

Ahmet Diriker. *42nd Regiment – Gallipoli 1915*. Translated by Ebru Diriker. Toronto: Lindenbrooks Publishing, 2018. Pp. 171.

*42nd Regiment – Gallipoli 1915* is a narrative of an Ottoman infantry regiment at Gallipoli from the perspective of its commander, Major Ahmet Nuri Bey, and relayed to us by his grandson Ahmet Diriker. I would characterise it as an annotated chronology of the war diaries of the 42nd Infantry Regiment and its parent organisation, the Ottoman Army's 14th Infantry Division. The period covers 24 July 1915 through 11 January 1916, when the victorious Ottomans withdrew the 14th Division from the peninsula.

Major Ahmet Nuri Bey's well-trained regiment arrived in the peninsula as the final British offensive was getting underway in August 1915 and was posted to the Kevreş Dere sector (on the eastern side of the lower Gallipoli peninsula). The regiment held the line against the French on Cape Helles during the August 1915 allied offensives. The regiment had been deployed to the battle lines in late July 1915 as part of the 14th Infantry Division, which was commanded by Colonel Kâzım Bey (who would later become famous in the Turkish War of Independence as Lieutenant General Kâzım Karabekir). It had previously been stationed at Şile to guard against a possible Russian amphibious landing but then redeployed to Saros Bay to guard the beaches against a British landing.

The author's methodology is to use his grandfather's regiment's war diaries and records in concert with Ottoman and French war diaries and histories to compose the narrative. The author's integration of the opposing sides' primary sources, making use of both French and Ottoman divisional and regimental war diaries for context, makes this an unusually balanced book. This is an extremely tactical and micro-level history of a commander and his regiment at war against the French and there is nothing quite like it out there as the remaining body of work from Ottoman participants focuses on combat against the British and Anzacs. The book is organised chronologically into four parts: "Before August 1915," "The 42nd Regiment in the Front-Line Trenches," "Trench Warfare," and "The Road to Victory."

Diriker narrates the story of a very successful experience in the front lines by the regiment; with "successful" being defined as fulfilling its defensive missions, albeit at the expense of costly casualties in dead and wounded. Structurally the text is built around

Ahmet Nuri's combat orders and reports. This gives the narrative an authenticity which much of the first-person literature of the campaign lacks. There are no significant errors in translation and the text reads easily and enjoyably. The personality, professionalism and humanity of Ahmet Nuri comes through the pages in a refreshingly vivid style. There are minor errors of historical fact; for example, Diriker states that the allies "sent the biggest fleet the world had ever seen" to the Dardanelles (p. 18) and that the Ottoman plan put "weaker troops along the coastline and stronger troops as reserves in the back" (p. 19). I would also note the author's surprising use of the term "Turks," when the proper historical term should be "Ottomans." The regiment, while it likely contained a majority of ethnic Turks, was an Ottoman Army regiment which certainly contained men of ethnic minorities resident in the empire.

Of interest to specialists of the Gallipoli Campaign is the commentary on what were called mining operations, which were conducted by specialised groups of tunneling engineers. Tunnels would be driven under the front lines, packed with explosives, and then detonated to create a physical gap in the trench lines. As the allied August offensives collapsed, both sides turned to tunneling operations in hopes of creating a local opportunity to advance. The Ottomans detected French mining operations and brought in German engineering specialists to assess the situation. This resulted in the initiation of Ottoman counter-mining operations. A number of mines were detonated by both sides in late October and early November, resulting in casualties but which failed to create favourable conditions necessary for a breakthrough. Also of interest is the nearly constant bombardment of artillery, mortars and grenades, which caused a constant flow of casualties to the rear, forcing Ottoman commanders to make significant efforts to maintain morale and fighting spirit.

Steve Chambers has reviewed this book in *The Gallipolitan*, pointing out its value for being "from the other side of the hill" and as a unique piece of the literature because it details the intense fighting in the French sector.<sup>1</sup> I would agree. As a specialist on the campaign, let me add that Diriker's work is important because it adds to a growing literature illuminating the capabilities and capacity of the Ottoman Army at war in 1915. We see here, in this short

<sup>1</sup> Steve Chambers, "Review of *42nd Regiment – Gallipoli 1915* by Ahmet Diriker," *The Gallipolitan* 148 (Winter 2018), 63.

book, a regiment which was in control of its battlefield space and, moreover, a regiment which was situationally and spatially aware due to a comprehensive system of combat reports. Because of this, Ahmet Nuri had a better understanding of the combat environment than his opponents and this allowed him to make rapid and effective decisions. We see proactive commanders constantly working to better their defences as well as taking care of their soldiers. Of note is the cooperative relationship between Ahmet Nuri's 42nd Infantry Regiment and his sister 55th Infantry Regiment, which occupied the adjacent sector of trenches. Time and again, these regiments came to each other's aid, without direction from above, using their own local initiative. This is the hallmark of a great army.

It is also notable that the story continues through the end of the war when, after Gallipoli, Ahmet Nuri and his regiment were sent to join Fahrettin Paşa and the Hejaz Expeditionary Force in Medina. It is largely unremembered that Fahrettin Paşa refused to surrender his force until two and a half months after the Mudos Armistice putatively ended the First World War in the Middle East. While this book may be difficult to find in Canada or the US, it is well worth the trouble for students of the Great War and for Gallipoli enthusiasts. I recommend this interesting and valuable book without hesitation or reservation.

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