

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

**GT167: 23 – 27 July 1916 (6 July)**

### **General Situation**

Falkenhayn was clearing his desk on 23 July. A car waited to take him to the railway station for an onward journey to spend two weeks in a Black Forest spa. Falkenhayn had borne the burden of command for 18 months without resorting to the incessant public commentary that many Allied commanders were guilty of. He made no public statement on his departure but quietly thanked his staff for their support and wished everyone well for the future.

While Falkenhayn was packing his bags, Ludendorff was already going through the paperwork in the basement. The Kaiser had promoted Hindenburg to be Chief of the General Staff but he was still in Berlin shaking hands with Ministers and the court officers. What Ludendorff found was not easy reading. The German Armies were well supplied, numerous and had good morale. Ludendorff also knew that his nation's forces had unparalleled stacking capabilities and were able to perform railway manoeuvres that the Allied forces would never attempt. Despite this the war situation had deteriorated badly this year and the Austrians were bleating constantly about the threats on every front. Ludendorff drew a sharp intake of breath when he realised that he was reading a recent dispatch from the Austro-Hungarian 5th Army which between the lines seemed to say they needed help in handling a few miserable hill bandits which were loose on their flank.

Ludendorff later wrote that he realised from the beginning that the Allies had significant advantages. The Central Powers were surrounded and could not break out of the encirclement while the Allies struck from diverse directions with increasing frequency at the time and place of their choosing. Germany could keep on parrying these blows but if one or more of their enemies did not give up then slow exhaustion would eventually wear out the German Armies.

Ludendorff knew better than anyone that the most vulnerable Allied power was Russia. The crisis on the Eastern Front was also most pressing as both Germany and Austria were discomfited by the loss of good grain lands following the Russian offensive. This had been exacerbated by the belligerence of Romania to which all observers had attributed as the cause of Falkenhayn's fall. Ludendorff was by no means blind to the long term threat of the Western Allies but he also had to deal with the most dangerous crisis at hand. In any event, the British and French had apparently exhausted their latest efforts in Picardy and perhaps there was time to administer a decisive beating to the Russians before the war had to turn west again.

### **The Eastern Front**

There continued to be some pressure on the Russian lines in Lithuania as the German 10th Army kept up active aggressive operations harassing the Russians. The Russian 2nd Army which was most exposed to this baiting had scant reserves and was stretched thin across a long front. These conditions also applied to the neighbouring Russian 1st and 12th Armies neither of whom could provide more than minimal support. On 26 July, the Russian North West Front permitted the 1st and 2nd Armies to retire to the Venta River though the 12th Army still held on to a line which ran through Kovno.

The Russian West Front did not move forward from the line Grodno – Bialystok – Brest. However, there were operations by raiding forces to disable the railway lines to the west of this line that might still serve to support German operations. The Russians naturally chose for destruction those lines

which the Germans had converted to their gauge the previous year. The Russians were also using their railways to dispatch units to Romania and the south. Some units would spend more than ten days on this journey.



Figure 1: The Russians are driven away from the line of the Siret River in northern Moldavia, 23 - 27 July 1916.

The principle Central Powers operation in late July was to clear the eastern bank of the Siret River and therefore to invade the northern extremities of Romania. This task was carried out by the Austro-Hungarian 7<sup>th</sup> Army which had some German support, particularly, from the Bavarian 5<sup>th</sup> Division, which handily broke up the Russian 23<sup>rd</sup> Cavalry Division on 24 July at Bucecea (5-6S.0112). In a few days, the Russian 11<sup>th</sup> Army lost contact with the Siret River all the way between Bucecea up to Mihăileni (5-5.4717) and some of their positions on the Prut River further north were also being abandoned.

### The Balkans

In Transylvania, the Romanians were coming into contact with the Hungarian forces defending Brasov/Konigstadt. The first significant attack took place in the hills above the city on 26 July. The Romanians had little artillery to support this first action but they had the advantage of numbers and

in Brasov, the command headquarters of the 145th Brigade sent some panicky wireless messages asking for immediate support. In reply, they received an equally panicky instruction to abandon the city. However, in a famous incident the brigade commander (who was Austrian) was removed from the headquarters by his (Hungarian) second in command who rallied the junior officers and insisted the city be held.

