

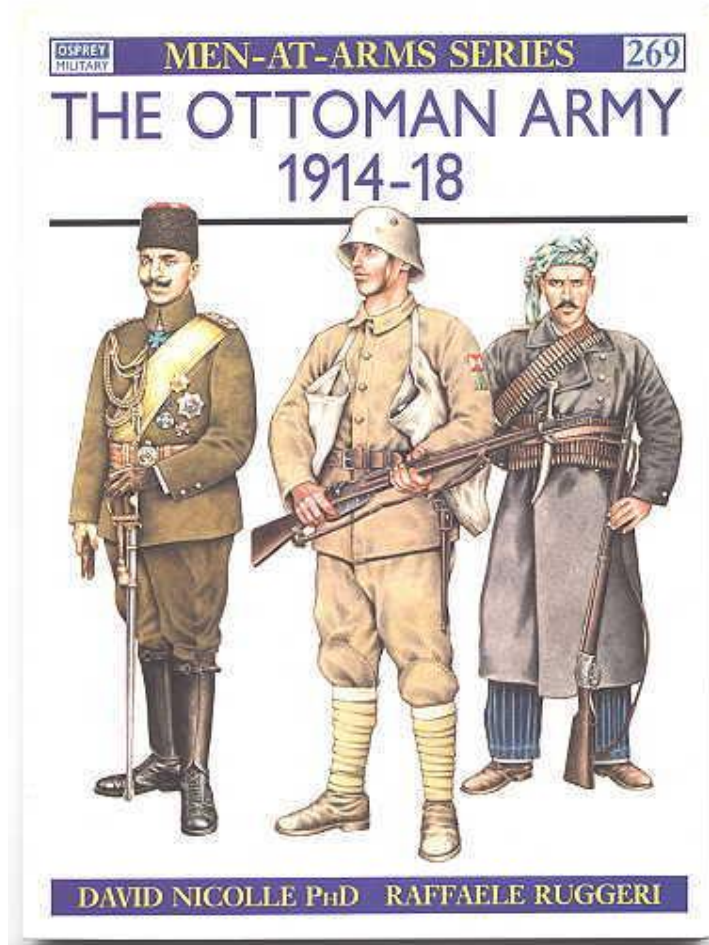
## The Ottoman Army 1914-18

Osprey Men-at-Arms series No. 269 (1994)

Text by David Nicolle; colour plates by Raffaele Ruggeri

Review by Rob Morgan

The armies of the Ottoman Empire fought on a score of fronts during the course of the Great War, having been in action during the Balkan Wars and modernized to some extent, along with the navy and fledgling air arm, after the 1909 palace revolution.



David Nicolle deals with the outbreak of war for the Turkish Empire (a decent, coherent map of Turkish territories is to be found on page 4) and he provides a chronology of the conflict from the signing of the treaty with the Germans in August 1914 to the collapse and Armistice in October 1918, and beyond, mentioning but not, sadly, examining the 1919 war of *ö*liberationö against the Allied armies of occupation in Anatolia. For the Turks, the Great War didn't end until 1923 or 1924, of course, and the final expulsion of the Greek army and destruction of the ancient Greek colonies of the coast.

The army -- there's a very useful two-page

organisation list, including those substantial elements serving in Europe proper -- along with air support, is covered first in terms of structure and its relation to Islam. Nicolle describes the ever present desertion problem, which might well be termed *ö*changing sides,ö as the Armenians, almost to a man, seem to have moved to the Russian army, and the Arabs were not far behind in joining the British. The German advisors, around 500 from early on, suggested wholesale shootings, but with army rations having fallen below subsistence level on most fronts by late 1917, even the Anatolian Turks were heading homewards in droves. The uniforms of the Ottomans, far from complex, which is useful for the wargamer, are dealt with, as is the equipment. Of course, increasingly German, and some Austrian and captured enemy equipment, became fairly standard issue as the war progressed, and by the time of the appalling

winter of 1915-16, an appeal to the population of Istanbul resulted in the issue of civilian warm clothing at the fronts, especially Gallipoli.

