

## **Strategic and operational innovations at the Hellenic Armed Forces, as parameter of the Balkan Wars, 1912-1913**

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The 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 so as to liberate their still enslaved Christian compatriots, and the second one involving Greece and Serbia against Bulgaria.

### **Establishment of the Joint General Staff**

In Greece, the military coup of 1909, contributed towards the victories won in the Balkan Wars, because it gave a new and proper impulse to reform the Armed Forces and implement new and well thought-out armament programs. The political and military leadership, foreseeing the upcoming changes in the Balkans and in order to put Greece in a position to liberate the occupied territories undertook coordinated action for the country's complete preparation. The collaboration of the land and naval forces constituted the fundamental precondition for achieving Greece's national objectives<sup>1</sup>. The *Higher Joint Staff of the Land Army and Navy*<sup>2</sup> was formed on 17 April 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 defence with the proper defensive works and transportation means, the gradual substitution, repair and selling off the outdated ships and every sort of useless war material whether being for use on land, or sea, the country's dowry with a complete naval base, perfect industrial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 manufacturing weapons and gun powder and in general the

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<sup>1</sup> Efpraxia S. Paschalidou, *Joint warfare across time; case studies from the Hellenic military history* (Hellenic National Defence General Staff 2010) 87-108

<sup>2</sup> Army History Directorate, *History of the Organization of the Hellenic Army 1821-1954* (Hellenic Army General Staff 2005) 238.

implementation of every project that could render the country self sufficient at time of war.

### **The Army's Organization**

In the 1909–1912 period, the Army was significantly modernized. New mobilized formations were organized, large-scale exercises were carried out under the immediate direction of the French Organizing Military Mission and several officers were trained further in Greece and abroad. The Army's organization was significantly improved; the materials and the mobilization supplies were completed, while modern weapons and guns were purchased. The most important reforms and changes involved the formation of large units of uniform composition, the reorganization of the Staff Service, the partitioning of the Artillery according to its use and the improvement of the logistics. The Hellenic Army was organized, staffed and equipped in a way as to be considered one of the most modern of its time, worthy to face up the challenges, a fact that was confirmed when it was called to fulfill its mission in the Balkan Wars of 1912–1913.

### **Fortifications and Armament<sup>3</sup>**

Since 1910, the Army Staff Service had started examining the fortifications of Thessaly and Arta. The construction of the respective projects started immediately with partial funding from the National Defence Fund. Supervision of the projects' implementation was assigned to specialist officers, who reported regularly on the progress of works. For the implementation of the projects workers and men from the Engineer Battalions were used. In August 1912 the Army Ministry, which monitored the fortifications, ordered the acceleration of the projects' completion and their equipping. Thus, by the mobilisation of 1912, four fort complexes had been completed in Thessaly, which had been constructed according to the current fortification engineering of the time and included Infantry entrenchments, from which the men could shoot standing, pillboxes, gun boxes, intercepting obstacles, ammunition warehouses, barracks, shelters, outposts, communications trenches and

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<sup>3</sup>Army History Directorate, *History of the Organization of the Hellenic Army, 1821–1954* (Hellenic Army General Staff 2005)265-267.

other facilities. Packaged fixed guns and their ammunition had been set in place. Furthermore, bridges were constructed on Pinios River, as well as roads to connect the projects with the rear. Remarkable fortifications projects were also implemented In Epirus, though incomplete at the beginning of the war.

In February 1907, the issues regarding the Army's small arms were regulated. For this reason new Mannlicher 1903 standard 6.5 mm cal. repeating rifles and carbines were introduced. From 10 July 1907 the Infantry, Evzone and Engineers Units started to be equipped with a repeating 1903 standard rifle and the Cavalry, Artillery, Nurse and Transport Units with a repeating 1903 standard carbine. In October 1910, the armament of nurses was modified and it was defined that they bear a revolver instead of a carbine. Moreover, the Field and Mountain Artillery were fully renewed in 1910. The old slow firing guns were replaced by new quick firing guns of the most perfect for their kind at that time<sup>4</sup>. The Artillery Units were supplied with new equipment; for the Field Artillery the Schneider system 1908 standard 75 mm field gun was provisioned, while for the Mountain Artillery the *Schneider-Danglis* 1908 standard 75 mm disassembled quick firing mountain gun was provisioned.

