

# **The Use of Air Power by the Italian Army in the Libyan War: Air Operations and Propaganda**

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The first war that saw the use of an air force was the Libyan War (Italo-Turkish War), in which the Italian army became the first military force in the world to weaponise aeroplanes and airships. This article examines four aspects: how the Italian army was able to form an air force at the beginning of the war, how pilots accomplished air operations, the effects of these operations and the perception of 'air power' that spread through Italy. By 1910, the Italian army had established pilot academies and trained some soldiers and sailors. Therefore, when the war began, the Brigade Specialists of Engineers (Brigata Specialisti del Genio) was able to induct skilled pilots, while some civilian pilots also volunteered to serve at the front. At the Libyan front, Italy's air operations, especially bombing, impact the situation enough to cause any significant change; instead, the Ottomans sometimes used the image of aeroplanes for boosting the morale of the local people who thought that the Islamic saint flew to help them. Meanwhile in Italy, it was assumed that the Italian pilots inflicted more damage than they sustained and newspapers propagated a narrative of 'the supremacy of the air and the panic on the ground'. As a result, a donation campaign for the Italian air service held in 1912 gathered over three million lire, and this focus of Italy on its air force was contemporarily mythicized as the unity of Italians.