An aerial photograph showing a large-scale military landing operation. Numerous parachutes are scattered across the ground, indicating a recent or ongoing parachute drop. The terrain appears to be a flat, open area.

Edward J. Erickson

Mesut Uyar

# PHASE LINE

The Amphibious Campaign for Cyprus, 1974

# ATTILA

A photograph of an amphibious landing operation on a beach. In the foreground, a large landing vehicle is being disembarked from a ship. A line of soldiers is visible on the beach, and several other landing vehicles are positioned further back. The background shows a hazy, mountainous coastline under a cloudy sky.

ATTILA

# PHASE LINE ATTILA



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The Amphibious Campaign for Cyprus, 1974

Edward J. Erickson, PhD | Mesut Uyar, PhD

**MCUP**

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This book is dedicated to those who served  
and to the memory of the fallen  
of all nations who served their countries in 1974 on Cyprus



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## FOREWORD

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I anticipate this monograph will prove to be one of the more valuable works ever written on the efficacy of modern-era amphibious warfare. While many students of military affairs have assumed that large-scale, forcible-entry amphibious operations are a thing of the past, the authors have done an outstanding job, in just eight concise and well-written chapters, to demonstrate how amphibious warfare, in combination with other joint operations, can prove decisive on modern-day battlefields. This monograph covers a little-known combat operation that incredibly involved two neighboring North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies—Greece and Turkey. The 1974 battle known in Turkey as Operation Star Drop-4 and erroneously in the West as Operation Attila took place on the perpetually restive island nation of Cyprus. Moreover, the authors have finally brought to light what is “arguably only one of two such [amphibious] operations” fought since 1945 that involved a substantially opposed landing. The operation also included the heavy use of airborne, airmobile, naval surface, and other follow-on armored forces that proved decisive toward relative Turkish success on Cyprus in 1974.

The island of Cyprus has long been the location of ethno-nationalist unrest. Divided between a predominantly Greek Cypriot population and a Turkish Cypriot minority, the island had been subject to bouts of internecine violence that ebbed and flowed over the years. In fact, I have some

personal experience with this very issue when my family, in the early 1960s, as part of the greater American diplomatic community on Cyprus, had to temporarily evacuate due to yet another outbreak of violence. As the authors have clearly emphasized throughout this excellent book, the real issue on Cyprus had to do with the concept of *Enosis*—the idea of uniting Cyprus with the Greek mainland. As might be expected, Turkish Cypriots had long been in opposition to this idea. The tense situation between the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities on the island came to a head in 1960 with the granting of independence to Cyprus. While constitutional protections were in place to protect the rights of the Turkish minority, in truth, the issue of representation and official governance over the entire island had never been fully resolved. This situation, in turn, created the ground for continued levels of ethno-nationalist violence that lasted until the mid-1970s with the outbreak of full-scale warfare on Cyprus described in detail by the authors of *Phase Line Attila*.

The central chapters of *Phase Line Attila* cover the details of the entire joint Turkish operation and includes the perspective of the Republic of Cyprus's military command, composed mostly of Greek Cypriots. When a Greek Cypriot military junta seized control of the Cypriot government on 15 July 1974, this event provided the pretext for a Turkish military intervention on Cyprus. While the Turkish government had always maintained a small regular combat regiment on the island, their plan to secure the island north of Phase Line Attila involved working closely with the local Turkish Cypriot militia and other forces sent by sea and air from the Turkish mainland. Furthermore, most of these forces landing on or near the invasion beachhead would be within easy range of Greek Cypriot coastal artillery, air forces, and certain naval surface forces. While the Turks were fortunate to not have to face robust beach defenses, such as those

experienced by the U.S. Marines at Tarawa in 1943, they did worry about the probability of violent Greek counterattacks on their tentative air and beachhead positions.

Interestingly, the authors noted that the possibility of fighting on Cyprus, always an issue to U.S. military and intelligence experts in the region, did not cause the United States undue concern due to their underestimation of Turkish military professionalism and overestimation of Greek Cypriot military strength and preparation on the island. In fact, U.S. planners knew very well how difficult and complex conducting a large-scale amphibious operation really was. They simply did not believe the Turks had the wherewithal to carry off such a complex operation and thought that the Greek Cypriots had more than enough force to deal with any potential Turkish incursion. However, what was a greater concern to America was the statement made by the Soviet Union at the height of the fighting that they might have to, at some point, come to the direct aid of Greece. The last thing the United States and NATO wished to see was Soviet troops on Cyprus. Thus, it was in the interest of the United States, NATO, and the United Nations (UN) to broker a cease-fire between the two belligerents as soon as possible.

The intense fighting on Cyprus during July and August 1974 vividly illustrated just how well the Turks carried out their amphibious and airborne operations. Although far from perfect, the Turks worked hard toward achieving their operational objectives despite some situations where the Greek Cypriot defenses proved to be fairly resilient. While the authors noted that the Greek Cypriots and Greeks on Cyprus fought back valiantly, the relentless Turkish attacks in a follow-on push they called Operation Victory enabled them to achieve most of their objectives, so that by 16 August 1974, they could unilaterally declare a cease-fire.

Phase Line Attila is now known as the “Green Line” on the island and serves as a clear and identifiable demarcation point between the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities on Cyprus. Nevertheless, Cyprus remains heavily militarized to this very day. While the Green Line is still maintained by UN peacekeepers, the threat of renewed violence has been greatly reduced. As the authors noted, this little-known or studied operation will have great value for military students, especially those studying modern-era amphibious warfare at Quantico, Virginia. I also concur with the authors that this operation should be seen as comparable to more famous military events, such as Operation Chromite (the Inchon Landing, 1950), Operation Corporate (the British operations in the Falkland Islands, 1982), and Operation Urgent Fury (the U.S. invasion of Grenada, 1983). In sum, this timely monograph will further our knowledge of the challenges and difficulties of conducting amphibious operations now and into the future.

General Glenn M. Walters, USMC (Ret)  
President, the Citadel  
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## ABBREVIATIONS

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### **AKEL**

Cypriot Communist party (*Anorthotikó Kómma Ergazómenou Laoú*)

### **CNG**

Cyprus National Guard

### **EF**

Cypriot National Guard (*Ethnikí Frouá*)

### **ELAS**

Greek People's Liberation Army (*Ellinikós Laikós Apeleftherotikós Stratós*)

### **ELDYK**

Hellenic Contingent in Cyprus (*ELiniki DYnami Kyprou*)

### **EOK**

Organosis (*Ethniki Organosis Kyprou* and sometimes *Organosis Akritas*)

### **EOKA**

National Organization of Cypriot Fighters (*Ethniki Organosis Kyprion Agoniston*)

### **G-DAY**

*Günü*—the Turkish word for day (equivalent to D-Day)

**IDEA**

Sacred League of Greek Cypriot Fighters (*Ieros Desmos Ellinokyprion Agoniston*)

**KTBK**

Turkish Cyprus Peace Force (*Kıbrıs Türk Barış Kuvveti*)

**KTKA**

Turkish Cyprus Regiment (*Kıbrıs Türk Kuvvetleri Alayı*)

**SOD**

Special Operations Directorate

**TCG**

The Republic of Turkey Ship (*Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Gemisi*)

**TE**

Cypriot National Guard reserve infantry battalion (*Tagma Epistratefseos* or Mobilized Battalion)

**TGS**

Turkish General Staff

**TLFC**

Turkish Land Forces Command

**TMT**

Turkish Resistance Organization (*Türk Mukavemet Teşkilatı*)

**UNFICYP**

United Nations Peacekeeping Forces in Cyprus

# PHASE LINE ATTILA



## CHAPTER 1

---

# A STUDY IN AMPHIBIOSITY\*

### INTRODUCTION

*Amphibiosity* is a recently derived word that is increasingly popular among the professional practitioners of amphibious warfare in the United States. In the military sense, it describes the extent to which an organization exhibits an expeditionary mindset and an ability to conduct amphibious operations. This book, *Phase Line Attila: The Amphibious Campaign for Cyprus*, is a study of amphibiosity with a view toward examining how the Turks successfully conducted a post–Second World War amphibious campaign in a contested environment.<sup>1</sup> *Phase Line Attila* details the Turkish amphibious invasion of northern Cyprus in July 1974 and the follow-on breakout operation in August. Sometimes erroneously called Operation Attila, the operation was actually named Operation Yıldız Atma-4 (Operation Star Drop-4), and it was a carefully planned and well execut-

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\* All place names on Cyprus have been standardized to the preferred terms to prevent confusion between switching between Turkish and Greek Cypriot place names for the same locations. Exceptions to this general rule include geographical features and other place names associated with battlefields, in which they are often named after other features found elsewhere, particularly Turkish place names for battlefield features (often named after existing places in Turkey).

