

Hellenic Army's preparation for the Balkan Wars; applying the joint warfare concept

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The First Balkan War

Two Balkan Wars took place in 1912 through 1913, the first involving an alliance of Christian states, namely Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria and Montenegro, against the Ottoman Empire. The goal of the allies was the liberation of their still enslaved Christian compatriots. The Second Balkan War involved Greece and Serbia against Bulgaria, and was the result of the latter's aggressive attitude and territorial claims against its former allies¹. The grievous outcome of the Greco-Ottoman War of 1897 followed by the Struggle for Macedonia (1904-1908) and the tensions stirred up in all matters of national importance, proved the absolute necessity for a radical transformation in Greece. A fundamental renewal of the national web and a structural change of the political scene were caused in August 1909 by the Military League, a group of junior officers claiming a revolutionary solution to the chronic problems of the state, the society and the army. Systematic efforts were introduced to reform and equip the military forces². The Balkan Wars constitute the first joint operation of the three branches of the Armed Forces with the rudimentary even though substantial participation of the Hellenic Air Force for the first time. The combination of the potential and the operational jointness of all the forces resulted to the achievement of the best outcome namely the liberation of the territories still under occupation and the doubling of the Hellenic territory³.

By the beginning of autumn 1912, the four Christian Balkan states, although they had not signed a common defence pact, were in solidarity and of united purpose against the Ottoman Empire. The Sublime Porte declared war against Serbia and Bulgaria on October 4th 1912. The Turks did not declare war against Greece, apparently having sought to avoid the Greek fleet from blocking the transportation of their troops from

¹ Detailed analysis in: Hellenic Army General Staff/Army History Directorate, *A Concise History of the Balkan Wars, 1912–1913*, Athens 1987.

² Hellenic Army General Staff/AHD, *History of the Organization of the Hellenic Army (1821–1954)*, Athens 2005, 219–279.

³ E. Paschalidou, *Joint warfare across time; case studies from the Hellenic military history*, Athens, 2010, 87–108.

Asia to the Balkans. Greece had early organized its Army on new grounds and had been supplied the required military material while new units were incorporated to the fleet. The Army of Thessaly commenced on its advance on October 5th 1912, aiming to the liberation of Macedonia. She captured Elasson and the fortified site of Sarandaporo. The IV Division entered Servia on October 10th, while the following day, sections of the Cavalry Brigade captured Kozani. After the defeat of the Turks in Sarandaporo, the Army of Thessaly turned to the east, with the objective to liberate Thessaloniki, considered as the prime political–strategic objective of the operations in Macedonia. On October 16th, the cities of Veria and Katerini were liberated. After the surrender of Thessaloniki on October 26th 1912, the Hellenic army turned to Western Macedonia where it successively liberated Florina, Kastoria and Korytsa.

The Hellenic Navy constituted the only naval force of the coalition and thus, it decisively contributed to the victory. At the same time with the army's advance, the fleet liberated Chalkidiki with voluntary Scouts Corps and the islands in North-eastern Aegean with detachments of marines. A considerable naval unit was the battleship "Averof" that possessed strong armor and heavy weapons. The fleet dominated in the Aegean and the Ionian Sea, blocking the Ottoman fleet to the Dardanelles and the Asia Minor coast, prohibiting thus the reinforcement of the Turkish troops by sea in all the war fronts in the Balkan Peninsula. The fleet also protected the sea transports that were vital at the time for the transportation and the supplying of the troops. Twice the Turkish warships attempted to exit to the Aegean and failed, having been chased back to the Straits after the naval battles of Elli on December 5th 1912 and Lemnos on January 2nd 1913⁴.

The Epirus Front

Epirus is a particularly mountainous region which presents an exceptional geographical district of Greece due to the Pindos mountain range extending across the middle, thus providing a natural border between Epirus, Macedonia and Thessaly in the east. For this reason Epirus constituted a particular theatre of operations during the Balkan Wars 1912-13 independent to that of Macedonia. The Hellenic Army of 1912 was forced to utilise practically its entire force at the main front of operations towards

⁴ Detailed analysis in: Hellenic Army General Staff/AHD, *Operations in Macedonia and the Aegean Islands against the Turks*, Athens 1988.

Macedonia and therefore could only make a small section available for Epirus with strength of approximately one division in order to secure the borderline from Amvrakikos Gulf to Metsovo, amounting to a total deployment of 150 km. Nevertheless, at the onset of war the Army of Epirus crossed the River Arachthos and after capturing various dominant heights northwest of Arta, marched towards Preveza, which it liberated and organised as its supply base. Following this, and the successful progress of the operations in Macedonia, the Ministry of the Army reinforced the Army of Epirus with several units and changed its mission to offensive. Harsh and continuous struggles followed, during which the Hellenic forces achieved significant successes supported by voluntary corps and the overwhelming sympathy of the people of Epirus, and the enemy was forced to withdraw to the fortified position of Ioannina plateau.

