THE FORGOTTEN WAR
A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE BATTLE FOR CYPRUS, 1974
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John Hughes-Wilson©

According to the UN there are still two long standing unfinished wars, both halted only temporarily by a ceasefire or armistice. One is Korea; the other is Cyprus. The Greek-Turkish war on Cyprus of July and August 1974 still remains a legally unresolved international conflict. In fact, in Cyprus it was only a UN sponsored ceasefire that officially ended the fighting. This has been the situation for the past 37 years.¹ A well armed corps of around 30,000² Turks still garrisons the North, where its deterrent presence ensures peace on the island.³

In many ways, the fighting on Cyprus of summer 1974 has become a forgotten war, except to its victims. The reasons for this are fairly clear. First, the battles on Cyprus are poorly documented; such published records as there are tend to be either in Greek or Turkish. Second, neither Greek nor Turkish war logs are available for public scrutiny. Lastly, Turkey’s obsessive culture of military secrecy keeps even historic records locked away.

However, as memory slowly turns to history, we can piece together much of the jigsaw that is the true account of the Battle for Cyprus nearly four decades ago and unravel the campaign that sent 1,300⁴ Turks and 2,000⁵ Greeks to their early graves, and which has disrupted the lives of thousands ever since. War does that.

The Greek Coup on the 15th of July 1974 was the catalyst which began Cyprus’s long nightmare.

However, many believe the problem started long before. Although Makarios agreed to the London and Zurich agreements at Lancaster House which set up the Republic of Cyprus⁶ in 1960, he was quite open that he always saw it merely as a stepping stone towards ‘Enosis’ or Union with Greece,⁷ despite the fact that successive Greek governments emphatically did not agree. (Sophocles Venizelos, the Greek foreign minister, bluntly told Makarios: ‘I will not allow you to direct the foreign policy of Greece’.)

When in December 1963 the Archbishop unilaterally tried to amend ⁸ the 1960 Constitution he knew that it would have the effect of forcing the minority population⁹ of Turkish Cypriots out of public office.¹⁰ Fierce fighting broke out between Greek and Turkish Cypriots, resulting in atrocities, massacres and a bitter polarisation of the two Cypriot communities.¹¹ ¹²

Britain and Turkey, two of the three powers guaranteeing Cyprus’ independence, threatened to intervene to stop the bloodshed. Britain quickly sent in troops to restore order,¹³ and on 27 March 1964 the UN followed with a peacekeeping force, UNFICYP, which remains to this day.¹⁴ Severe intercommunal fighting erupted in early 1964¹⁵ and, encouraged by their
undercover fighters, Turkish Cypriots began moving from isolated rural areas and mixed villages into ghettos and enclaves and armed to defend themselves.\textsuperscript{16}

The neutral President of the Supreme Constitutional Court of Cyprus, Professor Ernst Forsthoff, knew exactly where the blame lay. On 27th December 1963 he told \textit{Die Welt}, "Makarios bears on his shoulders the sole responsibility of the recent tragic events. His aim is to deprive the Turkish community of their rights." In his resignation interview with UPI press agency on 30th December 1963, the internationally respected German constitutional lawyer said: "All this happened because Makarios wanted to remove all constitutional rights from the Turkish Cypriots."

Cyprus's real long nightmare was beginning. For another decade a tense state of emergency, punctuated by regular murders and mysterious disappearances, ruled the Island. The minority population of Turkish-Cypriots became frightened refugees in their own land, guarded by the UN.\textsuperscript{17}

The explosive events of the 1974 Coup ended that uneasy stand off once and for all. In the Greek Cypriot civil war that followed at least 3,000 Greek Cypriot supporters of Makarios and the Communist party AKEL were killed by their fellow Greek countrymen.\textsuperscript{18} On the orders of the Athen’s Junta, ex-gunman Nikos Sampson and his EOKA-β's\textsuperscript{19} thugs prepared to exterminate the Turkish Cypriot community and declare ENOSIS, ‘Union with Greece’, by force of arms, backed by the Greek Cypriot National Guard (GCNG) plus thousands of soldiers flown in from Greece. Sampson later openly admitted in an interview that: “Had Turkey not intervened, I would not only have proclaimed Enosis but I would have annihilated the Turks in Cyprus as well.”\textsuperscript{20} That this was more than Greek killing Greek is clear. Correspondents from all over the world reported that they were shocked by the violence and brutality of the Coupists towards the Turkish minority. For far too many Greek Cypriots the July Coup was their chance to indulge in a long awaited ethnic cleansing.\textsuperscript{21}

For nearly four decades, tenacious and skillful propaganda has managed to airbrush the Greeks' responsibility for the tragedy of the hot bloody summer of 1974, and the war that followed, out of the history books.\textsuperscript{22} The story of Cyprus has been seen only through the distorting prism of the Greeks' tragic chorus. Turkey has been denounced as the aggressor and the sole cause of all Cyprus's woes.\textsuperscript{23}

However, at the time, Makarios himself quite openly blamed the Greeks for the disaster of 1974. In his speech to the UN Security Council after his narrow escape with his life from the coup plotters, the last head of a united Cyprus publicly confessed that his fellow Greeks were to blame, and he was unequivocal that it was the terrorist leaders of the Greek Cypriots who destroyed the Republic of Cyprus in the name of Enosis, saying:

"It was a (Greek) invasion, which violated the independence and the sovereignty of the Republic." And later in his UNSC speech:
“The Security Council should call upon the military regime of Greece to withdraw . . . and to put an end to its invasion of Cyprus.”

Although the wily Archbishop later conveniently forgot his tearful outburst to the UN, not only had he for once admitted the truth about the coup of 1974, but his interpretation of events was – astonishingly - backed by Greece itself.

On 21 March 1979 none other than the Greek national Court of Appeal in Athens ruled that the Turkish intervention of 20 July was not only legal but, significantly, was in direct response to the Greek coup,

"The Turkish military intervention in Cyprus which was carried out in accordance with the Zurich and London Agreements was legal. Turkey, as one of the Guarantor powers, had the right to fulfil her obligations. The real culprits ... are the Greek Officers who engineered and staged a coup and prepared the conditions for this intervention.”

