

# *Armies of the Greek-Turkish War 1919-22*

By Rob Morgan

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This Osprey Men-at-Arms title, No.501 in the series, by Philip S. Jowett and illustrated by Stephen Walsh has been waiting for my attention for some time now, simply because this is such a complex and astonishing subject. The Osprey titles on Lawrence and the Arab Revolts and the many campaigns of the Turks after 1900 provide something of a backdrop, but as with other Central Powers states, or what survived of them, the Great War didn't end with the Armistice for the Ottomans!



Much of the rump of the Ottoman Empire was occupied by Allied forces from 1919-22 and with Greece belatedly having entered the Great War against the Turks, she was encouraged to invade and occupy the western third of the mainland up to what was called the Milne Line. They were resisted successfully by Ataturk leading the remnants of the Ottoman army and a host of irregulars. That's the basis of this text, but in fact as the detailed Chronology tells, there were three wars fought between 1919 and 1922 across what's now called Turkey. The French fought the Turkish Nationalists, there was a short and bitter war in which Turkey crushed the Armenian army, and then in June 1920, the Greeks began a general advance into Anatolia, occupying the territory up to the Milne line. Other 'chunks' of Turkish territory were occupied by French and Italian forces, and the war began in earnest in early 1921 with the first of a number of small scale but brutal battles on the road towards Ankara, which with Constantinople occupied by

the Allies had become the new Turkish capital.

The opposing forces were vastly different. Greece with 126,000 men, had an artillery park of over 400 pieces, some 4,000 machine guns and about 20 aircraft, facing a similar number of Turks with only 160 guns, 700 machine guns and 4 planes. The Turks had signed an agreement with the new Soviet government, and this brought them a substantial arsenal. After Greece gained several military successes across the barren plains and hills of Anatolia, the Turks stopped the Greek army at the River Sakarya in a three week long battle. It was far from a victory for the Turks, but the Greeks withdrew.

A lengthy winter stalemate along a line which ran from the Sea of Marmara to the Aegean, saw a French withdrawal from its occupied zone, and the Turks raised new armies, especially cavalry

troops. The Greeks by this time were using well over two-thirds of their strength in defending rear areas, there was in effect a civil war between Islamic and Greek Orthodox populations, militias and irregulars waging almost everywhere including within the cities like Smyrna. Eventually, in the summer of 1922, at the week long battle of Dumlupinar, the Turkish cavalry broke through *en masse* and broke up the Greek front line troops. Within a month rapid advances led to the Turkish recapture of almost all territory lost to the initial invasion, far beyond the Milne line. The final stages of the campaign forced Greek troops to head for the western ports in penny packets, fighting rearguard actions along the way, in order to be evacuated, amid scenes of massacre.



**Greek Army**

The final phase was their evacuation by Allied ships, and the collapse of Greek power at home and on the mainland of Asia Minor. The Greek commander was shot by his own Government for the disaster. The losses on each side, in terms of men are still unreliable to this day, Jowett gives figures which are as he says incomplete; yet the loss of materiel, 40,000 rifles, 2,000+ machine guns, 1,400+ motor vehicles, and a dozen aircraft are probably reasonably accurate. It was a military adventure into which Greece was enticed and then abandoned especially by the French Government, and which was doomed to fail. Invading Turkey had something of the air of marching into Russia about it.

The text of this volume, much, well in fact most, of which was new to me, deals with the Greek Army - its composition, and this is indeed an Allied army with some differences to others I've encountered, with its Armenian allies, short lived as a nation and the irregulars who fought alongside them. Interesting information neatly described. The Turkish forces next; the doomed and crumbling Ottoman army of 1919, and the mass of nationalist irregulars and the new Ankara based regular army which won the war. All well described for the wargamer, as is the Caliphate Army, what survived as a mere remnant of the huge Ottoman army of the Great War, reformed by the Allies as a bulwark against Attaturk's new nationalists, and crushed by them in battle with astonishing speed. This army rapidly assembled grew to around 200,000 men by the end of the war. Many of course had fought in the earlier wars of the Balkans, Arabia and Palestine.

