



# Prelude to the First World War: The Balkan Wars 1912-1913

*Edward Robert Hooton*

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The fuse to the First World War was lit in the Balkans where simmering hatreds exploded into violence. Like a string of firecrackers, these hatreds had been fueled by attacks on the Turkish Ottoman Empire in the previous few years. From 1911-1912, Italy seized Libya. In 1912, the Balkan states united to drive Turkey out of Europe in the First Balkans War, and in the following year in the Second Balkans War, turned on each other in a division of the spoils which allowed Turkey to retain a foothold in Europe. This was a war of land campaigns, sea battles and amphibious operations in which the new military technology was first used. Submarine and aircraft attacked ships, aircraft made reconnaissance flights and bombed troops while even electronic warfare was used. It also saw mirror images of the events in the First World War; Bulgarians driven from Salonika where an Allied army would later be contained and Turkish troops held back in the Dardanelles, their guns driving off a naval task force. These now forgotten wars were the overture to the First World War and yet they have overtones a century later. The First World War saw echoes of these campaigns in Salonika and especially in the Dardanelles, while the ethnic tensions would erupt into further bloodshed after the Cold War ended as Yugoslavia collapsed during the 1990s.

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