This Greek judgement supported the Standing Committee of the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe, which confirmed the legality of the Turkish Intervention in Cyprus at the time, confirming that Turkey’s actions were a response to the Greeks’ coup: "Turkey exercised its right of intervention in accordance with Article IV of the Treaty of Guarantee.”

Respected Greek Cypriot ex-foreign minister Nicos Rolandis confirmed that the momentous events of 1974 were triggered by the Greek coup saying; ‘In 1974 we had the Greek coup d’état. It was a horrendous crime. It opened wide the gate for the Turkish invasion.’ He saw clearly the cause and effect of July 1974, and the foolishness of giving Turkey, on a plate, a pretext to invade. As Schiller so succinctly put it, ‘Against stupidity the gods themselves labour in vain.’

Makarios, Rolandis and Schiller were right. After the fighting of Christmas 1963, Turkey had been following events in Cyprus very closely indeed. As early as August 1964 Turkish jets intervened to stop Greek attacks on Kokkina (now called Erenköy), an isolated Turkish Cypriot coastal village in the northwest. The long tense decade that followed fixed Ankara’s eyes firmly onto the third largest island in the Mediterranean, just off Turkey’s southern coast.

Turkish sensitivity to Cyprus was nothing new. As early as 1928 Kemal Ataturk himself had emphasised the island’s significance, warning military commanders: "Pay attention to Cyprus; this island is important for us." By the mid-1950s Turkey had become seriously concerned. Although Ankara had little problem with British colonial rule, it was very wary indeed of the island ever falling into Greek hands. Turkey didn’t need a Greek controlled airbase 40 miles off her south coast. As EOKA’s anti-British campaign began, Turkish Foreign Minister Koprulu declared that Cyprus was an “extension of continental Turkey” and that it should revert to Turkey "on the basis of
geographical proximity”. Turkey had every reason to be worried. The aim of EOKA’s murder campaign for Enosis was openly proclaimed as “first the British and then the Turks.” And at the 1955 Tripartite Conference on Cyprus, Turkey gave another clear warning of its intentions:

“...The importance of Cyprus to Turkey does not arise from a single cause; it is a necessity which emanates from the exigencies of history, geography, economy and military strategy, from the right to existence and security, which is the most sacred right of every state . . .”

A year later, Turkish Prime Minister Menderes emphasised this threat of any new ‘Greek’ island, only 40 miles from Turkey’s southern shores,

“The fact that most parts of the Turkish shores are surrounded by the threatening observation posts of foreign states should be acknowledged by everyone. Today, only the shore facing Cyprus seems to be safe. For us, Cyprus is a continuation of Turkey and forms one of its essential security points . . .”

That Turkey was spoiling to intervene in Cyprus by 1974 was never in doubt. From 1967 onwards 39 Marine Infantry Division near Mersin had been specifically earmarked as the ‘Cyprus intervention division’ – just in case. The Greeks’ ill judged coup was virtually an open invitation for Turkey to move into Cyprus on the perfectly legal pretext of ending the bloodshed and protecting the Turkish Cypriot minority.

However, before doing so, Ankara went through the diplomatic niceties. A delegation led by Prime Minister Ecevit flew into London on the 17th of July to demand that Britain fulfill her responsibilities under the Treaty of Guarantee. Despite their military Sovereign Base Areas (SBAs) on the island a timid Britain chose not to act. Instead, deeply absorbed in the deteriorating security situation at home in Northern Ireland, Prime Minister Harold Wilson weakly suggested ‘a UN conference to discuss the crisis in a few weeks time.’ Even a request to land Turkish forces on Cyprus in the British Sovereign Base Areas was rejected.

Ankara noted Britain’s pusillanimous response. Turkey was made of stronger stuff and now seized its long-awaited chance. Under Article IV of the Treaty of Guarantee, Turkey intervened – quite legally – to restore order as one of Cyprus’ guarantor powers.

At dawn on 20 July 1974 Turkey launched Operation Attila and invaded.

Like most invasions it all went wrong from the start. The invaders didn’t turn up on time. Having spent the previous night secretly informing delighted Turkish Cypriots that Turkey was coming to their rescue in the morning, the Turkish Cypriot leader, Rawf Denktas, later admitted that waiting for the invaders that morning was “the worst hour of his life.” The problem was that two Greek patrol boats had challenged the Turkish ships in the dark as they
neared Kyrenia. They were easily sunk. But, pushed to the west, the amphibious task force made landfall three miles off their target and then had to wait for dawn to find the right beach and the anxious frogmen waiting to guide them ashore. The first wave of invaders consisted of 1 LST, 2 LSM's, 20 LCU landing ships, 5 Destroyers, 2 Gun Boats, and around 3,000 men.\textsuperscript{39} Forty miles to the North at Mersin, the follow on forces of 30 landing ships, waited anxiously for confirmation that the landings were successful. They were ready to bring the rest of 39 Division, plus a Jandarma and a Commando brigade with supporting artillery and armour.

The result was that the attacking marines of the ‘Cakmak Special Strike Brigade’ were late and, once on the beach at Pentemille, (‘Five Mile Beach’) despite having made an unopposed landing, failed to make deep inroads inland, only pushing as far as 300 metres south of the coastal road. Critically, once ashore they failed to secure the rocky forests of the Kyrenia mountains overlooking their positions. Initial Greek resistance hardened as the Greek anti-invasion contingency plan ‘Aphrodite 1973’ was ordered by the Greek National Guard High Command (GEEF) at 0700, and a hotch potch of infantry units supported by old Soviet T34/85 tanks rushed to seal off the beachhead.

