

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT156: 6 – 9 June 1916 (June 2)

General Situation

The start of the Russian Summer Offensive was one of the central events of 1916. The Russians had really been on the defensive since the autumn of 1914. There had been ebb and flow of the Eastern Front during the winter and spring of 1916 but until the Russian move forward from Rovno in April there had been no challenge which was in any kind of earnest. Even then, the Russians had gone no further than the Austrians allowed them. This time, as General Brusilov circulated his final orders on 7 June, it would be different. The objective was nothing less than a decisive defeat of Austria to win the war before Russia's own political weakness became unmanageable.

The Western Front



Figure 1: Attack at Courcelles-le-Comte and Moyenneville, 8 - 9 June 1916.

The French Army was badly bruised after their failures around Nesle (5-3.1012). Joffre was increasingly convinced that the key to Peronne was cooperation with the British on the other side of the Somme. Unfortunately, nobody had suggested to Haig that Peronne should be one of his objectives.

Instead the focus of the British Offensive had shifted further north. Rawlinson had convinced himself that the SPW Redoubt (5-3.1010) would only fall if it was outflanked but he had no ready plans for this. Haig still demanded action and Allenby (3rd Army) was agitating to be let loose as he was still chaffing at the failure of the II Corps efforts at Achiet-le-Petit (5-3.1010) in May.

By the end of the first week of June, Allenby considered that he could do best with a joint attack of the 3rd and 4th Armies on 8 - 9 June. This resulted in the Battle of Courcelles-le Comte and Moyenneville (5-3.1009). Rawlinson contributed the IX Corps which had first benefited from a few days of rest and an infusion of new blood. The 3rd Army prepared to send the V Corps over the top but apart from this the preparations for this British attack were bordering on negligent. The fighting of the past few weeks had underlined the value of heavy artillery but Rawlinson sent none with his contingent and Allenby had persuaded himself that field artillery was all that was needed.

The German side was under the control of the German 13th Army. Moyenneville may have been an average small French town but the German infantry had turned it into a mini-fortress. To get to grips with the Germans the British would have to cross innumerable ditches and wire obstacles which had been laid during the previous 18 months to the point where the defences were now exceptionally solid. The British attacked several times over two days and the results were no better than those which had already occurred further south. The only saving grace was that the German defences were so thick and comfortable to occupy the customary German counterattacks were weaker than usual. They had little ground they needed to win back.

Neither Rawlinson nor Allenby at first realised the extent of their losses as the initial reports had been excessively optimistic. It was really only on the day after the fighting ended that they were forced to admit that nearly one in seven of the men involved had been casualties and in the Divisions which had made assaults on Moyenneville the losses were nearly one third.

The Italian Front

Both sides were engaged in consolidating new front line positions. It was recognised by the Italian commanders that the next advance would require greater preparation though rumours of the Russian Offensive meant that Cadorna warned his subordinates that they had to be ready for an Austrian collapse.

The Eastern Front

Brusilov only disclosed his full plan to the Tsar on 7 June and in fact he had been improvising elements of it up to the last minute. The plan was complicated and had several Phases.

The First Phase, called the Reinforcement Phase was almost complete on 7 June. There had been a long build-up of the Russian forces in Volhynia which included replacements for weakened formations and transfers from the northern part of the Eastern Front. The last reinforcement was an extraction of units from the most southern parts of the front and in effect a donation of troops from the 8th, 13th and 11th Armies. In early June, these marched north into Volhynia and formed the immediate reserves of the 3rd and 5th Armies. Few went by rail because the railways were already working at their limits carrying ammunition.

The Second Phase was the Movement Phase. This began on 8 June and involved the 9th, 4th and 10th Armies between Luck and Pinsk (both currently in enemy hands). This was a movement across the Styr River above Luck along its whole length. This had two purposes. First it was to outflank the Austrian 1st Army defending Luck. Second it was intended to delay any intervention of the German

Armies, especially the German 12th Army, which was already trying to extract itself from the Pripet Marshes. Russian cavalry, particularly the 16th Division, was sent forward to harass the Germans and delay their movements. These movements greatly increased the scope of the Russian action. It had never been announced that Brusilov had authority over the 4th and 10th Armies.

The Third Phase would be the so-called Combat Phase. The crossing of the Styr had not been opposed but the real action had not begun.