<sup>1</sup> The authors wish to point out that *Attila* is the English spelling and, in Turkish, the name is spelled correctly as *Atilla*. To assist our English-speaking readers, we will use the English spelling in our book.

ed joint-operational-level amphibious assault against a defended island (*Attila* was the name of the phase line associated with campaign termination). Arguably, Operation Yıldız Atma-4 is one of only two deliberate amphibious campaigns conducted since 1945 against a well-armed enemy contesting the landings.

## **AMPHIBIOUS CAMPAIGNS**

There are three levels of war: the strategic, operational, and tactical levels. At the operational level of war, campaigns serve to connect tactical activities (usually battles and engagements) with the achievement of strategic goals. Commanders who plan and execute campaigns at the operational level of war are, for the most part, army group and field army commanders, although occasionally army corps fulfill this function when operating in an independent role.

It is important to recognize that a battle is not a campaign, although in some wars, extended and large-scale battles took on campaign-like aspects. A campaign is a series of battles and engagements designed to achieve a strategic purpose. Campaigns are longer in time and space than battles and involve indirect command, which means that the commander does not personally conduct or supervise operations in the field. In such circumstances, command is conducted by assigning missions and objectives to subordinate commanders. Supervision (commonly called control) is exercised through staff procedures, although it was not uncommon for a high-level commander to intervene in emergency situations. Campaigns fall broadly into two types—offensive and defensive—and within these a campaign may be *deliberate* (a doctrinal term meaning operations that are preplanned and preresourced in a long-term planning cycle) or *hasty* (a doctrinal term meaning operations that are taken expeditiously in re-

sponse to a window of opportunity with the resources at hand conducted with a short planning cycle).<sup>2</sup>

Yıldız Atma-4 was a deliberate amphibious campaign conducted against serious opposition. Its only real near-peer rival was Operation Musketeer, the Anglo-French landing at Suez in 1956. However, Operation Musketeer terminated incompletely for political reasons after only 43 hours of ground combat and was strategically unsuccessful.<sup>3</sup> There were four other operational-level landings after the Second World War, the largest of which was the Chinese Communist assault on Hainan Island in 1950, which was heavily opposed by the Chinese Nationalists. However, this was a hasty operation and the assaulting forces were carried over a narrow strait supported by field artillery fires in an improvised fleet of more than 2,000 Chinese junks. The remaining operational-level campaigns include Inchon in 1950 and the Falklands in 1982, both of which were hasty operations and literally unopposed landings, and Grenada in 1983, which was also a hasty operation and very lightly opposed. In truth, since the ending of the Second World War, amphibious assault continues to be a viable form of warfare but is rare at the operational level of war (table 1.1).

## **TACTICAL-LEVEL AMPHIBIOUS OPERATIONS**

China, the United States, Israel, Iran, and Sri Lanka executed a number of tactical level amphibious landings in the postwar years (table 1.2). It is important to note that these landings are accurately characterized as “operations” rather than campaigns. This is because they were actually

---

<sup>2</sup> See chapter 2 of *Warfighting*, Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 1 (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 1997) for a more complete definition of the levels of war; and see also *Campaigning*, MCDP 1-2 (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 1997), for a complete definition of a campaign.

<sup>3</sup> Wilfred P. Deac, “Operation Musketeer, Duel for the Suez Canal,” *Military History* 18, no. 1 (April 2001): 64.

**Table 1.1. Amphibious campaigns since 1945**

Name	Location	Level	Ground Duration	Operation Forces	Ground Remarks
Hainan Island (1950)	China	field army	20 days	100,000	joint
Chromite (1950)	Korea	army corps	5 days	30,000	joint
Musketeer (1956)	Egypt	task force	7 days	23,000	combined
Yildiz Atma-4 (1974)	Cyprus	army corps	28 days	40,000	joint
Corporate (1982)	Falklands	task force	21 days	6,000	joint
Urgent Fury (1983)	Grenada	task force	10 days	7,300	joint

Sources: Bruce A. Elleman, *High Seas Buffer: The Taiwan Patrol Force, 1950–1979* (Newport, RI: Naval War College Press, 2012), 10–15; Col Rod Andrew Jr. (Ret), *The First Fight: U.S. Marines in Operation Starlite, 1965* (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps History Division, 2015), 10–30; R. D. MacLaurin, *The Battle of Sidon*, Technical Memorandum 13-89 (Springfield, VA: Abbot Associates, 1989), 55–58; Pierre Razoux, *The Iran-Iraq War*, trans. Nicholas Elliott (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, an imprint of Harvard University Press, 2015), 249–354; and “History: The Navy from 1984,” Sri Lankan Navy, accessed 25 June 2019.

a component of a larger operation (or campaign) or their objectives were very limited in scope. Raids, river crossings, and bloodless occupations are not included as major operations; examples of these include but are not limited to: Nimble Archer in 1987, Ad-Dawrah in 1991, and Perejil Island in 2003. The United States Marine Corps executed a large number of tactical level amphibious assaults during the Vietnam War, including Operations Double Eagle, Jackstay, and Deckhouse I-V. For the purposes of this chapter, Operation Starlite during the Vietnam War was the most

**Table 1.2. Tactical-level amphibious operations since 1945**

Name	Location	Level	Ground operation's duration	Ground forces	Remarks
Jinmen Island (1949)	China	army corps	3 days	9,000	joint
Starlite (1965)	S. Vietnam	regiment	7 days	5,500	combined
Peace for Galilee (1982)	Lebanon	brigade	7 days	3,000	joint
Dawn 8 (1986)	Iran/Iraq	brigade	3 days	3,000	single Service
Sea Breeze (1990)	Sri Lanka	battalion	3 days	800	joint
Balavegaya (1991)	Sri Lanka	task force	18 days	5,000	joint

Sources: Bruce A. Elleman, *High Seas Buffer: The Taiwan Patrol Force, 1950–1979* (Newport, RI: Naval War College Press, 2012), 10–15; Col Rod Andrew Jr. (Ret), *The First Fight: U.S. Marines in Operation Starlite, 1965* (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps History Division, 2015), 10–30; R. D. MacLaurin, *The Battle of Sidon*, Technical Memorandum 13-89 (Springfield, VA: Abbot Associates, 1989), 55–58; Pierre Razoux, *The Iran-Iraq War*, trans. Nicholas Elliott (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, an imprint of Harvard University Press, 2015), 249–354; and “History: The Navy from 1984,” Sri Lankan Navy, accessed 25 June 2019.

successful of many and is presented as a representative tactical level amphibious operation.

## **YILDIZ ATMA-4 AS AN EXPEDITIONARY AMPHIBIOUS CAMPAIGN**

What differentiated Yıldız Atma-4 from its Second World War predecessors, and what makes it worthy of study today? Beyond the fact that it is the only example of a militarily and politically successful contested am-

phibious assault at the operational level since 1945, Yıldız Atma-4 was a textbook case of the application of deliberate amphibious planning as it existed in the postwar era. As a campaign, Yıldız Atma-4 served to fulfill the strategic purpose of preventing Greek Cypriots from politically unifying with Greece. Moreover, the campaign was expeditionary in the sense that the invading forces were self-sufficient logistically only by using sea-based resupply. Finally, in terms of the principles of war, the campaign demonstrates how surprise, maneuver, and unity of command can overcome risk and enemy actions.