Overhead both sides could see the airborne forces and helicopters heading south over the Kyrenia mountains to drop a paratroop brigade into the Turkish Cypriots’ central stronghold north of Gunyeli, controlling the vital Nicosia-Kyrenia road. Turkish parachutists dropped in and around the enclave in order to reinforce the TMT fighters.\textsuperscript{40} At least one stick was accidentally dropped directly on to Greek Cypriot defensive lines outside the enclave at Mia Milia(now Haspolat), and were promptly wiped out. As the battle for the central plain hotted up, GCNG forces moved to launch a coordinated pincer attack to pinch off the north of the enclave, where the villages of Bogaz and Agyrta controlled access to the vital Kyrenia pass. The attackers were stopped after a fierce battle by a combination of well dug in defences and Turkish air strikes, with the loss of five T34 tanks.

By the end of the first day it was clear that the Turks were ashore, but surrounded and pinned in their bridgeheads, and that the combination of enemy air superiority and having to pass round the flanks of the sheer rock walls of the Kyrenia range to get at the invaders was hampering the poorly coordinated Greek counter attacks.

The Greek command then made an extraordinary blunder. As at 21 July their order of battle was theoretically equal to the invaders. With up to 30,000 men under arms, 32 tanks and excellent - if mixed - artillery, the Greeks and their Greek Cypriot National Guard partners could have contained the two beleaguered bridgeheads. The problem was twofold: first, Greek planning assumed that any Turkish invasion would try and seize the harbour and docks at Famagusta on the east coast. Second, many of the Greek units had been dispersed around the island to snuff out any opposition to the recent coup. Instead of concentrating these forces to meet the isolated Turkish invaders as quickly as possible - which was the clear military priority – it ordered key dispersed units to ignore the landings and over-run the Turkish Cypriot
Fighters’ (TMT) enclaves\textsuperscript{41} dotted around the island at Gunyeli, Limassol, Larnaca and Famagusta, and wipe out once and for all the 15,000 or so irregulars of the Turkish Cypriot fighters.\textsuperscript{42} It seemed, for the Greek Cypriots, the chance of a lifetime to crush their hated enemies. It was a disastrous strategic mistake.\textsuperscript{43}

The Greeks’ second problem was that Turkey had total air supremacy. From their bases only 50 miles to the north Turkish fighter bombers could fly at will and even loiter over the battle areas searching for likely targets. But there was no ‘Greek Cypriot air force’: and the nearest Greek warplanes were 400 miles away on the other side of the Aegean.\textsuperscript{44}

Despite this handicap, in the early hours of the 21\textsuperscript{st} the Greek 286\textsuperscript{th} battalion made a determined night counterattack, led by a flying wedge of old Soviet BTR 152 armoured personnel carriers blazing tracers from their machine guns. They bulldozed their way down the coast road from Kyrenia and broke into the defences of the bridgehead. Some Turks panicked, others held on and repulsed the attack. In the mayhem in the dark, Colonel Karaoglanoglu, the commander of the eastern flank, was killed by an anti-tank rocket fired by his own side.\textsuperscript{45}

The 21\textsuperscript{st} was relatively quiet around Five Mile Beach as the Turks continued to build up their forces in their tiny bridgehead with tanks and even flying in angry generals determined to force the pace of operations. However, over the mountains, Greek attempts to wipe out the Gunyeli enclave continued with fierce fighting around Bogaz in the Kyrenia Pass.\textsuperscript{46}

Thanks to signals intelligence, a daring attempt was mounted on the 21\textsuperscript{st} by Turkish Special Forces paratroopers to ambush the Greek Cypriot Naval Commander. His plan was to outflank the bridgehead from the west. However as he was travelling on the Mirtou (Camlibel) road to coordinate the counter attack he was ambushed. In the ensuing battle he was wounded - but nine Turkish commandos were killed.\textsuperscript{47}

At sea, 200 miles north west of Paphos, the Turkish Navy suffered a disaster as a naval task force of three Turkish destroyers were sent to engage a 'large Hellenic landing force' believed to be heading for Cyprus. Unfortunately the warships were mistaken for Greek reinforcements from Rhodes. In a series of communications failings and poor inter-service coordination,\textsuperscript{48} Turkish jets bombed the three ships in the belief that they were actually Greek ships flying the Turkish flag as means of deception. All three destroyers were hit and the destroyer Kocatepe was sunk with the loss of over 100 sailors.\textsuperscript{49} Despite warnings from the UK SBAs – who had been monitoring the Turkish task force – that a serious mishap had left hundreds of sailors in the water, Ankara waited 24 hours before admitting the error.\textsuperscript{50}

The 22\textsuperscript{nd} saw renewed fighting as reinforced Turkish tanks and armoured infantry made a determined combined arms attack along the coast road and pushed east into Kyrenia.\textsuperscript{51} The fighting was fierce and in the close country of the town and its wooded surroundings the Turks lost five M-47 tanks to short
range anti-tank weapons before the Greeks fell back.\textsuperscript{52} One half of the attackers continued to push on to the east to clear the town and harbour, while another regiment swung south to seize the vital ground of the mountain pass and relieve the paratroopers bottled up in the Gunyeli enclave. The two forces finally linked up later that evening at Bogaz in the mouth of the pass. With the port of Kyrenia now secure in Turkish hands, the road to Nicosia was open at last, and the Turks could pour in reinforcements.

Their next target was a major attack to seize the vital objective of Nicosia International airport, which had been softened up by determined air attacks from F-100s and F-104s with napalm, and whose runway scabbed by cannon fire.

By the 23\textsuperscript{rd} however, the airport was well defended. During the previous night Athens had secretly reinforced the area with elite forces flown in from Crete.\textsuperscript{53} Unfortunately it was too secret. Flying at 50 feet over the sea, the 15 overloaded transports tried to land at Nicosia in the dark and without lights. The jumpy Greek AA gunners opened up and blew one of their own Noratlas’s out of the sky, killing 31 and damaging a second with another eleven dead. Despite this setback, by dawn the Greek infantry of Number 1 Commando were waiting.\textsuperscript{54} The open spaces of the airport made for a natural killing zone and as the Turkish infantry attacked in broad daylight, they were mown down from three sides. Phosphorus smoke grenades set fire to the dry summer grass and many of the wounded burned to death. Despite the carnage the Turks attacked again and again with suicidal bravery until the UN’s Canadian Contingent finally took over the airport to stop the slaughter.\textsuperscript{55} It has remained unused in UN hands ever since, its burned out Trident airliner a monument to the ferocity of the fighting.