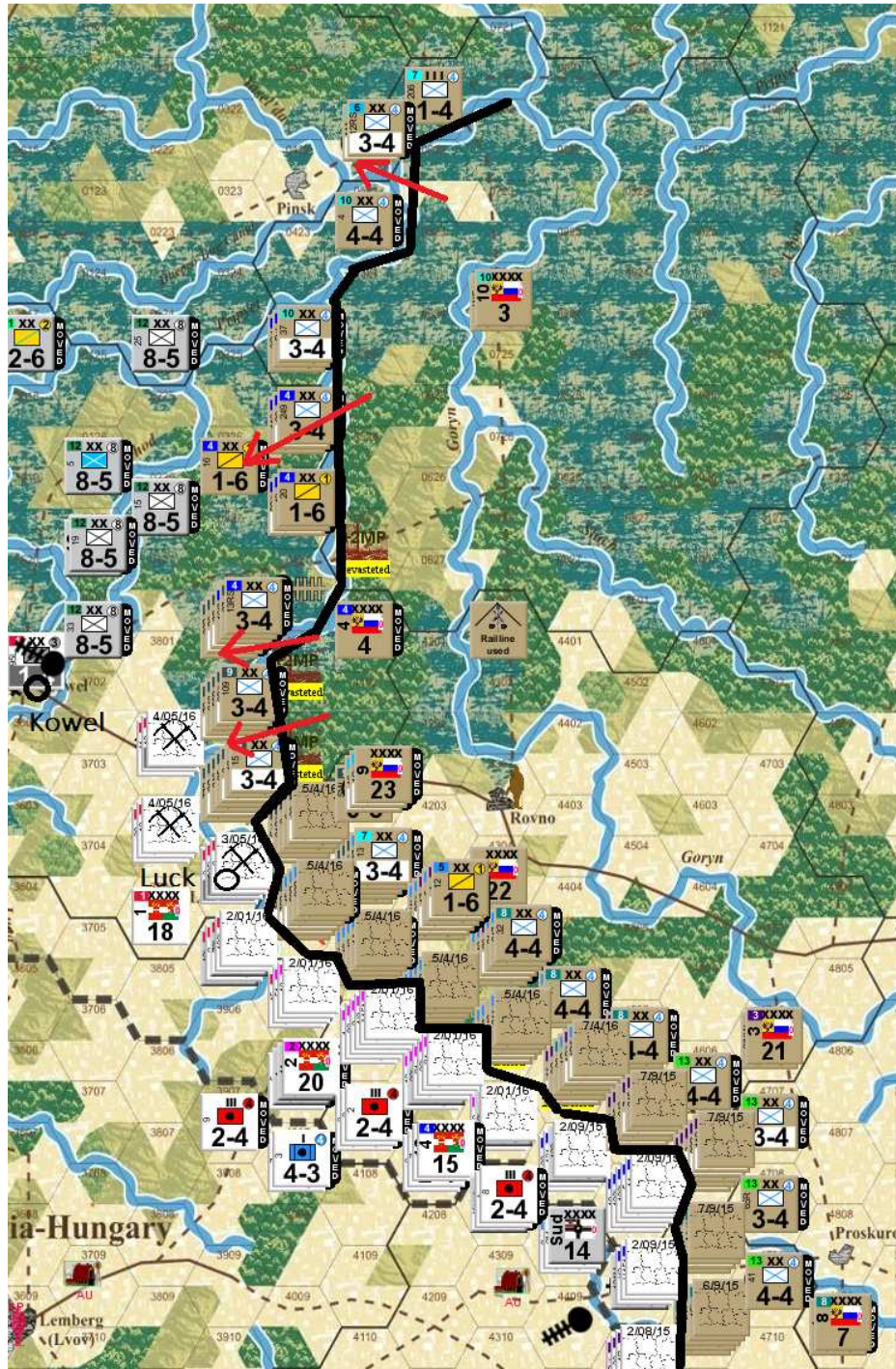


Figure 2: Initial Movements of the Brusilov Offensive, 8 - 9 June 1916.

The Balkans

When Sarrail enquired about the progress of the Serbian planning for the next attack on this front, he was disconcerted to be told that the Serbian Chief-of-Staff, Mišić, proposed to delay. A message from the Russians had reached Mišić on 9 June recommending the Serbians delay pending developments on the Eastern Front. Sarrail couldn't force the Serbians to take action but he bridled at this new sign of Russian influence and asked for a conference to clear the air.

The Near East



Figure 3: The Egyptian Expeditionary Force reaches the Palestinian border, 6 - 9 June 1916.

On 9 June, General Murray was sufficiently enthused by the arrival of his Army on the threshold of Palestine to issue a proclamation to all under his command reminding them that they were about to enter the Holy Land and that they should be especially respectful of the inhabitants and monuments they found there. Unfortunately, he also set out something of an itinerary which identified the timetable for the invasion as he saw it concluding with an advance on Jerusalem in August when the summer heat had passed its worst.¹ Needless to say this clumsy threat was communicated to the Turkish Army holding their lines in front of the Holy City who thereby had plenty of time to prepare for Murray's coming.

There was no attempt by the Turks to renew their attempt to push the Russians away from Lake Nazik (6-8.2921). One reason for this was likely shortage of supply. In such remote places it was extremely difficult for either side to sustain offensive operations for more than a few days.

¹ That is debateable because it can be very hot in the Levant until September. Murray was another General influenced by the theories of Global Cooling then current.

