

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT148: 1 – 5 May 1916 (May 1).

Looking back one hundred years to the period of World War One, the modern reader is astonished at the immaturity of the modes of diplomacy in that era. German hopes of a rapprochement with Russia had taken a blow because of court politics. The Tsar's forward policy in Volhynia seemed to be working at the beginning of May and the pressure was growing on Austria-Hungary against whom this move was directed. Then, on 2 May, it became known in Germany that a cell of Germanophiles had been uncovered in the circles surrounding the Tsarina and she had been sent to spend the summer in the country where she could not influence the government. That somebody should aspire to supreme power purely on the basis of being spouse to the holder of such power was scandalous even to the present day. After this, the peace talks in Stockholm did not resume.

The French and British had managed to keep their Sykes-Picot Treaty for a post-war division of the Near East under wraps, though soon enough the Italians and Russians would come sniffing around wondering what the plan was. Surely the British Empire was not going to swallow up the whole of the Ottoman Empire outside of Turkey proper? In any event, the British were being drawn in deeper into a region which might have unsuspected sources of volatility.

The relations of the Near East and Europe were also a cause of anxiety to the Central Powers. The historic mission of the Hapsburg Empire had been to keep the Turks out of Europe. The apparent fulfilment of this in the pre-war period had been one of the reasons the Empire had been increasingly seen as out of date. Despite this, the presence of a Turkish Army of Intimidation on the Greek border, and a request by the German Chancellor for Ottoman manpower to be sent to help sustain German industrial production was causing disquiet across the Balkans and was being propagandised as an invasion by the Entente press.



Figure 1: The Turkish 1st Army on the Greek border, referred to as the Army of Intimidation in Athens, 1 - 5 May 1916.

Falkenhayn's major strategic argument at this time was that Britain was much less committed to the conflict than France or Russia. The war could certainly be won if the British could be persuaded that they had no natural interests in supporting unworthy Continental allies. The end game for Germany therefore depended on some kind of *Britische Ausgang*. Since the French were well aware of the isolation which would ensue from Britain diminishing their European commitments, they used every trick they had to promote in England a sense of fear of the consequences of a German dominated Europe in which civilisation would stagnate while dining on sausages, cabbage and cherry cake. This campaign was known in the French Foreign Ministry as *Projet Peur*. It enjoyed only moderate success because the average British citizen had no fundamental objections to sausage or cherry cake and cabbage they could take or leave on a fancy.

The Western Front

Behind the fronts intensive programs of training were going on. A large proportion of the British strength on the Western Front had not yet seen a major battle. The same was true to a lesser extent of the French and Germans. New conscripts were being brought up to scratch as fast as possible. The French had some depleted ranks in their 4th Army which had borne the brunt of recent fighting in the Argonne. This part of the front was now strongly reinforced with artillery.

The German Army was seeking to expand at the cost of reducing the strength of individual divisions. This programme had only just begun and had not yet affected the German units on the Western Front which were still generally in a good condition.

The Italian Front



Figure 2: The Isonzo Express Railway, 1 - 5 May 1916.

The Italian front came to life again as Cadorna ordered a major redeployment from the Trentino to the Isonzo sector at the beginning of May. This meant the “siege” of Lavarone (6-4.2218) was lifted. It was not the first time the Italians had undertaken such a move but this latest switch encountered difficulties which had not previously occurred. The whole manoeuvre depended on the main railway between Milan – Verona – Udine (6-4.3117), universally known as the Isonzo Express. By this stage of the war, the Italian artillery arm was much larger than at the outset of hostilities and most of the heavy guns had been sent to the Trentino and now had to be recalled. The consequence of this was that most of the infantry had to walk from the Trentino. In Milan and Turin the main stations were overrun by recruits who could not comply with the orders on their conscription papers due to the shortage of trains. Whereas previous redeployments had been completed in about a week, Cadorna calculated that nearly two would be needed this time.

The Eastern Front



Figure 3: The Northern part of the Eastern Front with the Russian cavalry deployed, 1 – 5 May 1916.

