

Grand Campaign – Der Weltkrieg – Centenary Game

GT166: 19 – 22 July 1916 (5 July)

General Situation

Historians have always recorded that Romania formally declared war on the Central Powers on 21 July 1916. However a telegram to a New York commodity broker on 19 July showed precisely what was about to occur. It stated:

“Ref Order Min of Trade Berlin/Vienna No 44-13. Six year supply 4 zhillion bushels wheat cancel immediate effect advance payments held pending arbitration force majeure claimed. Hostile actions foreign powers prevents harvest, peasants all mobilized to army. Regrets Min of Agriculture Bucharest 19 Jul 16.”

On 20 July, Romania protested to the Bulgarian government in Sofia that Austrian river craft were patrolling the Danube frontier and Bulgarian troops had been observed entrenching on their side of the border in defiance of an agreement that this frontier should be demilitarised. Later the same day, the Romanian government broke off diplomatic relations with Bulgaria after receiving credible reports of there being Turkish forces in Northern Bulgaria.

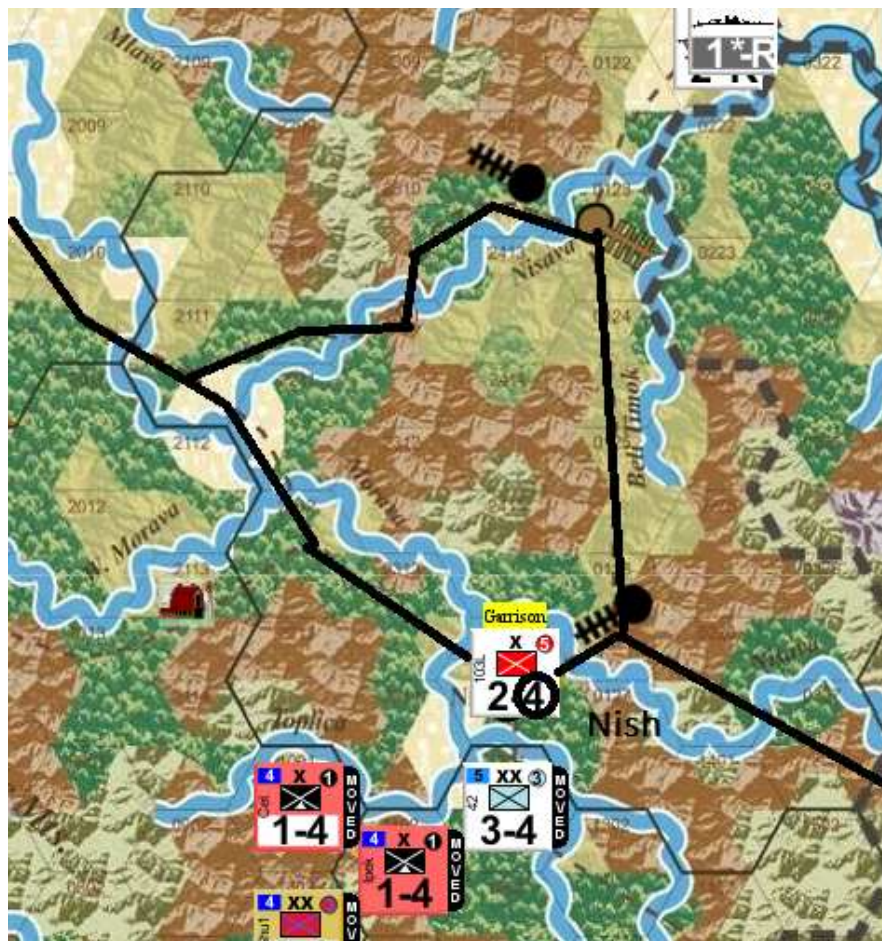


Figure 1: Railways around Nish threatened. Although the Montenegrins were close to the main line there was in fact a further route through the Nisava Valley, 19 - 22 July 1916.

The Balkans would soon be in turmoil once more. Its significance as a source of resources for the warring coalitions would be recalled. It was not only Romanian wheat that was of interest but the Turkish specialised metal trade was also under some threat as it depended on the railway junction at Nish. The following extract from a now hard to find paperback history of this obscure corner of the conflict shows what was at stake:

On 21 July, the weekly consignment of tin, lead and chromium delivered from Istanbul to Chemnitz was passing through Nish and temporarily halted for an inspection by the Austrian detail responsible for keeping the railway running through this key junction. It was a quiet night but the Austrians were nervous. They were aware of reports that Serbian forces were moving closer to the city and might arrive any day. The Austrian 42nd Division had disembarked at Nish that day and would hopefully improve the security situation which had hitherto been in the hands of Landwehr who had passed the last year in a state of idleness and might not be fit to take on the Montenegrins.