Deliberate planning by the Turkish General Staff to intervene in Cyprus began as early as 1970, but a Greek Cypriot coup d'état in 1974 triggered the operation. On 20 July 1974, the Turks assaulted a beach with two Turkish Marine battalions and reinforced it with an army infantry regiment to establish a beachhead. At the same time, they dropped an airborne brigade and landed a commando brigade by helicopter to establish an airhead. The Turks then, in a three-day period, consolidated the beachhead and airhead into what is called a lodgment. Three weeks later, reinforced by two infantry divisions, the Turkish VI Corps (under the name of *Kıbrıs Türk Barış Kuvveti* [Turkish Cyprus Peace Force]) planned and executed a breakout to what they had designated as *Phase Line Attila* to secure the northern one-third of the island.

There is a huge gap in the extant historiography of modern amphibious operations—there is almost nothing in print regarding the 1974 amphibious campaign for Cyprus except a growing memoir literature in Turkish and Greek.<sup>4</sup> This book aims to fill that gap by presenting a bal-

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<sup>4</sup> For example, see Tristan Lovering, *Amphibious Assault: Manoeuvre from the Sea* (Woodbridge, UK: Seafarer Books, 2007). This 503-page book aspires to cover definitively every amphibious landing operation (including raids) since 1915. Yet, Lovering failed to even mention the 1974 Cyprus operation.

anced campaign history that focuses on how the Turkish armed forces successfully planned and executed a complex, multiphased amphibious assault from the sea against a well-armed adversary actively contesting the landings.

## THE TURKS AND AMPHIBIOUS OPERATIONS

It is not widely remembered today that the Turks have several historical connections to twentieth-century amphibious operations. Many readers, of course, will be familiar with the Gallipoli campaigns of 1915 in which the Ottoman Army vigorously and successfully contested an Allied attempt to seize that peninsula. The Gallipoli campaign is seen today as the point of origin for the development of modern amphibious operations. Moreover, it is also a starting point for understanding how beaches should or should not be defended in the modern era. In fact, the Ottoman defense of the Gallipoli peninsula was remarkably effective in holding the British to tiny beachheads from which they were unable to advance.<sup>5</sup> However, it is almost forgotten today that the Ottoman Turks conducted their own ambitious and large-scale amphibious operation in the First Balkan War in 1913.

In January 1913, the Ottoman high command began planning to regain the initiative against the Bulgarians, who had seized most of Turkish Thrace in the fall of 1912.<sup>6</sup> Operationally, the Ottomans planned to land amphibiously at Şarköy in the Sea of Marmara to outflank the Bulgarians

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<sup>5</sup> For a comprehensive overview of the Gallipoli campaigns at the operational level of war, see Edward J. Erickson, *Gallipoli: Command under Fire* (Oxford, UK: Osprey Publishing, 2015).

<sup>6</sup> Hikmet Süer, *Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri Tarihi, Balkan Harbi (1912–1913), II Cilt, 2nci Kısım, 1nci Kitap, Şark Ordusu, İkinci Çatalca Muharebesi ve Şarköy Çıkarması* [Turkish Armed Forces History, Balkan War, Battle of Second Çatalca and the Şarköy Amphibious Invasion] (Ankara, Turkey: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 1993), 139–219.

and cut off their army investing the Çatalca lines. The Ottomans marshaled the Provisional X Corps, composed of the 31st and 32d Infantry Divisions, the 5th Cavalry Regiment, and artillery and engineer units, and began planning to land about 20,000 men on the beach at Şarköy.<sup>7</sup> The Ottomans planned to land three echelons, the first of which was an assault echelon. Altogether, in addition to the men, the Ottomans loaded 3,700 animals, 48 artillery pieces, and 23,500 boxes of ammunition in 22 civilian cargo ships. The landing force was accompanied by a battle squadron of two battleships and two cruisers for naval gunfire support. On 8 February 1913, the corps conducted an unopposed landing using the assault echelon of the 32d Infantry Division. However, in moving off the beach, the Ottomans encountered Bulgarian infantry in Şarköy village and on the surrounding hills, which they attacked and were supported by naval gunfire from the Ottoman Navy. This day might be termed D-day in modern terminology, and the Ottomans were successful in establishing a beachhead. The beachhead itself was tiny and would need to be expanded to accommodate the unloading of the entire corps.

On 9 February, Ottoman Army engineers constructed a temporary pier to unload the artillery, animals, and supplies while Ottoman infantry pushed inland and seized the high ground. On this day, the 31st Infantry Division came ashore as well as the corps headquarters, but most of the artillery, animals, and munitions remained on the ships. On 10 February, the X Corps occupied a lodgment that was 3 kilometers (km) wide by 2 km deep and both divisions were ashore. The Şarköy operation was directly tied to a simultaneous offensive north from the Bulair lines of the Gallipoli peninsula and, unfortunately for the Ottomans, that operation failed

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<sup>7</sup> For the only examination in English of this fascinating expedition, see Edward J. Erickson, *Defeat in Detail: The Ottoman Army in the Balkans, 1912–1913* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2003), 259–72.

disastrously. As a consequence, the operational need for the Şarköy operation immediately became irrelevant and the general staff decided that night to withdraw the corps.

The Ottoman withdrawal occurred under pressure from the Bulgarian Army and the lodgment perimeter had to be collapsed carefully and in a step-by-step manner. The heavy guns of the Ottoman battleships provided naval gunfire support that proved instrumental in holding the Bulgarians at bay while the infantry was compressed into an ever-tightening perimeter. By nightfall on 11 February, the last of the force was successfully evacuated from the temporary pier. Ottoman casualties were remarkably light and the operation faded into historical obscurity.

At the beginning of the First World War, the British, of course, knew about the Şarköy landing but had no substantial information regarding its planning or execution. In fact, Britain and the Ottoman Empire, separately and uniquely in 1913 and 1915, solved many of the essential problems inherent in landing fighting men on a beach. Both nations enjoyed command of the sea (for the Ottomans this may be termed as local command of the sea because the operation was isolated inside the Sea of Marmara) and both had access to adequate shipping. Planning time for both was terribly compressed but both were able in a planning period of about 30 days to solve most of the basic issues associated with movement.

## **THE EVOLUTION OF AMPHIBIOSITY**

After the failure of the Gallipoli campaign in the First World War, only the United States Marine Corps imagined that amphibious operations against a contested shore were possible. This vision was tied to ambitious American war plans against Japan, which demanded the seizure of advanced fleet bases across the Pacific. In turn, during the interwar period, the Ma-

rine Corps developed an amphibious doctrine at its Quantico base called the *Tentative Manual for Landing Operations*. At the same time, the Marines activated a permanent organization called the Fleet Marine Force (FMF) that would be manned, equipped, and trained in readiness to conduct amphibious landings. The doctrine and FMF were repeatedly tested from 1936–40 in Fleet Landing Exercises (called FLEXs, which sometimes included U.S. Army units as well). This, in turn, led to the development and procurement of specialized landing equipment. In 1941, the Marine Corps expanded from regiments to divisions and, institutionally, American military and naval leaders believed that the amphibious capability developed in the 1930s was workable in combat. Entering the Second World War, the United States possessed the only operational force in the world that was ready and organized to seize a contested shoreline.