The 23\textsuperscript{rd} also brought the UN fully into the fighting for the first time. Up to then apart from isolated incidents UNFICYP had remained strictly neutral, monitoring and observing the fighting and trying where possible to negotiate local ceasefires and evacuate civilians caught up in the fighting. However as the Turks advanced north of Nicosia, an UNFICYP observation post came under fire by the GCNG. Two members of the Canadian contingent were wounded. As clearly marked white and blue UN vehicles moved up a dry river bed to rescue their men, they again came under heavy fire from the Greek positions. This time the Canadian Airborne Regiment retaliated by firing 400 rounds of 50 calibre and 200 rounds of 30 calibre “for effect” at the GCNG before evacuating the wounded soldiers.\textsuperscript{56}

A UN-brokered ceasefire brought an uneasy end to the fighting between 24 July and 14 August. Turkey had intervened, got her foothold on the island and protected her minority. Both sides now jockeyed for advantage, military and political. The problem was that the UN ceasefire was more honoured in the breach than in the observance. On 2 August 1974 Greek forces ambushed and captured a Turkish armoured resupply column, capturing an M47 tank and an APC,\textsuperscript{57} (The captured M-47 later engaged a confused Turkish tank squadron near Skylloura on 15 August, hitting seven M-47 tanks.) And on the morning of 6 August, the Turkish 28 Division launched a surprise attack.
supported by 30 tanks and overran the Greek forward positions on the coastal salient around Lapithos (Lapta) and Karavas (Alsanjak) west of the bridgehead to straighten out their line.

By 14 August the Geneva talks aimed at a political solution had broken down. Turkey’s demands for a bi-zonal federal state plus complete population transfer shocked Cyprus’ acting president Clerides, who asked for an adjournment in order to consult Athens and his fellow Greek Cypriot politicians. But the long shadow of the Machiavellian archbishop fell over the table. Turkey flatly refused any more delays and on the Prime Minister’s orders moved to Phase 2 of the Attila plan. Now with two divisions, an armoured brigade, 200 tanks, (many of them the newer M-48) and over 150 guns on the island, plus total air supremacy, the result was inevitable. The outnumbered Greeks had tried to reorganise into a western, central and eastern defensive line but could do little in the face of such overwhelming Turkish superiority.

The breakout to the west was spearheaded by 28 division and the Commando Brigade, heading for Morphou (Guzelyurt) and Kormakiti. It easily brushed the Greek defenders of the 231st and 281st battalions aside, pushing them back to their final “Troodos Line” to the south. To the east, 39 division’s tanks and APCs attacked along two axes: one raced east towards Famagusta and another to the south east towards Mia Milia (Haspolat), and on towards Larnaca. The ten Greek battalions and 20 tanks defending the Eastern sector were quite simply overwhelmed.

In the centre a vicious battle developed on 16 August around the Greek national contingent (ELDYK) near the grammar school on the western outskirts of Nicosia. After the area had been softened up by bomb and napalm attacks, the 2,000 men of the reinforced ‘Turkish Cyprus Regiment’ supported by 17 M-48 tanks assaulted the regular Greek Army positions. Both sides fought hard. From an observation point somewhere near the Star Chinchilla Farm an unknown Greek Forward Observation Officer (FOO) managed to call in artillery fire from widely dispersed batteries of Soviet M-1944 100mm guns, old British 25 pounders, and 4.2 inch mortars - all coordinated to land on the target at the same time. This artillery tour de force separated the Turkish armour from the infantry causing serious casualties until a napalm airstrike silenced the FOO for ever. The fighting went on all day. Four Turkish M-48 tanks were knocked out and 100 Greeks died in the fighting before the survivors slipped away.

The final battle was at Pyroi (Gaziler), south east of Nicosia on 16/17 August. As the Turks advanced south to bring Larnaca within range of their guns, a single Greek infantry platoon with tank support attempted to repel a Turkish infantry battalion. In the fighting that followed four T-34s were abandoned on the road as they ran out of ammunition. The Turks followed south, creating the curious ‘Lourajina Appendix’ in the final ceasefire line. Cyprus’ second city, Larnaca on the south coast, would now be hostage to long range Turkish artillery.
After three days of continuous advance and confused fighting it was all over. Cyprus was sliced in half.\(^6^4\)

The Turks won because they had overwhelming superiority both on land and, crucially, in the air. Although nearly twenty aircraft were lost to anti aircraft fire and crashes, the ability to hound any movement meant that many Greek units were bombed and strafed before they got to the fighting and suffered heavy losses of both men and equipment. One artillery battalion set off with 12 guns and arrived with four. Turkish close air support bombs and napalm had done their work far from the battle lines.\(^6^5\)

The elite formations on both sides fought hard. Turkish generalship was slow but remorseless. UN observers – and some Turkish commanders - were astonished at the heavy casualties Turkish units were prepared to take\(^6^6\). On the Greek side coordination was poor among their widely dispersed units and even when defensive blocks were established, morale among some of the scattered Greek units was a factor. Although some units fought bravely, particularly the artillery which was well handled, at the end many Greek reservist units deserted *en masse* as they were overrun by the oncoming Turks, even abandoning serviceable tanks and guns.

The price of the battle for Cyprus was high. Both sides were undoubtedly guilty of some atrocities.\(^6^7\) The cemeteries and memorials commemorate the dead. But the wounds and scars are still there today, not just on the bodies of the old soldiers of both sides but on the politics and the map of Aphrodite’s island. In the outdoor museum under the shadow of the Turkish monument to the landings the hulks of ancient T34 tanks and antique Marmon Harrington armoured cars rust quietly in the sun close by the places where they fought and men died. Turks always refer to the invasion as the ‘intervention’, and certainly that would be a fair legal description of the first phase of the fighting. But the armoured breakout of phase two and the decisive Turkish advance that sliced the island in half was much more than that. True, it wasn’t an invasion by then: it was pure *blitzkrieg*.

