

## **Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game**

**GT157: 10 – 14 June 1916 (June 3)**

### **General Situation**

In mid-June, the Allied Offensive against the Central Powers could be claimed to have reached Continental proportions. The greatest attacks of the Russian Offensive coincided with the biggest attack to date of the Western Powers in France. There was even (coincidentally) an attack by the Serbians in the Balkans.

### **The Eastern Front**

The Movement Phase of Brusilov's Summer Offensive enjoyed more or less unimpeded success up to about 12 June. After five days, the Russians had advanced up to 40 kilometres beyond the Styr River and some units of the 8<sup>th</sup> Siberian Division were half way towards Kowel. This movement extended across the whole Pripet Region and Pinsk was back in Russian hands on 13 June. The Russians knew, thanks to their cavalry and reconnaissance aircraft, that the Germans were ahead of them but it was not until 14 June that major contacts were made between opposing infantry formations.

The German forces in the Pripet region, were the German 12th and 11th Armies which were slowly falling back and drifting south in mid-June. Ludendorff has sometimes been criticised for allowing the German Army in the East to advance too far beyond their railheads at this stage of the war which would impair their ability to respond to any crisis in the Austrian Army. There is very little evidence to support such accusations which were not made contemporaneously. The Austrian Army had never indicated that they might require further assistance beyond the contribution of the Sud Army. Quite recently, Conrad and Ludendorff had agreed that their separate spheres would meet at Kowel and German interest beyond this point was never welcomed. Conrad did not even begin to report on what was going on east of Kowel until about 14 June and even then he made no request for German aid insisting that Austrian morale was sound and equal to all challenges.

The so-called Combat Phase of The Russian Offensive commenced at first light (0350 hours) on 12 June with a barrage of artillery which covered an enormous stretch of front from Svydniki (5-5.3802), east of Kowel to Ploske (5-5.4206) which was about half-way between Rovno and Tarnopol (5-5.4209). The Russian artillery fired off a staggering amount of ammunition before Conrad had a chance to eat his breakfast (in Teschen, 500 kilometres away). The Russians had opposed the Austrian 1st, and 2nd Armies with respectively the 9th and 5th Armies. However, the matching forces were not at all equal. Within the area of the offensive the Russians had about 45 Infantry Divisions whereas the Austrians had no more than 18 including some strengthened Cavalry Divisions and German Landwehr Brigades.

During the morning of the attack wave after wave of Russian infantry moved forwards towards the already beleaguered lines. The Austrians had certainly been expecting some kind of attack. They had massed their own artillery behind their front, fortunately far enough back to avoid being overrun in the enemy onslaught. However nothing had prepared the Austrians for the surprising scale of the Russian effort and they had never before experienced such a weight of Russian shells.

It would be wrong to suggest the Austrians did not fight back bravely against this onslaught. The Austro-Hungarian 1<sup>st</sup> Army held off the attack on Svydniki (5-5.3802) and for three days a huge battle was fought to repel Russian 9<sup>th</sup> Army attacks on Luck where the Russian artillery shielded a river crossing. The commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Army, Von Brlog, insisted on a bitter resistance on the



sometimes held that the 21<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division saw cavalymen withdrawing on the morning of 13 June after the Austrian front had endured a torrid trial the previous day. The accusation was that the 21<sup>st</sup> Division followed the cavalry from the field and this was an unauthorised retreat. It is also often said that this Division was principally made up of Czechs who had enough of serving the Hapsburgs. Most modern historians reject this old story which was invested in some of the convenient myths of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century helped by the fact that the records of this unit have disappeared. Much more probably the Russians overran the unit during the afternoon of 13 June as they did many other units along this section of front including a German Landwehr Brigade (23<sup>rd</sup>). This was part of the breakthrough of Hornyka (5-5.4206) which saw six Russian Divisions advancing as much as 20 kilometres down the road towards Tarnopol (5-5.4209) during 13 – 14 June.

Brusilov reported to the Tsar on 14 June and claimed that the offensive was a success. He could not hide the fact that the Austrians were still fighting but their resistance was starting to fail at certain points of which Hornyka was merely the most dramatic. He stayed up late checking the Russian casualty tallies. The Russian losses were quite considerable too but from a short-term military point of view could be considered acceptable.

