



Rear Admiral Pavlos Kountouriotis

The Balkan Naval War

A campaign system and fast play rules for
Pre-dreadnought naval warfare and the Balkan War at Sea,
1912-1913

By David Manley



**Long
Face
Games**

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Introduction

This campaign pack follows on from my earlier packs that covered the Russo Japanese War and the Spanish American War. This time the setting is somewhat more obscure, at least to the casual amateur historian and wargamer, but covers the naval side of a conflict that, in promoting upheaval in the established order in the Balkans, helped set the stage for the outbreak of the Great War just a few months later. The campaign system follows the model established in "White Bear, Red Sun" and is supported by a set of player aids including campaign map, ship and counters, port control charts and other useful bits and pieces. Also included are the latest edition of my "Broadside and Salvo" fast play pre-dreadnought rules. These follow a similar DBA-inspired game system to my earlier Ancient, Medieval and Renaissance rules published by LFG so the principles will be familiar to users of those rules. However, their application has been modified to suit the peculiarities of the pre-dreadnought era and of course there are a host of era-specific rules and options that I hope capture the feel of the period. Players may be curious as to why I chose a set of rules that nominally covers naval warfare up to 1905 for a campaign fought a decade later. But a review of the ships engaged and the technology they employed shows that many of the ships, despite operating in the dreadnought era, were veterans of the previous decade and in many cases the previous century. That said the campaign system is adaptable to other set of naval rules covering the First World War.

Contents

- **A Brief History of the Balkan War at Sea**
- **Broadside and Salvo Quick Play Tactical Rules**
- **Balkan Naval War Campaign Rules**

Supporting Material

The following files are included with the PDF release of this campaign pack as separate files:

- **A3 Campaign Map**
- **Turkish Ship Counters**
- **Greek and Bulgarian Ship Counters**
- **Sea Area Control Counters**

Part 1 - The Naval Campaign of the First Balkan War, 1912-1913

Introduction

The First (and indeed second) Balkan War of 1912-13 is a conflict largely unknown outside Greece, Turkey, Albania and Bulgaria. In the autumn of 1912 the Greece, Macedonia and Bulgaria, the countries that made up the Balkan League, sought to throw the Ottoman Empire out of mainland Europe. In a series of highly successful operations they defeated the Turkish Army in Europe, pushing the border of the Ottoman Empire back to the isthmus leading to Istanbul. What is even less well known is that the navies of Greece, Turkey and Bulgaria fought a hard naval campaign in the Aegean, Black Sea and Eastern Mediterranean that included many features of much larger campaigns; from fleet actions and amphibious assaults through patrolling, convoy escort and blockade. It was this campaign that saw many of the islands of the Aegean come under Greek control (which continues to this day). Whilst the war was predominantly fought and won on land the naval campaign secured the flanks of the Greek and Bulgarian armies, allowing them to reinforce and resupply their armies whilst denying these luxuries to the Turks. In so doing the naval war was a key contributor to victory or defeat on land.

This book provides a short campaign that allows players to explore this little-known campaign whilst fighting out some interesting actions with unusual navies. It is designed for use primarily with LFG's "Broadside and Salvo" Other sets of rules covering First World War and pre-dreadnought naval actions, or LFG's "Si Vis Pacem" tactical rules, should be useable with a little adaptation

The Balkan Wars

Serbia, Bulgaria and Montenegro as independent nations were borne out of the gradual collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the West. But independence did not calm passions in the region, instead there grew a campaign to bring others of their nationalities still under Ottoman rule to independence. In a complex web of treaties, agreements and Russian influence the Balkan League was formed in September 1912. War broke out soon after

In mid October the Ottoman Empire declared war on the Balkan League on 17 October. The main area of operations was centred on Macedonia and Thrace. In Thrace the Bulgarian army besieged the major Ottoman fortress at Adrianople and scored major victories at the battles of Kirk Kilisse and Buni Hisar. The latter was the largest battle fought in Europe between the Franco-Prussian War and the Great War. Reeling but not broken, the Ottoman Empire rallied at the Chataldzha, the last line of defence before Istanbul. The Bulgarians, still a strong force but wearied by the extensive campaign, mounted an attack on the Turkish defensive lines which failed to break through. The offensive stalled and both sides settled into defensive lines that presaged the similar but more extensive lines on the Western front only a few years later c ridden Bulgarians on 17 November against the Ottoman positions there failed.