The irony is that the Turks intervention or invasion - call it what you will - has brought peace to Cyprus. Greek Cypriots routinely demand the return of their grandfathers’ homes and property in the North, and have kept up a clever round of “lawfare” over the years in an attempt to keep their grievances on the front page and sue to get their property back.\(^6^8\) But many Turkish Cypriots lost their homes and farms in the South, too. Asked why they don’t reciprocate and demand their property back or compensation, old men shrug and say that since the Turkish army arrived they and their families feel secure. A weary acceptance of this peaceful *status quo* seems to have settled over the divided island, now split in two for nearly four decades, as the UN struggles with the endless talks to reunite the parties - with little hope of success. For the Greek side a kind of Enosis has been achieved through the Republic’s controversial membership of the European Union;\(^6^9\) for the Turks, ‘*Taksim*’, partition, is a *fait accompli* on the ground, even if their tiny republic remains unrecognised by the international community. The island has been torn in half – in every sense - by the war.\(^7^0\)
Let Nicos Rolandis, the respected Greek Cypriot older statesman, have the final word. He lived through the war and the dramatic events that led up to it. Writing in 2008 he said,

“Cyprus has been the classic case of a country whose leadership, with some exceptions, was not characterized in recent years by political acumen. Our big “feat” in the past six decades has been to break Cyprus up into two parts. I recall what Constantinos Karamanlis, then prime minister of Greece, told us in 1978: “The Greek Cypriots started a struggle in 1955 for the union of Cyprus with Greece, while the Turks were fighting at the same time for partition. It appears that at the end of the day the Turks will achieve their objective.”

It is possible to walk the battlefields of 1974. Nowadays, tourists roam the hills and golden sands. Five Mile beach looks tranquil and welcoming. The Kyrenia pass is as spectacular as ever. It is hard to remember that these peaceful holiday places were once witnesses to battles as bloody and intense as any in history.

John Hughes-Wilson is the President of the International Guild of Battlefield Guides. He was posted to Cyprus in 1974 and served as ‘Operations Information Officer’ for UNFICYP, 1975-76.
'Turkey intervened in 1974, quite legally under Article IV of the Treaty of Guarantee, to restore order as one of Cyprus’ guarantor powers.'

'The Greek forces were more bothered at first about rounding up the Turkish Cypriot Fighters than the invading Turkish army . . .' 

'The Turks won because they had overwhelming superiority both on land and, crucially, in the air.'

'It is hard to remember that these peaceful holiday places were once witnesses to battles as bloody and intense as any in history.'
Shellfire at Eldyk’s positions  August 74
UN Redrawing an international border 1974

Shot down Turkish fighter
Signing the Cease fire August 1974 (UN plus the 3 Guarantor powers.)

Knocked out Turkish M 47 near Skyloura with Jandarma
The ill-fated Turkish destroyer Kocatepe in happier days

The only known photo of Kocatepe under attack
A Noratlas of the type shot down trying to land at Nicosia airport 21/22 July, killing 42 Greek reinforcements.

Turkish F104 Starfighter
Turkish infantry advances

![Turkish infantry advances](image1.png)

Turkish Reinforcements pour in

![Turkish Reinforcements pour in](image2.png)
Knocked out Greek T34s west of Kyrenia
FOUR MAPS

THE LANDINGS
20 July

AIRSTRIKES

Miles

0 5

KYRENIA

LAPITOS

BOGAZ

GUNYELI

ELDYK

NICOSIA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT
THE BRIDGEHEADS
21 JULY
TURKISH ATTACKS & CEASEFIRE 22/23 JULY
Makarios at the UNSC 19 July 1974

Greek Cypriot National Guard, Coup 15 July 1974
1. Following the hostilities of 1974, the Security Council adopted a number of resolutions expanding the mandate of UNFICYP to include supervising a de facto ceasefire, which came into effect on 16 August 1974, and maintaining a buffer zone between the lines of the Cyprus National Guard and of the Turkish and Turkish Cypriot forces.

2. According to the UN Secretary-General in 1994: “It is estimated that in recent years there have been in the northern part of the island a little under 30,000 armed forces of the Republic of Turkey making it one of the most militarized areas in the world in terms of numbers of troops and numbers of civilian population. Recently moreover there have been indications that the total numbers of Turkish forces on the island may have increased” (S994/680 7.6.1994.par.28.)

3. The Turkish Armed Forces in Northern Cyprus are known officially as the ‘Cyprus Turkish Peace Force’. (Turkish: Kıbrıs Türk Barış Kuvvetleri, or KTBK). Successive C-in-Cs are adamant that Turkish force of arms has been the critical factor in keeping the peace in on Cyprus since 1974 (Private Information). Opinion polls among Turkish Cypriots and expatriate foreign residents support this view.

4. Based on Turkish war memorial roll, Lefkoşa (Nicosia) Museum

5. Estimated – no accurate figure exists. Many of the Greeks murdered in the civil war following the 15 July Coup were later claimed to have been killed in the war.

6. Makarios had initially been reluctant to sign the Lancaster House agreement that gave Cyprus its independence from Britain. However a visit from two MI6 officers who threatened to reveal the Archbishop’s “homosexual proclivities” changed his mind. He signed. (Private Information) See also ‘The Cyprus Conspiracy: America, Espionage and the Turkish Invasion’, by Brendan O’Malley, Ian Craig I.B.Tauris Publishers. ISBN: 1860644392

7. In a post independence speech on 4th September 1962, at Panayia, Makarios said “Until this Turkish community forming part of the Turkish race which has been the terrible enemy of Hellenism is expelled, the duty of the heroes of EOKA can never be considered terminated.” When the UK House of Commons Select Committee on Foreign Affairs reviewed the Cyprus question in 1987 (H.C.no.23 of 1986-87), they reported unanimously on 2nd July that, ‘Although the Cyprus Government now claims to have been merely seeking to “operate the 1960 Constitution modified to the extent dictated by the necessities of the situation”, this claim ignores the fact that both before and after the events of December 1963, the Makarios Government continued to advocate the cause of ENOSIS and actively pursued the amendments of the Constitution and the related treaties to facilitate this ultimate objective.’