Nevertheless it was not the Serbs or Montenegrins which had stopped this train. The driver had refused to continue because of a small container which the guard had reported as glowing green in the night. Nobody knew what it was and it would have been removed had anybody dared to approach it. The guards speculated on what was haunting the little crate and debated whether it had been dug up from a cursed medieval graveyard or fallen from outer space. Hurried telephone calls were made to try and find out what they were dealing with.

Only in the morning did these efforts get Albert Einstein out of bed to answer the telephone before he could even straighten his hair. He knew what it was because the Berlin Institute of Science had spent weeks trying to obtain this special delivery of radioactive Radium. The young scientist was infuriated to discover that the dispatch of this precious material was being held up by ignorant superstition and bumbling railway guards.¹

The Eastern Front

The Central Powers were contesting the recent Russian gains.

The commander of the German 10th Army, Von Eichhorn, was determined that the Russians would not reach German territory and ordered three Divisions to attack on 19-20 July near Užventis (4-5N.1012). This was no more than a testing attack and the Russians were only lightly troubled by it. However, it was a signal that further Russian advances would come at a cost and for the moment there was no more Russian movement forwards.

¹ From "The Kaiser and the Bomb: The Mannheim-Hätten Project." by Karl Heinz Messler, (1969), New York.



Figure 2: The German 10th Army skirmishes with the Russians in Lithuania, 19 - 20 July 1916.

There was also a bigger attack in Galicia as the combined Austro-German armies there pushed back against the Russians who had retired to the line of the Bug after giving up on their drive to Lemberg. Actually the line of the river here was confused for in its upper reaches the river had divided into many tributaries and each of these streams had to be crossed. The Central Powers' attacks came up against strong Russian positions backed by heavy guns which kept the river crossings under fire. On 20 July, the Germans and Austrians suffered heavy casualties trying to force the Russians back from the river lands between Novy and Chuchmany (5-5.3908). The following day they were obliged to give up in the face of firm resistance.

The Russians main initiative on 21 July was to send immediate support to their new Romanian allies when they joined the Entente on that date. This involved the left wing of the Russian 11th Army and the newly formed 14th Army. In the first 48 hours, nine Russian Infantry Divisions and four Cavalry Divisions made a dash for the Siret River where enemy forces were reported to be concentrating. Further south some Russian units were able to cross this river and make contact with the Romanian 4th Army.