Meanwhile the war conditions began to change due to the prevailing unfavourable weather conditions, the significant reinforcements of the Turks from the area of Monastiri and the great defence capability of the forts which covered Ioannina from the south. These forts had been organised in time of peace under the supervision of German officials, who were expert on fortification issues. As expected, the forward advance of the Army of Epirus was interrupted and the two sides were limited to the exchange of fire and outposts combat. More effective measures were urgently required, being now feasible, since the operations in Macedonia had ended in a glorious Hellenic victory. It was thus decided to transfer significant forces from the Macedonian front for the liberation of Ioannina before the signing of the oncoming Peace Treaty by the warring parties. In the first ten days of January 1913, the Commander in Chief, Crown Prince Konstantinos undertook the administration of the operations. This was a clear indication of the nation's will to terminate the exhaustive campaign in Epirus at any cost. Indeed, on 21st February, after fighting hard and infiltrating deep into the right flank of the Turks' defensive position, the Hellenic forces forced them to surrender unconditionally. This victory served as reward for the ceaseless efforts and unique self-sacrificing spirit, patriotism and faith of the Hellenic warriors. The enthusiasm, expressed by the people of Ioannina on welcoming the Hellenic troops at the town's entrance, reflected the panhellenic enthusiasm, while at the same time the national prestige was internationally praised. However, the struggle

continued after this victory aiming at the liberation of the indubitably Hellenic North Epirus. By 5th March, Argyrokastro, Himarra, Agioi Saranta, Tepeleni, Premeti and Klissoura were freed from Turkish occupation, whereas Korytsa had already been liberated on 27th December 1912. The inhabitants of these areas, who were pure Hellenic in identity, welcomed the Hellenic Army with enthusiasm and a sense of national pride. Unfortunately however, these last battles failed to bring a rewarding outcome. The eternal desires and dreams of the Greeks of North Epirus remained unfulfilled, since their district, according to a decision of the major powers of the time, was included in the newly established Albanian State, thus breaching all the principles and rules of International Law⁵.

The Second Balkan War

Having participated with the other Christian Balkan Nations in 1912 to liberate fellow Christians who were still enslaved, Greece suddenly found itself faced with belligerent actions on the part of the Bulgarians. Thanks to the heroic self-sacrifices of the Macedonians and Hellenism as a whole during the Macedonian struggle (1904-1908) the Bulgarians had failed to alter the ethnic composition of Hellenism in Macedonia and felt that they had been given the opportunity to realise their irrational territorial aspirations in Greece. Another factor that significantly affected their endeavours was that they underrated the Hellenic Military Forces. The Alliance Treaty specified that the Bulgarian Army would act against Eastern Thrace in its entirety and if deemed necessary it would be reinforced by a Serbian Army force. However, Bulgaria attempted to occupy Thessaloniki immediately after war had been declared by deploying a strengthened Division. This Bulgarian threat was averted by the timely liberation of Thessaloniki by the Hellenic Army⁶.

However, the Bulgarians continued their offensive tactics, attempted to break into the Hellenic lines with small army units and to extend their occupation of undisputed Hellenic land. The Bulgarians also implemented this policy towards Serbia. Due to this stance of the Bulgarians and information gathered as to an impending attack on Greece and Serbia, the two latter countries signed a Defensive Alliance on 19th May

⁵ Detailed analysis in: Hellenic Army General Staff/AHD, *Operations in Epirus against the Turks*, Athens 1992.

⁶ Detailed analysis in: Hellenic Army General Staff/AHD, *Operations against the Bulgarians*, Athens 1992.

1913, in order to form a united front against the Bulgarian threat. In the meantime all attempts made by Greece and Serbia to reach a friendly settlement of their differences with Bulgaria met with Bulgarian intransigence and with Bulgaria making its intentions to attack its former allies clearly evident. The Bulgarian assault began suddenly on 16th June 1913 with no declaration of war, concurrently attacking the Hellenic forces in the region of Nigrita and Mount Pangeon and the Serbian forces in the regions of Gevgelis and Istip. Greece and Serbia reacted immediately and decisively and the 2nd Balkan War began while at the same time the Hellenic Army also continued its heroic combats to save its fellow Macedonians who had recently been liberated from the Ottoman Empire. This war is marked for its short duration since it only lasted one month, its ferocious fighting, culminating with that of Kilkis – Lahana (19th – 21st June) and the large number of subsequent casualties. It resulted in the Bulgarians being defeated and the permanent liberation of Macedonia. The Hellenic Armed Forces played a significant role in this by liberating Kavala and Alexandroupoli, as did the Allies, the Serbian Army and that of the Rumanians, who reinforced the allied endeavours by invading Bulgaria on 28th June 1913.

Under these circumstances, Bulgaria was forced to declare a truce on 18th July and on the 28th of the same month signed a peace treaty to end the war and to prescribe the borders between the Balkan Nations following tough diplomatic discussions in Bucharest. Greece reacquired Eastern Macedonia while Western Thrace was finally relinquished to the Bulgarians, even though the region had been liberated by the Hellenic Army.

The Army's Organization and the Establishment of the Joint General Staff

The grievous outcome of the Greco-Ottoman War of 1897 and the tensions stirred up in all matters of national importance, proved to the Powers and to the Greek people, that it was absolutely necessary to strengthen the country militarily. New systematic efforts were introduced to reform and equip the military forces and liberate it of the moral and physical deterioration caused by the previous war. Concerning the army, new units were thus created and new formations were structured allowing greater flexibility. In 1904, the first sound foundations for the organization of the Hellenic Army were laid down, and the new Organizational Charter of the Army was passed, designating that the army would comprise three divisions and that the country would

be divided into three mobilization districts, one for each division. Respectable sums for the procurement of individual arms, artillery guns, vehicles, ammunition, clothing and footwear, fortification works and any other requirements of the army were provided.

The years 1909-1912 were a period of radical transformation, resulting in a virtual regeneration of the army. The starting point of that regeneration was the military coup of August 1909. The rebel officers, who were members of the Military League, demanded, inter alia, the immediate reorganization and modernization of the army, in order to render it an effective fighting force able to meet the requirements of the nation at that time. A year later, in November 1910, Venizelos accepted an invitation from the Military League and became prime minister of Greece. His presence had a decisive effect on the political and military situation of the country. In 1911, the Venizelos government, in order to establish a rule of law and justice, proceeded to amend the constitution with a view to safeguarding individual rights and establishing new rules governing the exercise of state authority. A new law established the post of Inspector General of the Army to which Crown Prince Constantine was appointed, with a provision that in the event of war he would become Commander in Chief of the Army.