8. In December 1963, Makarios proposed thirteen amendments to the Constitution, which would free many public offices from the ethnic restrictions agreed in London and Zurich. The Amendments were seen by many Turkish Cypriots as threatening domination by the majority Greek Cypriots.

9. Turkish Cypriots made up just under 20% of Cyprus’ population in 1963. However, the 1960 Constitution guaranteed them 30% of government posts and protected their minority rights as a separate community.


11. Many Turkish Cypriots were warned by Greek friends “not to go into their office if you want to live”. (Private information)

constitution Makarios put his plan into effect, and the Greek Cypriot attack began in December 1963" The General was referring to the notorious "Akritas" plan, which was the blueprint for the annihilation of the Turkish Cypriots and the annexation of the island to Greece.

13. Britain's Spearhead unit, 1st Battalion Sherwood Foresters, was deployed on Christmas Eve 1963. Many British soldiers were sickened by what they saw and openly sympathised with the Turkish Cypriots. (Private information) Later the incoming UN contingent was similarly influenced by what they saw and one Swedish officer was jailed for supplying arms illegally to the Turkish Cypriots.

14. The function of UNFICYP was originally defined by Security Council resolution 186 (1964) of 4 March 1964 in the following terms: "... in the interest of preserving international peace and security, to use its best efforts to prevent a recurrence of fighting [between the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities] and, as necessary, to contribute to the maintenance and restoration of law and order and a return to normal conditions".

15. On 12th January 1964 the British High Commission in Nicosia wrote to London (telegram no. 162) "The Greek (Cypriot) police are led by extremists who provoked the fighting and deliberately engaged in atrocities. They have recruited into their ranks as "special constables" gun-happy young thugs. They threaten to try and punish any Turkish Cypriot police who wish to return to Cyprus Government... Makarios assured Sir Arthur Clark that there will be no attack. His assurance is as worthless as previous assurances have proved." And on 14th January 1964 the London Daily Telegraph reported that the Turkish Cypriot inhabitants of Ayios Vassilious had been massacred on 26th December 1963, and reported their exhumation from a mass grave in the presence of the Red Cross. A further massacre of Turkish-Cypriots, at Limassol, was reported by The Observer (London) on 16th February 1964. On 17th February 1964 the Washington Post reported that "Greek Cypriot fanatics appear bent on a policy of genocide."

16. The Turkish Resistance Organisation (Turkish: Türk Mukavemet Teşkilatı – TMT) was an underground Turkish Cypriot paramilitary organisation formed in 1958 to counter the Greek Cypriot Fighters' underground organisation EOKA, and to defend the Turkish Cypriot enclaves. Makarios and the Greek Cypriots - not unreasonably - saw it as a rebellious and illegal armed force that challenged the legitimate government.

17. See the confession of old EOKA fighter Andreas Dimitriu, 67, reported in Turkish Daily News (Hurriyet) of 23 November 2004. He told local papers: "We attacked and raped Turks; they gathered the men in the Taskent village and killed them . . . . soldiers coming from Hirokita raped a number of women . . . whatever we did, we did it together with Greek Cypriot officials."

18. Greek casualties during the Coup are notoriously hard to pin down, as many of the disappeared and dead were later written off as being victims of the Turkish invasion. Greek Cypriots officially cite 1,619 as still missing. However, on 28th February 1976 the Greek newspaper TA NEA published an interview with Father Papatsestos, the Greek Orthodox priest in charge of the Nicosia cemetery. He told the paper that on 17th July 1974 Greek officers required him to bury truckloads of Greek Cypriots in mass graves, together with one young Greek Cypriot whom they buried still alive, and ten dead Turkish Cypriots. This one priest counted at least 127 bodies brought to him. There must have been many other similar incidents throughout the island. On 6th November 1974 TA NEA reported the erasure of dates from the graves of Greek Cypriots killed in the five days 15th - 20th July, in order to blame their deaths on the subsequent Turkish military action.

19. ‘Ethniki Organosis Kyprion Agoniston’ (The National Organisation of Cypriot Fighters.) There were two versions: an underground group conducting a self admitted anti-colonial terror campaign under the Greek colonel Grivas, 1955 – 1960; and his revived version, EOKA β, (1971-74) dedicated to Enosis by overthrowing President Makarios. After Grivas' death in
early 1974, EOKA β came under the direct control of the Greek Junta. It was the Athens Junta that planned and authorised the disastrous Coup of 1974.

20. Interview with the Greek newspaper Eleftherotipia, 26 February 1981.

21 That the Coup and its aftermath did not just affect the Greek community is well attested. To take just one example, see France Soir’s Correspondent in Cyprus, who reported on 24 July 1974; "I witnessed extreme acts of violence. Greek Cypriots set Turkish mosques on fire, and those in the villages near Famagusta as well. Turkish villages not having arms or any other defense mechanism are living in the brutal atmosphere created by Greek Cypriot pillagers... Greek Cypriots having bazookas cause great chaos in Turkish villages. These acts of Greek Cypriots are disgraceful on behalf of humanity." See also contemporary correspondents’ reports from the Washington Post, US-UPI, Voice of Germany, London Times, Hans Janitscher, (Secretary General of The Socialist International Organization), Lars Harkanson, the UN Peace Keeping Force’s Representative in Cyprus, New York Times, The Sun, AFP, etc, etc.

22. On 3rd March 1996 the Greek Cypriot Cyprus Mail wrote: “(Greek) Cypriot governments have found it convenient to conceal the scale of atrocities during the 15th July coup in an attempt to downplay its contribution to the tragedy of the summer of 1974 and instead blame the Turkish invasion for all casualties. There can be no justification... a human drama has been turned into a propaganda tool.”