The Romanians were on the defensive in the Dobruja region. This was attacked by Bulgarian invaders within 3 days of the outbreak of hostilities who sought to advance up the main road towards Constanta. They encountered the Romanian 19<sup>th</sup> Division on 24 July near Arsa (6-6.2719) as the Bulgarians cleared the area of forces operating on their right flank. The Bulgarians had the advantage in this combat and the Romanians were forced to undertake a rapid reorganisation and reinforcement of their line further north.

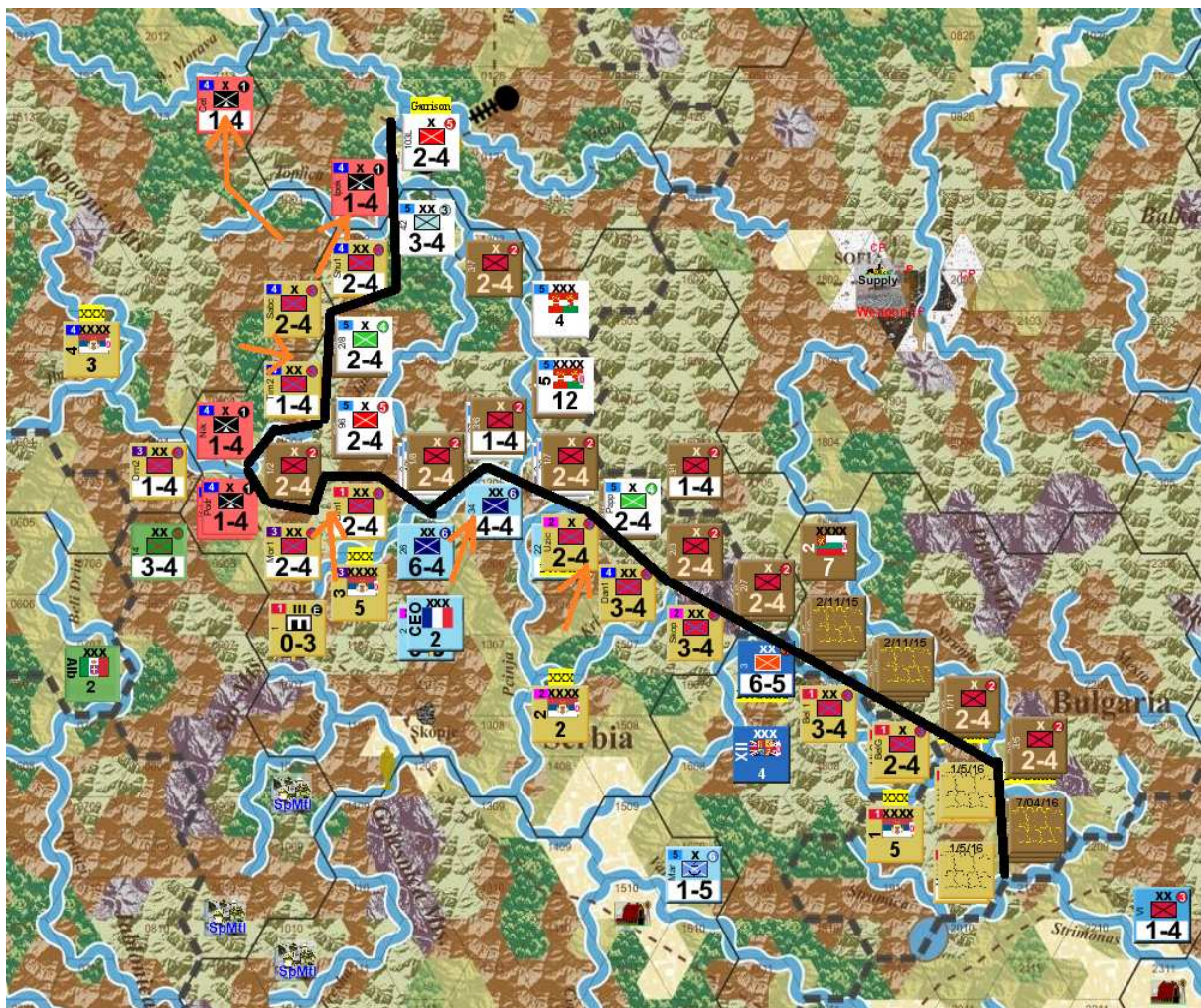


Figure 2: General Situation on the Serbian Front, 23 - 27 July 1916.