In the West the Serbian army defeated the western Ottoman army at the battle of Kumanovo on 23 October, going on to strike through Macedonia, Kosovo and on through Albania, reaching the Adriatic coast in December. Greece joined the Balkan League offensive, driving north east through Saloniki, and north west through Prevesa. Albania declared its independence at the end of November. A shaky armistice was agreed in December, but this collapsed after a coup in Turkey and fighting resumed quickly. This led to the eventual total collapse of Ottoman forces and holdings in Europe, save for the approaches to Istanbul behind the defensive lines at Chataldzha. With the objectives of the League largely secured and little prospect of a change in the situation at

Chataldza both sides went to the negotiating table. The Treaty of London ending the war was signed on May 30th 1913.

Whilst the bulk of the fighting was conducted on land there was an essential maritime campaign that was essential in supporting the main event. For the allies the major force was the Greek Navy. Its role was twofold, support the land offensive in Thrace, and to isolate Ottoman holdings in the Adriatic by securing the sea lanes through the Aegean Sea, past Greece and onwards to Prevesa and beyond. In the Black Sea the Bulgarian fleet, a fraction of the size of the Greek and Ottomans, supported land operations on the northern flank of the campaign in Thrace and, in so doing, tied up a sizeable element of the Ottoman fleet. It is this aspect of the war that this campaign seeks to recreate.

The Greek Navy

The Greek Navy was relatively modern, strengthened by the recent purchase of numerous new units and undergoing reforms under the supervision of a British mission. Invited by Prime Minister Venizelos in 1910, the mission began its work upon its arrival in May 1911. Granted extraordinary powers and led by Vice Admiral Lionel Grand Tufnell, it thoroughly reorganized the Navy Ministry and dramatically improved the number and quality of exercises in gunnery and fleet manoeuvres. In 1912, the core unit of the fleet was the fast armoured cruiser *Georgios Averof*, completed in 1910 and, at that time, the fastest and most modern warship in the combatant navies. It was complemented by three rather antiquated battleships of the *Hydra* class. There were also eight destroyers built in 1906–1907, and six new destroyers that were hastily bought in summer 1912 as the imminence of war became apparent.

Nevertheless, at the outbreak of the war, the Greek fleet was far from ready. The Ottoman battlefleet retained a clear advantage in number of ships, speed of the main surface units and, more importantly, in the number and calibre of the ships' guns. In addition, as the war caught the fleet in the middle of its expansion and reorganization, fully a third of the fleet (the six new destroyers and the submarine *Delfin*) only reached Greece after hostilities had started, forcing the navy to reshuffle crews, who consequently suffered from lacking familiarization and training time. Coal stockpiles and other war stores were also in short supply, while the *Georgios Averof* had arrived with barely any ammunition, and would remain so until late November.

The Bulgarian Navy

Whilst powerful on land the Bulgarian Navy was little more than a coastal defence force, comprising 6 torpedo boats and a single torpedo gunboat. With such a small force at its disposal the Bulgarians could have been expected to play only a very small part in the war at sea. Yet their presence in the Black Sea tied up the bulk of the operational Turkish fleet during the opening weeks of the war, paving the way for the surge in Greek operations that successfully bottled in the Ottoman fleet.