In the Second World War, the United States, Britain, and Canada became masters of amphibious warfare in the major theaters of war. Allied amphibiousness, or the extent to which Allied military and naval expeditionary organizations could plan and execute amphibious landing operations, became a known and reliable capability for Allied commanders. We need not review the specific operations in this book but, in general terms, the amphibious operations in the European and Mediterranean theaters of operations were conducted by shore-to-shore movements under the cover of land-based airpower. In the Central Pacific theater of operations, the amphibious operations were conducted by the sea-to-the-shore movements largely under the cover of carrier-based airpower.<sup>8</sup> Operations in North Africa and the Southwest Pacific were mixed. Amphibious operations in all

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<sup>8</sup> We would note that this statement pertains to Adm Chester W. Nimitz's Central Pacific offensives, which employed the U.S. Marine Corps, while Army general Douglas MacArthur's South Pacific offensives were often supported by land-based airpower.

theaters were expeditionary in the sense that the landing force had to be self-sufficient and bring everything it needed with it (or do without).<sup>9</sup> In this regard, as an amphibious expeditionary operation, the Turkish Yıldız Atma-4 operation was more akin to Allied amphibious operations in the European and Mediterranean theaters (shore-to-shore movement with land-based airpower).

The Allies of World War II faced a variety of defensive tactics designed to make them fail. There are basically two ways to defend a beach—at the water’s edge or to screen the beach and throw the invader back into the sea with counterattacking reserves. The Allies faced both systems. The defenses at Saipan in the Mariana Islands and Omaha Beach on the coast of Normandy, for example, were of the former while those at Salerno, Italy, and Okinawa, Japan, were of the latter. In all cases, the Allies learned to deal successfully with these defensive tactics. Importantly, the Allies maintained air and sea supremacy, which gave them freedom of action and enabled them to pick the time and place of the landings. In Cyprus, the Turks were confronted with Greek Cypriot defenses that lightly screened beaches and relied on counterattacks to limit the Turkish advance. Like the Allies, the Turks enjoyed absolute air and sea supremacy.

## **LANDING OPERATIONS AND OPERATION YILDIZ ATMA-4**

There are sequential phases in conducting an amphibious landing that is expected to be contested by the enemy. First, the men and equipment must be “combat loaded” in self-sufficient packages of units and trans-

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<sup>9</sup> The authors recognize that there are a number of definitions for the term *expeditionary*, but we feel that the defining essence is logistical in nature and a true expeditionary force, whether delivered by sea, land, or air, is entirely self-sufficient logistically for a defined period of time.

ported from a port of embarkation to the landing site.<sup>10</sup> Second, they must conduct a tactical movement from the ships to the beach and storm ashore. Third, they must push inland to establish a beachhead from which they will not be thrown back into the sea. In Normandy, on 6 June 1944 (D-Day), Allied infantry divisions and armored brigades stormed ashore from landing craft to create a large beachhead.

If airborne or airmobile units are employed, they must be dropped or air landed to establish an airhead behind the enemy's beach defenses but not so far that the enemy can isolate and destroy them before they can be relieved by the amphibious force. On D-Day in Normandy, three Allied airborne divisions were dropped in an attempt to isolate the beach defenders and seize key bridges. Once this is done, the invaders must then somehow connect the beachhead with the airhead to create a contiguous and unitary lodgment. In Normandy, while the British airborne were relieved almost immediately, it took several days for the invading forces to break through and relieve American paratroopers.

The concept of a lodgment evolved from Sir Ian Hamilton's innovative concept, which he termed the *covering force area*, used at Gallipoli in 1915. Hamilton used the term *covering force area* to delineate a secure area beyond the beach that was large enough to contain the attacking amphibious force, its logistical elements, and a fresh follow-on force that would break

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<sup>10</sup> The term *combat loading* means that personnel, equipment, and supplies are widely distributed among the available shipping so that, in the event of a ship being sunk, the landing force has no tactically crippling loss of capability. *Combat loading* is balanced against the term *administrative loading*, in which personnel, equipment, and supplies are loaded for maximum efficiency. In administrative loading, for example, it might be more efficient to load all of the helicopters into a single ship, but at the risk of losing an entire capability should the ship be sunk (as was the case of the container ship *SS Atlantic Conveyor* carrying all of Britain's heavy-lift helicopters during the Falklands Campaign). Combat loading, while not as efficient as administrative loading, significantly mitigates the tactical risk.

out and achieve an operational objective.<sup>11</sup> Today, this area is called a lodgment. In the D-Day landings, the Allied lodgment was not firmly established until D+2 (or 8 June 1944), when the American airheads were connected to the beachheads. A lodgment is necessary because the initial assaulting forces are generally so worn down or severely weakened by combat action that they lack the combat power to advance farther.

As will be seen, in 1974, Turkish military, air, and naval officers planned to establish a beachhead and an airhead. Once these were secured, they planned to link them up and establish the lodgment. As with Normandy in 1944, the Turks planned to bring in larger maneuver units to conduct their breakout to Phase Line Attila. The Turks enjoyed uncontested air and sea supremacy, which gave them freedom of action and the opportunity to do this. They used their advantages to dominate the battle space in three dimensions to conduct their operations according to their planned time line. Their opponents, the Greek Cypriot National Guard, on the other hand, fought battles of expediency and failed to defend successfully either at the water's edge or to conduct concentrated and decisive counter-attacks to drive the Turks back into the sea.

## **A STUDY IN AMPHIBIOSITY**

To what extent did the Turkish armed forces exhibit an expeditionary mindset and an ability to conduct amphibious operations? The Turkish establishment of the lodgment on Cyprus and the subsequent breakout to Phase Line Attila were extremely successful. In retrospect, the fluidity and proficiency with which the Turks executed their operations made it look far easier than it actually was. Moreover, the available (but scant)

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<sup>11</sup> Instructions for GOC A&NZ Army Corps, MEF GHQ, 13 April 1915, attachment to MEF War Diary, Australian War Memorial RCD/G1002281. For a fuller explanation, see Erickson, *Gallipoli*, 109–17.

literature in English and Greek about the Cyprus operation today is something of an apologia explaining the inevitability of the Turkish victory. In fact, the Greek Cypriots and their Greek comrades fought valiantly and achieved a number of tactical successes. The reader should keep in mind that the apparently overwhelming Turkish force that was brought to bear in Cyprus in July 1974 was committed in a very dangerous tactical situation with high mountains between the beachhead and the airhead. In fact, Yıldız Atma-4 was a high-risk operation and the rapid establishment of a contiguous lodgment was never a certainty. A more effective Greek Cypriot defense and response might have defeated in detail the widely scattered Turkish units. It is not unthinkable that the contest might have gone against the Turks at least long enough for the great powers to impose a negotiated settlement.

## **CHAPTER 2**

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# **THE MILITARIZATION OF CYPRUS**

### **INTRODUCTION**

A history of the demographics, culture, and politics of the island of Cyprus far exceeds the purpose of this book, but a brief introduction to the background that shaped Turkish intervention in 1974 is important to understanding these events. This chapter provides the background of how the early Cold War and decolonization drove a gradual militarization of the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities on Cyprus. As independence approached in 1960, successor paramilitary organizations remained in existence and the Greek and Turkish communities on Cyprus remained heavily armed. After 1960, the Republic of Cyprus founded the Cyprus National Guard (CNG), which, by 1974, was almost exclusively composed of Greek Cypriots. The 30-year militarization of the ethnically polarized island contributed significantly to the breakdown of the constitutional government and to the rising tensions that affected the Turkish and Greek Cypriot communities on Cyprus.

### **CYPRUS ENTERS THE TWENTIETH CENTURY**

The Greco-Roman world included ancient Cyprus, and the island was inhabited mostly by ethnic Greeks as well as other seafaring peoples of the

**Map 2.1. The operational area: Turkey, Cyprus, Greece, and Crete**



Map by authors, adapted by MCUP

The tremendous geographic advantage enjoyed by Turkey over Greece is immediately apparent. The closest Greek airbases are located on the islands of Crete and Rhodes.

