

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT163: 6 – 9 July 1916 (2 July)

General Situation

The renewal of the Allied offensive in the West underlined the fact that this was a war to the death. If there had been a way to get off the treadmill of carnage then surely it would have been found by now. Innumerable bloody battles had already been fought but a fresh one started up as if this history were nothing.

Of course under the surface, the Armies were being hollowed out and there was greater caution than before but when the signal to go over the top was given the troops loyally performed their duty as before.

The Western Front



Figure 1: Allied attacks resume on the Somme and the Canadian Corps is committed, 6 - 9 July 1916.

Haig and Joffre had concluded that after their recent separate efforts had been stopped at La Fere and Hamelincourt (5-3.1009), they would be better to combine forces again. This gave Haig a reason

to put affairs back into the hands of Rawlinson's 4th Army which had been better handled than Allenby's 3rd Army.

The objective was once more the SPW Redoubt and sections of the German line between Combles and Aizecourt-le-Haut (5-3.1010). The French 5th Army needed to break out of Peronne and if this coincided with a British effort then success might be achieved against a tiring German Army. The French concentrated a lot of artillery for the attack on 8 July including the bulk of their railway guns which were dragged into railway sidings in range of Combles. Three excellent French Divisions (8th, 9th and the Foreign Legion) went forward under a heavy barrage but they were pinned down and suffered high rates of loss while some distance short of Aizecourt, though they reached the outskirts of Combles.

The British attacked the SPW Redoubt on 8 July with the Canadian Corps and then next day with IV Corps a little further south. The Canadians lost many men due to enfilading and sustained machine gun fire during their approach but they did get a foothold in the Redoubt and forced some short tactical withdrawals (about 400 metres). The IV Corps advance was as costly and about as equally successful if one could call this success for Allied casualties were at least twice what the German 13th Army was enduring.

One of the things which sustained the German Army during this bruising period was a strong sense of professional pride which is often discernible as a major theme in post-war memoirs and was carried through to the Second World War. An example of this is found in recollections of Lieutenant (as he then was) Stahler. Stahler later went on to be the head of the German Advanced Squad Leader Academy in the inter-war period. His son was one of the most reputed infantry officers in WW2 who was said to have seen action on every front in every year of that conflict.¹

"We were marching down the road back to Courcellette (5-3.1010) where we were bunking in a triangular stone building of a type common in those parts. Corporal Uhl was beside me but he had a terrible cough and he kept spluttering "CX...CX...CX..." all the way. He was regularly dropping back to help the squad carry what was probably the heaviest heavy machine gun that was ever in our possession and was challenging our inherent portage capacity. We were exhausted and the pace kept slowing but at least we could look back on a job well done.

The last Canadian attack at Pozières (5-3.1010) had been magnificent in its way. Today only the Russians, Chinese and Japanese (I am told) use these outmoded "human wave" tactics but, in 1916, the British were still at it though eventually they learned to do otherwise. The line of sight we had was as clear as you could wish for and with no hindrance. The Canadians had no cover to speak of. My men were experts for this type of situation. There had been a certain amount of artillery fire before the start of our little scenario but we were mostly safe in the pillboxes, trenches and shallow foxholes that formed our position. A fire raged out of control in the wooden farm buildings to our rear but, so long as it did not spread towards us, we kept a clear view of the enemy trenches though at first they were covered with huge question marks. Who did they conceal?

¹ This is from the introduction to the Advanced Squad Leader Handbook which Stahler commenced writing in 1944. He was unable to finish it due to paper shortages in the last days of the Third Reich. Others completed it over forty years later.

When the Canadians appeared we opened up with every machine gun we had. I was positioned so I could supervise the fire of a whole platoon and modify the targeting of two machine guns. As they were crossing open ground, the negative effects on the enemy were extreme down the entire fire lane. I should be more modest, but I believe that I also influenced the accuracy of our fire. Our machine gunners always did their best whenever I near. That was leadership in those days. However, Uhl used to say all I ever did in combat was shout "DRM...DRM" over and over again.²

Where the Canadians kept moving, we kept firing. The machine guns suffered more breakdowns in those days but we were lucky in that respect. There was no hope of the enemy rallying once our fire superiority was established. Those enemy soldiers that passed the first severe check to their morale did not stand up but advanced in phased movements while hugging the ground. However, this was too slow and we could equally drop back a little to keep our distance. They had no hope of rallying in such a situation of desperation and when their own leaders were hit whole platoons started breaking and squads became half-squads pretty quickly. Of course routing in open ground was pitiful but you couldn't withhold fire at that point. We had let them come far enough out of their trenches so they couldn't get back if they changed their minds.