DM Summary – June 1916

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total [SM%]	Morale
Germany	9	4						12	25	1257	Good
Austria-Hungary	-	-						1	1	520	Good
Ottoman	-	-						-	-	76	Good
Bulgaria	-	-						-	-	21	Good
Central Powers	9	4						13	26	1875	
France	14	-						-	14	751	Good
Great Britain	-	11						-	11	300	Good
Russia	1	-						-	1	763	Shaken
Italy	-	-						-	-	99	Good
Belgium	-	-						NA	-	(105)	NA
Serbia	-	-						NA	-	(35)	NA
Entente	15	11						-	26	1913	

Player Notes

- CP: *East: The see-sawing continues as I once again withdraw the northern German armies into defensive clusters closer to their railheads. The GTL makes it very difficult to wear the Russians down and for me the jury is out somewhat still on the effect it could have. Conceivably, Russia could avoid economic collapse and the revolution just by managing losses and using the GTL as a consistent fall back line to prevent crossing the DM threshold for economic collapse. Further south, I suspect his concentration for a major offensive against AH is largely complete and his supplies are well stockpiled for at least a month's worth of consistent offensive pressure.*
- *Balkans: Quiet still.*
- *West: I am now in defensive mode having compelled the French to pull back their line for a length of 60km around Peronne. It means I can shift some forces into the front opposite the British to meet there inevitable offensive, now telegraphed by a rather ineffectual artillery barrage. Nonetheless, on the British front – I see a bad moon rising.*
- *Caucasus: My last attack resulted in an exchange and not quite the breakthrough I had hoped for. I may be misinterpreting the rules, but I thought a lakeside hex had no impact on choice of defensive terrain even if it is mountain terrain that leads down to the lake.*

The result was a halving of my attack strength whereas I was sure – without such halving – of forcing him to retreat and exposing his flank on Lake Van.²

- *Mesopotamia: Quiet.*
- *Palestine: Quiet.*
- *Italy: The Italians have occupied Monfalcone but I am not concerned about this. My Isonzo front is now stronger than it has ever been given that it is now also shorter than it has ever been. I am content that I can hold my line against the Italians and this is not a front I am concerned with making gains over.*

AP: The CP is under some pressure now and I still have some further cards to play. The most spectacular is the one marked Romania. However the current situation also highlights my weaknesses. The main one is supply.

The British have in the last two turns expended 28 supply points and inflicted 6 hits on Germany. That is more than one month's supply for a return which hasn't a hope of getting decisive results and would amount to much less than 100 DM per year. Of course with better luck I can improve on that, but to get that luck I have to keep attacking and I will run out of supply soon enough. I am already using unsupplied attacks to stretch this and in reality, of the 6 hits, only 4 are attributable to supply expenditure so the real exchange was one hit for 7 supply.

Consider also that the British are now in the best position to convert supply into German losses. Well the French can but I would prefer to keep them out of it for morale reasons and to some extent I can force the Germans to come and get the French but that may not be enough if the British do not buck up.

The Italians naturally only hurt Austria at the moment and their recent maximum effort used a long winter's accumulation of supply to inflict 14 DM albeit a valuable contribution given how critical Austrian morale is.

Then there is Russia which is not allowed to make unsupplied attacks with Shaken Morale. It has only hurt Germany in the last 9 months when Germany has attacked the Russians principally at the costly Battle of Riga. Most Russian armies have only enough supply to make one half-decent attack. I have been sending as much foreign supply to Russia as I can to help them stay in the fight and because of the impending offensive in the South. This is Russia's last big shot and it should be noted that the Russian Artillery Surprise requires double supply expenditure so the increase in efficiency is a one-time 150%. This will hurt Austria a lot but once it is over the Russians will be short of supply.

Thereafter the Russians' offensive potential is reduced back to 14 supply points per month plus the one-off bonus of Romania and any further foreign supply which might become harder to justify.

Unless something dramatic happens I will definitely unleash the Russians next turn. The target hexes have been identified. One problem I have is that it will possibly be overkill which is a waste of limited resources. By not manning the trenches more strongly in the threatened sector Austrian losses may

² Not quite sure why Ivor thinks this. The Russians had 2 SP defending the hex and the Turks had to inflict 2 hits to force a retreat as they are entrenched. The chances of doing this were twice as good in the mountain (Attack strength 5 = 33% chance on 1917 CRT) compared to the broken terrain where there was also a trench (Attack strength 10 – 3 drm = 16.6%). We agreed it would be broken terrain pending further rules verification but this could have contributed to the failure of the attack. Attacking in mountains is sometimes advantageous as there are no trenches and no negative drm on the attack (You may think you caught the defence by surprise by audaciously crossing inhospitable terrain).

be reduced by there not being enough Strength Points to satisfy my trebled hits. I am thinking it is just possible the Austrians may do something dramatic. A pre-emptive retreat to the Carpathians would frustrate my immediate aim but would open a gap between the Austrians and Germans. I will give that no more than a 10% possibility.