

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT158: 15 – 18 June 1916 (4 June)

General Situation

The Emperor Franz Josef was not enjoying good health and the atmosphere in the Schönbrunn Palace in Vienna was hardly lively. Since, the Emperor's attendants were protective of his well-being and trying to spare him excessive work, ministers increasingly avoided involving him in the day to day work of government and even updates on war policy. Conrad was stuck at his headquarters at Teschen and was too bound up in the detail of the campaign on the Eastern Front to break off and do his duty to keep the Emperor informed. The fact that the news would be bad news only added to this lack of consultation. The Imperial system in the Austro-Hungarian Empire was therefore also starting to break down under pressure of events. Whether or not the Emperor was properly aware of what was occurring, there was no real secret in the upper echelons of the army and government. The blow which had been suffered in the East added to the disquiet that Conrad's leadership had always engendered.

The Eastern Front

The Russians were advancing quite freely as they exploited the opportunities given by their Summer Offensive. This was now the fourth stage of Brusilov's campaign, the so-called "Advance after Combat". Technically this was not a true Phase according to Brusilov's *Operational Handbook* which he published in later life to try and secure a meagre pension. According to that source the true fourth Phase of the offensive was supposed to be the "Replacement/Recombination Phase" which referred to the reorganisation which was expected after a hard fight. Although there is no doubt that many of the intended actions of the Phase took place on schedule in mid-June, in reality no-one near the front line was reading the handbook and the Russians were for the moment carried forward by a belief that their enemies were crumbling.

The easiest forward movement was by the Russian 4th and 9th Armies. The 4th Army had sent a Cavalry Corps on a bold lunge forwards in the general direction of Brest-Litovsk. It was intended to cause maximum disruption and distraction to German forces which might be redeployed to assist the Austrians. The 9th Army meanwhile was feeling its way forward with its right flank thrusting ahead almost to Kowel.

The Estonian Division on the left wing of the Russian 9th Army found its way into the burning town of Luck on 17 June. The Austro-Hungarian 1st had fallen back about 18 kilometres in the previous two days and its line had come level with that of the 2nd Army which was still holding most of the positions it had held before the offensive.

The other weak point was on the left wing of the Austro-Hungarian 4th Army which was trying to respond to the Russian advance at Horynka (5-5.4206). In the extremity, the most vulnerable point was further along the Tarnopol road at Vyshnivets (5-5.4207). The 4th Army deployed the 3rd Landwehr Mountain Division here (a German unit). The division commander was no respecter of the rule book. In his rear area were a number of artillery regiments waiting to withdraw. The gunners and horse teams were issued with proper rifles and ordered into the front lines. The Colonel of the Austrian 4th Artillery Regiment protested and referred to the KuK Army regulation 29 – 14 but the

German officer invoked the old Reichswehr Law of Retreat 14 – 4 which he insisted meant the artillery could hold a line where no retreat could be permitted. Had a neutral arbitrator in military law or custom been present the Colonel might have been vindicated but rank prevailed and the Austrian gunners and some German ones too allowed themselves to be herded into the front. There, between 17 – 18 June, they helped fend off some powerful Russian attacks. The 3rd Landwehr took some heavy losses in these actions as they were repeatedly asked to counterattack as one Russian Division after another threatened to break through.



Figure 1: The Russian exploitation of the Summer Offensive, 15 – 18 June 1916.

The Balkans

The Allied offensive northwest of Skopje was able to keep moving forward. Kacanik (7-6.1107) fell on the morning of 17 June where there were signs of a hasty Bulgarian retreat. Next day, the Allies fought against the Bulgarian 6th Division which was trying to block the road to Ferizaj (7-6.1006) in

the Serbian province of Kosovo. Two Serbian Divisions (1st Shumadia and 2nd Timok) led the advance up the main road with the French 26th Division following behind. Several Montenegrin Mountain Brigades were operating on the Allied left which was as well because the country was very mountainous in that direction and the Montenegrins had done well to fill all the hidden defiles of the region. Despite a massive numerical superiority, the Bulgarians and the mountainous terrain defeated the most hopeful efforts of the Serbians to get through to Ferizaj and their losses were not insignificant.

The Near East

The lethargy of summer rested heavily on the Near Eastern Fronts in mid-June 1916. Although the British had re-activated their Indian Corps in Iraq the initial movements were very slow and uncertain. Maude was still a relatively new commander and he felt his way very tentatively during this period, partly out of concern for lack of supplies, and partly out of concern for the troops and how they might suffer in the hot weather. On 18 June, Maude's maximum advance in more than a week had been no more than 20 kilometres and not a single Turkish soldier had been spotted.



Figure 2: Maude on the march in Iraq, 15 - 18 June 1916.