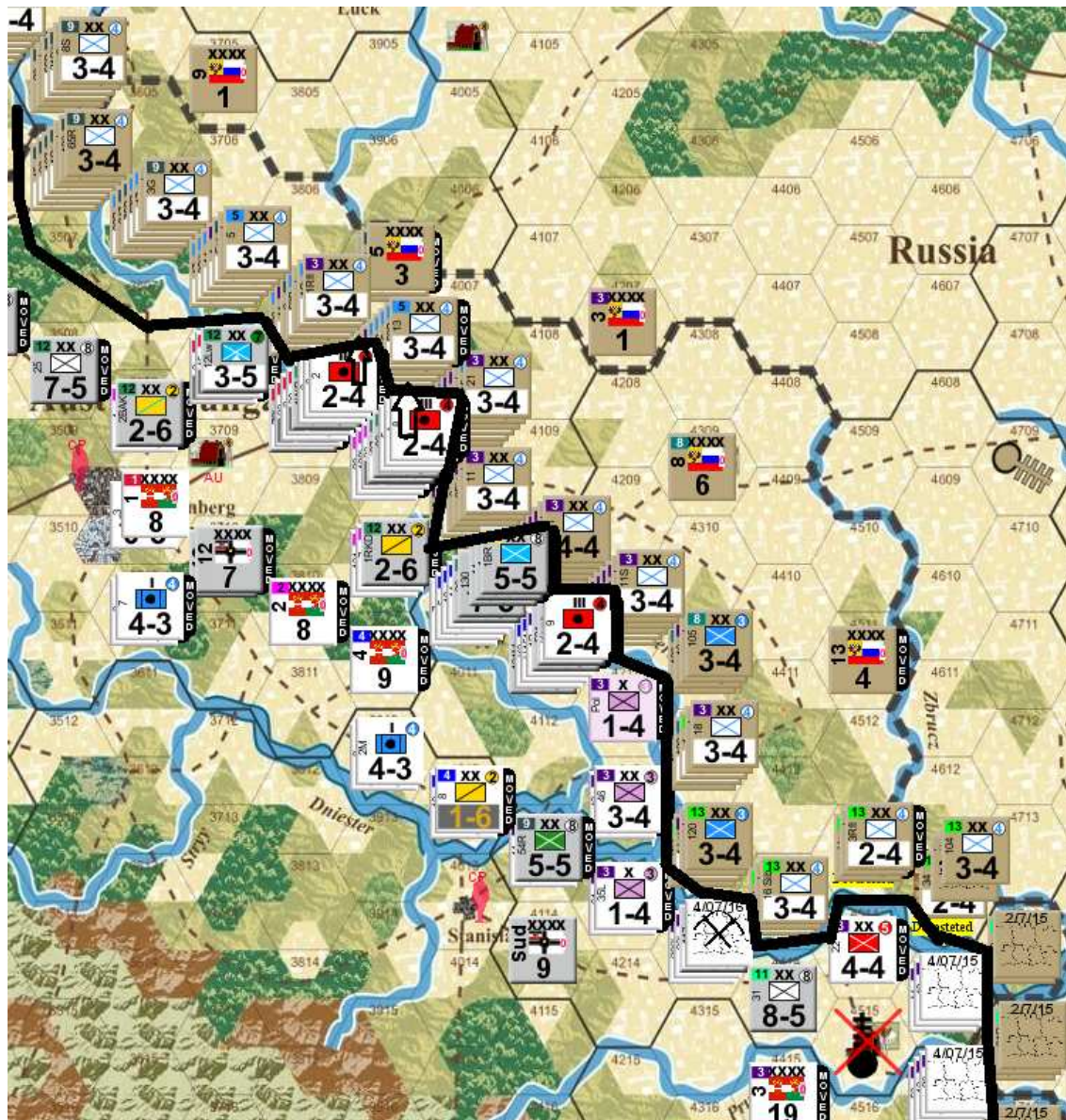


Figure 3: The Galician Front from Lemberg to Czernowitz, 19 - 22 July 1916.

The Balkans

One of Romania's primary war aims was to take control of Transylvania. That region had been very lightly garrisoned by the Austro-Hungarians and the Romanian Army had been presuming that it would be easily overrun. The main initial objective the Romanians gave to themselves was the city of Brasov/Kronstadt which lay not far from the border. A few Hungarian Brigades were guarding the route through the Transylvanian mountains from Bucharest and Ploesti. When hostilities began, the Romanian 2nd Army was not yet ready for an assault but two Romanian Divisions crossed the frontier through the hills (6-6.1508/9) east of Brasov on 21 July. Next day, these Romanians got a shock because they ran into the outer pickets of a unit which claimed to be German when only Hungarian defenders had been expected. These Germans were from the 103rd Mountain Division and had arrived in Transylvania by railway only a couple of days previously. If the Austro-Hungarians were to hold Brasov they would need help from this reinforcement.



Figure 4: The Romanians make their first moves into Transylvania, 21 - 22 July 1916.

The worries of the Hapsburgs were also focusing on the rail junction at Nish. The Montenegrins had cut more than half way across Serbia in no more than a fortnight. The Austro-Hungarian 5th Army and the Bulgarian 1st Army were being forced out of Macedonia and Kosovo by the developing threat to their communications. Had the Allied Army in Macedonia been stronger, then the situation could have been truly disastrous for the Central Powers.

Instead Mišić and Sarrail were content to see their enemies manoeuvred out of their positions and it seemed expedient to tolerate their escapes so long as they kept retreating. Historians have frequently lauded the Serbian commander as some kind of genius of indirect warfare on the strength of this campaign and compared him favourably with other Allied commanders of the same period. However, a more balanced view is that Mišić merely exploited opportunities which were given to him. Had he been obliged to undertake a futile frontal attack there was nothing in Mišić's record which suggests he would not have undertaken it.

The Near East

The summer weeks passed with no further offensive action after the last Russian attacks in Armenia. Everywhere everyone longed for some cooler days.

The Western Front

After a few days' rest, both sides had repaired their trenches on the Somme Front. Only around La Fere was there still a lack of definition of the front leaving the French and Germans to cautiously patrol the town and its environs. The inhabitants of La Fere had by then fled. It was left as a ghost town that was considered an unlucky place to go by soldiers on both sides. Considering visitors might attract shellfire from both sides its poor reputation was hardly surprising.