Mediterranean. The island was successively a part of the Roman, Byzantine, and Arab Empires, and it was conquered in the twelfth century by the Crusaders. The Crusader kingdom of Cyprus was forcibly incorporated into the domain of Venice in 1489. Less than a hundred years later, in 1571, Cyprus fell to the Ottomans, who held and administered the island until 1878, when Great Britain took administrative control of the island as a prize for its support against possible Russian encroachments after the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–78. Britain did not claim sovereignty over the island at this juncture. The strategic value of the island to Britain waned after their invasion of Egypt in 1881 and slowly but steadily Cyprus became something of a military backwater. This situation changed briefly

during the First World War when the Ottoman Empire joined the Central Powers in 1914. Britain annexed what was already a de facto colony, and Cyprus served as an important naval and military base during the war. Although Britain formally declared Cyprus as a Crown colony in 1925, its brief period of strategic importance was over until the close of British military bases in Egypt in 1954.

The political problems between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots began as early as 9 July 1821, when the Ottomans executed almost 500 Greeks, including four bishops in Nicosia, Cyprus, for rebellion.<sup>1</sup> Nationalism was then sweeping through Europe and the revolt in mainland Greece inspired the Greek Cypriots to bid for independence and *Enosis* (union with mainland Greece). With the encouragement and support of Europeans, Greece won its independence from the Ottomans and, consequently, the concept of the *Megali Idea* (the Great Idea) arose in the Greek-speaking world. The Megali Idea advanced the understanding that historical Greece (the Peloponnesus, the European and Asiatic Aegean littorals, the Black Sea littorals, Thrace, and Constantinople) and those same areas inhabited by ethnic Greeks in the modern age were one and the same. In an era of nineteenth century ethno-nationalism, the Megali Idea transformed into a sort of irredentist claim by Greeks for acquisition of Asia Minor and the Aegean and Black Sea littorals. On Cyprus, the majority Greek Cypriot community quickly became caught up in *Enosis* and the Megali Idea and these positions became politicized, bringing the Greek Cypriots into confrontation with the minority Turkish Cypriot population. The British policy of *divide et impera* (divide and rule) also played an important role in enabling communal struggle. For example, when the British introduced a limited

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<sup>1</sup> Nancy Crawshaw, *The Cyprus Revolt: An Account of the Struggle for Union with Greece* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1978), 20–21.

measure of self-government through a constitution in 1882, they made sure to check the Greek Cypriot legislative power with the support of Turkish Cypriot power. The Turkish Cypriots, as a vulnerable minority group well aware of forced migrations of Muslims in Greece and later in Crete, preferred British colonial administration against incorporation into Greece. Turkish Cypriot support for British rule retarded their political aspirations and organizations until 1919. A small Turkish Cypriot party emerged that year, advocating the return of the island to the then Ottoman Empire.<sup>2</sup> It is important to mention that the British leaders offered Cyprus to Greece at least two times; the first offer took place during the London Peace Conference of 1912–13 in London in return for a British base at Kefalonia Island and the second offer was extended in 1915 for active Greek cooperation in the First World War. In both cases, the Greeks refused the offer.

As a Crown colony, Britain attempted simply to manage the status quo until 1931, when episodes of demonstrations, disturbances, and violence erupted in many of the cities and towns. Initially provoked by economic reforms, they later transformed into nationalist demands. On 9 October 1931, an unruly mob of Greek Cypriots burned the Government House, which was the seat of the British administration on the island.<sup>3</sup> During the next two months, dozens of Greek Cypriots were killed and wounded as Britain reinforced its island garrison with soldiers, Royal Navy ships and landing parties, and Royal Air Force (RAF) air squadrons. In the end, British military forces restored order. The source of discontent seemed to lie in a gathering sense that *Enosis* was destined to happen but was thwarted by Britain. This was accelerated by contemporaneous outbreaks of

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<sup>2</sup> Crawshaw, *The Cyprus Revolt*, 24.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Holland, *Britain and the Revolt in Cyprus, 1954–1959* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, an imprint of Oxford University Press, 1998), 1–3.

anticolonial nationalism in British India, Palestine, and British colonies in Africa. Throughout this time, the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities on the island coexisted in an uneasy state of political suspension while Britain tried in vain to restore some form of self-government. However, as the Second World War approached, tensions between the communities grew as the Turkish Cypriots embraced Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's ideas of "Turkishness," which were imported from the fledgling Republic of Turkey. This newfound sense of identity imbued Turkish Cypriots with a similar sense of the ethno-nationalism that had infected the Greek Cypriots earlier.<sup>4</sup> As war approached, the separate Greek and Turkish educational systems on the island stressed ethno-national identities, languages, and cultures, which socialized young Cypriots into regarding themselves as Greeks or Turks rather than sharing a common Cypriot identity.<sup>5</sup>

After the German conquest of Greece and Crete in May 1941, Britain maintained a large air and ground garrison on Cyprus, and the island once again became an important strategic asset in the war against the Axis. With Greece on the side of the Allies and Turkey leaning that way after 1942, Cyprus remained calm for the duration of the war. Indeed, popular support for the Allied cause and Britain reached an all-time high when some 37,000 Cypriots, of whom one-third were Turkish, volunteered to serve in Britain's Cyprus Regiment.<sup>6</sup> When the war ended, the British leaders, especially the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, toyed with the idea of permitting the union of Cyprus with Greece but retaining leased bases. However, this idea was quickly dropped when the Turkish reaction and the possibility of Greece becoming Communist were considered. Simul-

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<sup>4</sup> Holland, *Britain and the Revolt in Cyprus*, 11–13.

<sup>5</sup> David French, *Fighting EOKA: The British Counter-Insurgency Campaign on Cyprus, 1955–1959* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 17.

<sup>6</sup> Holland, *Britain and the Revolt in Cyprus*, 13.

taneously with the end of war, anticolonial insurgencies broke out in Palestine and other British colonies, such as Malaya and Kenya. Crippling nonviolent movements rose again in British India and violent Communist insurgency threatened mainland Greece itself. Amid this background of activity, Cyprus remained surprisingly quiet—partly because the Greek Cypriot community was engaged in an internal struggle for political supremacy between its right and left wings.<sup>7</sup>

Into this mix stepped Colonel Georgios Grivas, a 50-year old Greek Army officer who had left Cyprus at age 17 and returned in 1948. In the interim, Grivas fought against the Turks in 1921, attended France's *École de Guerre*, and fought against the Italians in 1940. According to one historian, Grivas maintained a lifelong interest in guerrilla warfare based on his experiences against the Turks.<sup>8</sup> When Germany occupied Greece in 1941, Grivas went underground and formed a controversial right-wing terrorist resistance organization known as X (*Xhi*).<sup>9</sup> At the same time that Grivas set up X, the left-wing Greek Communists established *Ellinikós Laikós Apeleftherotikós Stratós* (the Greek People's Liberation Army or ELAS) as its principal arm of military resistance to the Germans. By 1944, internecine fighting between Grivas and ELAS broke out frequently, causing accusations that targeted Grivas for collaboration with the Germans. Both organizations used subversion and terrorism as their principal tactics, but Grivas's ideas were so radical that the British refused to assist him against ELAS during the war. And, interestingly, Grivas got most of his

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<sup>7</sup> Holland, *Britain and the Revolt in Cyprus*, 14–15.

<sup>8</sup> Crawshaw, *The Cyprus Revolt*, 90–91.

