

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg - Centenary Game.

GT155: 1 – 5 June 1916 (June 1)

General Situation¹

Such was the literacy of European society in this era that writing a few lines of verse to record a significant experience or feeling was as common a form of communication as can be imagined. The Dutch Poetry Society of Haarlem had the idea of a competition and this led to the holding of the First World War International Poetry Festival² which took place on 4 and 5 June 1916. Few of the actual poets turned up as they were normally serving soldiers. The winner of the Grand Prize was the now completely forgotten, “*óda egy árokba*” (ode to a ditch), by the Hungarian artilleryman, Fidesz Sneider.

This Festival was sneered at by any who regarded themselves as proper poets. The Italian Gabriel Annunzio, however, could not resist and he sent his patriotic poem *Monfalcone* to Haarlem though it was too late to be admitted as a proper entry. This poem was perhaps not up to Annunzio’s usual standard, though he once said it was his only truly strategic poem. It is usually omitted from any anthologies of his work. The opening lines were:

See the terrain clear to Monfalcone, the acres washed clean by blood.

Would you chose a hundred hexes of Russian wood,

Or take instead all the mountains of Serbie, and the farms of France?

...

Western Front

The farms of France were certainly suffering devaluation, especially those around Noyon and Nesle (5-3.1012). The French 5th and 10th Armies were still trying to establish themselves on the southern approaches to Peronne when another German attack exploded against their lines on 1 June. Once again the French 5th Army became the focus of powerful thrusts made by infantry of the German 13th and 14th Armies who were well supported by artillery of large calibre. The French were too disorganised and insufficiently well-entrenched to put up effective resistance. By the evening of 2 June, the French II Corps had been torn to shreds and along a 20 kilometre front the French were retreating. The withdrawal spread again along the line and next day the French 10th Army advised Joffre that it could not hold Noyon if the Germans attempted to retake it.

The French reinforced this part of the front during the next few days and were relieved that the Germans found no reason to extend their advance far forward from their existing lines. Joffre urged Haig on 3 June to hurry up his operations above the Somme so that Peronne might be threatened from the north. Haig, however, refused to be hurried and he permitted Rawlinson’s 4th Army to spend three days (3 – 5 June) engaged a slow bombardment of the SPW Redoubt behind Thiepval (5-

¹ For a full account of the Battle of Jutland which was reported at this time see the separate volume of the Official History on Naval Operations (Editor’s Note: This is still to be published in 2016)

² It was the First Festival, not the First Word War which clearly couldn’t have been so named then. The Festival was notable because there were participants from both warring camps.

3.1010). This, Haig hoped, would degrade the German defences and allow the next infantry assault to have a better chance than the last. History tends to be more critical of this phase of the Somme campaign and generally declared the whole episode a waste of ammunition and time. The best thing which can be said about it is that the infantry could be rested while the guns fired.

