

First World War in the Balkans and the Middle East

Author: Lucas Willen

Date: 08-12-06 10:08

Does anyone have any information or thoughts regarding the organisation of armies in the Balkan theatre for Battlefront eg Serbia, Austria Hungary, Bulgaria, Montenegro, Russia. Info down to brigade level is easy to obtain but the information I need is for battalion level and below.

Likewise, does anyone have any information regarding the Turks who were also involved in the Balkan campaigns as well as the better known campaigns in the Middle East.

Regards

Luke

Author: Mark Hayes

Date: 08-14-06 11:02

The answers depend on what time period you are looking for. If you are considering 1914 it is pretty easy. Almost everybody's infantry company had a field strength of around 200 men in four platoons. The Germans and Romanians had three platoons. I can work on more detail if that is the time period you are interested in.

If you are looking at the later part of the war, the answers are more difficult to come by. The Osprey books provide some sketchy info, but I couldn't do anything with the degree of confidence that I did for the Western Front.

What one really needs to research from are some of the excellent studies reprinted by the Battery Press. I have seen these books, but I do not own any of them. These entries are taken from the On Military Matters catalog:

British General Staff *ARMIES OF THE BALKAN STATES, 1914-1918* A compilation of handbooks on the Balkan States, covers o/b's, training, (14) uniform/insignia plates, b/w maps. Covers Bulgarian, Greek, Montenegrin, Rumanian and Serbian forces. 1 vol, 411 pgs 1997 NASHVILLE, BATTERY PRESS

War Office General Staff *AUSTRO-HUNGARIAN FORCES IN THE FIELD, OCTOBER 1918* The order of battle at the close of WWI, it also includes a breakdown of the command structure and a description of each unit from Army level down to artillery companies. 1 vol, 225 pgs 1994 NASHVILLE, BATTERY PRESS

anon-British General Staff *HANDBOOK OF THE RUSSIAN ARMY, 1914* Details the administration, organization, use of Infantry, Cavalry, Artillery, Engineers, Support Services, and much more, b/w illust, appendicies. 1 vol, 336 pgs 1996 NASHVILLE, BATTERY PRESS

Erickson, Edward J. *ORDERED TO DIE: The Ottoman Army in World War One* The first english language general history on the subject, based on newly available Turkish archives a detailed look at the army that fought a multi- front war & kept fighting until the end, biblio. 1 vol, 304 pgs 2001 WESTPORT, GREENWOOD PUBLISHERS

anon-British Intelligence Section, Cairo *HANDBOOK OF THE TURKISH ARMY, 1916* Details the administration, organization, use of Infantry, Cavalry, Artillery, Engineers, Support Services, and much more, b/w illust, appendicies. 1 vol, 235 pgs 1996 NASHVILLE, BATTERY PRESS

von Sanders, General Liman *FIVE YEARS IN TURKEY* Von Sanders was chief of the German Military Mission to Turkey from 1913-1918, he was also the commander of the Turkish 1st, the 5th & later Army Group F in Syria, 18 maps, important WWI memoir. 1 vol, 326 pgs 2000 NASHVILLE, BATTERY PRESS

Falls, Cyril *MILITARY OPS IN MACEDONIA: V1* Details the struggle between Serbia & Austria, the landing of Allied forces in Greece, the Salonika front, the intervention of Rumania, o/b's of both Allied & enemy forces 1916, maps, appendicies. 1 vol, 472 pgs 1996

NASHVILLE, BATTERY PRESS

A good website for the Austro-Hungarian Army is:
<http://www.austro-hungarian-army.co.uk/index.htm>

In particular the 1914 organization is at:
<http://www.austro-hungarian-army.co.uk/inforg1.html>

Mark

Author: Lucas Willen
Date: 08-14-06 14:17

Thanks for the info Mark. So, most companies should contain, in TOE terms, a strength of 18 - 20 stands?

1914 organisations for Eastern European, Balkan and Turkish armies would be a good place to start. One thing I have read about the Turkish army is that they were underofficered and their companies were under strength so this might be worth considering in terms of commanders. Maybe the Turks should onl have a commander at company level?

So far as I am aware there were no major changes in the composition of an infantry company in the case of most armies specified in my original post although there were changes at a higher level such as additional machine gun companies. This information is relatively easy to obtain from sources as the World War One Sourcebook and the First World War Databook.

I would be willing to start working out stats for these armies if you could put them into card fromat.

Luke

Author: Mark Hayes
Date: 08-14-06 15:48

Luke,

If we looked at things more by organization than numbers, the typical company had 16 sections: 4 platoons of 4 sections each. So if we had one stand equal a section then a company would have 16 infantry stands plus 1 commander stand.