### The Balkans

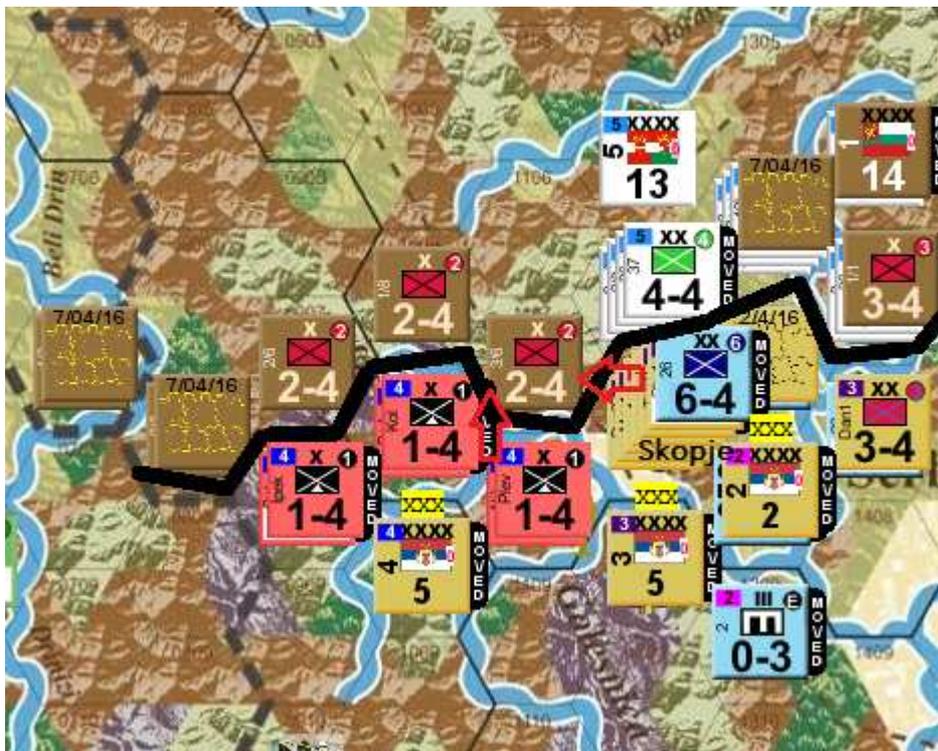


Figure 2: The Allied attack towards Kacaznik which caused bad relations between the Bulgarians and Austrians, 13 - 14 June 1916.

Just before the start of the Russian Offensive, the Serbians announced to General Sarrail that they were ready for action and asked for French support for an attack they made on 13 June north of Skopje on the road to Kacaznik (7-6.1107). Sarrail made one of his divisions available (26<sup>th</sup>) but the action was primarily a Serbian affair with the French providing long range support.

This attack caused bad blood between Stepanov, the Bulgarian Chief of Staff and the commander and staff of the Austro-Hungarian 5<sup>th</sup> Army because Austrian troop movements between 10 and 12 June had left the Bulgarian 8<sup>th</sup> Division holding the threatened sector of the front with a single

Brigade. The Bulgarians were also unable to prevent the Montenegrin Corps moving forward against their right flank which terminated in remote regions close to the Albanian and Montenegrin borders.

The Bulgarians did nevertheless manage to keep the Serbians out of Kacaznik for two days during which the leading Serbian Divisions suffered significant losses but Stepanov said he would never trust the Austrians again.

### **The Near East**

By 12 June, the flood waters around Kut had subsided sufficiently to allow Maude to break camp and start moving up river again.

In Armenia, the Turks were threatening to renew their attack near Lake Nazik (6-8.2921). Meanwhile Russian cavalry was on its way to provide aid to the Russian forces hanging on around Lake Van. Yudenitch was also gathering reserves in the Upper Aras Valley from where they posed something of a threat to Erzerum still nearly 40 kilometres from the Russian lines.

### **The Western Front**

The failure of the British attacks at Moyenneville (5-3.1009) had two positive consequences for the Allied campaign. First they persuaded Haig that Allenby's 3rd Army was not going to be a vehicle for success and that the offensive needed to focus on the southern parts of the line closer to the Somme. The second consequence was that the Germans had reinforced the northern flank of their 13th Army and their 1st Army too which controlled the front south of Lille.

