

The History of the Twentieth Century

Episode 66

“An Immense Box of Sand”

Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

In the year 1910, on the eve of the fiftieth anniversary of the Kingdom of Italy, two Italian writers founded what came to be known as the Italian Nationalist Association, often known by its Italian abbreviation ANI. The ANI held its first conference in December 1910. The keynote speaker said, in part, “there are proletarian nations, as well as proletarian classes; that is to say, there are nations whose living conditions are subject to great disadvantage, compared to the way of life of other nations, just as classes are. Once this is realized, nationalism must, above all, insist firmly on the truth: Italy is, materially and morally, a proletarian nation. What is more, she is proletarian at a period before her recovery. That is to say, before she is organized, at a period when she is still groping and weak and being subjected to other nations, she is weak not in the strength of her people, but in her strength as a nation. Nationalism must become, to use a rather strained comparison, our national socialism. That is to say, that just as socialism taught the proletariat the value of the class struggle, we must teach Italy the value of the international class struggle. But international class struggle means war. Well, let it be war! And let nationalism arouse in Italy the will to win a war. We propose a means of national redemption which we sum up in the expression ‘the need for war.’”

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[opening theme]

Episode 66. An Immense Box of Sand.

Yeah, I don't know about you, but that whole “national socialism” thing is creeping me out. We'll have to keep an eye on that. But for today, our main topic is Italy's war against the Ottoman Empire. First off, let's review.

You may recall from episode 25 that Italy has had designs on the Ottoman province of Tripoli in North Africa for a long time. Ever since 1880, when the French snagged Tunisia as a protectorate, a move which triggered a patch of bad relations between France and Italy, Italy has been eyeing the territory that we today call Libya. France and Britain quietly cut a deal with Italy, whereby in exchange for Italian acceptance of French control of Tunisia, and British

control of Egypt and Cyprus, France and Britain agreed to keep their hands off Tripoli and leave it for the Italians.

Italy pursued a policy of building economic ties to Tripoli. The British and the French had already demonstrated that a European power could acquire a colonial protectorate without firing a shot, by slowly ensnaring it in a web of commercial and financial relationships. This was sometimes called “peaceful penetration.” And so, during the period from 1880 to 1910, Italian policy was aimed at a similar peaceful absorption of Tripoli as an Italian protectorate, not through force of arms, but through social and economic ties. A key component of this strategy was Italian banks investing in infrastructure projects, such as roads and aqueducts. The Ottoman government was even willing to look the other way when Italian investors bought land and business interests in Tripoli, although that was technically against Ottoman law.

In ancient times, what we now call Libya was part of the Roman Empire. To Italian nationalists, that fact alone was sufficient to make these lands fair game for Italian imperialism in the twentieth century. In those ancient times, Libya was a much richer and more productive land than it was at the beginning of the twentieth century. Confident Italian nationalists, though, assumed that was because Turks and Arabs couldn’t manage a country to save their lives, and that under Italian management, Libya would bloom again.

There was still the matter of Italy’s allies, Germany and Austria. You may recall that it was irritation over France’s grab of Tunisia that drove Italy into the Triple Alliance back in the day. But Italy was never firmly committed to that alliance, and everyone knew it. Italian foreign policy in this period was typically a matter of playing off her official allies, Germany and Austria, against Britain and France. Italy’s membership in the Triple Alliance was valuable to her alliance partners, and so they worried whenever they saw signs of Italy drifting away toward Britain or France. Britain and France, for their part, were quite interested in the possibility of tempting Italy away from the Triple Alliance, and so were inclined to give Italy what she wanted.

Italy is a country with a seafaring tradition, as you might guess by looking at a map and taking note of its long, long coastline. The fledgling Kingdom of Italy quickly became a naval power in the Mediterranean. Not on the scale of Britain, admittedly, which had important strategic interests in the Mediterranean and kept a substantial naval force there. The Mediterranean was Britain’s gateway to the jewel of her Empire: India. Even before the Suez Canal was built, a great deal of trade with India went through the Mediterranean, taking overland routes across the Suez Isthmus or across the Levant and Mesopotamia to the Persian Gulf. Britain controlled the island of Malta, in the center of the Mediterranean, and stationed its fleet there. This is very close to Italy, but Italy and Britain kept their relationship cordial enough that neither saw the other’s fleet as a strategic threat. You might recall that Italy took control of Eritrea and part of Somalia during this time, which required Italian naval movement back and forth through the Suez Canal. Britain and France gave the Italians no trouble about this, because they wanted to encourage Italy to see them as strategic partners rather than rivals.