23. For a recent example of a recent supposedly “expert analysis” which completely fails to mention the Cyprus Greeks’ coup, see Joshua Chaffin, Financial Times, (UK) dated 29 July 2011.

24. For the full text of Makarios’ impassioned speech to the UN, see UNSC minutes dated 19 July 1974.

25. Greek Court of Appeal, Decision No. 2658/79, 23 March 1979


27. See Nicolas Rolandis’ Political Bureau (Nicosia) release March 2011

28. The extraordinary stupidity and inability of the Greek military junta in Athens to think through the inevitable consequences of their actions on Cyprus in the summer of 1974 remains one of the inexplicable mysteries of the whole affair, and has been commented upon by many, Greek and Turk, as well as many other observers of events. The Greek word hubris springs to mind, meaning excessive pride, arrogance and defiance of the Gods. However, hubris, as Greek scholars know, is inevitably followed by nemesis or retributive justice from the vengeful gods, to bring about the downfall of the unwise or over-ambitious. It seems as good a summary of the Athens Junta’s policy that hot summer as any.

29. The attack was ordered by Grivas who saw himself as the ‘true’ leader of the newly formed Greek Cypriot National Guard. (GCNG)


31. EOKA murdered at least 200 Turks, mainly policemen.

32. Turkish Foreign Minister Zorlu, minutes of Tripartite conference on Cyprus, August-September 1955

33. For further evidence of Turkey’s wary eye on Cyprus see also: Hurriyet (2 July 1980) by Ozal, former Prime Minister of Turkey, who referring to the Turkish Cypriot UDI of November 1983, said: “Cyprus is an island which pierces the middle of Turkey like a dagger. It is
extremely vital from the viewpoint of our security. This island should not be in enemy hands. The existence of Turks in northern Cyprus is a guarantee in this direction”.

See also Milliyet (November 1983), where Turkish Cypriot leader Raouf Denktash stated: "Naturally Turkey has strategic interests in Cyprus. It is fortunate for Turkey that the Turkish Cypriot community exists here. Even if the Turkish Cypriot community did not exist, Turkey would not have left Cyprus to Greece, Mr. Koruturk told me something which is very important. The honourable President had told me: 'If Cyprus passes to Greece and is militarized then Turkey ceases to be a maritime nation'. This is an extremely important factor”.

34. Ulster dominated British domestic politics in summer 1974. On May 28 the Northern Ireland Executive under Brian Faulkner, set up after the Sunningdale Agreement, had collapsed after just five months, and a million workers had gone on strike in Ulster. Direct rule from Westminster was re-introduced, and extra troops were sent to Northern Ireland. Moreover, Wilson headed a minority government after the February general election, and was planning another general election that October. With Watergate at its height, and US President Nixon (literally) on his knees with Secretary of State Kissinger, the hot summer of 1974 was no time for extra adventures for the US and UK; both Greeks and Turks may have sensed their chance for independent action and taken a gamble.

35. The 1976 UK House of Commons Select Committee on Cyprus found (HC 331 1975/76 para.22), that Turkey had proposed joint Anglo-Turkish action under the Treaty of Guarantee. On 14th August 1974 (Daily Telegraph 15th August) Prime Minister Ecevit confirmed that he had indeed travelled to London to urge Anglo-Turkish intervention. However the then Labour Government in Britain refused to take any effective action, even though they had troops and aircraft available in their Sovereign Bases in Cyprus. They argued that Britain was under no duty to act, even though Article II provided that Britain would guarantee the state of affairs established by the 1960 Constitution - which it manifestly failed to do. The Select Committee concluded that "Britain had a legal right to intervene, she had a moral obligation to intervene. She did not intervene for reasons which the (Labour) Government refuses to give.” It may have been more than timidity, as many conspiracy theorists have claimed. See also the detailed account of the Ecevit-Wilson talks by Turkish journalist Mehmet Ali Birand – widely considered to be one of the best and fairest reporters in Turkey – in his 1985 book, ‘30 Hot Days’ Milliyet, Istanbul 1976.


37. The prospect of an invasion of Cyprus had been considered by the TGS since 1964. Definitive operational plans called ‘Attila’ were created in 1967. The ultimate goal was the "Sahin" and "Attila" lines, to slice off north Cyprus. The operation was to be divided into two phases. The first objective was the creation of a beachhead that would give access to the sea and to push through to the Turkish-Cypriot enclave of Gönyeli just north of Nicosia. The aim was to seize a joined up bridgehead from Kyrenia to Nicosia, and then to negotiate and seek a diplomatic solution. Should that fail, then the plan (Attila 2) called for a major breakout to seize their second main objective, the "Attila" line. The first phase was expected to take 3 days, and the second 3–4 days, for a total of 6–7 days. (Private information) Although the official plan is still considered a military secret by the Turkish General Staff, see: "Otuz Sicak Gün" ('Thirty Hot Days'), Mehmet Ali Birand, Milliyet, Istanbul 1976.

38. Personal interview with ex-President Denktas


40. There is some evidence that Turkish Cypriot civilians were busy clearing the dropping zone north of Nicosia three days earlier, on 17 July. See airline employee Taff Lark's
recollections of the war in the old BOAC website, “Better On A Camel”, a collection of memories of events over the past 60 years or more, contributed by over 30 former staff of BOAC, BSAA, BEA and British Airways. One Cyprus Airways Trident airliner actually flew over and reported the Turkish invasion fleet.

41. See the evidence of the Commander of the Greek National Contingent (ELDYK) at the time, Colonel Mihalis Yorgitsis, who later testified to the Greek Cypriot parliamentary committee investigating the events of 1974 that after the Coup his first priority was ‘to target Turkish Cypriot enclaves - not worry about any Turkish reaction’.