Significant reforms took place, concerning the structuring of the army and the reorganization into large units of uniform composition, the division of the Artillery into groups according to type and the systematic organization of logistics services. Armaments were updated by the procurement of new rifles and guns, and personnel were given intensive training. In 1911, a French military mission under the leadership of Major-General Joseph Louis Paul Eydoux was invited to undertake the training of the troops; the mission made a substantial contribution to the quality and operational improvement of the army. In January 1912, the new Organization of the Army was published, according to which the army adopted the triadic system of organization. The Hellenic Army would consist of four divisions, each comprising three Infantry regiments and one Field Artillery regiment, six independent Evzone battalions, two battalions of Pack Artillery, one battalion of Heavy Artillery, three Cavalry regiments (of which two were formed into a brigade), and two Engineer regiments. As a result of the new organization, the divisions became lighter and better adapted for warfare in

the mountainous terrain of Greece. During this period the army's training method was gradually transformed and soldiers were systematically trained in the methods of modern warfare (such as the use of fire and terrain, development of an attack mentality, etc.); army unit leaders were trained to command their units in warfare conditions. Annual military exercises took place during the summer months and helped to improve the army's combat effectiveness. Finally, it was decided that the Krupp gun be replaced by the quick-firing Schneider-Canet field gun and the Schneider-Danglis pack gun. Large orders for ammunition and mobilization equipment were placed and construction was begun on warehouses, fortification works, wharves, railways and other infrastructure projects. The fortification of the country was accomplished at the same time that the procurement of weapons and material was taking place. The mobilization took place in accordance with the mobilization plan, which was updated annually by the General Command, taking into account as far as possible the country's actual capabilities in conscript-age manpower, pack animals, vehicles and military material of all kinds. The Mobilization Plan of 1912 was an obvious improvement and was based on the government's policy, the army's new organization, training of the younger conscript classes, and the receipt of new military equipment and weapons. The army's primary objective in the event of war with Turkey was defined as the elimination of Ottoman Army in Macedonia and an active defense of Epirus until the battle in Macedonia was resolved.

The Navy General Staff was established in 1907⁷ and as the need for the coordinated action of the army with the Navy became ever more demanding, the *Higher Joint Staff of the Land Army and Navy*⁸ was formed on April 17th 1910. Its task was the drafting of a common plan of operations for the army and the Navy, the research in the required military and naval organization and preparations, as well as the ensuring for the complete implementation of that plan, at a given time. Also the gradual reinforcement of the country's ground defenses with the proper defensive works and transportation means, the gradual substitution, repair and selling off the outdated ships and every sort of useless war material whether being for use on land, or sea, the country's dowry with a complete naval base, perfect industrial factories for

⁷ Law ΓΣΚΖ' Government Gazette, Α', no. 144, July 21, 1907.

⁸ Hellenic Army General Staff/AHD, *History of the Organization*, 238.

manufacturing weapons and gun powder and in general the implementation of every project that could render the country self sufficient at time of war.

Defensive coalition of the Balkan states

Greece alone could not successfully confront Turkey militarily, nor did Athens expect that it could unilaterally force Turkey to accede to Greek demands. Consequently it was deemed necessary to seek the cooperation of the other Balkan states. Conditions were conducive to a diplomatic initiative, as a spirit of conciliation and mutual understanding had already begun to take hold among the rulers of the other Christian states of the Balkans. Their close cooperation was crucial for their own survival and for the liberation of their subjugated compatriots. In contrast Greco-Bulgarian negotiations faced serious difficulties due to Sofia's territorial claims on the Greek lands of Macedonia and Thrace, which were to be liberated from Turkish subjugation. Despite these thorny issues Greece finally decided to sign a defense pact with Bulgaria, a pact which contained no mention of the fate of any liberated territories. Greece's decision was dictated by its belief that, in the event of a wider conflict between the Balkan states and Turkey, its reorganized army was in a position quickly to liberate the territories up to the desired line. A rapprochement between Greece and Bulgaria was achieved rapidly and although it did not end in an official agreement, nonetheless reflected the prevailing mood in both countries, which was conducive to cooperation. On May 1912, the treaty signed between the two countries, providing for a defensive alliance had a three-year term and called for mutual assistance and support in the event that Turkey attacked either state. A military agreement was also signed three months later, just before the declaration of the First Balkan War. According to this agreement, in the event of a Turkish-Bulgarian war, Greece undertook the obligation to attack Turkey with an army of 120.000 men and its entire fleet. Bulgaria undertook a comparable obligation in the event of a Greco-Turkish war, namely to attack Turkey with an army of 300.000⁹.

The effacement of the ottoman domination over the whole area resulted to the reorientation of national dominance and the complete transformation of continental

⁹ D. Kaderes, *War I, A Review on the operations of the Four Allies*, *Stratitiki Historia* 73 (2002) 52–63.

and maritime borders, such as the Aegean Sea. The latter constituted for the Ottoman Empire the most precious transportation path of supplies and communication lines between the Asiatic and the European part of the empire. Therefore, the members of the Balkan Alliance, Bulgaria and Serbia were in need of the Hellenic naval power over the Aegean space in order to obstruct the operations of the Ottoman Navy. In reality, the Serbian and Bulgarian army had the potential to successfully confront the Ottoman army, even without the participation of Hellenic Army. However, they realized that the influence and probably the outcome of military operations would have been negative for them in the case of the unhindered use of the Aegean Sea by the Ottoman Navy. Therefore, the Hellenic naval power for the allied victory was vital. The Aegean Sea constituted the Ottoman Empire's main transportation route between the Asian and its European sector. The dominance on that sea route by the Balkan allies would serve to cut off the Turkish army's great source in men and supplies that the Allies would have to confront from Asia. Greece's integration in the Coalition was considered necessary by the other Balkan states because of its strong fleet, despite the territorial claims that Greece would likely raise.