In contrast, by 1911, The Ottoman Empire hardly had a navy worth speaking of. Sultan Abdul Hamid II had gutted the Navy for political reasons when he had assumed the throne, because the Navy hadn't supported him and he viewed it as a potential threat. Which is ironic, in view of Ottoman history. The Empire had once been the supreme naval power in the Mediterranean. After the Young Turks came to power in 1908, they began to push for a reversal of this anti-Navy policy. The Ottoman Navy acquired some old battleships from Germany and had even ordered a couple of the newfangled dreadnoughts from Great Britain.

But let's get back to Italy. As a member of the Triple Alliance, Italy was obligated to keep its alliance partners up to speed on its ambitions in Tripoli. During the 1891 renewal of the alliance, Italy got Germany to commit to support Italian designs on Tripoli. In the 1902 renewal, Italy got Austria on board with a secret side agreement that Austria would also support Italian hegemony in Tripoli. It's important to keep in mind that the Austro-Hungarian Empire has a coastline along the Adriatic, and therefore a naval presence in the Mediterranean. So Austria-Hungary has a stake in Mediterranean naval affairs, and the Italians needed to keep them onside.

It was at this same time, 1902, that France began angling to take the more or less independent state of Morocco as a protectorate. Here was an opening for Italy, where Italy could offer France support for its designs on Morocco in exchange for French support of Italian designs on Tripoli. In 1903, the Italian king, Victor Emmanuel III, made an important state visit to Paris, as we saw in episode 25, where he was wined and dined by the French president, Emile Loubet. In 1904, the French President made a reciprocal visit to Italy.

One of the benefits of this new warmth in relations between France and Italy was that France and Italy came to an agreement over the borders between French West Africa and Tripoli. The fact that Italy was taking an interest in the borders of Tripoli tells you quite a bit right there.

With France squared away, there remained only the approval of Britain, which was easy enough. Britain was quite content with Egypt and Cyprus and Malta, and was happy to see Italy's ambitions focused in a different direction.

The Italians even got the Russians on board, getting an agreement where Russia would respect Italian interests in Tripoli in exchange for Italy's promising to look the other way if and when Russia got around to its strategic ambition of taking Constantinople. So things are looking pretty good for the Tripoli project.

After the Young Turk uprising of 1908, however, the new government in the Ottoman Empire began to push back against the Italian economic penetration of Tripoli and began to enforce those laws barring foreign investments. The reaction to this upsurge in nationalism in the Ottoman Empire was to further incite the upsurge of right-wing nationalism in Italy, culminating in the formation of the ANI in 1910.

March of 1911 marked the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the Kingdom of Italy. That same month, Giovanni Giolitti became Prime Minister for the third time. Giolitti was an old-school liberal who was interested in expanding the right to vote in Italy to something close to universal male suffrage. He probably thought he would get a lot of grassroots support for that, particularly from the newly enfranchised. What he got was grassroots support for war.

The right-wing nationalists and their allies in the newspapers reiterated Italian grievances. France had snatched Tunisia away. Italy had been humbled at Adowa, in Ethiopia. Now even the Ottomans were dissing Italy. Who would ever respect a nation that keeps getting humiliated and never does anything about it?

In June of that year there was a conference in Rome dedicated to the question of Italian emigration. Emigration was continuing and increasing, a matter of concern to Italian policy makers. The wealth disparity between the north and south of Italy, if anything, had only gotten worse since unification. Nationalists raised the same old argument that what Italy needed was colonies, so that southern Italians had a place to go where they could build new lives while also building up their own country, rather than some other country, like the United States.

The conference became more of a rally for war over Tripoli than a sober discussion of the emigration problem. The fact that the King himself attended the conference only added to the pressure on the government. July 1911 saw the Agadir crisis, which we talked about last week. In Italy, Germany's actions at Agadir sent a message that Germany was now gunning for new colonial possessions in the Mediterranean, and that if Italy did not move on Tripoli, Germany might.