<sup>9</sup> George Grivas-Dighenis, *The Memoirs of General Grivas*, ed. Charles Foley (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1965), 5.

arms from the Germans.<sup>10</sup> In 1948, Grivas became enthralled with *Enosis* and plotted ideas with fellow conspirators about how to lead an armed struggle on Cyprus and, according to Grivas himself, “that moment the liberation movement passed from the sphere of abstract idealism into the field of action.”<sup>11</sup>

Colonel Grivas arrived on Cyprus in 1951 and met with Archbishop Makarios III—also known as Michael Mouskos, who was not only the official head of the Orthodox Church in Cyprus but also de facto leader of the Greek Cypriots—and the men were immediately at odds, with Grivas advocating guerrilla war and the archbishop advocating small acts of sabotage. During the next several years, Grivas steadily peddled his ideas and built a secret revolutionary committee of like-minded men. Grivas also recruited, organized, and trained nationalist groups in active guerrilla warfare and sabotage as well as in leading riots and demonstrations.<sup>12</sup> Grivas took the nom de guerre Digenis, after the legendary tenth-century Byzantine frontier warrior Digenis Akritas, and, by 1954, had cached weapons and founded secret groups around the island. Makarios was drawn reluctantly into supporting Grivas and, in March 1955, Grivas named his organization *Ethniki Organosis Kyprion Agoniston* or the National Organization of Cypriot Fighters (EOKA).<sup>13</sup> The Greek government in Athens officially provided no support in the way of weapons or training for the organization, but turned a blind eye to the activities of nationalist government offi-

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<sup>10</sup> Another view is that the British refused to support X because they had agreed to include Communists in the post-occupation government. The authors thank well-known Greek publisher and defense journalist, Savvas D. Vlassis, for this perspective.

<sup>11</sup> Grivas-Dighenis, *The Memoirs of General Grivas*, 13.

<sup>12</sup> There were a number of preexisting independent paramilitary youth groups on Cyprus that Grivas unified. See Doros Alastos, *Cyprus Guerrilla: Grivas, Makarios and the British* (London: Heinemann, 1960), 50–57; and Crawshaw, *The Cyprus Revolt*, 100–5.

<sup>13</sup> Grivas-Dighenis, *The Memoirs of General Grivas*, 31–32.

cials and military officers. Consequently, EOKA remained small and poorly armed, but it was tightly organized and positioned in strategic locations throughout the island. It is important to keep in mind that, at this point, EOKA was focused against the British colonial administration rather than against Turkish Cypriots.

Amid these preparations for an insurgency and amid discussions in the British cabinet, Britain had to evacuate its Egyptian bases in 1954. All of a sudden, Cyprus regained its pre-1881 strategic importance, becoming the home of the joint headquarters in the British Middle East. Later on, the British and Americans constructed listening posts and radar stations, thereby turning the island into one giant eavesdropping site.

## **THE EFFECT OF THE CYPRUS INSURGENCY**

Colonel Grivas and EOKA began operations on 1 April 1955 with a widespread series of explosions across the island and with a leaflet campaign proclaiming a call to Greek Cypriots for direct armed action. EOKA got off to a slow and clumsy start as many bombs failed to explode and one saboteur was even electrocuted when he threw a dew-covered rope over a high-tension line.<sup>14</sup> During the summer, Makarios became an active participant in planning operations and pushed Grivas toward small-scale terrorist activities. Britain tried to defuse the situation in September 1955 by hosting the Tripartite Conference on the Eastern Mediterranean and Cyprus in London between the United Kingdom (UK), Greece, and Turkey, but all the conference managed to do was to identify the three differing visions of what a future Cyprus might look like. Moreover, public opinion in Greece and Turkey polarized and incidents of violence against the oth-

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<sup>14</sup> Crawshaw, *The Cyprus Revolt*, 114–15.

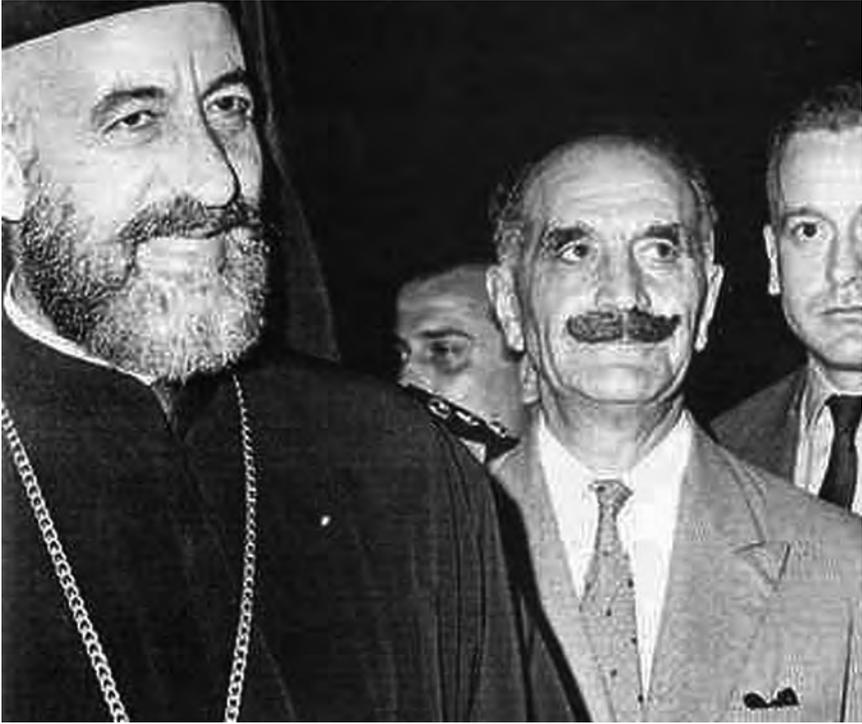


Photo courtesy of the *Cyprus Mail*  
Archbishop Makarios III (a.k.a. Michael Mouskos) and Col Georgios Grivas. These men bear a large degree of responsibility for the divisive wedges driven between the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities on Cyprus.

er nationals broke out in both countries. Until 1955, Turkey had shown little interest in Cyprus because it perceived no threat in the British colonial administration. However, with the possibility of *Enosis* looming large, Turkey suddenly became an active party. The Americans muddied the waters by bringing the issue of self-determination to the United Nations (UN) but avoided the adoption of any UN resolutions that would restrict options for them and the British. Lack of progress and frustration played into the hands of Grivas. The situation became worse when EOKA arms

smuggling, thanks to its supporters in Greece, enabled it to accelerate the tempo of the insurgency in the fall by killing enough British soldiers and civilians that Britain evoked emergency powers in December 1955, thereby naming these events the “Cyprus Emergency.” Field Marshal Sir John Harding, the former chief of the Imperial General Staff, was assigned as the governor general, and he initiated a counterinsurgency campaign. In addition to the military reaction, Harding conducted unsuccessful talks with Makarios and then had the archbishop deported to the Seychelles islands (a British possession) in March 1956.

The insurgency intensified in the spring of 1956 as the Greek Cypriots rallied around the deportation of Makarios. Colonel Grivas began to deliberately target British civilians, and EOKA tactics slipped steadily into terrorist attacks on uncooperative Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots as well. The British decision to enlist more Turks into the ranks of law enforcement (by the creation of the so-called auxiliary police force) not only increased the Turkish casualties but also gave EOKA the opportunity to label the entire Turkish Cypriot community as collaborators. The insurgency now fully engulfed the island and Harding’s soldiers took the war to the EOKA mountain enclaves. There is a rich literature about the British counterinsurgency campaign on Cyprus, which is outside the scope of this book, but there were a number of periods of intense fighting followed by armistice-like lulls as the principals talked. The insurgency ended in 1959 when Britain negotiated a treaty granting Cyprus independence.<sup>15</sup>

In a four-year period, when compared to other contemporary insurgencies, the Cyprus Emergency was not particularly bloody or destructive,

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<sup>15</sup> See Treaty Concerning the Establishment of the Republic of Cyprus, 16 August 1960, in Nicolas D. Macris, ed., *The 1960 Treaties on Cyprus and Selected Subsequent Acts* (Mannheim, Germany: Bibliopolis, 2003).

although the press and media treated it so. The total number of people killed in the emergency was somewhere between 500–600 and three times that number were wounded and injured.<sup>16</sup> Britain lost 104 dead and 601 wounded, while the Turkish Cypriot community lost 62 and 105, respectively. In fact, the Greek Cypriot community lost 263 killed and 252 wounded, of which the majority were killed at the hands of fellow Greek Cypriot EOKA terrorists.<sup>17</sup> Overall, therefore, how did the insurgency affect the future of Cyprus? It poisoned relations between the Greek and Turkish communities on the island by creating an atmosphere of fear and tension. Cypriots, who formerly were apolitical or unsympathetic to the issues of independence or *Enosis*, now took a side. Further, Turkish Cypriots and Turkey started to express the idea that self-determination was not under the monopoly of the Greeks only and it had to be applied to both communities. The partition, *Taksim* in Turkish, became the rallying cry of the Turks against *Enosis*. Importantly, the Turkish government decided to involve itself directly in the affairs of the island.