The advance of the Serbians and the Allies had not yet been exhausted. During July, the front had moved north up to 60 kilometres and the 1<sup>st</sup> Danube Division reported that it had crossed the Southern Morava on 26 July.

The Serbian IV Corps was well behind the Austro-Bulgarian front and the Ipek Brigade was firmly in control of the entrance of the Toplica Valley (6-5.2314) and observing the western outskirts of Nish.

The Cetinje Brigade had also moved off further to the northwest and was commanding the entrance to the Western Morava Valley (6-5.2113). The railway between Belgrade and Nish was as yet still undisturbed but the Montenegrin partisans were getting ready to strike.

### **The Near East**

The Turkish command in the Caucasus was divided in two as the 5<sup>th</sup> Army took over the northern half of the front from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army on 23 July. The two Armies then engaged in some rivalry over possession of reserve units which had been extracted from the front lines in recent weeks.

The British commander's rivalry was focussed on possession of supplies. Murray, anxious to give his future attack on the Jaffa-Jerusalem line the best possible chance of success had discovered the scale of supplies passing through the Suez Canal *en route* to Mesopotamia. On 25 July, he protested to London against what he perceived to be a waste of resources. How, he asked, could any success at Baghdad make any difference to the outcome of the war in the Near East? In Murray's view everything should be staked on an advance in Palestine which if successful would surely render Baghdad untenable for the Turks.

### **The Western Front**

When the Allied offensive had begun in May the French 7th and 9th Armies had advanced as far as the Aisne and the city of Reims beyond which they found well prepared German lines. The action had then been focused further west and French resources and heavy artillery had been concentrated with the sectors of the 5th and 10th Armies. However, as the fighting in Picardy died down, Joffre directed a shift of Artillery to support the front in Champagne.

On 25 July, the French unleashed a fierce short but very destructive bombardment against the German trenches between Auménancourt and Warmeriville (5-3.1514). After three hours of shelling, the French infantry went forward led by the elite 2nd and 3rd Colonial Divisions. On the left of the advance, the French 7th Army committed its Russian brigade which suffered 50% losses within the first afternoon of the attack while moving through some broken ground near Auménancourt.

The German 3<sup>rd</sup> Army had not been in combat for some time but it still responded to this attack magnificently. It wasn't that the French were that bad. Their infantry – artillery coordination was the best of the time but the Germans managed to avoid the worst of the shelling by judicious tactical withdrawals and by holding ground lightly so that the French infantry assaults quickly lost their power as they were pulled into the German trench systems. By the end of 26 July, French losses were mounting rapidly and Joffre permitted the attacks to cease while the territorial gains were as modest as ever. On 27 July, the Germans also made a very powerful counterattack which sent some French units reeling back and diminished even further the gains of their attack.



Figure 3: The French attack in the Eastern Champagne, 25 - 27 July 1916.

### The Italian Front

The Italian illustrated journal *La Nuova Italia* carried a famous cartoon in its August edition (published in late July). It depicted a tennis court where the balls were fired by cannons and the surface of the court was broken up by the impact of the cannonballs half buried in the earth. The sun was high in the sky and one of the players (Austria) was sitting on the ground winded being attended to by a worried doctor trying to get him to his feet. The Italian player (Cadorna) was lounging in a chair resting in the shade. The referee was asking if he wanted to play on but he replied there was no hurry and he would have another glass of lemonade first.