In detail, the Hellenic-Bulgarian Military Agreement that was signed in September 22nd 1912 clearly defined that "*the utmost aim of Hellenic fleet was to impose its dominance over the Aegean Sea and cut down the maritime communication lines between Asia Minor and European Turkey*". The potentials of Bulgarian Navy, were used for the protection of the Black Sea coasts, were extremely light and certainly not in the position to confront the ottomans in the Aegean. Plus the need for the precious obstruction of the transportation of ottoman military units through Aegean maritime paths proved that the Greek contribution in this anti-ottoman alliance was more than necessary in terms of securing allied dominance over the Aegean.

The Reinforcement of the Hellenic Navy

The mountainous terrain of Greece, its many islands and peninsulas, and the insufficient road and railway network of the country, meant that the sea borne mobilization of the Greek army was the only effective form of mobilization, so the possession of a battle fleet was of obvious utility. Since the islands of the Archipelago and much of the Aegean littoral had always been a principal war objective, their occupation could have not been effected without the support of a battle fleet. The first

decade of the twentieth century saw an interesting debate on Greek naval strategy but little progress being made. In fact, lack of funds and an ageing fleet made the Greek Navy a negligible quantity within the Mediterranean naval situation. Perennial problems of organization, infrastructure, naval personnel, their education and deficiencies were a few of the many that beset the Hellenic naval service at the opening of the twentieth century. Given the problems and the disappointing record of the Navy in the War of 1897, it was concluded that internal resources alone were insufficient and therefore a foreign assistance was necessary. In the frame of a Franco-Greek understanding, a loan was available for the reorganization of the Greek armed forces and in 1907 Vice-Admiral Fournier visited the country in order to express his views on its naval program. A British Naval Mission arrived in Greece in 1911. The year that intervened between then and the outbreak of the First Balkan War constitutes a rather brief period for effective radical changes in fields as strategic, organization, education and training, and not least in the procurements policy of the Greek Navy. Finally, a royal decree in August 1912, served the real naval needs of the country, duties, function and procurements were better defined than previously¹⁰.

The collaboration of the land and naval forces constituted the fundamental precondition for achieving Greece's national objectives. Greece's financial condition did not allow the building of a naval force comparable to that of the Great Powers. However, the constitution of a naval force that would succeed in meeting the requirements of the likely confrontation with the Ottoman fleet was within the Greek state's capacity. Given that Bulgaria was contesting only land space but at that time did not share a common border with Greece and the Ottoman Empire occupied both land and sea space bordering with the Greek state, the reinforcement of the army was certainly necessary. The Navy's armoring was though a non-negotiable and demanding need. Greece would have to fight with Bulgaria along a solely land front, after she have confronted the Turkish forces on two fronts, the land and the naval. Thoughts and dilemmas that supported the exclusive reinforcement of the one or the

¹⁰ Prince George, *About the Composition and the Completion of Our Naval Forces in relation to Admiral's Fournier Program*, *Naftiki Epitheorisi* 231 (1952) 115–138. Also detailed analysis in: D. Fokas, *O Stolos tou Aegeou (The Aegean Fleet) 1912-1913*, Athens 1972.

other of the two branches soon were rejected. Concerning the choice of the sort of ships that would strengthen the fleet, the view prevailed that the fundamental role of a strong fleet would be its active involvement in the army's offensive operations since Greece intended to conduct an offensive war. The acquisition of battleships was chosen over more torpedo ships or submarines. The great firing power of the battleship was vital for the needs and the operations of a powerful Navy¹¹. That advantage also acquired strategic importance in connection with land operations, like the landing of troops and the capture of islands with minor fortification that the fleet would soon be called to carry out during the Balkan wars. On military terms, it is true that the Greeks managed to prevail at the Aegean operational theatre due to the purchase of the battleship-cruiser "Averof" which has been the operational precondition for Greece's participation to the Balkan Wars¹². The battleship fulfilled those requirements while it constituted the operational precondition for Greece joining the Anti-Ottoman Balkan Coalition. "Averof's" expensive purchase shifted the balance of power and it ensured the dominance in the Aegean. Without this battleship the country would substantially lack in naval power against Turkey and possibly, she could have found herself forced to choose neutrality in the 1912 offensive, as it was already agreed by Serbia and Bulgaria. "Averof's" contribution on the Balkan Wars has been evaluated as extremely important. In fact, the general feeling is that the Greek participation on the Balkan Alliance was determined by that ship: *"Unless the ... administration would have purchased that vessel, Greece would have been significantly inferior on terms of naval power against Turkey. Consequently, she would have no other choice than to stay neutral in 1912 during the Serbian and Bulgarian expedition against Turkey, based on the military agreement that was signed. That ship not only saved Greece during the 1912 Balkan War but also Greece's allies. Because it secured the Greek domination over the Aegean with the*

¹¹ A. Fagridas, *The Helli Naval Battle. The cruiser 'Averof' dominates in the Aegean*, *Stratitiki Historia* 88 (2003) 14–25.