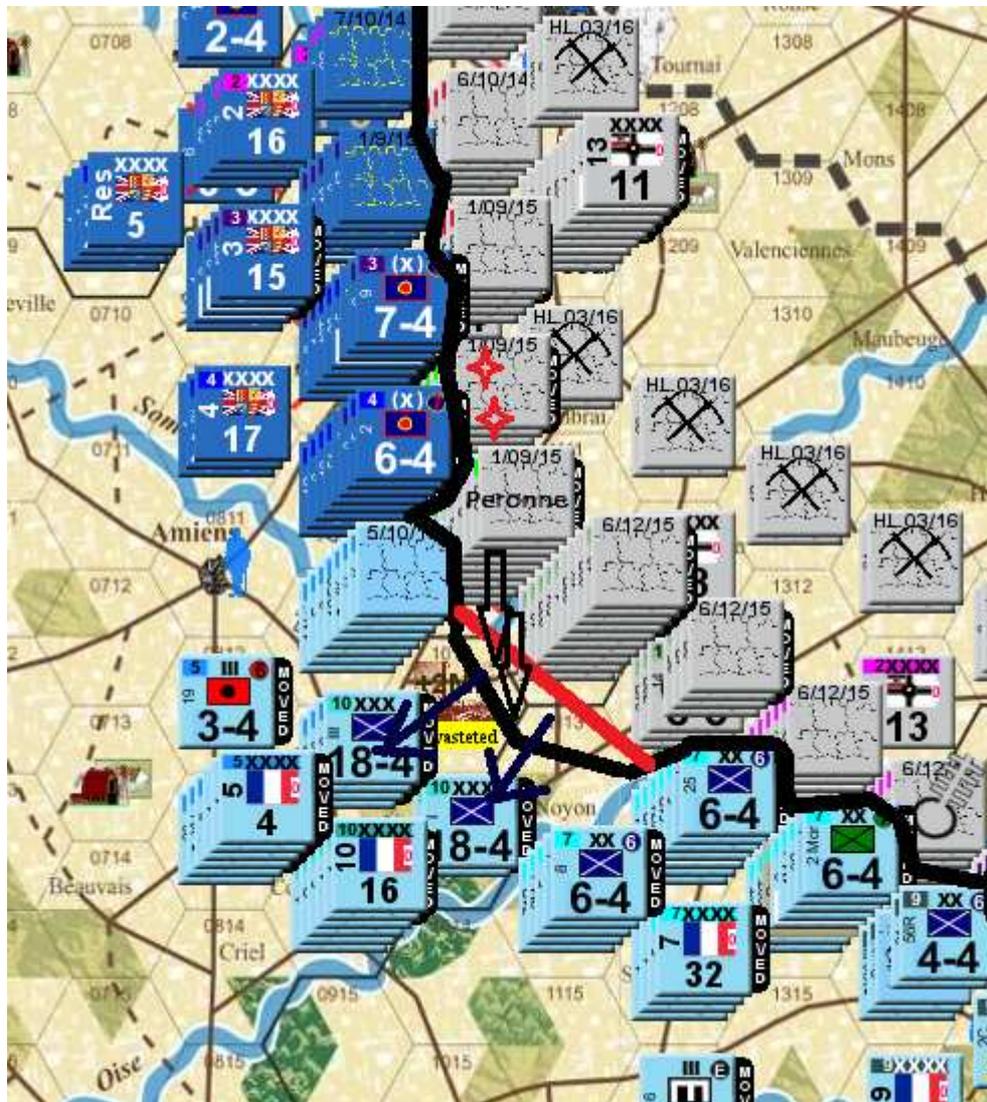


Figure 1: Operations around Peronne, 1 - 5 June 1916.

Italian Front

The Italian military hospitals were overwhelmed by the consequences of the 4th Isonzo Offensive and especially the bloody last phase against Monfalcone (6-4.3218). By the beginning of June, many casualties were still in field hospitals and the walking wounded often stayed with units which needed every last man. Criticism of Cadorna and the Duke of Aosta (the “bloody Duke”) was starting to surface, but then on 1 June, it was reported that the Austrians were beginning to evacuate Montfalcone and in the next two days they disappeared down the coast towards Duino and Sistiana (6-4.3319).

It was frankly not hard for Italy to go from complete despair to universal joy within the shortest period and the Italian 3rd Army moved into Monfalcone on 3 June. Though many of the men were

limping as they went, the Italian 10th Division secured the honour of being the first to arrive in the town. The Duke of Aosta was by then a hero once again and all the previous hardships were discounted a little. By 5 June, the Italians had caught up with the Austrians at Sistiana. The outskirts of Trieste were less than 30 kilometres away.



Figure 2: The Italians advance through Monfalcone after the Austro-Hungarian withdrawal, 1 - 5 June 1916.

Eastern Front

Brusilov and his staff were working long days in early June. They had been given the complete confidence of the Tsar to choose the time and place for the Russian summer offensive. It was beyond any doubt and an open secret that it would fall on the Austro-Hungarian sections of the front in the south. Brusilov's most difficult calculations concerned supplies, including ammunition, and railway schedules. Priority was given to moving shells and anyone watching Russian trains along the main routes and as far distant as Archangelsk would have been observing the material being drawn in to the Russian South West Front upon which this bounty was to be lavished.

On their side of the front, the Austro-Hungarians could only wait for the storm to break. Conrad affected confidence and assured anyone who had the right to know that the outcome would be similar to the recent Italian Offensive. If any ground was lost it would be at such cost that the Russians would not be able to repeat it. Privately, Conrad wondered if he was in a race to a Revolution and, who could know, if Hapsburg or Romanov would fall first?