The Western Front

Late on 14 June, Joffre had asked General Mazel of the French 5th Army to approach the German 13th Army and see if it could be agreed that Peronne should be an open city. The Germans had already decided that they would have to withdraw here and they swiftly accepted the French offer of a local truce. This meant that French were able to move into the whole area of the Somme bend and liberate Peronne on 17 June with little further resistance. The British attacks which had been made to the north west of Peronne also ceased on 15 June and they did not have to start up again as the French moved forwards to secure the objectives the British had been fighting for a few days previously.

The French, however, resumed fighting as soon as 17 June and this time their actions were directed against the German 14th Army covering La Fere. The French threw in most of their 5th and 10th Armies to attempt to cross the upper reaches of the Somme and make progress towards St Quentin

and La Fere. At first German resistance was firm but the French attacked with considerable skill and bravery. These *poilus* had learnt a lot in two years.

Late on 18 June, the 1st CEO Division, a colonial formation, was ordered to make an attack against what were the old outworks of the former French fortress of La Fere. It was expected that the Germans might defend such a position but to the relief and amazement of the assault companies they discovered the Germans had evacuated. As night was falling the extent of the German withdrawal was not realised and the colonial units spent the dark hours expecting a German counter-attack at any moment. When dawn broke next day, they looked for the enemy and could not find them.



Figure 3: The French advance reaches Peronne and La Fere becomes a focus for further attacks, 14 - 18 June 1916.

The Italian Front

This front remained quiet as both sides slowly recovered from their exertions during the 4th Isonzo Offensive. Cadorna was impatient to begin a fifth offensive but had to recognise that there were not sufficient stocks of shells to support any extensive effort.

DM Summary – June 1916

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total [SM%]	Morale
Germany	9	4	20	16				12	61	1293	Good
Austria-Hungary	-	-	22	-				1	23	542	Good
Ottoman	-	-	-	-				-	-	76	Good
Bulgaria	-	-	1	1				-	2	23	Good
Central Powers	9	4	43	19				13	88	1937	
France	14	-	4	8				-	26	763	Good
Great Britain	-	11	12	-				-	23	312	Good
Russia	1	-	*14	5**				-	20	782	Shaken *Pinsk and **Luck recaptured
Italy	-	-	-	-				-	-	99	Good
Belgium	-	-	-	-				NA	-	(105)	NA
Serbia	-	-	(2)	(2)				NA	(4)	(39)	NA
Entente	15	11	30	13				-	69	1943	

Player Notes

CP:

- *East: Brusilov launches his long anticipated offensive and it is devastating; forcing me to evacuate most of the AH forward trenches. AH has still not reached Shaken Morale, but is now not far from it at 542 DM. I fully expect another strong attack next turn – probably just one against a location vulnerable to a three-sided assault, after which his supply will start to bite and I can throw some German support at the obstinate Conrad,*
- *Balkans: Quiet after his last attack.*
- *West: A particularly concentrated attack (149SP) caused the loss of over two divisions at Peronne. I made the mistake of trying to reinforce Peronne but the river isolates it and so, instead, I have had to vacate it or risk the loss of s further two divisions there.*
- *Caucasus: Nothing significant.*
- *Mesopotamia: Quiet; although the floods have started to subside.*
- *Palestine: Quiet with danger close. I am as best prepared as I can be for the impending attacks to take Jerusalem.*
- *Italy: I continue to build my new defensive line to deny Trieste.*

AP: *This turn will have been difficult for the CP. The game gives a very good depiction of the crisis which historically overtook the CP in the summer of 1916 as the Allies demonstrated a new capacity for large scale offensives.*

The retreat from Peronne was a near inevitable consequence of the difficulty of defending that hex. Because of the river behind it the Germans needed to be able to survive 2 turns of attack to hold off

the Allied offensive. That would have been possible if there were five or preferably six Divisions holding the hex or part of a reserve placed behind the front not in an enemy ZOC but four Divisions was just insufficient.

I didn't expect the Germans to pull out of La Fere but it is understandable given the result of the attack. The biggest possible attack with a 6 rolled is the most devastating event in DWK and I have been looking for it.

I gave the British a turn to rest. I am keeping the intensity of the combat at a moderate heat but no more because I do not want to exhaust my attacking potential too quickly.

The Russians went hunting artillery looking to force a retreat they would destroy three artillery regiments. However, I suspected that Ivor was forgetting the rules. I was a little shocked when he cited SR 14-4 which clearly says the Strength Points of all units are counted when assessing when retreats are required. This is certainly misleading because SR 29-14 is explicit that artillery units do not count and it also states this impacts rule 14-4. SR 29-14 certainly trumps the prior rule but it is not good drafting and I couldn't insist on the consequences this time.

I have somewhat inadvertently pushed forward dangerously far in the northern Pripet region. The Germans could be tempted to try and cut this force off but if they do so they will be leaving the Austrians more exposed. It will be interesting to see whether this bait is grabbed.