¹² The order for the vessel was placed by the Greek government at the Italian shipyards of Orlando in October 1909 and has been rather dramatic: that same vessel has been the subject of Italian and Ottoman negotiations that eventually failed. Greeks exploited this progress and immediately placed their order paying significant advance. When the Ottoman representatives were informed about the Greek moves, interrupted their trip to Paris and returned as soon as possible to Italy, but it was already too late for them! The vessel's total displacement reached 10.000 tones and its speed the 24 knots. Its firepower was quite significant and "Averof" has certainly been the most modern and sophisticated war ship of its time in the maritime Aegean space in comparison to the other vessels of both enemy fleets.

assistance of the other units of Hellenic fleet, prevented the transportation of Turkish troops from Asia Minor to Macedonia and Thrace and secured the victory of the allied forces”¹³.

The Hellenic Air Force – the Aviators Company

The pressing need for the reorganization and modernization of the national armed forces, especially after the outbreak of the 1909 military coup, also led to the emergence of a small, yet noticeable, air arm¹⁴. The innovative spirit, brought forward together with the post-revolutionary establishment of a healthy political system, were the two most important reasons that led to the birth of the air arm. Soon after the appearance of the first flying machine, several nations started considering it as a tool of war. France was the first to establish in 1910 the first ‘phalanx’ of military aviators, followed swiftly by Germany and the other Great Powers. Greece was not left far behind. When Major-General Eydoux was invited by the Hellenic government in 1911 as head of a French Military Mission, he also set to establish an air arm, whose early organization was heavily influenced by the French model. The Greek Government early realized the utility of the airplane in the military operations and Prime Minister Venizelos had expressed his conviction that the airplane can constitute a significant tool of war. The Ministry of War keenly supported the French proposals as drafted by General Eydoux and his team of specialists. His first priority was to select the personnel which would undergo intensive training prior to manning the air arm. In mid-December 1911, after careful selection, three officers were sent to France for training and were enrolled in the Henry Farman Flying School.

At the beginning of May 1912¹⁵, four *Henry Farman* biplanes fitted with 50 horse power Gnôme engines arrived at the port of Piraeus in boxes, and one of those flew in

¹³ P. Argyropoulos, *Memoirs, The Navy Issue, The Military Revolt in Goudi, the Split 1900–1916*, Athens 1996, 87.

¹⁴ Hellenic Air Force General Staff - Air Historical Branch, *Hellenic Wings. An Illustrated History of the Hellenic Air Force and its Precursors, 1908-1944*, Athens 1999, 18-35. Also, D. Kaderes, *The creation and action of the first Hellenic Air Force*, *Stratitiki Historia* 21 (1998) 60–63.

¹⁵ Year 1912 may be considered as the year of aviation both due to the appearance of several aircraft over the Hellenic skies and to the gradual development of an air-minded public, which was introduced to the airplane both by the state’s efforts and the enthusiastic attitude of the press. As a result, when the state decided to ask for public contributions for the further development of the air arm, the public was quick to respond. Aviation found a great supporter and an important source of funds in the Greeks abroad. The positive climate, fuelled by the enthusiastic coverage of these activities by the press, gave the opportunity to the government to embark upon the realization of its aviation development program.

the first ever military flight over Hellenic airspace. Prime Minister Venizelos noted: “*Hellas will always keep in line with the progress of the Nations, having herself contributed to such progress from ancient times; I also do hope that the airplane could be an important means for the realization of our National Idea*”. Venizelos did not hesitate to fly as a passenger in the first trial flights, in February 1912, as he sought to convince himself and to assure the people that not only the airplane was a safe means of flight, but it could be used in the war operations against the Turks – as the confrontation with them seemed inevitable.

Lower rank officers of the Army were already being trained in France as aviators, already from December 1911. In the Army’s Organizational Charter of 1912, the “*Wireless Telegraphy and Air Company*” was included in the composition of the Engineering Corps. On the war’s declaration, the Company was integrated in the Service of the General Headquarters, under the immediate order of the Commander in Chief based in Larissa. The Company was staffed by four aviator officers (Artillery, Engineering Corps, Cavalry) after having been trained in France, technicians of the Engineering Corps and 50 privates¹⁶. The air fleet was composed of four *Henry Farman* biplanes fitted with a 50 horse power engine. The operations illustrated the weakness of this particular model to meet the war requirements. Thus the more modern and improved *Maurice Farman* was ordered. Those were fitted with an 80 horse power engine and they could carry an observer as well. The initial role of the Aviators Company in the theater of operations was limited to carrying out reconnaissance and elementary bombardment missions. The pilot – having simultaneously the duty of an observer – could fly above the enemy’s positions and watch the maneuvers of the enemy troops, spanning a reconnaissance field extending in his range of action and without being in danger from the powerless anti-aircraft means of that era.

Greece was not caught unawares in terms of military organization and preparation on the outbreak of the Balkan Wars. Already in 1912 the first Army Air Company, had been included in the structure of the Hellenic Army for the first time in its history,

¹⁶ In order to create an adequate pool of pilots during the War, a new Act was passed on October 6th 1912, concerning the “Enrolment of foreign engineers having a pilot’s license into the Hellenic Army”.

under the Communications Unit of the Engineering Battalion. When general mobilization was ordered, the air arm was ready to meet the challenge. During the Balkan Wars, the fronts' wars and the wars of the trenches, the opponent sides used to occupy and defended a certain region expanse where the bulk of the troops lied. Every single maneuver in the front and information on the adversary's maneuvers were of critical importance, in measure with the reconnaissance of the forts and the trenches that constituted the greatest bulk of the war. On October 5th 1912, as the Army of Thessaly proceeded to the first offensive actions, heading to Sarandaporo, the Larissa General Headquarters issued the order "*for carrying out the first military air reconnaissance mission*". The mission was met with absolute success; it caused excitement to the soldiers and succeeded in carrying out the reconnaissance of the broader front region. The information that was collected proved valuable to the Command, in the Army's general offensive that followed at Elasson. The daily reconnaissance flights continued to be carried out from Sarandaporo to Servia to survey the manoeuvres and the defence tactics of the adversary that was already retreating. The reconnaissance was followed by the light bombardment that mainly had an impact in the enemy's morale while raising that of the allies. Those missions served to detect the withdrawal and the hasty retreat of the adversary after the first battles and as a consequence the land troops decided to swiftly chase after them and to fast advance.