The Balkans

General Sarrail attended a conference with his Serbian counterpart Mišić on 4 June in which a series of discouraging intelligence reports were reviewed. These collectively showed that the enemy were now largely in strong positions and further attacks could expect greater losses than previously. The two commanders agreed that they would then therefore have to accept these consequences. Sarrail asked Mišić to recommend the location of their next effort and said he would provide French support.

The Near East

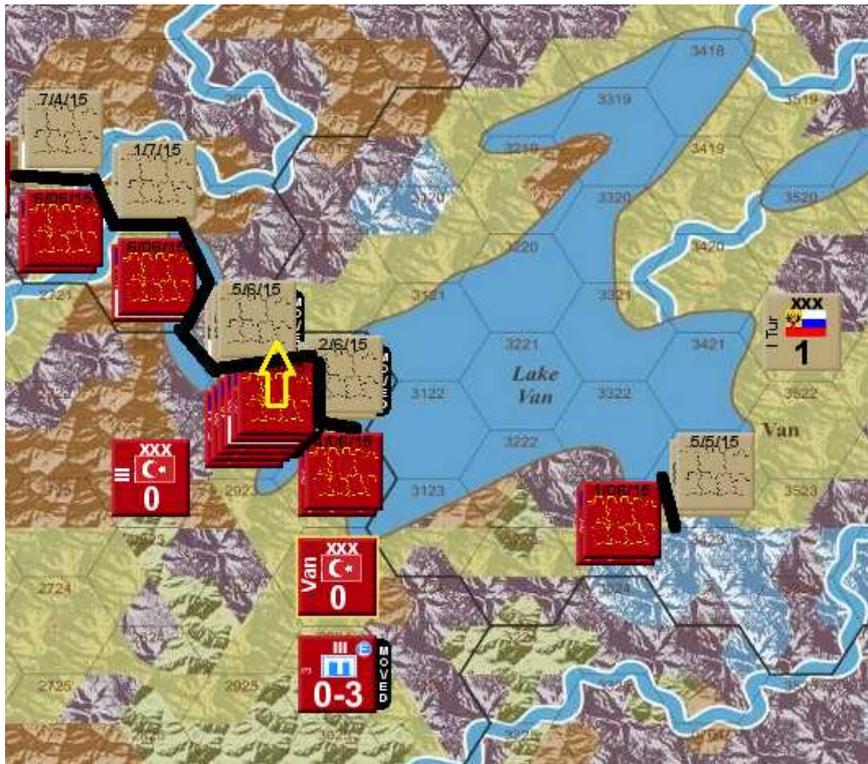


Figure 3: The Front around Lake Van, 1 - 5 June 1916.

The conflict in Armenia re-ignited with a Turkish attack on 2 June against positions of the Russian 2nd Turkmen Brigade holding the south eastern shores of Lake Nazik (6-8.2921). The Turkish III Corps had been reinforced and the Russians were badly outnumbered but they were able to hold their ground. The defenders were in some peril and a regiment was detached from the 1st Finnish Division, whose headquarters were by Lake Van, to give support to the Turkmen who were losing strength too fast to prevent a Turkish breakthrough on their own. The Turks were not far from their (empty) depot at Bitlis during this engagement but the Finnish and Turkmen soldiers who opposed them were very distant from their homes and from any support by the rest of the Caucasus Army. Yudenitch was not even aware of this attack before 4 June.

Not far from Kut, General Maude left his tent on 3 June and squelched through the Mesopotamian mud a short distance before sitting down to a cup of tea with some grizzled village elders who had been rounded up from neighbouring settlements for this entertainment. Maude questioned them on when the floods would subside. After a certain amount of tooth sucking, reflections on the numbers

of flies, and the flight paths of swallows a consensus was reached. Maude was told the waters would fall dramatically in less than a week and in this case the village elders were spot on.

In Sinai, the Egyptian Expeditionary Force had moved forward from El Arish (8-8.1736) on 4 – 5 June. Murray had ordered an advance right up to the Palestinian border but the heat of the day precluded swift movements and everything was done at night and that slowly. Although a few patrols had reached the frontier, which was deserted according to their reports, it would be some days yet before the rest of the Expeditionary Force reached this objective. The arrival of the 4th Australian Division at Suez at the beginning of June meant Murray would have a full Corps of Australians for future operations and this might be what would be needed to take Jerusalem.

