

## #2

Disease posed a problem on all Ottoman fronts; their prevalence depended on climate and the particular circumstances at the frontlines. Typhus, for example, played a significant role in decimating the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army during the campaign against Russia led by Enver in January of 1915. While the climate in the Caucasus exacerbated the spread of typhus, this “winter disease” posed a problem on all fronts and especially where crowded and unsanitary circumstances facilitated the spread of lice. Malaria was most common in warmer climates and was the most frequent cause of sickness in soldiers stationed in Mesopotamia and Gallipoli. Deaths from bacterial disease, caused by consuming contaminated water or food, or else through oral contact with exposed utensils or drinking vessels, peaked among troops of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army fighting in Palestine during March and April of 1915. The situation at the Gallipoli front was especially bad not only because the surrounding regions’ environment (such as marshes) was a breeding ground for malaria, but also because the soldiers were housed in abhorrent conditions; the barracks had no bunk beds and soldiers slept crowded on the floor. Moreover, a general shortage of water, a lack of water pumps, inadequate field toilets and innumerable flies swarming around them proved to be a deadly combination. Flies easily transmitted microbes and bacteria, contaminating water and food supplies and causing an epidemic outbreak of dysentery in May 1915. The worst were the green ugly “corpse flies” which feasted on the bodies left on the battlefield. The inability to bury fallen soldiers, as fighting was continuous, constituted another problems. The decaying corpses covered in flies quickly became cesspools of diseases. Being a soldier at Gallipoli, no doubt, meant fighting not only a human enemy, but also an invisible and perhaps more dangerous one. It was an enemy – albeit tiny in appearance – that reigned supreme, as the only weapons against it, i.e. adequate hospital beds, medical staff and medicine, were in short supply.

Besides unbearable conditions on the fronts, wartime movement, resulting in overcrowding and lack of hygiene, continuously handicapped Ottoman efforts... Soldiers, deserters, civilian refugees, and deportees on the move often carried with them microbes, bacteria, and typhus-infected lice. The empire’s poor infrastructure contributed to the spread of disease. Limited trains to and from the fronts were often packed to capacity, meaning that common soldiers and microbes were crammed under unsanitary conditions into freight cars over long stretches of time. Passenger train upholstery generally turned into breeding grounds for lice....

Large numbers of displaced civilians added pressure to the empire’s health concerns. Refugees and deported minority populations not only were exposed to diseases, but also contributed to their dissemination.

Schulze-Taniellan, Melanie. “Disease and Public Health (Ottoman Empire/Middle East).” *1914-1918 Online: International Encyclopedia of the First World War*. P. 4-6. 8 Oct. 2014. Web. 9 August 2018.



“The Ottoman Empire: War on Four Fronts, November 1914.”

<https://www.themaparchive.com/ottoman-empire-war-on-four-fronts-november-1914.html>