Both factors meant that when Joffre proposed a joint Anglo-French effort against Peronne it was well timed in that Haig was more receptive to the notion of combined operations and also the German defences had been weakened after the Battles of Nesle (5-3.1012).

The Battle of Peronne began on 13 June and was for two days the biggest operation ever mounted by the Allies. Peronne had been a French objective since the start of the Allied offensive but it only now became the direct focus of the fighting. The commander of the French 5<sup>th</sup> Army, General Mazel, had identified the bridges over the Somme as a weak point of the German defensive system covering the town. Many of these bridges had been damaged in 1914 and heavy French guns had been targeting every bridge in range for several days. On 13 June, the Germans had four Divisions deployed in a semi-circular arc between two stretches of the Somme River and all their supplies and communications had to cross the river. This defence had been weakened after the second action at Nesle and because of the redeployments the Germans had undertaken to respond to the British attacks further north.

The French moved forward on their right with three Divisions of the 5<sup>th</sup> Army and the I Corps of the French 10<sup>th</sup> Army. Previously similar movements had provoked strong German counter-attacks but not this time because the Germans were already too busy fending off the British 4<sup>th</sup> Army which had thrown forward the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Divisions to try and seize the Somme crossings below Peronne. There was a particularly fierce combat at Cappy (5-3.1011) where there was a bridge in one of the several bends of the river which was defended by the German 2<sup>nd</sup> Guards Division throughout 13 and 14 June. Further east the German 34<sup>th</sup> Division struggled to keep the Irish 19<sup>th</sup> Division and the British 54<sup>th</sup> Division out of Hem-Monacu and Feuillères (5-3.1011) which were at opposite sides of another Somme crossing that carried the main road between Paris and Lille and the last major bridge before Peronne itself.

Although the Germans stopped the British and Canadians reaching their tactical objectives, the German 13<sup>th</sup> Army was forced to recognise that it was in a poor position. The French had not yet unleashed their full strength but the effort of holding the British had used up every last local reserve and no further reinforcement could be anticipated for several more days. The German 14<sup>th</sup> Army which had cooperated well with the 13<sup>th</sup> Army in other recent actions could send no help (it claimed) because the bridges south of Peronne were under French shelling and needed to be strongly garrisoned in case of a French thrust in that direction.



Figure 3: The Allies strike at Peronne, 12 - 14 June 1916.

### The Italian Front

This front was quiet, which given the plight of the Austro-Hungarians elsewhere was something of a blessing to the fading Hapsburg power.

### Player Notes

CP:

- *East: No real change on the EF.*
- *Balkans: I contemplated an attack on the French but, given the worst result I could expect would be 2 hits and it would be the minimum I could expect from a CAtk, I opted to sit tight instead.*

- *West: The defence is solidifying as new troops fill the trenches opposite the British lines; along with some strong artillery concentrations. I am expecting more offensive activity here but am also concerned of a sneak French offensive further to the east.*
- *Caucasus: I continue to move forces east to attack along the west bank of Lake Van. I hope to hold him in the west and centre and drive him back in the east to try and turn his flank here and perhaps cause a general re-dispositioning of Russian forces northwards.*
- *Mesopotamia: The German combat support group is making heavy work of getting to Baghdad through the burning summer heat. Having experienced a Baghdad summer – I sympathise wholeheartedly.*
- *Palestine: The lead Commonwealth forces have now reached the Sinai and this impending threat is starting to loom large.*
- *Italy: I contemplated an attack on Monfalcone but, as with the Balkans, I think AH is better off defending at this stage.*

#### DM Summary – June 1916

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total [SM%]	Morale
<b>Germany</b>	9	4	20					12	45	1277	Good
<b>Austria-Hungary</b>	-	-	22					1	23	542	Good
<b>Ottoman</b>	-	-	-					-	-	76	Good
<b>Bulgaria</b>	-	-	1					-	1	22	Good
<b>Central Powers</b>	9	4	43					13	69	1918	
<b>France</b>	14	-	4					-	18	755	Good
<b>Great Britain</b>	-	11	12					-	23	312	Good
<b>Russia</b>	1	-	*14					-	15	777	Shaken *Pinsk recaptured
<b>Italy</b>	-	-	-					-	-	99	Good
<b>Belgium</b>	-	-	-					NA	-	(105)	NA
<b>Serbia</b>	-	-	(2)					NA	(2)	(37)	NA
<b>Entente</b>	15	11	30					-	56	1943	

AP: I have not done 6 attacks in a turn since September 1914. If I do 6 a month it is notable. This is in keeping with my general game philosophy which is that DWK rewards big attacks preferably big attacks repeated.