DM Summary – June 1916

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total [SM%]	Morale
Germany	9							12	21	1253	Good
Austria-Hungary	-							1	1	520	Good
Ottoman	-							-	-	76	Good
Bulgaria	-							-	-	21	Good
Central Powers	10							13	23	1871	
France	14							-	14	751	Good
Great Britain	-							-	-	289	Good
Russia	1							-	1	763	Shaken
Italy	-							-	-	99	Good
Belgium	-							NA	-	(105)	NA
Serbia	-							NA	-	(35)	NA
Entente	15							-	15	1902	

Player Notes:

CP: *These next two months are going to be fairly critical. The French have advanced along a broad front, the British have started their summer offensive ahead of schedule, the Russians are going to spring a Brusilov offensive soon and still have the capability to launch an amphibious raid along the Black Sea coast, the Italians have seized an expanding bridgehead across the Isonzo and German supplies are low. Only in Mesopotamia and Palestine will there be any likely respite due to the stifling summer. At least air parity remains and neither side got gas.*

- *East: No change.*
- *Balkans: Quiet.*
- *West: All of my supply from German factories goes West this month; I am going to need it there. So do my scanty RPLs to bolster the trenches. I cannot afford to sit by idly and wait so, once again, the Germans launch a furious stalling attack into the French assembly areas before they can complete their new trenches. Again this attack falls*

south of Peronne. I use less supply and have more to gain from disrupting him by going on the attack than waiting for cattks which double my supply expenditure to get the same value.

- *Caucasus: I have been subtly – hopefully – shifting forces around in the CAU to shift focus and effort from the coast to the eastern flank on Lake Van. I hoped this shifts would go largely unnoticed by Robert and now have sufficient force to try and unhinge his defences along the lake shore. The attack goes in from NW of Bitlis and I hope may force him to evacuate his trenches there.*
- *Mesopotamia: Quiet.*
- *Palestine: Quiet.*
- *Italy: I withdraw 20km along the coast of the Adriatic and to the approaches to Trieste. This may seem a risky gambit, but it shortens and straightens my line and allows me to concentrate more force into the defence. Previously, he could attack my one position from three adjacent locations. Now to get at Trieste he has to attack from a single hex. It does allow him an expanding bridgehead across the Isonzo though.*

AP: My efforts to secure the front around Peronne are getting nowhere. The German attack (102 combat strength) inflicted losses in the ratio 14:7 (reduced from 21 by the retreat) with the dice split 6/2 against the French and I will not tolerate that for long and without stirring up action against the Germans elsewhere. The problem is that the main chance of that is the British offensive which is limited by supply. I may have been mistaken in doing a bombardment (28 combat strength) this turn which had unspectacular results but it is a way of spinning out the period in which I can sustain supply on this front. Ideally I want to do so indefinitely but even my poor bombardment used up more than half a month's supply. I think realistically I cannot expect miracles yet. I have more artillery than I can supply and in any event artillery does not work effectively unless the infantry is supplied as well and yet, in contradiction, I still want to make something of my capability of doing unsupplied attacks. All this runs into the hard facts that I do not have enough supply, enough replacements, and German morale is too high still so they can just take it and attack the French with a good opportunity. These things can change. I chose to send more supply to Russia. Maybe the British could use it better? Replacements will come. I can still waste men with the British. Also German morale will not last forever and there was another 12 DM for food deficit this month. Germany is paying 3 DM a month as a result of ground it lost or gave up during 1915 on the Western Front.

I applaud the Austro-Hungarian retreat from Monfalcone (6-4.3218) for timing as well as for the fact. I also pat myself on the back for last turn's attack which demonstrated this was not a good hex for the Austrians to hold even if it cost me a lot to attack. The Austrians were defending a five hex front on the Isonzo and now that will be reduced to three hexes. When the Russians attack, the Austrians will regret how long a front they are holding in the East.

This month's production saw most Allied nations draw down more manpower than they produce. Heavy fighting is forcing the building of lots of replacements and I may be peaking my manpower. I also realised how expensive tanks are at the moment and they are several months away from doing anything to justify the cost.

I really enjoyed this turn – every hex gained by the Italians is a joy to me.