Russian battalions marched off before they were fully mobilized. I can't remember the details, but I once decided that Russian companies should be 3/4 the strength of German or Austro-Hungarian companies.

Turks were always very much understrength; 1/2 not being unusual.

There are some changes to company organization as the war goes on, even in the relatively backward Eastern Front. The most common change is the ad hoc formation of 'grenadiers' or 'bombers', which become a necessity of life in the trenches. The Russian Army institutionalized this change at the end of 1915 by converting the 4th platoon in each company to 'grenadiers', arming each man with 10 grenades, a shovel, and wire cutters. Some men in the platoon were also given pistols or carbines. According the Osprey book on the Russian Army in WWI, it is unclear how widespread the practice became, but it definitely occurred in the XXV Army Corps, the Grenadier Corps, and the Special Army.

It also become common practice for armies to form assault detachments later in the war. The Austro-Hungarian assault detachments first appeared at the beginning of 1917 after volunteers were trained by the Germans. By the summer of 1918 each division supposedly had an assault battalion of three infantry companies, MG company, infantry gun platoon, light mortar platoon, and flamethrower platoon. The first Russian assault detachment deployed to the front in the summer of 1917 as the 1st Storm Detachment consisting of

two infantry battalions, 3 machine gun companies (8 MGs each), a dismounted scout detachment (16 men) and a mounted scout detachment (16 men). I don't have any information handy, but I recall that the Turks had formed assault detachments by late in the war as well.

This is just speculation, but I imagine the Serbs that fought with the Entente forces at Salonika eventually adopted the organization of the French. They seemed to have been received support from the French in other respects.

Romanians, coming rather late to the game, probably did not have much of a chance to modify they starting TO&E too much.

Mark

Author: Lucas Willen ()
Date: 08-15-06 11:46

Starting with the Bulgarians, for the simple reason that I have a Bulgarian army in 1:300 Bulgarian Infantry Battalions had approximately 1000 men each at full strength so I think a regimental organisations should look something like this:(based on the information provided in The World War1 Databook and The World War 1 Sourcebook)

Regimental Headquarters

1 Commander

Regimental Machine Gun Company

2 Heavy Machine guns

3 Infantry Battalions each with

Battalion Headquarters

1 Commander

6 Infantry Companies each with

1 Commander

4 platoons with

1 Commander (see discussion below)

4 Infantry

In a Bulgarian Infantry Division there were 2 infantry regiments per brigade and 3 brigades in a division.

Infantry were equipped with the 1888 and 1895 Mannlicher Rifle in about equal quantities. Machineguns were the 8mm Maxim Machinegun mostly wheel mounted and a few mounted on tripods)

Bulgarian Infantry Divisions had 2 Cavalry squadrons of 150 men (136 sabers) so let us say that each squadron should have something like

1 Cavalry Commander

10 Cavalry stands

Cavalry were equipped with the Mannlicher Carbine but occasionally might use the old Berdan Carbine instead.

Artillery support comprised a field artillery regiment and a Mixed Artillery Regiment.

Field Artillery Regiments had 9 field batteries each of 4 75mm Cruesot guns.(1 or 2 models per battery)

The Mixed Artillery Regiment had 6 Field batteries as above.(75mm Cruesot Guns, sometimes

87mm Krupp guns) Some divisions were given an additional Field Howitzer battery of 4 105mm Schneider-Crucesot howitzers and/or a mountain artillery battery of 4 75mm Shnieder Mountain guns.

Sometimes guns could be replaced with the older S75 or 87mm Krupp guns, 120 and 150mm Krupp Howitzers and 75mm Krupp Mountain guns as appropriate to the unit

The Infantry Division had a Pioneer Battalion of 2 infantry companies. Without further information I would assume a strength similar to that of the infantry companies,

A Bulgarian Cavalry Division had 2 Cavalry brigades each of two regiments.

The Cavalry Regiment was organised into 4 squadrons each of 147 men saber strength 130) with an attached machine gun section

Regimental Organisation should be something like

Regimental Headquarters

1 Commander
2 Heavy Machineguns

4 - 6 Cavalry Squadrons

1 Cavalry Commander
10 Cavalry Stands

Divisional Artillery support was 2 Horse batteries each of 4 75mm Guns presumably also Schneider-Crucesot (1 or 2 model guns per battery)

Bulgaria started the war with 9 Infantry divisions rising to 14 by the time of the armistice. The Bulgarian army fielded 1 Cavalry Division at the start of the war and raised a second in 1917/18. So far as I am aware there were no significant organizational changes during the war/

The Bulgarian army served in the Balkans during the Serbian, Rumanian and Macedonian campaigns which provide it with a range of interesting potential opponents including French, British, Serbs, Italians and Russians. It might be allied to Germans, Austrians and Turks.

