

= Battle of Bizani =

The Battle of Bizani took place in Epirus on 4 ? 6 March [O.S. 19 ? 21 February] 1913 . The battle was fought between Greek and Ottoman forces during the last stages of the First Balkan War , and revolved around the forts of Bizani , which covered the approaches to Ioannina , the largest city in the region .

At the outbreak of the war , the Greek Army on the Epirus front did not have the numbers to initiate an offensive against the German @-@ designed defensive positions in Bizani . However , after the campaign in Macedonia was over , a large number of Greek troops were redeployed to Epirus , where Crown Prince Constantine himself assumed command . In the battle that followed the Ottoman positions were breached and Ioannina taken . Despite having a slight numerical advantage , this was not the decisive factor in the Greek victory . Rather , " solid operational planning " by the Greeks was key as it helped them implement a well @-@ coordinated and executed assault that did not allow the Ottoman forces time to react .

= = Background = =

As the main war effort of Greece was initially turned towards Macedonia , on the Epirus front the Greek army was outnumbered by the Ottoman Yanya Corps at the outbreak of hostilities in October 1912 . After stopping an initial attack by the Ottoman commander Esat Pasha at Gribovo , however , the Greeks succeeded in liberating Preveza (October 21) and pushing north in the direction of Ioannina , repulsing an Ottoman attack at Pente Pigadia (Beshpinar) . On November 5 , a small force from Corfu made a landing and captured the coastal area of Himarë without facing significant resistance , and on December 20 Greek troops improved their positions in Epirus and entered Korçë , north of Ioannina , thus cutting off its last supply route and threatening the city 's northeastern flank .

= = Prelude = =

The terrain south of Ioannina provided excellent defensive ground . Moreover , the Ottoman forces further reinforced their positions with permanent fortifications , constructed under the direction of the German General Rüdiger von der Goltz . These were equipped with concrete artillery emplacements , bunkers , trenches , barbed wire , searchlights and machine gun positions . The Ioannina fortress area included two major fortresses , those of Bizani and Kastritsa , guarding the main southern approaches , along with five smaller forts in a ring around the city , covering the western and northwestern approaches . The forts were well supplied with artillery , totaling some 102 pieces (most of them 87 mm) . By December 1912 , both sides were reinforced : the Ottomans received part of the Vardar Army , retreating after the Battle of Monastir , bringing their forces up to some 35 @,@ 000 , while the Greeks also brought up the 2nd Division from Macedonia and a number of volunteer regiments , for a total of 25 @,@ 000 men . The Greeks launched a first attack on the fortress area on December 14 . The Ottomans succeeded in repelling it in a series of actions that lasted until December 22 , and even gained some ground , albeit at the cost of high casualties which depleted their numbers to some 26 @,@ 000 men .

With operations in Macedonia completed , the Greek High Command now turned its attention to Epirus . Three divisions were transferred to the theater , raising the total of Greek troops to ca . 40 @,@ 000 , along with 80 artillery pieces (amongst which 12 heavy 105 mm and 155 mm guns) and six aircraft . On the other hand , an additional number of Ottoman soldiers , who were retreating from the Macedonian front , reinforced the defenders . Throughout the period , the siege continued actively , with artillery duels , attacks by Albanian irregulars on Greek supply lines , and reconnaissance and bombing missions on the city by the Greek airplanes . At the same time , the hardships of the winter affected the morale of both sides . The Greek Epirus front commander , General Konstantinos Sapountzakis , launched a new frontal attack on January 20 . Although it gained ground , pushing the defenders back into the fort of Bizani , the high casualty rate and the

worsening weather resulted in the operation being suspended a few days later .

During the preparations , a mixed unit that included local women protected the left flank of the Greek Army , against a possible attack by Ottoman groups that were stationed in Paramythia . Moreover , groups consisting of local females supported the Greek side in several ways , particularly in the transportation of guns , food , clothes , and other important supplies . On specific occasions women also participated in the armed conflicts against the Ottoman forces , some of them were distinguished in the battlefield , like Maria Nastouli , who reached the rank of captain .

= = Battle = =

After the renewed failure , Sapountzakis was relieved of his command and replaced by Crown Prince Constantine . Constantine now proceeded to carefully marshal his forces , bringing up more men and artillery . The Crown Prince formulated a new plan , whereby his army would feign an attack on Bizani from the southeast , while the main effort would be actually directed on the fortress area 's southwestern flank .