As the summer wore on, Italian newspapers began running stories about alleged Ottoman hostility toward Christians in Tripoli. They were also printing wild speculations about the agricultural potential and mineral wealth of Tripoli. They ran pieces profiling the Arab population of Tripoli, how much they resented the oppressive Turkish rule, and how they would welcome Italian liberation.

So let's summarize: their government is our enemy but the Arab people love us and would welcome us as liberators if we came in and overthrew their terrible, awful, no-good government. And they have great mineral wealth that will make this military operation practically pay for itself. How can we afford *not* to invade them?

Yeah where have I heard that one before? The former British Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury, once said, "I think that the constant study of maps is apt to disturb men's reasoning powers." This war is a case study supporting that proposition, and supporting as well the proposition that never are world leaders' reasoning powers more deeply disturbed than when they are studying maps of the Middle East.

One problem, though, was that Italian policy at this time, like the policy of many other countries, was to prop up the Ottoman Empire. The ever declining, increasingly hollowed out, Empire looked more and more like a goner every day. There were nationalist uprisings of various ethnic groups across the Empire breaking out all the time. The fear was, if the Ottoman Empire lost its grip on its European territories, the scramble that other countries would enter into to gobble up its lands could lead to an ugly war. And we're principally thinking about Austria and Russia in the Balkans, not to mention Serbia, Bulgaria, and Greece.

So if Italy plans to go to war with the Ottoman Empire, the challenge is to strike the Ottomans hard enough to make them want to give up Tripoli without hitting them so hard that the Empire loses its grip on the Balkans and plunges all of Europe into a war. Spoiler alert: that's exactly what is going to happen.

By September, Italian newspapers were full of stories of Muslim extremists in Tripoli fomenting hatred against Italian expatriates working there, and claiming that Italians in Tripoli were now in fear of their lives. The papers were also reporting that the Ottoman government was shipping arms to Tripoli in preparation for war.

Only that last part was true, and it was only true because the Italian Right had been banging the war drums for almost a year now, and the Ottoman government was getting nervous. There had been a revolt in Yemen earlier in 1911, and the Empire had had to send half of its Tripoli garrison to Arabia to put down that revolt, leaving Tripoli less well defended than usual. On September 28, the Italian government delivered an ultimatum to the Empire: Italy was going to avenge the many offenses committed against it by occupying Tripoli, and the Ottoman government was expected to cooperate in this occupation and withdraw its forces. The ultimatum demanded an Ottoman response within 24 hours.

The Ottomans responded within the deadline by offering Italy the same deal that Britain had in Egypt, that is to say, Tripoli would remain formally Ottoman territory, but under the control and administration of Italy. The Italian government refused this offer as inadequate and declared war.

[music: Overture to *La Forza del Destino*]

As I mentioned earlier, Italy had a robust navy while the Ottomans scarcely had a navy at all. This meant that the Empire had no way to send troops to Tripoli. Transports sent by sea would be vulnerable to Italian naval attack. Soldiers could theoretically be moved through Egypt, but Britain, anxious not to alienate Italy, refused to permit Turkish soldiers to pass through what was officially Ottoman territory.

The main Italian fleet headed straight for Tripoli as soon as war was declared. But smaller Italian naval units engaged the Ottoman Navy in other theaters. I mentioned a revolt in Yemen? The

Italians had a few older cruisers stationed in Eritrea, which they used to put up a blockade on Ottoman controlled ports in the region as a way of strengthening the revolt and complicating the Ottoman position.

An Italian destroyer squadron set out for the Adriatic coast of the Ottoman Empire – what is in our time the coasts of Albania and northern Greece. The Italians fired on some small Ottoman ships, and in no time the government of Austria-Hungary was having a freakout, since Vienna regards the Adriatic as her sea. You already know there had been a small-scale Albanian revolt going on for the past couple of years, and the Austrians were also worried that these Italian naval attacks would aid the Albanian rebels and destabilize the Balkans. In a matter of days, the Austrians were redeploying their own navy south from its base in Pula, at the northern end of the Adriatic, and even threatened to militarize their land border with Italy.