**Schneider-Danglis mountain gun:** The 75mm *Schneider-Danglis* 06/09 was [Greek](#)-designed and [French](#)-manufactured. The invention of a mountain gun that could easily be broken down to pieces for transport and reassembled into a highly efficient weapon is claimed by two Greek army engineers, (then) Engineering Corps Major P. Lykoudis, who made such a design in 1891, and then Artillery Major [Panagiotis Danglis](#) who made his own design in 1893. Danglis' proposal to the Greek Army Ministry caused an immediate reaction by Lykoudis, who claimed that his designs had been copied. Surprisingly, at the time no particular interest was shown, neither by the

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<sup>4</sup> The Hellenic Army's armament in the end of the period in question comprised of the following:

- Schneider field guns	144
- Schneider-Danglis mountain guns	36
- Maxim machine guns	60
- Mannlicher-Schoenauer rifles	100,000
- Mannlicher carbines	15,000
- Gras rifles	112,000
- Revolvers-Pistols of various types	7,640

Greek military, nor by foreign weapon manufacturers; the rivalry between the two men would continue, though, for several years. Danglis devoted personal effort into developing his design, and eventually convinced French *Schneider* armaments company to construct and test his design. Prototype development, construction and testing were completed between November 1905 and June 1906. Meanwhile, Lykoudis had arranged with the German manufacturer Krupp to develop his design. The final "victory" for Danglis came in 1907. In that year, after testing, the Greek Army determined that the *Schneider-Danglis* weapon was superior to the *Krupp-Lykoudis* and placed an order for the gun with the French manufacturer. Other nations followed with orders, and this mountain gun proved its merits in action (it was used by Greece in the Balkan Wars, World War I and World War II), while *Schneider* developed the technology further in later models. Danglis' efforts came to a successful conclusion altogether, when a fair financial settlement was made with the French manufacturer concerning the rights to use his design.

### **The Reinforcement of the Hellenic Navy**

The Hellenic Navy constituted the only naval force of the Balkan coalition and thus, it decisively contributed to the victory. The Navy General Staff was established in 1907 and as the need for the coordinated action with the army became ever more demanding, the Navy's needs were also included in the new and well thought-out armament programs. Their aim was to achieve naval supremacy again, as soon as possible, since the Ottoman Empire had already acquired two German battleships, two new light cruisers and reinforced its torpedo flotilla. A program to construct new units for the Hellenic Navy was realized, based on a combination of large and small ships, and these were to be the ships that actually brought victory in the 1912-13 War. 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 possessed 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.

The Ottoman fleet was speedier and even more, possessed an excellent port behind the Dardanelles<sup>5</sup>. The Hellenic Navy possessed only two comparative advantages; the first was the possession of the armored-cruiser *Averof*, which was more modern and faster than any other battle-ship in either fleet and the second was the possession of the small submarine *Delfin*, whose presence had a considerable effect on morale, since the Turks neither possessed nor clearly understood how to deal with this new form of naval warfare. Without a doubt, the appearance of the submarine as a war ship, was catalytic in the conduction of naval operations, mainly confirmed during the following World Wars.

*Delfin*, was commissioned in 1912 and took part in the 1<sup>st</sup> Balkan War, the first ever worldwide, offensive submarine patrol, on 21 November 1912 and the first torpedo attack, submerged on 9 December 1912, with Commanding Officer (C.O.) Lieutenant Commander Stephanos Papparigopoulos RHN, against the enemy Ottoman cruiser *Medjitieh*, out of the straits of Dardanelles and north of the island of Tenedos<sup>6</sup>.