The Italian Front

There were still no signs of urgent activity on the Italian Front. Cadorna issued a bulletin on 22 July welcoming the Romanians to the anti-Hapsburg alliance and praising the Serbians for their recent advances. That was all.

DM Summary – July 1916

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total	Morale
Germany	1	8	10	1	5			13	38	1334	Good
Austria-Hungary	5	4	-	1	2			2	14	569	Shaken
Ottoman	-	2	-	-	-			-	2	80	Good
Bulgaria	-	-	-	-	-			-	-	23	Good
Central Powers	6	14	10	2	7			15	54	2009	
France	-	6	4	-	-			-	10	778	Good
Great Britain	-	12	15	-	-			-	27	353	Good
Russia	6	*5	**3	\$6	%4			NA	24	816	Shaken – *Kovno and Leipaja recaptured **Grodno recaptured \$ Brest recaptured % Bialystok recaptured
Italy	-	-	-	-	-			-	-	99	Good
Romania	-	-	-	-	-						
Belgium	-	-	-	-	-			NA	-	(105)	NA
Serbia	-	-	-	-	-			NA	-	(39)	NA
Entente	6	23	22	6	4			-	61	2032	

Player Notes

- CP: *East: I am starting to sense a respite on the EF and my last limited attack against the Russians sent them reeling. I am happy when I get 2:6 results in my favour on the attack. This turn I take the offensive to him in the far north where his line is very thinly stretched and poorly supplied and make a mandatory attack east of Lemburg. Unfortunately, my excessive use of artillery two turns ago has warned him off and he has slunk back across the river here; so this attack could hurt me more than him. Nonetheless, I feel I am regaining some initiative here again. I have also built up a reasonable force on the Romanian frontier with the Danube HQ starting to look more like an army as divisions move in and I have reconstituted the AH 7th Army here too. I don't know why Robert*

thought I was neglecting reinforcing this area as I have been slowly shifting forces there over the last 6 turns.

- *Balkans: My right flank is now totally in the air but I managed to transfer an AH div – withdrawn to a rail line last turn and out of any ZOCs – to help to secure that flank. I now need to stabilize it.*
- *West: Quiet for the first time in a long time as I complete the new 13th Army trenches which they have held now for two turns against unrelenting pressure. I think the TE will spend the rest of the month licking their wounds now.*
- *Caucasus: I will soon be able to establish a 2nd Army on this front; one to cover the coast and the other to hold the centre and right.*
- *Mesopotamia: Mexican standoff in the blistering heat.*
- *Palestine: As above.*
- *Italy: I am about as prepared as I can be on this front and make no alterations to my defensive dispositions.*

AP: Romania enters the war without much of a bang. My most important move in this new theatre is to move my 14th Army into northern Romania to block the forces gathering in the Upper Siret region.

I looked carefully at the position in the Baltic where the Germans had thrust forward to make a small attack (1 lost SP on each side). It seemed a big risk for the Germans to take in the exact spot in which I destroyed an isolated German Division last year. This time 3 German Divisions advanced with a LOC protected by two 1 SP units. If I could gather 30 supplied SP to attack I could guarantee destroying 9 DM worth of units including one surrounded Division and I would only need about 38 SP to raise that to 19 DM destroying two surrounded Divisions and 46 SP would guarantee the elimination of the whole force (25 DM). The CP must have realised I only had about 25 SP and I chose to hold back because this would use up practically all my supply on that front.

The game could now move slow or fast. I incline to slow. At the rate the Russians are going they will be in Economic Collapse this autumn. That means the Caucasus Front will start collapsing and I will be on the way to Russian Surrender in early 1917. Although I do not fear Russian Surrender (almost welcome it for the problems it causes the CP with garrisoning) that seems a bit early for my taste. However, the only thing I can do to delay it is to retreat to the GTL but if I do that Austria is off the hook and Romania is toast.

That suggests it is in the CP interest to go after Russia aggressively now. However, I am not so sure. If the CP begins a major counteroffensive now it will be stretched thin and its attacks will be relatively weak such as the attacks made this turn which were to my advantage in attrition. Cumulatively this will accelerate US entry and Austrian Collapse. It may be better to wait 2 – 3 months and then attack in overwhelming strength which will deliver better combat ratios.

This suggests again there is a genuine choice in strategy at the moment. However, getting the Russians off their backs is important and urgent when the Allies are sitting on CP food. I doubt the CP will be able to resist the call for quick action.