The Austrian Chief of Staff, General Conrad, pressed for Austria to go to war with Italy, as he had many times before, and will many times again. The Austrian Kaiser, Franz Josef, took this opportunity to dismiss Conrad from his position, at least for a little while. Conrad was the protégé of the Imperial Crown Prince, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, you see, and the Kaiser and the Archduke did not get on.

Anyway, war with Austria was the last thing Italy needed right now, so the Italian government apologized to the Austrians and withdrew the ships from the Adriatic. Vienna also extracted from Italy her agreement to withdraw her objection to the Austrian annexation of Bosnia three years earlier.

All this gives you some idea of how delicate the situation in the Balkans has become. It wasn't a very auspicious beginning for the war with the Ottomans, either.

The main Italian fleet reached the city of Tripoli on October 1. They cut the telegraph line linking Tripoli to Malta, cutting off the Ottoman garrison's communications. The next day, the Italian cruiser *Giuseppe Garibaldi* steamed into Tripoli harbor under a white flag with a message for the garrison: Tripoli must surrender within 24 hours, or the Italian fleet would open fire on the city. Foreign nationals in Tripoli were advised to leave, and most did.

The population of Tripoli at this time is about 30,000. Tripoli's defenses were old and crumbling, and it was clear the city could not defend itself against the Italians. So during this 24-hour grace period, Ottoman commanders in Tripoli met and decided the best strategy would be to abandon the city and withdraw south, into the forbidding interior of the country, and wage guerrilla war against the invaders.

And so, most of the defenders withdrew, leaving only a skeleton force to man Tripoli's fortifications. Although this was effectively a surrender of the city, no official surrender was

offered, and the Italian fleet began its attack on October 3. The Italians concentrated their fire on Tripoli's coastal fortifications, which, as I said, were in poor condition and undermanned. They were able to put up only token resistance before being reduced to rubble.

There were about 1,700 Italian marines aboard the fleet, and by the next day, October 4, they were landing in the city. They were able to take Tripoli with this small force because of the Ottoman withdrawal, although their position in the city remains precarious, and part of the Italian fleet needed to stay close at hand so that their guns could provide cover for the marines on the ground.

But the rest of the fleet steamed east, looking to intercept the Ottoman fleet, such as it was. The main battle fleet of the Ottoman Empire at this time consisted of two pre-dreadnought battleships, hand-me-downs from the Germans, two cruisers, and a squadron of support ships. When the war broke out, this fleet was on maneuvers in the Aegean Sea. They were not equipped with radios, and they were unaware that Italy had declared war. It might have been possible for the Italians to catch the Ottoman fleet by surprise, except that a civilian Turkish ship flagged the Ottoman fleet down and explained the situation to them. The Ottoman commander immediately turned the fleet north and fled for the safety of the Dardanelles, which the Ottomans had heavily fortified. The fleet would remain in the safety of Turkish waters for the duration of the war, and once again Italy was denied the sort of dramatic military victory she's been hungering for since about 1848.

Their Italian pursuers, once they realized they'd missed their opportunity, turned back toward Libya and in particular the port town of Tobruk, which has the best natural harbor in the region. Tobruk had minimal defenses and a garrison of fewer than 70 soldiers. The Italians took a few shots at what passed for Tobruk's fort, which immediately surrendered. A landing party of 500 sailors took the town the same day that Tripoli fell.

In the ensuing weeks, the Italians attacked the coastal towns of Derna and Homs. In both places, Ottoman resistance proved stubborn at first, but following the lead of the garrison in Tripoli, the defenders withdrew to the south a few days later, abandoning the towns.

Benghazi proved to be more of a challenge; it was the second largest town in Libya at that time, which isn't saying much, as its population was only about 5,000. There the Italians made an amphibious landing just to the west of the town, and after some difficult fighting through salt marshes, captured it.

The next step was to beef up these thin Italian garrisons. The Army mobilized some 40,000 soldiers, including some colonial forces from Eritrea and Somalia, and sent them to reinforce the Italian positions. The Italians also sent airplanes to Libya, and began regular reconnaissance flights around their Tripoli perimeter, the first military use of airplanes in history.