Greece decided to purchase submarines (submersibles) for the first time, so in September 1910 the submarines *Delfin* and *Xifias* were ordered from France. The construction of *Delfin* had begun at the beginning of 1909, long before the order was placed by the Hellenic Government. It was completed by November 1911 and an intense training program of the crew and equipment trials followed. Soon after, urgent actions that forewarn for serious preparations to deal with an imminent war, began, so she arrived at Piraeus, on 5 October 1912, on the day when the war was declared, and the Hellenic *Aegean Fleet* sailed from Phaleron bay<sup>7</sup>. The imperative operational demands of the Hellenic Navy, due to the declaration of the Balkan Wars, enforced the hasty preparations of the submersible in an environment, at the Salamis Naval Base, unprepared and unable to technically support this new unit of the Navy. The whole burden for the preparation of *Delfin*, for her participation in naval war operations lay in the submersible's crew, who achieved to fulfill this difficult task with superhuman efforts and continuous work.

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<sup>5</sup> Zisis Fotakis, *Greek Naval Strategy and Policy, 1010-1919* (Routledge 2005) 45-46.

<sup>6</sup> Timotheos G. Masouras - Thomas S. Katopodis, *Hellenic Submarines* (Hellenic Maritime Museum, Piraeus 2010) vol.I, 96

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, Masouras-Katopodis, *Hellenic Submarines*, 102.

Nevertheless, the utility of the *Delfin* had its limitations, since she was handled by an inexperienced crew, who had to rush to Greece at the outbreak of the hostilities long before completing its training in France. It is not suggested that the crew of the Greek submarine was unprepared to perform well. Far from it. *Delfin's* unescorted journey of 1,100 miles non-stop set a world record and had convincingly proven the ability of its crew. However the fact that there was no reserve submarine crew in the Greek navy meant that the only existing one had to undertake an excessive amount of duties, which naturally lessened its battle-effectiveness<sup>8</sup>.

Since its departure on 19 October, she began war patrols daily<sup>9</sup>. In the morning of 9 December 1912, *Delfin* was heading towards the port of the town of Tenedos, to charge her batteries and replace electrical power spent during the night. As soon as the submersible arrived at the port, she asked the destroyer *Leon*, there, if they could charge her batteries, to receive the reply *Medjitieh* – the Ottoman cruiser – with five destroyers is outside the Straights”. *Delfin* did not hesitate, the batteries only half charged, but the remaining capacity probably sufficient for one attack. The Ottoman ships could not be seen, but soon after a Hellenic destroyer informed *Delfin* that the enemy ships were at the west end of the island of Imvros. Despite the problems she faced, *Delfin* went into diving order. At 10.30, on 9 December 1912, at the right moment and from a distance of 500 meters, the C.O. Lieutenant Commander Stephanos Paparigopoulos RHN, ordered firing of the bow torpedo<sup>10</sup> against the first ship in the line of the cruiser *Medjitieh*. The torpedo was fired normally, but immediately executed some jumps on the surface of the sea and then disappeared. The impression formed was that it had sunk. The attack was unsuccessful. In a short while, the second ship in the enemy line was in a good position for firing by the submersible.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, Fotakis, *Greek Naval Strategy*, 46.

<sup>9</sup> Dimitrios G. Fokas, *O Stolos tou Aegeou (The Aegean Fleet) 1912-1913* (Nereus, Athens 1972) vol. B, 158-161. Petros Protopapas, “The first submarine attack”, in: *Naval Review* (vol. 118, September 1932) 54-67, and *Naval Review* (vol. 412, November-December 1981) 469-477.

<sup>10</sup> This is the first, worldwide, submerged torpedo attack, because in international bibliography (Michael Gunton, *Submarines at War... to The Cold War* (Carroll & Graf Publishers, New York 2003) 25-27, Clay Blair Jr., *Silent Victory. The U.S. Submarine War against Japan* (First Naval Institute Press edition, Annapolis 2001) 36-37, Antony Preston, *Submarine Warfare. An illustrated History* (Thunder Bay Press, San Diego CA 1999) 22-24 and Spencer Dunmore, *Lost Subs. From the3 Hunley to the Kursk, the greatest submarines ever lost-and found* (Da Capo Press, Toronto Ontario Canada 2002) 45-51, the first submerged torpedo attack is considered to be the attack made on 22 September 1914, by the German submarine U9, with C.O. Lieutenant Otto Weddigen and the sinking of three old British cruisers, 12,000 tons, the *Aboukir*, *Cressy* and *Hogue*, in the North Sea near the cost of Denmark.

