enough to stop any thought that the enemy might try and exploit their initial gains in preference to the slow preparation for further action which was their real method.

The Italian Front

Even *The Times* would not have found the trench redundant here. Nor could anyone honestly discover any hint of any kind of return to the war of movement.

The Eastern Front

The Russians were retreating again north of the Pripet Marshes as all of the German Armies in this region were re-mobilising after the winter. Grodno was retaken by the German 77th Reserve Division on 20 April.

Only south of the marshes were the Russians preparing to resist. Having thrust forward in Volhynia, the Russians hoped to retain some of the ground won. They were immediately challenged however at two points. First, at the angle of their advance, the Austro-Hungarian 4th Army, supported by elements of the German Sud Army and a considerable number of heavy guns, opened an attack on 19 April against the Russian 3rd Army around Teofipol (5-5.4507). This was of course ground which had already been contested periodically during the last several weeks but this time the Austrians

caught the Russians unawares and smashed to pieces both the Russian 17th and 23rd Divisions. The situation would have been very dire but for the fact that the Russians had accumulated ample reserves in this region and the front was quickly restored before the Central Powers' could exploit their initial success.

The difficulties of the Russians were, however, multiplied by the advance of the Austro-Hungarian 1st Army to the Styr River. Above Luck the river bends in a semi-circle and the Russian units which had occupied the right bank of the river found themselves in a precarious position subject to cross-fire from the opposite side. The Russians were also aware that the German 12th Army was approaching from the direction of Kowel and on 22 April some of the Styr crossing points had to be abandoned. The wisdom of the Russian movement forward in Volhynia was called into doubt by these developments.



Figure 2: The Spring Campaign in Volhynia, 19 - 22 April 1916.

The Balkans

On 19 April, the French Marines were driven out of Rupite and the survivors were obliged to take refuge in Mitino (7-6.2109). After another day's fighting, the Marine brigade was down to no more than a third of its effectives and another Bulgarian attack would surely have swept the remainder away. There was no such attack on 21 April though the Marines nervously manned their positions

until they were ordered to retreat during the night. With the road through Mitino open, the Bulgarians had nothing to stop them moving around the right flank of the Allied forces in Macedonia.

The Near East

In Palestine, the Turkish 4th Army was preparing the ground for a defence line about 20 kilometres to the south of Jaffa and Jerusalem. In this it was perhaps influenced by the successful defence of Baghdad where the enemy had been allowed to closely approach their objective before being driven away. An attack was still some way away because the nearest units of the British Empire were now nearly 200 kilometres distant.

In the Caucasus, the Russians were attempting to break through the thin Turkish lines which had formed to stop the further exploitation of the Russian success at Rize. Three separate Russian Corps were engaged in attacks between 21 – 22 April. The main effort was a Russian push into the mountains above Ataköy (7-6.1416) where the Turkish Tigris Division conducted a heroic defence against Russian infantry and cavalry which stormed the steep slopes with reckless bravery. This was a reflection of the elite units which the Russians had committed, including the 4th Siberian Division, and the 2nd and 21st Cavalry Divisions. The Russians were forced to admit that the cavalry disappointed them though they had performed well in earlier stages of the Rize campaign. The problem was that the fighting was at the extreme end of a long supply line stretching back to Batum and the horses were suffering from lack of forage. Two Cossack Divisions on half-starved nags had to be pulled out of the Ataköy attack before it began.

The Turks had a second success at the same time when their 97th Regiment stopped the whole Russian III Caucasian Corps on 22 April when the Russians tried to advance at Demirkaya (6-8.1916) in an attempt to break out of the Coruh Valley and over the mountains directly towards Erzerum. It seemed therefore the Russians were blocked everywhere.



Figure 3: The Turks block the Russian offensive, 19 - 22 April 1916.

DM Summary – April 1916

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total	Morale
Germany	8	-	-	8	3			12	31	1164	Good
Austria-Hungary	2	-	-	-	5			1	8	491	Good
Ottoman	-	-	-	-	1			-	1	72	Good
Bulgaria	-	1	-	1	-			-	2	19	Good
Central Powers	10	1	-	9	9			13	42	1726	
France	10	-	-	7	7			-	24	705	Good
Great Britain	-	-	-	-	-			-	-	252	Good
Russia	-	-*	-	2	12**			-	2	747	Shaken - *Grodno recaptured and **lost again
Italy	-	-	-	-	-			-	-	62	Good
Belgium	-	-	-	-	-			-	-	(105)	NA
Serbia	(1)	(1)*	-	-	-			-	-	(33)	NA – *Skopje recaptured
Entente	10	-	-	9	19			-	38	1758	

Player Notes

CP:

- East: The Russians have still left a swathe of devastated hexes between their forces and the Germans which make it near impossible to get sufficient force into position to attack – he remains tantalisingly out of reach although my last small attack against him caused him a small amount of attrition for no loss to my own forces. My response is to advance German forces just a little deeper into Russia to deter him or force him to fight. The same does not apply to the AH front lines. Expecting a strong Russian attack to fall somewhere here and wishing to avoid being forced to attack in early May due to supply stockpiles – I choose to attack with AH forces in two locations. This is not to gain any territorial advantage but purely to cause attrition and run down some of his supply (as well as some of my own). It could be argued that it is to my benefit to let him build up supply until he is forced to attack, but he can easily avoid this by conducting small attacks without much risk if necessary to keep his supply just below the mandatory offensive level. This is unlikely to ever happen as AH will consistently be forced to do so before this happens. By doing so now, perhaps I also delay the likely offensive against AH a little by once again forcing him to worry about what the Germans are doing.*
- Balkans: The French Mar Bde remains in the same position so the Bulgarians attack again. Two more attacks will eliminate it entirely unless reinforced and it remains unsupplied.*

- *West: My last attack caused me more damage than it did the French; no surprise – not one attack has benefitted the German forces more than the French. Any plan to bleed them out would result in my terminal haemorrhaging well before the French. Verdun is far too strong a defensive location, but I resume the attack against the same position as before, this time with air support. Hopefully with a better outcome...*
- *Caucasus: Not much happens here other than some minor manoeuvring.*
- *Mesopotamia: Quiet.*
- *Palestine: Quiet.*
- *Italy: Quiet.*

AP: This is my worst move since the fall of Riga. The Austro-Hungarians wasted no time in challenging my Russian forces which advanced last turn in Volhynia. The Russians are not yet ready to attack the Austrians but I thought I would be happy to fight some defensive battles at the moment. I did not full expend supply because I want to save it for my own offensive and underline the point that continuing this attack may be costly.

I am also attacking with the Russians in the Caucasus because no one else is able to take on the Turks at the moment. This, however, didn't turn out very good.

The combats in the West cannot be avoided and I think the Germans are doing the right thing picking attacks which allow as even an exchange of losses with the French as possible. If they had better luck this would look even better. However, it is still a fairly limited offensive and this turn was only over one hex side. This is perhaps a consequence of German morale imposing a need to be cautious. At this intensity of combat, I do not feel that compelled to relieve pressure on France so I am keeping to my own secret timetable for my own plans but if there are more turns like this I may be forced to think again.