The situation in the front with the army's constant advance necessitated the advance of the Aviators Company to the Kozani airfield. From there, they carried out daily reconnaissance missions. Following the liberation of Thessaloniki, the main focus of the Greek struggle was transferred to Epirus. Therefore, the Air Company was moved there to continue its action in the new front, along with the II Division. Materiel and personnel were advanced on board ships from Pireaus to Preveza. The Air Company's first mission on December 5th concerned the reconnaissance of the enemy positions up to Ioannina and the enemy's bombardment. The new Maurice Farman aircrafts allowed and provided for a co-passenger, who carried out the observer's and the bomber's duty. The missions continued throughout the duration of the operations until the final liberation of Ioannina, on February 21st 1913. The airplanes provided reliable information for the enemy fortifications – particularly at the Bizani fort – the

positions of the artillery batteries, the trench lines and the locations of the enemy's inventories. The army made effective of that information, particularly in drafting the artillery's firing plan. Efforts to bring down the planes were not fulfilled. In the contrary, the dropped bombs spread the panic in the Turkish lines. Also the pilots applied the supply from air in a secluded region and they dropped food and newspapers in the residents of the besieged city of Ioannina.

The Air Force in the Sea Struggle

The successful first flights by Army pilots led to the examination of undertaking a similar task also by the Navy. In Europe, the Naval Staffs of several countries were already in the process of examining the issue in depth. The Air Force of Naval Cooperation, having the advantage of the hydroplane that could land on the sea could reinforce the fleet as to maintain its dominance at the Aegean Sea. Lieutenant D. Kamberos with the aid of men from the Engineering Corps converted the first military plane into a hydroplane. "Daedalus" flew successfully on June 22nd, 1912. However the outbreak of the first Balkan War did not permit the completion of the planned organization of the Naval Air Force. The naval Air Force acquired its first hydroplane in November 1912¹⁷.

The Greek fleet after the victorious naval battles of Elli (December 3rd 1912) and Lemnos (January 2nd 1912) and while the islands of northern and eastern Aegean had been liberated, was anchored in the Moudros harbor. On January 21st 1913, a Maurice Farman hydroplane carried out a successful flight up to Tenedos. Immediately the Chief of the Fleet Admiral Coundouriotis asked for an air reconnaissance to be informed of the position of the Turkish fleet that had been blocked in the Hellespont Straits. The first military mission to the benefit of the Navy was carried out on the 24th of that month and it constituted a milestone in the history of the sea operations. The hydroplane's pilot was Lieutenant Michael Moutousis and Aristidis Moraitinis was the observer. The flight lasted 2 hours and 20 minutes and covered a distance of 180 kms by the way of Samothrace and Imvros. The pilot with maneuvers managed to escape the firing of the coastal Turkish artillery while the observer was drafting a detailed plan of the enemy ships positions. At the same time, they bombed a Turkish

¹⁷ Descriptions and illustrations in: I. Paloubis, *From the seas to the skies; The Naval Air Force Chronicle 1913-1941*, Piraeus 2009.

transport ship. On its return, the hydroplane was forced to land on the sea at the Hellespont's exit and it was towed by the warship "Velos" that was watching the flight and was waiting five miles far of the Straits, in the Moudros harbor. The military observers branded the mission as the first in world operation of air force and naval cooperation while the Greek and the foreign press praised the fact. The Turkish press comments gave a clear picture of the impression of the Greek aviators' achievements.

The Liberation of the Aegean Islands

Venizelos' intention to assign – already from the summer of 1912 – the fleet's command to Admiral Coundouriotis, in case of war, was effected on October 5th 1912 when the Hellenic Fleet departed from Faleron, heading not to Oreoi of Euboea, as it had been planned but to the island of Lemnos that could serve as a natural mound opposite the Dardanelles. To meet the objectives of the Military Agreement with Bulgaria, the Greek fleet had to capture the islands of Lemnos, Imvros, Tenedos and Samothrace so as to control the exit from the Dardanelles. Fleet warships, requisitioned steam ships, a naval detachment and two companies of the 20th Infantry Regiment were dispatched to capture those islands. On 6th October the fleet reached Lemnos castle and the infantry companies landed on the island and captured it. Moudros bay constituted the fleet's military base. Due to its strategic location, the bay served as a power multiplier, ensuring the control of the Straits. Then the islands of Thasos, Imvros, Samothrace, Psara, Tenedos and Icaria were also liberated.