However, the splash of the ejection and the torpedo on the surface of the sea were detected by the Ottoman ships and the destroyers moved towards *Delfin* at full speed. The Hellenic fleet was not in the area and an offensive return of the enemy destroyer was probable<sup>11</sup>. Almost twenty years after *Delfins'* attack, the magazine *Naval Review* stated: “Nevertheless, she will remain as one of the finest pages in the Hellenic Navy and her memory and the excellent example of the pioneers in submarine navigation in Greece, will inspire the new commanding officers and the crews of submarines, if fate holds new wars for the Nation”.<sup>12</sup>

### **The Hellenic Air Force**

The air force fleet decisively contributed to the war's outcome, despite its small size and its limited operational capability, mainly by diminishing the enemy's morale. The first aviators undertook and carried out reconnaissance missions as well as strikes against the land enemy targets to the benefit of the army in Macedonia and Epirus. On 24 January 1913, a Hellenic hydroplane carried out the first ever mission of naval support cooperation by identifying the Ottoman fleet in the Dardanelles.

The Greek Government early realized the utility of the airplane in the military operations<sup>13</sup>. Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos had expressed his conviction to General Eydoux, who was head of the French Military Mission in Greece that the airplane can constitute a significant tool of war. Lower rank officers of the Army were already being trained in France as aviators, already from December 1911. 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. The air fleet was composed of four *Henri 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* were ordered. Those were fitted with an 80 horse power engine and they could carry an observer as well. The initial role of the

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, Masouras-Katopodis, *Hellenic Submarines*, 113.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, Protopapas, “The first submarine attack”, 67.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, Paschalidou, *Joint warfare*, 95-96.

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.

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 every 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 5 October 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 Ellassona. 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 Piraeus to Preveza. The Air Company's first mission on 5 December 1912, 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 21 February 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 Ottoman 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**

After the hydroplane's successful flights, the Hellenic Government considered necessary the planning and the organization apart of the existing Army Air Force and of a naval one. 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 22 June 1912. However the outbreak of the first Balkan War did not permit the completion of the planned organization of the Naval Air Force, which acquired its first hydroplane in November 1912.

The Greek fleet after the victorious naval battles of Elli (3 December 1912) and Lemnos (2 January 1913) and while the islands of northern and eastern Aegean had been liberated, was anchored in the Moudros harbour. On 24 January 1913 a Maurice Farman hydroplane carried out a successful flight up to Tenedos<sup>14</sup>. Immediately the Chief of the Fleet Admiral Pavlos Koundouriotis asked for an air reconnaissance to be informed of the position of the Ottoman fleet that had been blocked in the Dardanelles Straits. The first military mission to the benefit of the navy was carried out and it constituted a milestone in the history of the sea operations. The hydroplane's pilot was Lieutenant (Army) Michael Moutousis and Ensign Aristides Moraitinis was the observer. The flight lasted 2 hours and 20 minutes and covered a

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<sup>14</sup> Air Historical Branch, *Hellenic Wings. An Illustrated History of the Hellenic Air Force and its Precursors, 1908-1944* (Hellenic Air Force General Staff 1999) 26-31.

distance of 180 kms by the way of Samothrace and Imvros. The pilot with maneuvers managed to escape the firing of the coastal Ottoman artillery while the observer was drafting a detailed plan of the enemy ships positions. At the same time, they bombed an Ottoman transport ship. On its return, the hydroplane, which had been riddled by enemy light gun-fire, was forced to land on the sea at the Dardanelles 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 harbour.<sup>15</sup> 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 Ottoman press comments gave a clear picture of the impression of the Greek aviators' achievements. As Wilson stated, "for the first time in history, the Hellenic fleet used an airplane to identify an enemy fleet and bomb it. This incident became a special characteristic turning point in the development of naval operations since then and the use of airplanes in identifying and bombing enemy fleets."

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<sup>15</sup> Ioannis Paloubis, *From the seas to the skies; The Naval Air Force Chronicle 1913-1941* (Hellenic Maritime Museum, Piraeus 2009) 30-33.

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