The Cyprus insurgency also led to an increasing militarization of the communities on the island. In August 1955, the British Special Branch discovered the existence of a Turkish Cypriot anti-EOKA organization known as *Volkan* (Volcano).<sup>18</sup> The *Volkan* organization was born out of the need to defend Turkish suburbs and villages. There were also other groups independent of *Volkan*, such as *Karaçete* (Black Gang) and *9 Eylül* (9th September). Unlike EOKA, they did not have foreign sponsors or experienced military leadership and never attracted many adherents. Occasionally they

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<sup>16</sup> French, *Fighting EOKA*, 307.

<sup>17</sup> French, *Fighting EOKA*, 307. The ratio of killed to wounded in the case of the Greek Cypriot community was 1:1, indicating the effectiveness of the EOKA assassination program against “traitors” and non-supporters.

<sup>18</sup> French, *Fighting EOKA*, 255–56.

bombed a Greek Cypriot police station or fomented a riot, but they were largely quiescent. However, as the insurgency accelerated, more Turkish Cypriots died. And as the community became aware of Grivas's *Enosis* aspirations and its obvious dangers, a new sense of apprehension affected the Turkish Cypriot population. This grew worse when, in July 1957, Grivas ordered direct attacks on Turkish Cypriot villages, leading to spiraling bouts of violence and reprisals.

On 24 November 1957, leaflets appeared in the streets proclaiming the establishment of a new umbrella organization known as the Turkish Resistance Organization (*Türk Mukavemet Teşkilatı*) or TMT. The TMT connected almost immediately with Major General Daniş Karabelen, a Turkish Army expert in underground and paramilitary operations, and by May 1958, the Turkish General Staff controlled the TMT.<sup>19</sup> In August, an infantry officer, Lieutenant Colonel Rıza Vuruşkan, led 11 regular and 14 reserve officers from Turkey to Cyprus, "disguised as school teachers, business men, and Imams."<sup>20</sup> In the same way that EOKA attempted to establish a grip on the Greek Cypriot community, so too did the TMT attempt to suborn the Turkish Cypriot community. However, unlike EOKA, the TMT enjoyed the full support of the Turkish government in Ankara. Under the aegis of the Turkish General Staff, which had activated a Special Operations Directorate (SOD) to coordinate its efforts on the island, these leaders energized and consolidated the TMT, so that a robust organization existed in most towns and villages by July. Vuruşkan, who had taken the nom de guerre Gray Wolf (*Bozkurt*), soon began a campaign of counterterrorism against EOKA.

In June 1958, Britain had fought EOKA to a standstill and announced that it planned to impose a solution on Cyprus. The British government

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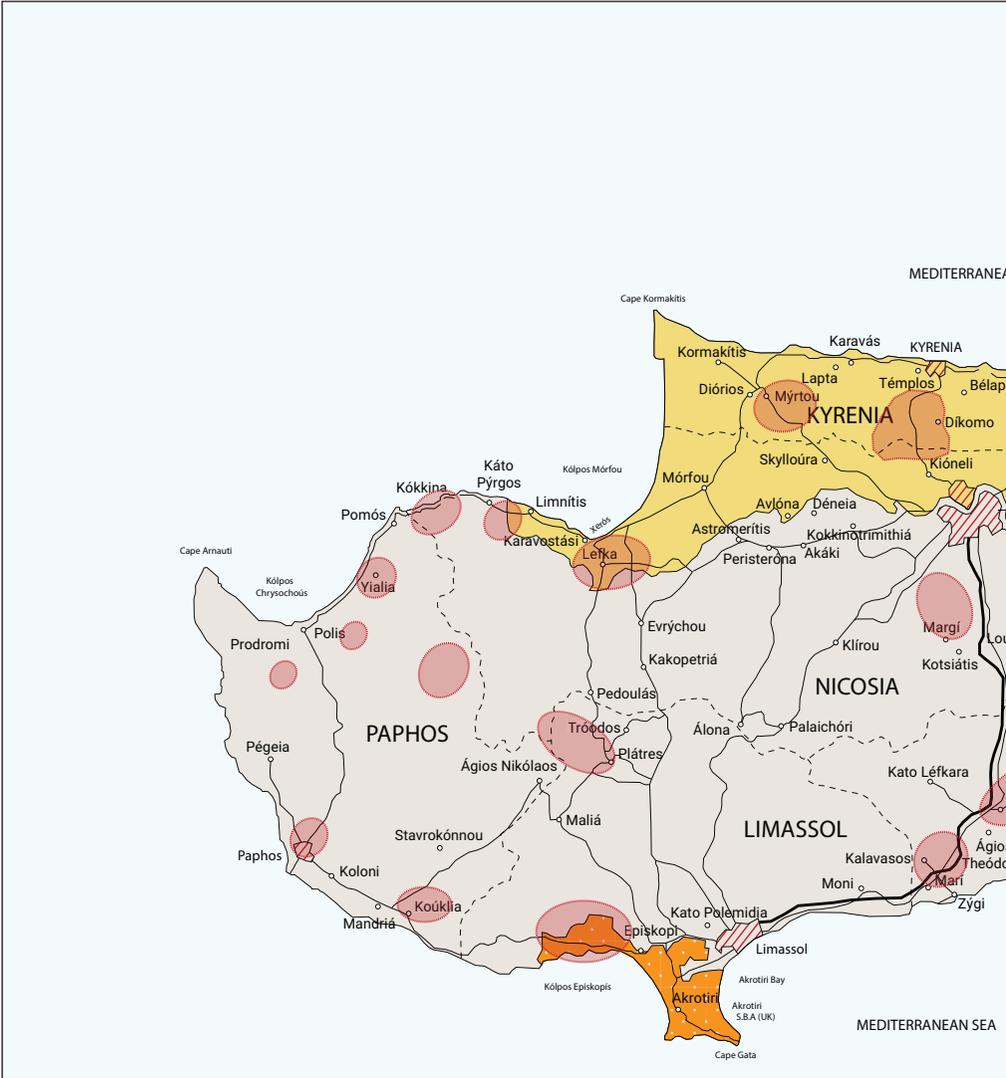
<sup>19</sup> French, *Fighting EOKA*, 257.