Army. The recruits by this period of the war were more Yugoslav than Serbian in that the definition for eligibility encompassed anyone vaguely Slavic who might be found in any of the Western Allied countries and in addition large numbers of Austro-Hungarian prisoners. The entire cooking and waiting staff of the popular Croatian restaurant “Zagreb” in Piccadilly, London had been rounded up one day, four months previously, and were press ganged for service in the Serbian Army. No one thought of the writ of Habeus Corpus until it was too late.

The Near East

Enver Pasha made a belligerent speech in Istanbul on 1 May in which he predicted a great Turkish Offensive which would throw the Russians out of the Caucasus and an Arab uprising which would do the same to the British invasions. On the ground there was little sign of any new-found Turkish offensive spirit but the Allied forces were exhausted in both Armenia and Iraq and Turkish attacks might have found some vulnerability.

DM Summary – May 1916

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total [%SM]	Morale
Germany	-							12	12	1186	Good
Austria-Hungary	-							1	1	504	Good
Ottoman	-							-	-	72	Good
Bulgaria	-							-	-	20	Good
Central Powers	-							13	13	1762	
France	-							-	-	712	Good
Great Britain	-							-	-	252	Good
Russia	-							NA	-	759	Shaken
Italy	-							-	-	62	Good
Belgium	-							NA	-	(105)	NA
Serbia	-							NA	-	(34)	NA
Entente	-							-	-	1777	

Player Notes

CP: *This monthly turn the briefly enjoyed German air superiority becomes one of parity. That didn't last long. Germany does get gas though – we'll see whether it may come of use and be worth the risk. Even though I vacated numerous Russian towns, there was still no food to be had in the east; so the food situation remains critical. Germany is now also able to start producing new divisions from reorganisation, which they do. A previous house rule limited this to one third of each type max as a mountain div and no more than one third of each type for production in any one monthly turn.*

- *East: There is no point penetrating further into Russia and moving away from my railheads, so the German forces – less Sud Armee – start to move back towards viable*

rail LoCs. Robert has commented on the lack of Engineers due to construction of the Hindenburg Line being an issue for me due to inability to lay track. I don't see it as a great constraint as building track closer towards the Russian GTL is a pointless exercise when the Russian can just withdraw to safety. The last AH attack was profligate. I had hoped for the best and got a hiding for it with losses of 3:1 in Russia's favour. Conrad will have to hold back his ambition for a while.

- *Balkans: Consolidation – no activity of note.*
- *West: I need to reorganize somewhat on the WF again. Consistent attacks against Verdun and the Argonne will burn too much supply too quickly and leave me exposed to a major TE offensive. I have to balance offensive aspirations against defensive realities.*
- *Caucasus: The Turks are gradually building up capability here again and have contained the advance.*
- *Mesopotamia: Quiet.*
- *Palestine: Quiet.*
- *Italy: Quiet.*

AP: *The CP lost air superiority only a month after gaining it. Here is the record since the beginning (which for this purpose is March 1915)*

Prior to June 1915	Parity
June 1915 – January 1916	Allied air superiority
February – March 1916	Parity
April 1916	German air superiority (double)
May 1916	Parity

The Italian intentions are now revealed. It is not always possible to spring surprises in this game and I will have to take my lumps and attack a strong section of the Austrian front line. There are not many weak spots now. Laverone (6-4.2218) is too strongly defended to justify an attack, so I am switching to the Isonzo front. Rule 22 requires an offensive this month in Italy but I am not motivated by that. I have been waiting for spring to arrive and now it is I will happily accept high losses just to ensure that the Italians can get their teeth into the Austrians finally.

Perhaps the other significant thing this turn is that I am being as generous as possible with providing International Supply to Russia. Britain and France are assigning their maximum allowed allotments (6 and 3 respectively) to Russia and Russia has been getting the US supply (10). That means with domestic production (14) added, I can get 33 supply points on Russia's account this month more than double its ordinary monthly production. The reason is of course to fund a Russian Artillery Surprise which will use stupendous amounts of supply. It also means the Allies are not allowed to send any other supply to the Near East this month, but it does not look like that will be a problem.