By October 21, three weeks into the war, the Italian Army and Navy had accomplished everything the government had asked of them. The five most important towns in Libya were securely in Italian hands, and the Ottoman defenders isolated in the harsh desert interior, cut off from communication and supply. This was everything the Italian war plan called for. Civilian administrators were appointed, and grand proclamations were issued to Libyan civilians, announcing that they were now under Italian protection, the hated Turks were gone, and henceforth the rights of Arab Muslims would be guaranteed by the benevolent rule of Victor Emmanuel III. Pacification of the rest of the country, the Italians assumed, would be accomplished by administrative and economic means after the Ottoman government surrendered the province. So all that Italy is waiting for now is a peace treaty with the Ottoman Empire.

Anyone...? Anyone...?

The first inkling that securing these five towns was not going to be enough to win the war would come on October 23, when Ottoman forces attacked the eastern flank of the Tripoli perimeter. At the same time as this attack, an uprising of armed Arab civilians behind the Italian line led to 500 Italian soldiers being surrounded and massacred. Many of these Italian soldiers had been crucified, their eyes and genitals mutilated.

The attack shocked the Italian military command. It had been thought that Ottoman power in the province had been all but neutralized. Key to the success of this attack was the uprising behind the lines, and it was clear that some Arab civilians inside Tripoli were in communication with, and were coordinating with, Turkish forces outside the perimeter. Besides the security threat, the uprising gave lie to the Italian claim that the population of Tripoli was chafing under Turkish rule and grateful for their liberation at the hands of the Italians.

The next day, Italian military commanders in Tripoli ordered a house-to-house search of the city for weapons. This search degenerated into a bloody massacre of thousands of Arab civilians, including many women and children. Foreign journalists in Tripoli sent home dispatches describing the unprovoked slaughter. There's no evidence that the Italian command actually *ordered* a massacre, but you know, the difference between an army and an armed mob comes down to discipline, doesn't it?

Rome would respond to the unexpected resistance by mobilizing and sending over a second army corps to the province. By early 1912, over 100,000 Italian soldiers would be stationed in Libya, guarding a relatively few square kilometers of land against perhaps 25,000 guerrilla fighters.

The war in Libya ground into a stalemate. The Arab population of the province, under the direction of a handful of Turkish officers, many of whom infiltrated the province from Egypt or Tunisia or by sea at their own expense and risk, controlled most of the province apart from a few

coastal enclaves. Whether the Italians were occupying Libya, or were under siege, was really a question of point of view.

The Ottoman military had had decades of experience fighting what we now call counterinsurgency against guerrilla uprisings across the Empire. The Ottomans now reverse engineered their experience, if you will, and constructed a highly effective guerrilla army. They stayed away from the coast, and out of range of Italian naval guns, and avoided confrontations with large Italian forces, but would ambush any small Italian force that was foolish enough to wander too far from its base.

For political reasons, the Italians needed a victory. They needed Italian sovereignty over Libya. Some sort of shared agreement, like what the Ottomans offered them before the war, would be an embarrassment, because it would make the whole war look like a big mistake. Italy needed a win. It needed a convincing win, a win big enough to justify all this effort.

In November, the Italian government formally annexed the province. It was a move that was at best premature and at worst made the Italian government look ridiculous, considering that Italy controlled only a tiny fraction of the territory and population of Libya. But the government went through with it anyway, to bolster its position at home, and to counter the diplomatic pressure that was building from the other great powers to mediate the conflict. Italy was deliberately painting herself into a corner, trying to eliminate the possibility of any kind of compromise.

Italy's allies, Austria-Hungary and Germany, were both eager to see this war end. Austria-Hungary, as always, was thinking about the Balkans. German diplomats had been working to build closer ties to Turkey, but now the Ottoman government was imploring Germany to use its influence with Italy to end the war. Even Britain was coming under pressure from its Muslim subjects in India who saw the Italian invasion of Libya as a Christian assault on a Muslim land, and wanted to see Westminster take a harder line against the war.

The war was costing the Italian government far more than it had budgeted. In fact, by this point, about half of the Italian government's revenues are being spent on the war in Libya. The Italian Army had had no prior experience fighting under desert conditions. The soldiers' uniforms were too dark and too heavy for the climate. Italian Army canteens held only about a quarter as much water as the canteens the French were using in North Africa, and the large numbers of Italian soldiers stationed in small coastal towns were straining the limits of the fresh water supplies. And the sewage systems in those towns were hopelessly inadequate to the demands now placed on them.