Filled with these satisfying thoughts on the excellent conduct of my men we turned a corner in the road to reveal a sight which showed that we were not all supermen. The road was blocked by a wire entanglement and in the middle of it I recognised Leutnant Von Karsties, who some in the regiment reckoned was a combat commander, though I was still in some doubt. Von Karsties had with him a squad and a half-squad. Several men were suffering from light wounds and their order was completely broken by being tangled up in this random wire that they had apparently blindly stumbled in to in broad daylight. Von Karsties was trying to get his men to recover and he had discarded the infernal pack of cards which he always had to hand.

I asked Von Karsties why he did not get out of the wire first but he seemed unable to think of moving as he shuffled a number of ideas in his mind. Suddenly, his men went to ground as a shot was heard in the distance. This was not an ideal place to be suppressed. It was certainly disadvantageous being on a road, in wire, with jumpy men. Von Karsties was convinced there were enemy forces nearby. I asked him where he was going and he handed me a scrap of a map which was his only knowledge of the area. According to him, a small enemy force had got through our lines and he had been ordered to adopt a reconnaissance posture and sweep the area of any that he found. The little map, which barely covered the effective range of a machine gun, showed a small rise of ground to the north and Von Karsties expected that the British might be on the reverse side of the slope.

We couldn't see anyone. The random shots showed there was an enemy sniper about and even I was nervous. This wasn't our business. My job now was to get my men safely back to the barracks and, taking leave, I wished Von Karsties well.

Before we left I saw he had picked up his cards and finally he issued an order to advance and extract his men from the wire and a small distance towards the low hill. He then got his men into some shell holes which I hadn't noticed before.

A couple of days later, I read Von Karsties report of what happened next. It seems that he had got close to the small British force whose marksmanship availed little against Von Karties attack at point blank range with hand grenades. His men then finished the job in close combat ambushing the

² It is suggested this may have been "Die Rotten Motherf.....s". We prefer to think something may have been lost in translation.

broken enemy survivors twice over. Dieter was something of a hero in this combat and earned the Iron Cross. If anything it was overkill but you cannot be too gentle in these situations.

Von Karsties had a lot to learn but I had to admit that his willingness to engage in hand to hand combat after a difficult approach was a sign of promise. I knew his sons at the infantry school years later who were all afterwards front fighters. They were all built from the same cardstock .”

The Italian Front

The two sides maintained a live and let live approach to the war during the lulls between major offensives. As it was high summer, large numbers of resting troops would take over an alpine lake and swim and sun themselves for days at a time.

The Eastern Front

The Russian Armies in the north were still moving forward steadily. On 9 July, the Russian 4th Cavalry Division paraded along the sea front at Leipaja. On the same day, Kovno watched (somewhat sullenly) as the Russian 39th Division filed into the city. At the same time the Russians controlled the whole east bank of the Nieman almost up to Grodno.

The Russian summer offensive was therefore spreading far wider than Brusilov had actually intended. On 9th July, the Russian 4th Army was on the Bug River 60 kilometres west of Kowel. At Lemberg, the civilian population panicked on that day when the news circulated that strong Russian forces were at Reminov (5-5.3709) barely 10 kilometres from the city boundary. Within hours a stream of refugees began leaving the city. The city came within the zone of the Austro-Hungarian 1st Army but the commander, Von Brlog, was out visiting artillery units further west. The mix of units in the city had no idea whether they would be ordered to fight a last ditch defence or not. Hopeful rumours that the Germans would come and stabilise the situation were just guesses.

The Balkans

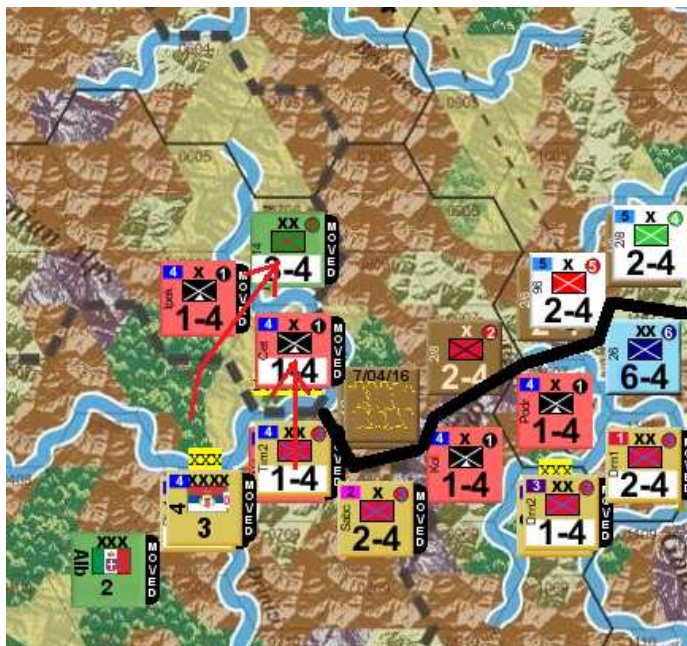


Figure 2: The Allies return to Montenegro, 6 - 9 July 1916.

