

Reader's Theater Script

A Soldier's Voice from WWI: Gallipoli

Adapted by J. P. Williams from: Wallis, Sarah, and Svetlana Palmer. "Chapter 6 GALLIPOLI." *Intimate Voices from the First World War*. Toronto: HarperCollins, 2003. 120-45.

Mehemed:

18th October 1915

After 01.00 hrs. My little dugout is small with a roof of logs, and to keep out the grenades its entrance is covered by wire netting. I sleep on a wooden bed with a straw mattress under my blankets and a kilim. Other furnishings include my crystal paraffin lamp, my coffee set and tin brazier. Thank God, I am quite comfortable. My orderly is in the adjoining dug-out. He is a good and obedient fellow, with a pure heart.

Narrator: These are entries from the diary of 21 year old Turkish 2nd Lieutenant, Mehmed Fasih, while he was defending the Gallipoli peninsula. They are the actual words of a World War I soldier.

Mehemed:

18th October 1915

0.2.00hrs. Exploding enemy shells shake the ground but miss their target. They land either in front or behind our positions. Today they're sending over more of their little presents than usual. I sense fear in the enemy's every move. Perhaps the rumour was true. Their infantry is being thinned out and replaced by fire power.

Narrator: On 29th October 1914 the Turkish Navy shelled Russia's Black Sea ports without warning. The next day the outraged Russian Empire declared war on her neighbor and centuries-old foe. By 2nd November 1914 Russia's allies, Britain and France were also at war with Turkey's Ottoman Empire. Backed by Germany, who offered Turkey L5million in gold to join the Central Powers, Turkey declared Jihad--Holy War--on Britain, France and Russia. Having lost a third of its territories in a succession of disastrous wars, Turkey hoped to reestablish itself as a powerful presence in the east.

Britain feared for the safety of her interests in the region, her trade routes, prestige, and power. If Afghanistan and Egypt fell under Ottoman control, the British Empire, including India, would be imperiled.

Mehemed:

4th November 1915

20.20hrs. The firing intensifies to our left. I run to the trenches. Our soldiers are blazing away, our left is really getting it. The enemy is raining shells down on us. Thank God, they aren't landing inside our trenches. The enemy uses a lot of flares to illuminate both our rear and our front lines. We benefit from this light as much as he does. His shells are really pouring in.

Narrator: In February 1915, British, Commonwealth, and French forces bombarded the Turkish forts on the Dardanelles in order to re-open the straits, closed by Turkey since 1914. The naval battle failed, so in April 1915, British, French, Australian, and New Zealand troops landed on the Gallipoli Peninsula. The strength of Turkish resistance and poor quality of British leadership resulted in stalemate, and the fighting stagnated into trench warfare as on the Western Front.

Mehemed:

4th November 1915

24.00hrs. I....put a kettle on the brazier. The weather is clear and mild. A dud explodes occasionally. Though I keep picking off lice there are plenty more- I just can't get rid of them and am itching all over. My body is covered with red and purple blotches.

01.00hrs. I am sleepy. I have not slept for two nights. However, I must stay awake all night. This is important. On May 28th the enemy launched his offensive at midnight. I hunt lice for a while, then stretch out. Unable to stop myself, I fall asleep.

5th November

08.00hrsAs we walk along I notice a group of first-aid men gathered around a stretcher. 'It is Sergeant Nuri.'

Oh my Lord! How many more tragedies will you make me witness? Nuri has injuries to his chest, head, one arm and both legs. His head and chest are ripped wide open. His hair is all messed up, his uniform is soaked with blood. He is pale, his mouth hangs open. You can see his bright white teeth between his lips. His eyes are half open, staring at the sky. His pure, handsome features are still evident. His hands are locked together on his chest. He seems to be cursing those who have destroyed him. I can't stand it anymore.

This boy was responsible for training the battalion's replacements. He had absolutely no business at the frontlines. During lunch breaks however, he just wouldn't stay put....The loss of a soldier like him upsets me greatly. I have already witnessed so many deaths and tragedies but none has affected me so deeply. Very few upset me anymore, as a matter of fact.

....I obtain special permission to bury Nuri in the officers plot.... I let my tears flow freely and address Nuri, "Oh, my son! It is so very painful to put you to rest."...We bury Nuri. It was God's will that I would say the opening verse of the Koran over him. Who will be next? I again feel it very difficult to control myself. Hot tears stream down my face. One day this will come to an end, as all things do. I turn from the grave and walk away.

17th November

18.00hrs. Heavy rain, driven by violent wind, drenches everything. My dugout is leaking. Would love to see those people who say 'soldiering is easy, the military are overpaid!' spend one night sleeping in the mud. Would they say such things ever again? I don't think so. I'm 21 years old. My hair and beard are already gray. My moustache is white. My face is wrinkled and my body is rotting. I can't bear these hardships and privations any more. Being an Ottoman officer just means putting up with shells and bombs.

22nd November

05.00hrs. Daydream about a happy family and nice kids. Will I live to see the day when I have some? I know I should be infinitely grateful for what I do have, but why have I not, to this day, been able to find real happiness, the kind that sets the heart free and brings comfort to the soul? Dear God! Will you ever grant such things to be my lot in life?

And what about my men? We have had seven groups of reinforcements so far. Originally there were 200 soldiers in each of our companies, but now we are down to 50 or less apiece. The rest have become martyrs, or are either missing or wounded. As for the officers, none of us has escaped unscathed. This continuous fighting has exhausted us.

24th November

15.30hrs. When I finally reach our trenches I find a large pool of blood. It has coagulated and turned black. Bits of brain, bone and flesh are mixed with it. Shell fragments are scattered around. The trail of blood leads to the front of my dugout. This is the route followed by stretcher-bearers carrying our dead away. Very upset, I enter feeling very apprehensive. I have become cowardly. I tell myself that fear is futile, that wherever you are, death will find you if it is your time. I must always take what precautions I can, but beyond that whatever will be will be.

4th December

04.30hrs My orderly tried to wake me for report, but couldn't. Am writing it now. All is quiet, so I go back to bed...I was dozing off when there was a terrific explosion close by. Earth falls into my dugout. I pull the blanket over my head and fantasize about the future. Will I ever have a sweetheart? Dear God, maker of Heaven and Earth and all creatures! Please let me live to see the day when I can taste such bliss.

13th December

10.00hrs Go to see how my men are doing. Each time I pass by the olive grove I am profoundly affected by the memory of the all the martyrs buried there. My heart keeps telling me that at the end of the war they will come back to life. Oh my God! Show mercy to those of us who are still living! And guide us!

19th December

03.35hrs Battalion commander arrives "Hurry! Prepare a reconnaissance patrol. The enemy has withdrawn from Anafarta and the entire flank." Offer him tea. The patrol is readied. Explain it will move into no-man's-land from the spot where the mine was detonated.

Narrator:

Mehmed Fasih stopped writing his diary here. For nearly eight months the Turkish defenders of Gallipoli have managed to keep every inch of their land. Their demoralized, exhausted and battle weary troops withstood their enemy and kept Gallipoli Turkish.

Allied casualties totaled 243,00 killed, missing, wounded or sick. Official Turkish sources put the number of Turkish casualties at 250,000.

Mehmed Fasih survived Gallipoli and fought with the Turkish forces on Sinai. In October 1917 he was captured by the British in the desert near Gaza during their advance on Jerusalem and spent the rest of the war in a POW camp near the Suez Canal. Mehmed's daydreams of having a family, which he wrote about in his Gallipoli dugout, also came true; he married in 1924 and had two sons. He died in 1964, aged seventy.