The Ottoman government, on the other hand, believe it or not, was actually turning a profit on the war. The province of Tripoli was a net loss to the Empire. It cost more to hold onto than it raised in tax revenue. The Italian blockade of the province cut off Constantinople's revenue, but

they weren't spending any money in the province anymore, either. The guerrilla army was being supported by the locals, and led by a handful of volunteer army officers. So the Ottoman government has no real incentive to end this war. They held out, hoping that the other Great Powers would tire of Rome's power grab and would press Italy to quit the war.

This turned out to be a forlorn hope. None of the other Great Powers felt it could afford to alienate Italy. Even in February 1912, when two Italian cruisers attacked some light Turkish vessels at Beirut, a region of the Empire that the French were interested in, no Great Power, not even France, so much as batted an eye. The Italians, by the way, had attacked those ships because they saw them as a threat to Italian access to the Suez Canal, Italy's lifeline to its holdings in Eritrea and Somalia.

But this attack was a significant moment for the Ottoman government, because it drove home the point that intervention by the other Great Powers was not going to happen. No one was going to swoop in and expel the Italians from Libya for them.

From the Italian side, the only solution appeared to be an expansion of the war. But this was a tricky problem. Again, Italy would have to hit the Empire somewhere else, hard enough to convince it to make peace, but not so hard as to shatter the Empire and trigger a larger war.

So what would that look like? Where would the attack be? The obvious place was in the Adriatic, where the Ottoman coast lies very close to Italian territory. But the Austrians had already made it clear they would not stand for that. Did Italy have the military might to force its way into the Dardanelles? Probably not. And even if it did, that would only make either Britain or Russia, or more likely both, go ballistic.

Where else then? Taking advantage of Italy's naval supremacy, Italian strategists settled on an attack on three Aegean islands. Rome was careful to run this plan past the other Great Powers first, but no one raised a strenuous objection, and so that became the strategy. On May 4, 1912, the Italians landed troops on the east coast of the island of Rhodes. In a matter of days, they had defeated the Ottoman garrison and secured the island. As the month of May progressed, the Italians quickly occupied more Aegean islands. This group of Italian-occupied islands came to be called the Dodecanese, from the Greek, literally meaning "twelve islands," although the Italians ultimately occupied many more than twelve islands, basically everything in the Southeast Aegean between Crete and the Turkish coast.

Unlike Tripoli, here the Italians truly were greeted as liberators, by the largely Greek-speaking Orthodox inhabitants of the islands, who were pleased to be out from under Ottoman rule.

But as you may have noticed, twelve is a bigger number than three. The Italians had moved more aggressively in the Aegean than they had said they would, and several of the Great Powers, particularly Austria, objected.

There would be long negotiations, but a treaty would be agreed to in October 1912. The diplomats did what diplomats do; they worked out a formula of words everyone could live with. The Ottoman government agreed to withdraw from Libya, but would appoint an official to represent the Sultan in his capacity as Caliph, in other words, to supervise religious affairs in the province. In other words, the Ottomans could claim they had retained a certain measure of sovereignty over Tripoli, while the Italians could claim the Ottoman government had conceded Italian sovereignty over Tripoli, which they went ahead and did.

As for the Dodecanese, the treaty said the Italians would hand those back after the Ottomans completed their withdrawal from Libya. That language was vague enough for the Italians to interpret as “never,” which they also went ahead and did.

But maintaining stability in the Balkans, the greatest concern of the other Great Powers, was already a lost cause. Because a few days before the treaty was signed, a new war had broken out in the Balkans. And one of the first moves in that war was the Greek Army occupying the other Aegean Islands. Imagine how the inhabitants of the Dodecanese must have felt. Italian rule must have seemed like a godsend, after centuries of Ottoman rule, but now it didn't look so good compared to what the neighboring islands were getting: unification with Greece, an option now denied to them by those very same Italians.