The main movement on this front in early July was the return of the Allies to Montenegro. This was led by the Italian 14th Division which had by reconnaissance determined that the south east of Montenegro was undefended. Between 8 and 9 July, the Italians pushed forward swiftly as far as Klina (7-6.0706). They were followed by two brigades of Montenegrin militia who were delighted to be on home territory. The enemy was strangely absent and only a few Bulgarian patrols crossed the hills from Kosovo to observe the Allied movements.

The Near East

The British 76th Brigade passed through Gaza (or Gazze) on 8 July. It did not pause there more than a few hours but headed north into the Palestinian Hills. Altogether six British, Indian and Australian Divisions (and a South African Regiment) were advancing on a broad front. Best estimates suggested the opposing, but invisible, Turkish 4th Army had at most about 10 Divisions at its disposal.

Murray's force at least had some confidence as it closed in on the Turkish positions waiting further north. Maude's command in Iraq was much less certain as they were short of supplies and had been repelled from Baghdad before. Nevertheless, there was some degree of coordination in the two British campaigns in going forward at the same time, albeit during the height of the summer.

Yudenitch was already engaged and, between 8 and 9 July, made a second effort to pierce the Turkish line in the mountains. This time the attempt was made along the Tekman Valley (6-8.2418) which threaded through some high plateaus guarded by the Turkish 32nd Division. The Russians led their attacks with their own Turkman units and Kuban Cossack Brigades who were well suited for mountain fighting. These managed to stretch the Turkish lines very thin. Yudenitch mistakenly thought that they may have broken through during the afternoon of 9 July but the reports were too optimistic and despite great sacrifice the Turkish front still blocked the Russians' progress.



Figure 3: Yudenitch's last push up the Tekman Valley, 8 - 9 July 1916.

DM Summary – July 1916

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total	Morale
Germany	1	8						13	22	1318	Good
Austria-Hungary	5	4						2	11	566	Shaken
Ottoman	-	2						-	2	80	Good
Bulgaria	-	-						-	-	23	Good
Central Powers	6	14						15	35	1990	
France	-	6						-	6	774	Good
Great Britain	-	12						-	12	338	Good
Russia	6	*5						NA	11	803	Shaken – Kovno and Leipaja recaptured
Italy	-	-						-	-	99	Good
Belgium	-	-						NA	-	(105)	NA
Serbia	-	-						NA	-	(39)	NA
Entente	6	23						-	29	2000	

Player Notes

CP:

- *East: Limited Russian offensives continued to pile pressure on AH. I had wished to hold the river line on the Bug but an attack against a weakly held sector of cavalry only left me with tough decisions. There was a 50% chance of holding but, further along the line, he had another opportunity to create a bridgehead. I opted to fall back with the Cav rather than risk losses there and he did succeed in establishing a bridgehead at his other point of attack, so it was probably for the best. My only realistic COAs were to try and fight for the Bug line (at risk of rapidly escalating AH casualties) or commence a withdrawal towards the Danube where I can defend along a major river and also reinforce with Germans and gunboats to deny crossings. I opted for this second COA. The second order effect will be to give up more food producing areas within AH – but I have a longer term plan to address this. The Brusilov Offensive has restored some initiative to the Russians for now, but I do not expect it to last long. I also have supply now with the Danube HQ and troops heading there to reinforce it.*
- *Balkans: More lateral movement to reinforce AH positions with allies.*
- *West: I reinforce positions likely to be subject to combined Anglo-French attack whilst rebuilding battered divs with the very few RPLs which arrived this turn.*
- *Caucasus: Quiet.*
- *Mesopotamia: Quiet.*
- *Palestine: Quiet.*
- *Italy: Quiet.*

AP: I note that Russia has passed 800 DM, so there is now less than 100 DM more to Economic Collapse this year and there is still a lot of year left and a lot for the Russians to do.

Part of the dilemma is that I have achieved some degree of ascendancy in the East and, with Romania, things will get more hairy for the CP and there is only 32 DM left to Austrian Economic Collapse. However, I will only be able to convert that result if I keep the Russians exposed to a German counter-strike. The main threat at the moment is the German 11th and 12th Armies in Southern Poland. However, they do not constitute overwhelming force so I should be able to hold my own. So long as I can keep taking cheap shots at the Austrians on their bent back front covering Lemberg, I could be the winner of this contest.

An effective element of my campaign at present is that I am sustaining multiple threats so that the CP is not easily able to focus on any one of them. The weak point is supply. I will not be able to repeat the Caucasus attack and on almost every front supply will be the principle limiting factor in my ability to continue offensive combat. However, I am nearly two months into the Western Front offensive and I managed a fully supplied 144 combat strength attack (marred by a 1/4 die split and an 8/18 split in the losses in Germany's favour).

The next CP moves will be interesting. In particular will there be any preparation for the Romanian entry now only three turns away? That front is served by single-track railways.