The Chios Liberation: The turn of the first Balkan War was quite favorable for Greece when on 9th November 1912; the landing fleet sailed off from Thessaloniki, having as mission to liberate the island of Chios¹⁸. Following the liberation of Thessaloniki in October, the Army's operations had been focused on Western Macedonia. A day before the landing fleet's departure, the island of Lesbos (Mytilene) had been liberated. A naval detachment of 250 men and an infantry battalion (15 officers and 1.019 soldiers) landed on Mytilene, in the plain and they captured the island. Chios' liberation was a distinct case in comparison with the other Aegean islands, since a

¹⁸ D. Patsoules, *Landing on Chios. The island's Liberation in 1912*, *Polemos kai Istoria* 61 (2003) 28–41.

vehement landing and operations that lasted for approximately a month and a half were required. Having a strategic importance for securing the dominance in Central Aegean and the Archipelago in general and being located opposite to Smyrna, Chios had been prepared defensively from the period of the Italian–Turkish war. The struggle for its liberation demonstrated interesting and unique operational situations with several of them having no precedent for the Hellenic Army and the Hellenic Navy. The Greek forces encountered the challenge of landing without possessing relevant experience and established tactics of amphibious operations. The Greek Army and Navy officers of the time lacked sufficient knowledge for carrying out amphibious operations. That was also true for most of their contemporary colleagues with probably the exception of the Great Britain officers. For the first time the Hellenic Army and the Hellenic Navy would have to carry out a landing, even a vehement landing against the enemy resistance. It is remarkable how the commanders of the amphibious force adjusted themselves to the new situation they encountered and how they improvised with an astonishing ingenuity. The officers of the two branches excelled in ingenuity and adjustability in the particular conditions of the landing and of the fierce struggle that followed in the island’s interior. The landing force under the general command of Captain Damianos consisted of three armed merchant ships named “Arcadia”, “Esperia” and “Macedonia”, three troop carriers, “Erietta”, “Sapfo” and “Patris” and two destroyers, “Nea Genia” and “Keravnos”. The land force under Colonel Delagrammaticas consisted of two battalions of the 7th Infantry Regiment and one battalion of the 1st Infantry Regiment that were transported from Thessaloniki on board “Sapho” and “Patris”. “Erietta” sailed off from Piraeus carrying 200 marines under Lieutenant Demestichas and eight Krupp mountain guns¹⁹. The landing was supported by the guns of the armed merchant ships and the destroyers of the flotilla that provided cover to the boats that reached the shore with no casualties. The cooperation of the land force and the ships in the field of support did not terminate in the landing but continued throughout the whole operation in the island’s mountainous regions with an especially successful outcome. The mountain artillery in parallel with the support of the Navy firing as well as the raids by guerrilla groups in the role of an amphibious squadron constituted the decisive factors for the

¹⁹ I. Demestichas, *How Chios was captured in 1912*, Naftiki Ellas 218 (1951) 4–5, 22.

liberation of Chios, after a fierce struggle that lasted for more than a month, in contrast to the other islands that fell almost without a fight.

29th Marines Landing Regiment

During the second Balkan War there was no opponent at sea since the struggle against the Bulgarians was only on land²⁰. The Greek warships provided support from the sea in the operations in Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, they bombarded the Bulgarian positions and they contributed to the containment of the Bulgarian maneuvers. For the men of the 29th Naval Regiment, the war on land was an unprecedented experience.

The 29th Marines Landing Regiment was established on June 17th 1913 under the command of the Thessaloniki fort. It was composed of two battalions and it was assigned the mission of accompanying and providing support to the fighting units of the Land Army. The first battalion involved detachments that had fought for the liberation of the Eastern Aegean islands, during the first Balkan War. The second one was comprised by men from the ship crews and reserved officers that remained idle in the naval base. They were led by Commander Typaldos. The choice of the uniform was the first serious problem that had to be confronted. Until then, there had been no need for an appropriate uniform for land operations, but the pressure of time did not allow for designing a new one. It was thus, decided that the officers would wear the summer expedition uniform, having a green–khaki color and the non-commissioned officers would wear the linen detachment uniform and the sailors would wear the winter uniform along with the wicker hat even though it was summer. The equipment they would carry was light and insufficient for front line land operations, but it was chosen on the experience of the action in the landing operations of 1912–13, where the detachments had confronted the relatively small Turkish garrisons. The Regiment after its establishment started an intense training in the prospect of the new war conditions. It was transported to Thessaloniki on 12th January 1913, where, it was reinforced with a platoon of quick firing guns and participated in the defense of the fort. On the declaration of the Greek – Bulgarian war on 17th June, the 1st Battalion's first duty was the collection of the Kilkis – Lachanas battle casualties. Next day it was forwarded to Gevgeli with the task to be reserve of the 10th Division and participate in

²⁰ K. Avtjigiannis, *The last operations. The Navy's contribution in the land struggle*, Polemikes Monographies 70–78.

the battle. There were also advanced companies of the 2nd battalion to reinforce the front line divisions while other companies were assigned the clearing and the guarding of the railways network. The train that transported them was attacked by the Bulgarian artillery and the sailors continued on foot. Fighting along sections of the land army, without considering the risk perhaps due to inexperience and without the full conception of the battle conditions came out of the trenches very early. The Bulgarians that did not anticipate an offensive action from the Greeks were taken by surprise by the appearance of those strange warriors with wicker hats and they retreated. The offensive was ordered and led by Lieutenant Demestichas that had also been distinguished in the operations of capturing the Aegean islands.

At the same time with the army's advance to the Stromnitsa valley, the fleet blockaded the coast, up to the river Evros mouth despite the shelling that received unsuccessfully on 25th June on its passage from Alexandroupolis. The Marines Landing Regiment landed on Alexandroupolis on 14th July with the mission to secure the regions of Western Thrace that had been liberated by the Greek forces. A similar mission had been assigned to that Regiment in Kavala, from 6th July 1913.

The action of the 29th Naval Regiment was short lived since it did not exceed for months. Its establishment came as a result of the decision for the Hellenic Navy to contribute to the forthcoming land operations. Certainly the manpower, the training, the arms and the experience were not in favor for a force competent to fight in front line operations. Nevertheless, wherever sections of the regiment were engaged, the boldness and the bravery of the sailors gave them the victory. They met their mission of guarding the railways, supporting the land sections and maintaining the order with an absolute success despite the lack of experience by officers and sailors alike in such missions.