The Turkish Navy

The Ottoman fleet had performed poorly in the Greco-Turkish War of 1897, forcing the Ottoman government to begin a drastic overhaul. Older ships were retired and newer ones acquired, chiefly from France and Germany. In addition, in 1908 the Ottomans called in a British naval mission to update their training and doctrine. In the event, the British mission, headed by Admiral Sir Douglas Gamble, would find its task almost impossible. To a large extent this was due to the political

upheaval in the aftermath of the Young Turk Revolution; between 1908 and 1911, the office of Navy Minister changed hands nine times. Inter-departmental infighting and the entrenched interests of the bloated and over-aged officer corps, many of whom occupied their positions as a quasi-sinecure, further obstructed drastic reform. In addition, British attempts to control the Navy's construction programme were met with suspicion by the Ottoman ministers, and funds for Gamble's ambitious plans for new ships were not available.

To counter the Greek acquisition of the *Georgios Averoff*, the Ottomans initially tried to buy the new German armoured cruiser SMS *Blücher* or the battlecruiser SMS *Moltke*. Not able to afford the ships' high cost, the Ottomans acquired two old *Brandenburg*-class pre-dreadnought battleships, which became *Barbaros Hayreddin* and *Turgut Reis*. Along with the cruisers *Hamidiye* and *Mejidiye*, these two ships were to form the relatively modern core of the Ottoman battlefleet. By the summer of 1912, however, they were already in poor condition due to chronic neglect: the rangefinders and ammunition hoists had been removed, the telephones were not working, the pumps were corroded, and most of the watertight doors could no longer be closed.

The War at Sea

On the outbreak of hostilities on 18 October, the Greek fleet, placed under the newly promoted Rear Admiral Pavlos Kountouriotis, sailed for the island of Lemnos, occupying it three days later (although fighting continued on the island until 27 October) and establishing an anchorage at Moudros Bay. This move was of major strategic importance, as it provided the Greeks with a forward base in close distance to the Dardanelles Straits, the Ottoman fleet's main anchorage and refuge. In view of the Ottoman fleet's superiority in speed and broadside weight, the Greek planners expected it to sortie from the straits early in the war. Given the Greek fleet's unpreparedness resulting from the premature outbreak of the war, such an early Ottoman attack might well have been able to achieve a crucial victory. Instead, the Ottoman Navy spent the first two months of the war in operations against the Bulgarians in the Black Sea, giving the Greeks valuable time to complete their preparations and allowing them to consolidate their control of the Aegean.

By mid-November Greek naval detachments had seized the islands of Imbros, Thasos, Agios Efstratios, Samothrace, Psara and Ikaria, while landings were undertaken on the larger islands of Lesbos and Chios only on 21 and 27 November respectively. Substantial Ottoman garrisons were present on the latter, and their resistance was fierce. They withdrew into the mountainous interior and were not subdued until 22 December and 3 January respectively. Samos, officially an autonomous principality, was not attacked until 13 March 1913, out of a desire not to upset the Italians in the nearby Dodecanese. The clashes there were short-lived as the Ottoman forces withdrew to the Anatolian mainland, so that the island was securely in Greek hands by 16 March.

At the same time, with the aid of numerous merchant ships converted to auxiliary cruisers, a loose naval blockade on the Ottoman coasts from the Dardanelles to Suez was instituted, which disrupted the Ottomans' flow of supplies (only the Black Sea routes to Romania remained open) and left some 250,000 Ottoman troops immobilized in Asia. In the Ionian Sea, the Greek fleet operated without opposition, ferrying supplies for the army units in the Epirus front. Furthermore, the Greeks bombarded and then blockaded the port of Vlorë in Albania on 3 December, and Durrës on 27 February. A naval blockade extending from the pre-war Greek border to Vlorë was also instituted on 3 December, isolating the newly established Provisional Government of Albania based there from any outside support.

Lieutenant Nikolaos Votsis scored a major success for Greek morale on 31 October: he sailed his torpedo boat No. 11, under the cover of night, into the harbour of Thessaloniki, sank the old Ottoman ironclad battleship *Feth-i Bulend* and escaped unharmed. On the same day, Greek troops of the Epirus Army seized the Ottoman naval base of Preveza. The Ottomans scuttled the four ships present there, but the Greeks were able to salvage the Italian-built torpedo-