DM Summary – July 1916

Nation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Food Deficit	Month	Total	Morale
Germany	1	8	10	1	5	9		13	47	1343	Good
Austria-Hungary	5	4	-	1	2	1		2	15	570	Shaken
Ottoman	-	2	-	-	-	-		-	2	80	Good
Bulgaria	-	-	-	-	-	-		-	-	23	Good
Central Powers	6	14	10	2	7	10		15	64	2019	
France	-	6	4	-	-	12		-	22	790	Good
Great Britain	-	12	15	-	-	-		-	27	353	Good
Russia	6	*5	**3	\$6	%4	4		NA	28	820	Shaken – *Kovno and Leipaja recaptured **Grodno recaptured \$ Brest recaptured % Bialystok recaptured
Italy	-	-	-	-	-	-		-	-	99	Good
Romania	-	-	-	-	-	2		-	2	2	
Belgium	-	-	-	-	-	-		NA	-	(105)	NA
Serbia	-	-	-	-	-	-		NA	-	(39)	NA
Entente	6	23	22	6	4	18		-	79	2050	

Player Notes

CP:

- East: The EF is very interesting again if a little untidy. I attack again in Lithuania to try and keep attriting him and keep him at bay. I am weak I the north now but still strong enough to be able to hold my line and also muster a small offensive capability. The terrain is also pretty open allowing for good odds on low strength attacks and with poor counterattack potential; especially given the paucity of his supplies. If he uses supply for what will in any case be low strength CAtks, so much the better. If he doesn't, his chances of inflicting casualties are greatly diminished. It is fighting on the cheap for me but allows me to keep grinding him down or force him to disengage and withdraw, which will have a knock on effect along his whole thinly spread line lest he risk and outflanking opportunity for me. The vast central front is just one long, thin line of troops acting as blocks really for both sides. Offensive capability is minimal. Further south is both messy and interesting with enormous concentrations of Russian troops but scarce supply. I also hold some strong positions and am able to free up a large proportion of my German*

combat power whilst still bolstering AH defences. The front here is lapping into Romania and forcing the Russians to shift forces southwards, but he lacks strength and I will seize a bridgehead across the Siret River by driving back his cavalry screen. This bridgehead will allow me to attack – in some strength – into the open country of this part of Romania. The attack against his Cav screen requires no supply if he stands, but I suspect he won't. Another attack further north along the Siret will also force a withdrawal and allow me to start driving a wedge into the Russian 11<sup>th</sup> Army. In the Carpathians I am thin but need only deter him from moving through here, which he would have to do without supply. I suspect this area of the front might take on the flavour of a Mexican standoff. On the Bulgarian border, I hold a thin line along the Danube but have launched a limited attack, with Turkish flank support, from Varna towards Constanta. A Turkish corps HQ is en route to provide for the TU div attached to the Bulgarian 3<sup>rd</sup> Army.

- *Balkans: I am hastily trying to anchor my right flank here. He is not strong enough to attack on this flank but can keep peeling around it.*
- *West: I do nothing on the WF this turn but hold position.*
- *Caucasus: The Turkish 5<sup>th</sup> Army HQ now takes command of a new sector in this theatre encompassing all forces from the river Karusu to the Black Sea. The front was too long for a single army HQ to adequately extend command and control over it.*
- *Mesopotamia: Quiet – and extravagantly hot.*
- *Palestine: As above.*
- *Italy: Given the pressure I'm starting to exert on the Romanian front, I am expecting the Italians to start trying to wear down AH strength and morale imminently.*

AP: My French attack was designed to remind the CP that the threat in the West has not gone entirely away. The result (7:13 against but the Russians reduce French DM to 12) was not so good and is a reminder I cannot just let loose with the French without limit. The aim was to encourage the Germans to temper their aggression in the East and making another significant step towards Submarine Warfare. It would be a stretch for me to make it happen in September but it could happen if the Germans lose a lot of DM in the East now as a result of their own operations.

The other thing about my French attack is it had a lot of Artillery support. This is critical for the French because it reduces their losses relative to the amount of firepower they deliver. I am also making good use of the French railway guns. They can join an attack from a position some way away and help conceal intentions.

The Russians have also defensively deployed Artillery on their front on the Bug and a brigade participated in the last CP attack on this line. I am reluctant to use supply for defending infantry on this front now but it is worthwhile to use it on defending Artillery. I mentioned also that the CP massing of Artillery to counterattack at Lemberg was another distinctive use of Artillery prompted by shortage of Infantry. That is three contrasting uses of Artillery in the last few turns.

This shows there is not one use for Artillery in this game but there are multiple motivations which vary according to situation. Sometimes they go unused for a period and it is hard to find advantageous uses (most infantry also sit out most turns quietly too). They are specialised weapons which are not suited for every situation.