The Greek artillery began firing a preparatory bombardment on March 4 , continuing through the day . It is estimated that the Greeks fired 150 rounds per gun in this bombardment , while Ottoman counter @-@ fire was hampered by lack of ammunition . The assault was launched on 5 March [O.S. 20 February] 1913 , with three Greek infantry divisions ? the 4th , 6th and 8th Infantry Divisions ? thrusting against the eastern and western sectors of the defensive perimeter . At the same time the Metsovon Joint Brigade launched a diversionary attack from the north . The first Greek units , under heavy artillery support , breached the defensive line in Tsouka sector at morning , and during the following hours the Ottoman defenses were broken in five locations . As a result , the defending Ottoman units from Tsouka to Manoliasa retreated immediately to Ioannina in order to avoid encirclement . Moreover , as these breakthroughs from different axes threatened to collapse the entire defensive perimeter and to cut off his front echelons , Esat Pasha was forced to keep his reserve troops back and engage them in a defensive role . By 18h , the Greek 1st Evzone Regiment , together with the 9th Battalion commanded by Major Ioannis Velissariou , entered the village of Agios Ioannis on the southern outskirts of Ioannina .

As a consequence of the Greek advance , the fortresses of Bizani and Kastritsa were cut off by 16h and isolated from the rest of the Ottoman army and its headquarters in Ioannina . As night fell , the forts ceased firing , and their garrisons abandoned them , trying to cut through the rather loose Greek encirclement to Ioannina . In their attempt to withdraw towards Ioannina , a significant number of Ottoman troops , totaling 35 officers and 935 soldiers , were captured by the Greek units positioned on the city 's southern outskirts . Several Ottoman positions capitulated the next morning , although Bizani and Kastritsa continued to resist until after the surrender . Meanwhile , Esat Pasha realized that the battle was lost , and tried to evacuate as many troops and wounded as he could to the north . As the Greeks pressed their advance however , he contacted the city 's foreign consulates to seek help in negotiating a surrender . At 23 : 00 on 6 March [O.S. 21 February] 1913 , he agreed upon the unconditional surrender of Ioannina and the Ottoman garrison to the Greeks . The following day the Greek forces under Crown Prince Constantine were parading through the flag @-@ covered streets of the city . On the other hand , Esat Pasha upon arriving in Turkey was welcomed as a national hero .

= = = Aerial warfare = = =

The Greek forces used a small fleet of six aircraft , which mainly consisted of Maurice Farman MF.7 biplanes , during the operations . They used an airfield near Nicopolis and performed several reconnaissance and bombing missions with considerable effect . Among the aviators were Dimitrios Kamperos , Michael Moutoussis and Christos Adamidis , who were flying above the Bizani and Ioannina sectors at a height of 1 @, @ 600 ? 2 @, @ 300 meters (5 @, @ 200 ? 7 @, @ 500 ft) . On numerous occasions Ottoman troops , after recovering from their initial confusion , attempted to shoot down the aircraft with their rifles , with little success . Nevertheless , N. de Sackoff , a Russian

pilot flying for the Greeks , became the first pilot ever shot down in combat , when his biplane was hit by ground fire . He then came down near Preveza , repaired his plane and resumed flight back to his base . The day Ioannina came under Greek control , Adamidis , also a native of the city , landed his aircraft on the city Town Hall square , to the adulation of an enthusiastic crowd .

= = Aftermath = =

During the battle , the Greek army inflicted some 2 @, @ 800 Ottoman casualties , while suffering only 284 of its own . The Greeks captured some 8 @, @ 600 prisoners , while the remainder of the Ottoman garrison was able to retreat into Albania . The Greeks also captured 108 artillery pieces and large amounts of matériel . On 16 March [O.S. 3 March] 1913 the Greek forces entered Gjirokastër and Delvinë , and took Tepelenë the next day . At the end of the war they reached a line that stretched from the Ceraunian mountains (above Himarë) on the Ionian coast to Lake Prespa to the east . The success in the Epirus front enabled the Greek headquarters to transfer part of the army to Thessaloniki , in preparation for a confrontation against the Bulgarians .

Given the strongly entrenched opposition the Greek Army faced , historian Richard Hall cites the Battle of Bizani and the fall of Ioannina as Greece 's greatest military achievement in the First Balkan War . Numerical superiority was not a decisive factor for the Greeks during the final assault . Instead it was the way they planned their operations that led to a well coordinated and executed assault and left no opportunity for the Ottoman side to react in time . The surrender of Ioannina secured Greek control of southern Epirus and the Ionian coast . At the same time , it was denied to the newly formed Albanian state , for which it might have provided a southern anchor @-@ point comparable to Shkodër in the north (see also Provisional Government of Albania) .