Altogether, the Allied attacks I undertook this turn involved 275 Strength Points and 106 Supply Points. As I used the Russian Artillery Surprise and Russian attacks are inflicting tripled losses on the defence it is the equivalent of 487 Strength Points almost all supplied. This is unprecedented fire power. But for the fact the defenders are in trenches this would be worse than the worst of 1914. The attack on Peronne is also likely the biggest single attack I have made in the game so far.

*I have badly drained my supply for this effort but the shock of this should give me far reaching results even when I cannot repeat it.*

*The Russian Offensive should put Austria Hungary close to but not quite over Shaken Morale. I would actually prefer that I fail to breach that target this turn because it will slow the German response to the crisis. Despite the advantages of the Russian Artillery Surprise, under the surface it still suffers from the weakness of the Russians. I could not even guarantee capture of one hex. All four Russian attacks added together amounted to less force (ignoring the tripled results) than I was able to put against Peronne. That is the true balance between the West and the East. Nevertheless, this and imminent Romanian entry are going to force the CP to focus on the East for a while.*

*The Peronne attack not only relies on massive force but is a rare joint French-British effort in which I can spread the losses. It also relies on the fact that the Germans cannot reinforce the hex because their adjacent units in the front line cannot cross a river into an entrenched hex in zones of control (SR 6-9 applied). There is a real chance that I can force a retreat here in one or two attacks even if the Germans hold for now. The defence was reduced to four Divisions after the last German attack near here but that has exposed its vulnerability.*

*One of the most significant distinctions between the strength of different defending hexes is how accessible they are for the rapid arrival of reinforcement. Peronne with the present configuration of the front is a notably weak hex for this reason.*

*Something similar happened in the Balkans. I was reconciled to waiting for Romanian entry before making another effort here because the CP line presented a fairly uniform defence of at least 4 SP which I cannot overcome. However, an attempt to concentrate for an attack which was not made resulted in part of the front being left with only 2 SP. I will usually strike at such an opportunity.*

### **Allied Attacks – 3 June 1916**

Location	Attack	Defence	Attack Result	Defence Result
Kacaznik, Serbia (7-6.1107)	6 Fr, 13 Serb 1 FR Supply 12 – 4	2 Bulg 1 supply Wooded Rough CA 6 + 2	D6 = 1 1 hit 1 DM Bulg	D6 = 4 2 hits 0 DM Serb Hex held
Peronne, France (5-3.1011)	43 Br/ 20 Br Art 69 Fr/ 18 Fr Art 21 Br Supply 26 Fr Supply 149 - 2	32 Ger 16 supply Trench, Clear CA 96	D6 = 4 18 hits 18 DM Ger	D6 = 4 16 hits 12 DM Br 4 DM Fr Hex held
Hornyka, Volhynia (5-5.4206)	32 Rus/2 Rus Art 18 supply 34 – 3 Triple attack	7 AH, 1 AH Cav, 2 Ger 5 supply Trench, broken Retreating CA 18	D6 = 6 15 hits 7 DM AH 2 DM Ger	D6 = 3 2 hits 2 DM Rus Hex captured Cav withdrew

Kozyn – Stovpets Volhynia (5-5.4005)	24 Rus/4 Rus Art 16 supply 28 – 3 Triple attack	8 AH 4 supply Trench, Broken CA 24	D6 = 4 6 hits 6 DM AH	D6 = 6 5 hits 5 DM Rus Hex held
Luck, Volhynia (5-5.3904)	32 Rus/2 Rus Art 18 supply 34 – 4 Triple attack	8 AH 4 supply Trench, Broken, River CA 24 + 1	D6 = 2 6 hits 6 DM AH	D6 = 4 4 hits 4 DM Rus Hex held
Svydniki (5-5.3801)	8 Rus/2 Rus Art 6 supply 10 – 2 Triple attack	6 AH 3 supply Marsh CA 18 + 1	D6 = 3 3 hits 3 DM AH	D6 = 4 3 hits 3 DM Rus Hex held