

## **How significant was the role of the British Expeditionary Force in Macedonia between, 1915-1917 and how the Bulgarians defended themselves?**

The British Expeditionary Force (BEF) in Macedonia, from 1915 to 1917, played a critical yet often overlooked role in the larger context of World War I. Operating in what was widely seen as a secondary theater, the BEF faced numerous challenges as it aimed to support Allied operations against the Central Powers, particularly Bulgaria, which had allied with Germany, Austria-Hungarian Empire and the Ottoman Empire who actually ruled Bulgaria until 1878. My research seeks to examine the nature of this campaign, analyzing the objectives and limitations of the BEF in Macedonia and understanding how Bulgarian forces mounted such a strong defense against the British-led operations. Through this reflective report, I will outline the research questions, methodology, significant scholarship, and the progress made thus far, including the process of adjusting and refining the scope of my research and analysis.

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the British campaign in Macedonia and its interactions with Bulgarian defense strategies, I formulated the following research questions. They will help me answer the main research question of my dissertation:

### **What were the objectives BEF in Macedonia and what were their limitations?**

Answering this question will reveal the strategic purpose of British involvement in the Macedonian campaign. It examines the BEF's role within the broader Allied strategy, especially given that the Balkan theater was not the primary focus of British military efforts. Investigating these objectives also allows for a critical understanding of the logistical and strategic challenges that may have constrained the BEF's operations.

### **How did the geographical, logistical, and political factors shape the BEF's campaigns?**

The mountainous terrain and generally the harsh environment Macedonia presented a unique set of challenges for the BEF. Additionally, political considerations, including relations with other

Allied forces and the unstable situation in Greece, had a significant impact on the campaign's progression. This question helps clarify how these factors influenced British tactical and operational decisions. It would also help to answer how Bulgaria conducted its defensive operations.

### **How effective was the Bulgarian defense in countering the BEF, and what strategies did they use?**

This question aims to shed light on the Bulgarian military's defensive strategies, including fortifications, local knowledge of terrain, and tactical innovations. Understanding the Bulgarian perspective is essential for a balanced analysis of the campaign, revealing both the strengths and limitations of the BEF in the face of a determined opponent.

### **How did this campaign influence broader Allied and Central Powers' strategies in the Balkans?**

Finally, this question will put Macedonian campaign in its proper context within the larger war effort, assessing its impact on Allied and Central Powers' military strategies in the Balkans. And from the sources I found so far there is plenty to be said about this.

## **Methodology**

The methodological approach to this research combines primary and secondary source analysis. Primary sources include official military reports, soldiers' diaries, letters, and other firsthand accounts. These documents provide valuable insights into the daily realities of the campaign, such as the BEF's struggles with disease, weather, and limited resources. Furthermore, these sources will probably offer some perspectives on the morale of British troops.

For secondary sources, I will rely on works by historians and scholars who have extensively studied the Balkan theater of World War I. For instance, C. Falls' "Military Operations Macedonia" serves as an essential official military account of the campaign, allowing me to review the strategic decisions made by British commanders and their consequences on the ground. Additionally, the secondary literature provides historical context and critical interpretations of both BEF and Bulgarian operations.

A comparative analysis method will be used to compare the BEF strategies with those of the Bulgarian forces, examining differences in military tactics.

### **Progress So Far**

At this stage of research, I am working on finding and obtaining the relevant primary sources and literature and highlighting the campaign's major events from 1915 to early 1917. What I found out, and I could believe in that knowing the area, was that there were logistical limitations of the BEF, particularly difficulties of supplying and maneuvering troops in Macedonia's challenging terrain. The campaign was also incorrectly viewed by the British leadership as a secondary front, something that turned out not to be true.

Additionally, the Bulgarians were formidable opponent, with early successes largely attributable to well-fortified positions and effective use of the terrain. Bulgarian forces seemed adept at exploiting their local geographical knowledge, using fortified mountain positions and harsh weather conditions to their advantage.

### **Narrowing/Broadening the Topic**

Initially, my research intended to cover the entire span of British operations in Macedonia from 1915 to 1918. However, I decided to narrow the focus to the period between 1915 and 1917. This adjustment will allow me to concentrate on the BEF's initial confrontations with Bulgarian forces before the rush of additional forces in the theater in 1918. By limiting the scope, I aim to provide a more thorough analysis of specific battles and maneuvers, offering insights into how the BEF's contributed to the military developments in the Balkan theater.

If I decide to do more research on the topic of the Macedonian Front I will incorporate additional perspectives from other Allied forces in Macedonia, such as the French or Serbian armies, to place the BEF's experiences within a broader Allied framework.

While discussing the topic with my dissertation supervisor, he gave me some important tips namely that I need to answer a research question, not simply discuss an issue so I changed the title of my dissertation to the current one.

## **Conclusion**

This reflective report outlines the main directions of my research into the British Expeditionary Force's involvement in the Macedonian front and the Bulgarian defense between 1915 and 1917. Through a focus on primary and secondary sources, and a comparative analysis of British and Bulgarian strategies, I aim to contribute to the understanding of this often-overlooked campaign or as Lord Hankey's once exclaimed, "the most controversial of all the so-called sideshows."

## Bibliography

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