42. The Greek National Guard High command appears to have been wrong footed. The initial plan (drawn up by EOKA’s Grivas back in 1964) had been codenamed "Aphrodite One" and relied upon the presence of a full Greek division on the island of 10,000 troops plus heavy weapons. However this division had been withdrawn from the island in 1967. A new plan, ‘Aphrodite Two’, was drawn up by the Greek Cypriots aimed at a major ground offensive with the primary aim of wiping out the Turkish Cypriot enclaves. Faced with a Turkish invasion, High Command ordered that this contingency plan to crush the Turkish Cypriots should go ahead. In Boulay de la Meurthe’s unforgettable comment: "It was worse than a crime; it was a blunder."

43 A fact admitted by the ‘Hellenic Nationalist Page – Cyprus 1974 Timeline’

44. Even the nearest, at Greek Rhodes, were 270 nm away.

45. Today’s sprawling suburb to the west of Kyrenia (Girne) is named in his memory.


47. The ambush did however force the Greek counter attack plan from the west to be abandoned.

48. See “Cyprus, 1974”, by T. Cooper and N. Tselepidis, published October 28, 2003 for ACIG.org. The three Turkish destroyers sent to investigate the Greek ships were the Adatepe, Kocatepe, and Tinaztepe. Aware that their transmissions were being monitored by the Turks, Greek Intelligence officers at Paphos transmitted that it was a Greek naval force offshore. The signals deception worked, as the Turkish Air Force launched an airstrike against their own destroyers.

49. Some sources say 84.

50 The strike package consisted of 28 F-100D Super Sabres, each carrying two 750 pound bombs, and sixteen F-104G Starfighters, each carrying a single 750 pound bomb. The fighters had no particular problem finding their targets, and attacked immediately, despite the large Turkish flags on the ships. The problem was that the Greek Navy also operated former USN destroyers, of the Gearing class. Kocatepe took a bomb down the funnel and sank in minutes.


54 See the description of the mission at ‘koti.welho.com/msolanak/kyprosengl.html’

55 See the ‘The Battle of Nicosia International Airport – Cyprus 1974, by a Greek Commando’, Published Istoria (History), 1993.
56 See UNFICYP Ops Log, 23 July 1974. The incident stirred a deep animosity between the GCNG and CANCON; and when a Canadian officer was sniped and killed in early 1975 many members of CANCON were convinced that it was a revenge shooting by the GCNG who had taken casualties from the Canadian fire on the 23rd. (Private Information)

57 See ‘The Action of the Captured M47 in Attila II in The Unknown Soldier of Cyprus’ (Savvas Vlassis)

58 The Greek side was felt to be stalling. Makarios in particular was deeply distrusted - by all sides, including the Greeks. (Private information.) See also Dodd, Clement. “The History and Politics of the Cyprus Conflict. New York: Palgrave MacMillan 2010.

59 See UNFICYP war logs, 14 – 17 August 1974.

60 UNFICYP observers’ reports. The fighting was close to Camp UNFICYP HQ. Professional artillery officers who observed the fighting from the UN OPs were impressed at how well handled the Greek artillery was on the 14th and 16th of August.


62 UN observers saw “dozens” of bodies being cleared after the battle.

63 Private interview with senior Turkish Officer.


65 See www.pyrovolitis.org.cy (‘Website of the Department of Artillery’)

66 Private information.

67 As with every war, stories abound about PoWs and civilians (on both sides) being shot out hand. Some of them are almost certainly true, but are hard to verify. Let one account speak for all: “...I just went berserk, like a rabid dog. I burst into a house. There were six or seven people inside and a child. I swung the machine-gun and mowed them down. All seven. Afterwards I noticed the child. What harm had it done, you ask? It was Turkish. They’d shot my fellow-villager, they’d shot my captain, so I’d shot them. I had a row with an officer from Nicosia, . . . about why I’d shot them. I said to him, ‘Why did I shoot them? I’ll tell you. Because it’s war . . .’ ” (See the full account by Peter Loizos (a Briton by birth, whose father originally came from Cyprus), in ‘The Heart Grown Bitter’, Cambridge University Press 1981.) On the Turkish side there are clear photographs of one group of five identified Greek PoWs surrendering at Mia Milia on 14 August 1974. They have never been seen since.

68 A good example of the continuing ‘Lawfare’ on Cyprus is the Apostolides v Orams case, decided in the European Court of Justice in April 2009. The case determined that although the Republic of Cyprus in the South does not exercise effective control in North Cyprus, cases decided in the South’s courts are applicable because – according to the EU - European Union law theoretically applies to the whole island. The government of the TRNC does not recognise the ruling: but the Orams also owned a house in UK. Under EU law, if the Orams didn’t hand back their house in the TRNC to the Greek Cypriot claimant, then their own house in UK would become forfeit instead. The legal wrangle continues, to the delight of the lawyers on both sides.

69 In 2004 Turkish Cypriots voted for reunification of the Island under the UN’s ‘Annan Plan’. However, Greek Cypriots voted against reunification. To many observers’ surprise the Greek Cypriots were then promptly rewarded for their intransigence by being invited to become members of the EU at the behest of Greece - while the EU embargoes on Turkish Cyprus
continued. With the Cyprus problem still unsolved that has since been openly admitted by several senior EU politicians to have been a serious mistake. (See for example, Turkish PM Erdogan’s criticism of German Chancellor Merkel’s visit to Cyprus, 12 January 2011; “I guess Ms. Merkel has forgotten what she has said. It was she herself who said it was wrong to admit Greek Cyprus into the European Union.”)

70 Turkey’s continued occupation of the northern half of Cyprus by right of conquest has provoked a steady stream of condemnatory UN resolutions and court judgements since 1974. For one important example see United Nations Security Council Resolution 541 (1983) which considered the “attempt to create the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus is invalid, and will contribute to a worsening of the situation in Cyprus”. It went on to state that it “Considers the declaration referred to above as legally invalid and calls for its withdrawal.” See also the lengthy list of UN Resolutions on Cyprus at: ‘en.wikipedia.org/.../List_of_United_Nations_Security_Council_resolutions’ and the relevant official UN websites.