

Die in Battle, Do not Despair: The Indians on Gallipoli 1915, by Peter Stanley, West Midlands: Helion, 2015, £25.00

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The First World War of 1914-1918 was a very significant event in the history of the world. It led to the dissolution of five empires and redrawing of the map of the world with consequences that resonate on the international arena till today. It also set the stage for an even greater conflict that was to follow 20 years after the Guns of August had fallen silent.

The centenary commemorations of the 'Great War' have led to fresh academic examinations of the conflict, as well as the results that emanated from it. This has included new perspectives on the role played by India in the conflict as well as the impact of the conflict on India. Over 1.4 million Indian soldiers fought in nearly every theatre of the war and earned over 9,200 decorations, including 11 Victoria Crosses at the cost of some 74,000 casualties. While the deployment of the Indian Army on the Western Front (France and Belgium)¹ and East Africa² has received some attention, its role in other theatres is conspicuous by its neglect.

The Allied campaign to force the Dardanelles and gain access to the Sea of Marmara beyond in order to force a possible Turkish surrender and thereby bring an early end to the war, has come to acquire a near-mythic significance in Australia and New Zealand in particular. For these young nations, the experience of Gallipoli came to symbolise the anvil upon which their national identities were forged. The role played by the gallant

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Turkish defenders under Mustafa Kemal Pasha, the founder of modern Turkey also ensured that Gallipoli would have a special significance in that nation's history as well. The memory of that momentous campaign continues to live on in these countries even till today and is remembered every year with near religious fervour on 25 April, hallowed as ANZAC Day. However, as is often the case with national commemorations, it is often forgotten that others shared the trials and tribulations of the campaign as well.

The story of the Indians at Gallipoli was almost entirely unknown until now. People in Turkey, Australia and New Zealand were almost unaware of the Indian presence at Gallipoli; but, more importantly, the people of India had no idea about it either. Peter Stanley's book *Die in Battle, Do not Despair: The Indians on Gallipoli 1915*, has finally managed to fill this void. This seminal theatre history brings to life in vivid detail not just the involvement of the Indian expeditionary force as a whole but includes hitherto unknown personal stories of many of the men who served there. The latter is no small feat, as anyone who has ever ventured to look for personal accounts of Indian soldiers from the war or for that matter any period would know that very little survives. The accounts used by the author in the book bring the narrative to life in a manner seldom experienced in writings on Indian military subjects and have painstakingly been dug out through extensive research from archives spread across several countries.

Indian soldiers at Gallipoli had, so far, found brief mentions in regimental histories and published diaries of British officers, and even these were at best accounts of their exploits painted with a broad brush. A fresh perspective was offered for the first time by the essay: 'Their Mercenary Calling: The Indian Army on Gallipoli, 1915'³, which attempted to shed more light upon this forgotten chapter in the history of the Indian army.

As one of the leading military historians in Australia, the author is eminently qualified to tell the story of the Indians at Gallipoli and he does this with great dexterity. He covers not just the fighting units of the 29th Indian Infantry Brigade but also goes into great detail about the invaluable services rendered by the Indian mountain batteries and the various Indian mule corps', without whose dedication and steadfast gallantry the campaign would have been untenable.

The author recounts the tale of the Indian deployment at Gallipoli starting from mobilisation and departure from India in October 1914

and the initial deployment in the defence of the Suez Canal in 1914-15, to the departure for Gallipoli as part of the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force in April 1915. The command and planning failures of the campaign are covered in detail by the author who notes that, 'the preparation of the Dardanelles expedition has become legendary as an abject definition in how to plan to fail.' The narrative then follows the trials and tribulations of the various components of the Indian Expeditionary Force 'G', as the Indian Army at Gallipoli was known, beginning with the landings of the 7th Indian Artillery Brigade on ANZAC on 25 April 1915. This is followed by the arrival and deployment of the Mule Corps and the 29th Indian Infantry Brigade at Cape Helles till the middle of June, before heavy casualties forced it to withdraw for recuperation and reinforcement to the island of Imbros. The heroic yet futile attempt to break out of ANZAC during the August offensive and the mismanaged landings at Suvla form a part of the engrossing narrative.

Close links between British officers who were well versed in the languages and traditions of the men and the troops that they commanded were a hallmark of the British Indian Army. These bonds transcended generations. The very heavy casualties that occurred at Gallipoli made the replacement of these officers extremely difficult. The author records a touching account of how Lieutenant (later Lieutenant General) Reginald Savory stayed in touch with the family of Ude Singh, the Indian soldier who had saved his life at Gallipoli long after the man had passed away. When Savory died in 1980, one of the first persons Lady Savory informed was Ude Singh's son in Chandigarh.

The author delves at length into the relationships between the ANZACs (Australia and New Zealand Army Corps) and their Indian comrades at arms by using hitherto unknown letters and diaries of the ANZAC soldiers. A recurrent theme in the book is the respect with which the ANZACs viewed the professionalism of the Indian soldier. He records friendships that were formed on the battlefield despite the racially polarised societies that the ANZACs came from. Among the numerous things that the Indians and ANZACs shared on Gallipoli were the Indian rations, which were far more palatable than the biscuits and bully beef of the ANZACs.

The book also significantly revises the statistical knowledge of the total number of Indian soldiers who served on Gallipoli. Previously believed to be approximately 4,500, the author convincingly postulates 16,000 as the total figure. Among the various useful appendices is a

nominal index of the 1,516 names of Indian soldiers who fell during the fighting and are listed on the Helles Memorial.

The book is easy to read and gripping. It is truly a remarkable story of camaraderie in adversity and the author deserves the highest praise for having resurrected it. The otherwise excellent narrative is occasionally marred by grammatical and spelling errors but this does not in any way detract from the overall quality of the work, which is perhaps unparalleled in Indian military history writing.

NOTES

1. Gordon Corrigan, *Sepoys in the Trenches: The Indian Corps on the Western Front 1914-15*, Spellmount Publishers Ltd, 2004; George Morton-Jack, *The Indian Army on the Western Front: India's Expeditionary Force to France and Belgium in the First World War*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014; Merewether and Frederick Smith, *The Indian Corps in France*, London: John Murray, 1918; J. Wilcox, *With the Indians in France*, London: Constable & Co, 1920.
2. S.D. Pradhan, *Indian Army in East Africa, 1914-1918*, New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1996.
3. Rana Chhina, 'Their Mercenary Calling: The Indian Army on Gallipoli, 1915', in Ashley Ekins (ed.), *Gallipoli: A Ridge Too Far*, Wollombi: Exisle Publishing, 2013.