Deceptive Landing Operations

Balkan War I. The need to intensify the blockade of the Northern Epirus coast under the prospect of a Greek general offensive against Bizani, as well as the decision for transporting the Serbian army from Thessaloniki to take part in the siege of Skodra, led the Greek government to issue an order in early February, according to which a new operational unit was established, namely the Ionian Squadron. The blockade of

the Epirus and Albanian coast was intensified and on 19th February 1913, the show-off amphibious operation in Agioi Saranda was carried out by the ships of the squadron with the purpose to occupy the 13th Turkish brigade in conjunction with the final general offensive against Bizani.

Balkan War II. During the transportation of the 8th Division from Epirus to the Eastern Macedonia, the naval show-off was used as a stratagem to deceive the opponent Bulgarian army and to conceal the actual maneuver. On 22nd June 1913 the Hellenic warships sailed into Thassos harbor where they installed their base until the end of the war. There, they received an order from the Naval Ministry to carry out a deceptive naval show-off in the coast of Kavala. The whole of the day on 24th June, the warship “Hydra” and a large number of cargo ships that were vacant were parading ostentatiously and repeatedly outside the city’s harbor. That maneuver produced the impression on the Bulgarians that one and possibly two divisions that were in the Epirus were landing eastern of Kavala. The next day they evacuated Kavala and the complete retreat followed. When that retreat was confirmed, the fleet occupied the city, on the 26th June. The Bulgarians had evacuated the whole of Western Thrace and thus, the fleet the same day that the 8th Division captured Chrysoupoli it also occupied Porto Lagos and Alexandroupolis, as a result of the common action and the coordinated joint operational cooperation of the land and the naval forces.

Epilogue

The Balkan Wars constitute the first joint operation of the three branches of the Armed Forces with the rudimentary even though substantial participation of the Hellenic Air Force for the first time. The combination of the potential and the operational jointness of all the forces resulted to the achievement of the best outcome namely the liberation of the territories still under occupation and the doubling of the Hellenic territory. The political and military leadership demonstrated that they possessed the strategic thought for the development of the branches of the Armed Forces and the necessary joint concept early before the expected beginning of the war. The army was organized on new grounds, the significant reinforcement of the Navy was decided and the airplane’s potential to contribute to the military operations was

recognized. At the strategic level, the power of the Navy was used as the country's main contribution in signing the anti-Ottoman coalition. Furthermore, the capture of the Aegean islands in a very short time proved the success of the joint operational plans. The fleet had secured the dominance in the Aegean and the Ionian Sea for the Balkan Coalition. Greece exploited in the best possible ways of the units in its disposal and thus it succeeded the best possible outcome. The Greek side claimed its dual contribution in land operations as well as in the sea, where the decisive victories of its fleet had paralyzed the communication of the Ottoman troops with Asia Minor.

At the tactical level, the exploitation of the Air Force's particular characteristics led to the success of the land and naval operations while the Navy's collaboration in the army's actions and vice versa realized in the battle fields as well as in landing operations. During the period the army liberated Macedonia and Epirus, the Greek fleet, apart from the transportation of troops, the execution of landing operations and the overall reinforcement to the struggle, had also liberated the islands of eastern and northern Aegean Sea and it had forced the Ottoman fleet to be constrained in the secure moorings of the Straits. During the Balkan wars the unity of the branches' efforts, the joint concept of the theater of operations and the need for cooperation became obvious. In individual sectors, the unitary command of all the personnel involved in an operation, the transportation of forces by the Navy to the battle field, the cooperation in intelligence collection and the joint decision making with the involvement of commanders from different branches, were successfully applied.

The Balkan Wars constitute a field of consciously applying the joint warfare concept both at the strategic and operational level exploiting the lessons from the military history which illustrate that the dominance in the Aegean Sea creates the preconditions for securing the victory at war. The shift in the balance of power in the Aegean with the purchase of "Averof" produced political advantages and strengthened Greece's stance in the negotiations with the Balkan countries. This shift also cut off the enemy's supply lines to the advantage of the land force while at the same time generated the conditions for the liberation of the islands. The use of the Air Force in the war fronts was more or less in an exploratory dimension. Despite of this it contributed with ingenuity and dare to bombard the enemy positions with the rudimentary means of that era, to the acquisition of the naval advantage and even to

creating a sense of a technology gap in the opponent, immediately impacting on his morale. Even though the joint warfare did not manifest itself in its modern form and range since the Air Force acted not as an autonomous branch but as part of the land army, or the Navy, the advantages of the coordinated planning paid off at the tactical level primarily. The search for joint solution at the operational level demonstrated with the formation of naval detachments for capturing the islands at the same time with the boarding of land army sections on ships for the same reason, the establishment of the marines Regiment, as well as the use of naval detachments in pure land operations. The landing operation at Chios gives the mark of the good cooperation of the two branches in long amphibious operations. The Balkan wars remain in the history of the joint warfare of Greece as the period that confirmed the lessons of the wars of antiquity and the Revolution of 1821.

Greece, having capable political and military leaders, a people with high ethics and morality arose more united and stronger from the two Balkan Wars having accomplished a large part of its nationalistic goals. Macedonia and Epirus having spent a long drawn out period under enemy repression was reunited with the motherland, while the islands of the Aegean Sea became the bulwark of freedom once again. The sovereign land of the country increased from 64.000 sq. km to 120.000 sq. km and its population rose from 2.800.000 residents to 5.000.000. Its economy was reinforced by new sources of wealth that gradually led to the marked improvement in the living standards of the entire Greek nation which could now face its future with optimism and hope.