Nicolle goes on to deal with Ottoman logistics, which were dreadful. 'Ill-prepared for war' would be a real understatement, and German 'experts' seemed more or less unable to alter affairs! The tale of Ottoman small arms is fascinating to read. There was as great a shortage of rifles and pistols in the Ottoman forces of 1917 as there was in the Confederate army in the spring of 1865. It was that bad. The artillery was an interesting part of almost every European gun foundry's products over 40 years, though I'd like to have seen more information here. The dearth of machine guns, and of mountain artillery, in particular, must have been a nightmare on several of the northern fronts.

The author examines the extent of German influence, which was substantial, but could have been greater and could have been used with greater effect. A number of German combat units arrived in Palestine toward the end of the war, but had they been available during the Suez phase, they might have achieved a good deal. Transport, both rail and road, is considered, and again the astonishing ineffectiveness of the German advisors is apparent. Having built a motor road from Istanbul to Sivas, a distance of several hundred miles, the fact that the Ottomans had no motor transport to use it meant that Germany had to send lorries but these the Ottomans had no experience of at all!

The navy was fairly active against Russian forces in the Black Sea and the defensive strength of the Dardanelles gave few opportunities for sorties against overwhelmingly larger enemy forces off the coast. The creation and sustaining of the infant Ottoman air force suggests an intriguing tale. In fact, by 1917, some Turkish squadrons, Nicolle tells us, consisted of merely a 'single aircraft with two pilots and two observers.' Other squadrons included captured aeroplanes.

The closing section deals with Auxiliaries and Allies, a subject touched upon in greater detail in Osprey MAA 208, on 'Lawrence and the Arab Revolts.' This completes a fascinating pen portrait of a vast empire with far too many problems ever to be solved. The author considers the Armenians, an army in their own right after 1918, and the Kurds, who provided immense numbers of auxiliary cavalry. The tale of the diverse units such as the Georgian Volunteer Legion, raised in the Caucasus, seems to ring an early bell for World War II, and the Persian invasions -- by Britain, Russia and Turkey and their puppet armies would make for a brilliant campaign on the map, if not the table top. He closes with a comment on the lesser fronts, Somaliland, Eritrea and Ethiopia, where the Turks had long held ambitions. The 'Mad Mullah,' an Ottoman ally, continued to be active as an enemy until the 1920s and RAF air power saw him off.

The photographs are delightful, but I'm afraid the plates are rather poor in this volume and the subjects not brilliantly chosen. Though B3, the Arab bicycle infantryman, and the Kurd auxiliary at Plate C3 are unusual to say the least. The specialist troops in Plate D, the ski trooper and the Yilderim 1918 Turkish 'stormtrooper' are better than, say, the plate of the Istanbul Fire Brigade or the Afghan prince! For better and more useful illustrations, take a look at Osprey's Warrior 145 on the Turkish infantryman.

The Turks are far from well represented in terms of wargames figures. No armour existed, of course, and virtually nothing motorized beyond a few staff cars. But you can, in 20/25mm scale, turn to the B&B Miniaturesø Allanby (*sic*) range, which are attractive, and if you choose these then the Airfix 1/72nd Arabs will provide a few unusual allied figures. You could use a couple of EMHAR 1/72<sup>nd</sup> WWI German guns, and a few of the crew figures to beef out the ranks. Or the Austrian gunners from HAT, of course. Frontlines IT range have some good Turk and Arab figures, though Iøve never bought any of them.

The best option as always is 15mm. Look first at Irregulars Balkan Wars figures for Turks in the fez, rather attractive too, and then at their 1870-1918 range for the post-revolution Turkish army figures. There are 10 packs in all and nicely designed. Incidentally, for post war opponents try the Greek army figures by Irregular, again unusual. They knock out a few Montenegrins which can be converted (pun) with little effort to Balkan Muslim auxiliaries.

Peter Pig sadly, hasnø ventured into the Ottoman world for some reason, but in the WWI range, pack 149, described as 15mm Freikorps will serve very well as Yilderim steel-helmeted assault troops (Plate D1); and in their Sudan Range 22, the Bashi Bazouks foot and especially the mounted versions would be ideal Kurdish auxiliaries, very much so in fact. A German senior officer crops up in the WWI range too, if you want a little assistance at HQ. Of course the øPigø German guns or a few British post-Kut captured weapons will serve well. I do like the Irregular howitzer too, a hefty beast. While an Ottoman Air Force comes from øTumbling Diceø in 1/600<sup>th</sup> scale.