Obviously any suggestions or further organizational information would be welcome.

Luke

Author: Lucas Willen
Date: 08-16-06 05:24

I am taking the original First World War TOEs available on this site for Britain, France, Germany and Belgium as my template. These permit the use of the platoon as the ME. However, First World War units do also have the infamous Field Craft rule to contend with and the Bulgarians should probably have a relatively poor rating on this score, either a 1 or 2 depending on the experience of the unit and stage of the war.

Looking at the designers notes in the Over The Top rules the communications problem actually occurred at a higher level (i.e. battalion to brigade and divisional level. Junior commanders were expected to use their initiative. Remember, an infantry commander still only has a command radius of 5 inches. We should perhaps be developing a battalion and brigade level orders system to simulate the higher level C3I problems. There is something that I am currently working on that is virtually ready for WW2 and modern but still needs work for the First World War period.

Looking at the information on the Bulgarian army in the World War 1 Sourcebook it was well trained and officers had a good rapport with their men. The army had recent military

experience in the 1912 and 1913 Balkan Wars. Under the 1904 Army Law all able bodied males spent 2 years in the regular army, then 8 in the active reserves, 7 in the reserve army and finally served in the opolchenie retiring at 46. All of this would indicate considerable military experience (Bulgaria was often referred to as the "Prussia of the Balkans" at this time)

Having said that it would probably have a somewhat worse Fieldcraft rating early in the war. I would also include a morale modifier on the maneuver table to simulate lower morale in 1918

In the case of certain other armies such as Russia and Turkey I would agree that officers should be removed from the MEs at some stage of the war to simulate their lack of flexibility

Luke
Author: Mark Hayes
Date: 08-16-06 09:35

The idea behind the Platoon Sub-Maneuver Elements (SMEs) was to limit flexibility, not create a new ME. A platoon should not have a commander. I had not decided exactly how the SME should work because we never did in any playtesting. But the basic idea is that the units of the platoon must remain within a certain distance on the table from each other, perhaps 2". Thus, if one unit of the platoon is pinned down by fire, the others do not maneuver independently. This contrasts with the Stosstruppen and other assault companies that show up during the war, where the units can maneuver independently like a WWII formation. I thought this was a way to simulate this fundamental change in tactics during the war through a relatively simple game mechanic.

Mark
Author: Lucas Willen
Date: 08-16-06 11:51

My impression of the First World War is that junior commanders were often expected to, and had to, act on their own initiative which is why I felt that, at least for some of the better armies, they might be included.

However, bearing Mark's comments in mind I would have no objections to removing the platoon commanders.

When we come to do the Russian and Turkish armies would it be a good idea to remove company commanders from the MEs as well, depending on the year of the war as suggested in my previous post? This would be to simulate lack of officers due to casualties and was the approach used in Greg Novak's Over The Top rules.

Luke
Author: Lucas Willen ()
Date: 08-17-06 06:16

Turkish Infantry Division. In theory battalions had a book strength of between 700 and 900 men. In reality companies could have as few as 100 men. Below I will provide the book strength for Turkish units. Scenario designers may reduce the strength to suit their scenarios.

There were 3 types of Turkish Division: th Nizam (Regular Army), Redif I and Redif II (Reservists).

An infantry division had 3 Regiments organised as follows

Regimental Headquarters

1 Commander

3 Nizam Infantry Battalions each with

1 Commander
2 Machineguns

4 Infantry Companies each with

1 Commader

4 Platoons each with

3 Infantry

OR

3 Redif I Infantry battalions each with

1 Commander
2 Machineguns

4 Infantry Companies each with

1 Commader

4 Platoons each with

5 Infantry

OR

3 Redif II battalions each with

1 Commander
2 Machineguns

4 Infantry Companies each with

1 Commader

4 Platoons each with

4 Infantry

1 Artillery Regiment

1 commander

6 - 9 batteries each with 2 guns. Artillery included 75mm Krupp guns (some of the 1905 pattern), 75mm Schnieder Mountain Guns,, some old German 87mm field guns. The Turks also had a few 150mm Krupp and Schnieder howitzers)

Turkish Cavalry Brigade

3 Cavalry Regiments each with

Headquarters

1 Commander
2 Machineguns

If Redif 4 Squadrons each with

1 Commander
10 Cavalry

If Nizam 5 squadrons organised as above

Note that Turkish cavalry was bad often with low quality horses and, in the reserve squadrons often untrained irregulars