There is a word in Italian—*fiasco*. It is a cognate of the English word “flask,” and literally refers to one of those wine bottles with a straw basket woven around it. In Italian theatre, it became an idiomatic term for a huge and embarrassing failure, and later in the twentieth century, this idiom will be adopted by English speakers. The Italo-Ottoman War was a *fiasco*, an expensive boondoggle that gained Italy nothing worth anything like the blood and treasure expended on it. Worse, it took Europe one step closer to a general war.

A future Italian prime minister looking back on the war ten years later would say that it “cannot be looked on as anything but an aberration. Libya is an immense box of sand which never had any value, nor has it now. Libya covers more than 1,100,000 km² and has less than 900,000 inhabitants, of whom even now, after 10 years, less than a third are under the effective control of Italy.”

The war did give the Italian military the opportunity to experiment with some new technologies that we are going to see a lot more of in the twentieth century. I already mentioned their first use of airplanes for reconnaissance. Later, Italian pilots would start dropping explosive devices, by hand, onto concentrations of enemy troops. In other words, the first use of airplanes for bombing.

The need to import supplies, even drinking water, from Italy to Libya created a hefty and expensive logistical tail, but it also forced the Italian Army to experiment with the use of trucks to haul supplies in the hot, dry climate, where horses and donkeys did not do so well. When Arab guerrillas started attacking the trucks, the Italians created the first armored cars – armored trucks really, topped with a machine gun – to escort their supply convoys.

It will take until about 1930 for Italy to fully pacify Libya, and the human cost will be terrible. Between the fighting, disease, starvation, and emigration, Libya will lose half its population because of this long conflict. Libya's population will not return to its 1911 level until about 1950.

We'll have to stop there for today. Thanks for listening. You know that I couldn't possibly produce *The History of the Twentieth Century* without the efforts of many fine scholars and writers whose works I rely on. You can find some of my favorites at the website, historyofthetwentiethcentury.com. Click on "Further Reading" for a list, including links to Amazon.com, where you can purchase your own copy. If you do buy a book through one of those links, I get a small commission, which comes out of Amazon's pocket, not yours, so if you are interested in reading any of them, please click through our website. It's another way you can help support the podcast.

This week, I want to highlight a particular book, because I was particularly reliant on it in creating today's episode. It is *A Box of Sand*, by Charles Stephenson, and as far as I know, it's the only modern English-language study of the Italo-Ottoman War, which, I believe is an important and neglected event from this period of history. I'm going to try something new today. I've created a contest at Amazon.com, where the prize is a free Kindle copy of *A Box of Sand*, as a way of saying "thank you" to our listeners. The contest is open until March 15, and you have to be at least 18 years old and a resident of the United States to be eligible. My apologies to the 49% of my audience who listen from other countries, but it's Amazon's restriction, not mine. It has to do with the different publication rights in different countries.

If you'd like to enter the contest, go to our website, historyofthetwentiethcentury.com, and look for "*A Box of Sand* Giveaway" on the front page. There you will find a link to where you can enter the contest and also see the full contest rules. You will have to follow us on Twitter to enter the contest, so you'll need a Twitter account if you don't already have one. Those are free. And you'll need an Amazon Kindle account to receive the prize. The contest ends at midnight Pacific time on March 15, so be sure to enter right away.

And I hope you'll join me next week, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*, as we take a farewell tour of pre-war France and take one last look at what's going on there before the coming storm changes the world forever. It's the twilight of the Belle Époque, next week, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. As the war in Libya dragged on, and the costs to Italy mounted, there was rising political disaffection at home. Italian socialists had opposed the war from the beginning, of course. The flagship Italian socialist newspaper, *Avanti*, repeatedly insisted that the war would drag on and be costly and provide no benefit whatsoever to ordinary Italians. These predictions, which the socialists began making as soon as the war started, began to seem prescient six months later. In the town of Forlì, in Romagna, a socialist writer and journalist named Benito Mussolini edited a smaller newspaper called *The Class Struggle*. He was also an outspoken opponent of the war and when he began to organize general strikes in protest, he was arrested and sentenced to five months in prison. This made him a hero to the socialist movement in Italy, and after he was released, he was made editor of *Avanti*, and under his management, the newspaper's circulation soared.

We'll have to keep an eye on this guy. I think he's going places.

[music: Closing Theme]