There are some useful, as far as the wargamer's concerned, sections on the weapons of each army and it's supporting irregulars. As might be expected a hotch-potch of rifles, and WWI heavy machine guns; the Greeks had lots of the awful Chauchat light machine guns. Artillery for the most part was French in Greek service, and old Central Powers and Ottoman guns with the Turks, but from 1921 the Italians and French sold arms and ammunition to the Turks as well! Motor transport was inadequate; neither side possessed an adequate pool of vehicles, and the

desert-like conditions of Anatolia made for many breakdowns. Camels and women porters were extensively employed. It was interesting to learn that the Turks acquired at least seven FT17 light tanks, and used them in the latter stages of the war. Greece had no armour to speak of, apart from one or two British Peerless armoured cars. There were some WWI aircraft on both sides. Greece had some DH9's, and SPAD's and Nieuport fighters, and the Turks had a few old Albatross D.III's, while later in the war, they bought twenty SPAD XIII's. There were few air to air encounters.

The description of the uniforms, I use the word lightly, worn beggar's belief. The Greek 1908 green khaki uniform was soon supplemented with US army kit as well as Canadian and French gear, some in horizon blue it seems- a good deal of Serbian issued kit too. Greek headgear was varied, and the steel helmet was the French Adrian where it was issued. The account of insignia and rank badges is a valuable addition to the wargamer's file.



**Turkish Nationalist Army**

The Turkish irregulars dressed like bandits, and the Nationalist army was often kitted out in the old Ottoman gear of 1914-18, with later on French, American and Italian items where they could be obtained, often entire units were to be found in say, Italian kit. Their cavalry tended to wear the best of what was available. Insignia was simple of course, and there were a few units used as 'stormtroopers' with steel helmets. Kit generally, especially water bottles and packs, were in very short supply. The problems of uniform and gear and weapons are reflected in the plates which are excellent. Greek troops on the whole are shown well supplied in plates A, B and C. The Turks are shown in a variety of uniforms, usually with simple cylindrical cloth peasant headgear rather than the old WWI issue peak-less *kabalak* helmet. The Armenian soldier shown in plate H3 is virtually dressed as a Russian. The irregulars are a little neater than they should be of course, but the general idea is there!

The set piece battles were little short of long-distance slogging matches, apart from the Turkish breakthrough at Dumlupinar, which is a classic cavalry manoeuvre. However, the massive problems of the interior lines of the Greeks lend themselves to the prospect of numerous raids, ambushes and attacks on support columns – all very interesting for smaller scale table top encounters. In many ways this was an early 'partisan' war, or comparable to the struggles in say, Yugoslavia or Ukraine in the mid-war period of WWII.

### **On the table top**

The best range of figures for these Asia Minor fights are to be found in Irregular Miniatures 15mm ranges for 'The Balkan Wars' and '1870-1918'. A few items from 'Peter Pig's 15mm WWI range to 'top them up'.....

In the Balkan range the Turkish lancers serve well for the late war 'elite' Turk cavalry, while a few of the infantry, and maybe one or two of the gun crew will also serve, as will the senior officer figure. The WWI Turks are good for the Caliphate troops, but will need a headgear change for the Nationalists. Look at 'Peter Pig's' WWI 'Belgian Grenadier' heads for instance, ideal. Guns in either range, and there are enough MG's about to suit any choice, but the rotten little 'Chauchat' will have to be ever so slightly scratch-built, not difficult though. The 'Pig' Turks supply a few odd items, like 'boys; for porters, and this is where you find casualties too. The irregulars on this side can come from the same source, Montenegrin troops, but one or two delights crop up. In the 'Colonial' range FIM6 is a mutineer with pistol who looks ideal, and FIM8 is a cavalryman of cut-throat style. Both companies make an FT17.

There are ten packs of excellent Greek figures in the same range, including infantry, cavalry, elite Evzones and artillery. You can also use a few of the Serbian troops for a little more variety among the Greeks. While the 'adrian' helmeted Italians in the Irregular WWI range, especially NC 123, 4 etc, will provide troops wearing helmets. The 'Montenegrins' in the range will do, with very little alteration at all, for auxiliaries and volunteer irregulars on the Greek side. French field guns from the same source, 'Peter Pig,' have the same on offer, and you can drop in a larger WWI British piece if you feel the need. As always you'll have to dig around for decent early motorised transport, but there are plenty of camels and mules around in the scale. Mick Yarrow's are the best priced.

The Armenians can be simply peaked cap Russians repainted. And of course you can slip in French colonials for the early struggles, and standard Irregular WWI Italians too. Aircraft, but no dog-fights, from Tumbling Dice and Irregular. Finally, although there was an invasion, of sorts, by sea, and a massive evacuation, almost on the scale of Dunkirk if you include civilians, there was no real naval aspect to this war.