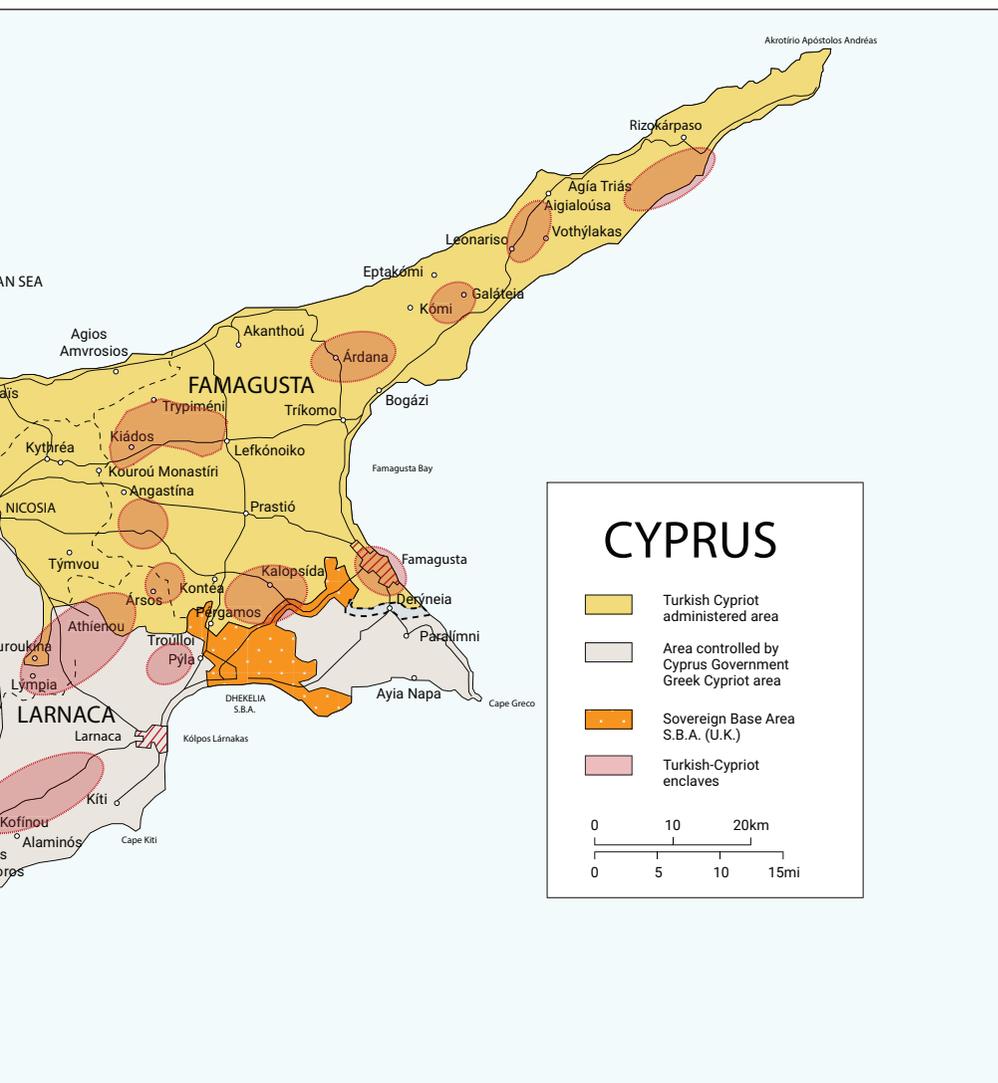
<sup>20</sup> French, *Fighting EOKA*, 257.

then turned to Greece, Turkey, Archbishop Makarios (who had returned from deportation two years earlier), and the twinned Cypriot communities in an attempt to find a resolution acceptable to all parties. Increasing numbers of Turkish Cypriots favored partition and, by the fall of 1958, EOKA terrorism against Turkish Cypriots and emerging Turkish resistance against Greek Cypriots created an intercommunal sense that partition of the island might stop the violence. Some Turkish Cypriots soon had to move to the northern part of the island, while those remaining in the south moved into compact and defendable enclaves.

Though approximately 6,000 Turks became refugees, it foreshadowed a grim milestone for the things to come. Representatives from the three governments met in London and then Zurich, Switzerland, and hammered out a basic agreement about the general federal structure of an independent Republic of Cyprus. The agreement also included guarantees by the three powers to maintain the status quo on the island after independence. The agreement—what has become known as the London-Zurich Agreements—was finalized in London and signed on 19 February 1959 by the prime ministers of Britain, Greece, Turkey, and the representatives for the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities. The outcome of this agreement was the negotiation of three treaties, which were signed in Nicosia, Cyprus, in August 1960—the Treaty of Establishment safeguarding British military interests by providing two sovereign British military bases; the Treaty of Alliance founding a defense pact between Greece, Turkey, and Cyprus and allowing the permanent stationing of Greek and Turkish military contingents; and finally the Treaty of Guarantee ensuring the independence, integrity, and security of the Republic of Cyprus but categorically refusing its union with any other state and partition. The most critical part of the treaties was naming Britain, Greece, and Turkey

Map 2.2. The Turkish-Cypriot enclaves





Map by authors, adapted by MCUP

About 20 percent of the Cypriot population was ethnically, religiously, and linguistically Turkish Cypriot. About 77 percent of the island's population was Greek Cypriot with the remainder classified as "other." After 1960, the minority Turkish Cypriots were increasingly concentrated into 109 enclaves, composing 3 percent of the island's territory.

as guarantor powers and endowing them with the right to act jointly or unilaterally to preserve the treaty-bound new state.<sup>21</sup>

## CONSTITUTIONAL BREAKDOWN

The Republic of Cyprus came into existence on 16 August 1960 with the ratification of the Treaty Concerning the Establishment of the Republic of Cyprus between Britain, Greece, Turkey, and the new Republic of Cyprus.<sup>22</sup> A subsequent Treaty of Guarantee between Britain, Greece, and Turkey included an important clause committing the guarantors to prohibit, directly or indirectly, the union of Cyprus with any other state or the partition of the island.<sup>23</sup> This treaty also assured Britain that it would retain sovereign rights over two legacy airbases on Cyprus (Dhekelia and Akrotiri) and the three nations reserved the right to take action, if necessary, with the sole aim of reestablishing the “state of affairs created by the present Treaty.”<sup>24</sup>

The Treaty of Alliance established a military agreement between Greece, Turkey, and the Republic of Cyprus.<sup>25</sup> Greece and Turkey also pledged under the Treaty of Alliance to station 950 and 650 soldiers, respectively, on the island and participate in a tripartite headquarters. A simultaneous agreement between the three allies included articles concerning a rotational system of command for this headquarters composed of Cypriot, Greek, and Turkish officers as well as articles concerning the training of the Army of the Republic of Cyprus.<sup>26</sup> Importantly, the agree-

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<sup>21</sup> French, *Fighting EOKA*, 306–8.

<sup>22</sup> See Treaty Concerning the Establishment of the Republic of Cyprus, 16 August 1960, in Macris, ed., *The 1960 Treaties on Cyprus and Selected Subsequent Acts*, 20–22.

<sup>23</sup> See Treaty of Guarantee, 16 August 1960, in Macris, *The 1960 Treaties on Cyprus*, 127–28.

<sup>24</sup> See Articles III and IV, Treaty of Guarantee, in Macris, *The 1960 Treaties on Cyprus*.

<sup>25</sup> See Treaty of Alliance with Additional Protocols, 16 August 1960, in Macris, *The 1960 Treaties on Cyprus*, 134–38.

<sup>26</sup> See Agreement for the Application of Alliance, 16 August 1960, in Macris, *The 1960 Treaties on Cyprus*, 139–93.

ment formalized the stationing of Greek and Turkish military contingents, under the command of the respective general staffs, on the island. The agreement allowed the Hellenic Army a contingent of 950 soldiers commanded by a colonel and the Turkish Army a contingent of 650 soldiers commanded by a colonel. In effect, the Hellenic Army maintained a full-strength infantry battalion, while the Turkish Army maintained an under-strength infantry battalion.<sup>27</sup> Both contingents were allowed mortars and recoilless rifles (antitank guns), but heavier weapons such as artillery and tanks were prohibited.

In terms of a government for the island, the basic parameters establishing the architecture of the republic's presidential system had been settled by the UN at Zurich and formalized in a constitution, which in practice proved unworkable.<sup>28</sup> The fundamental problem affecting the establishment of a working polity was the island's demographics—the 1960 census indicated that about 20 percent of 572,000 inhabitants were ethnically Turkish while 77 percent were ethnically Greek. To compensate and protect the Turkish Cypriot minority, the new constitution allocated key governmental positions by ethnic composition, which overrepresented the Turkish Cypriots. The president was a Greek Cypriot, the vice president was a Turkish Cypriot, and there was a council of seven Greek and three Turkish Cypriot ministers. Both the president and vice president held veto powers over the council's decisions and actions. A house of representatives was composed of 35 Greek and 15 Turkish Cypriots and the constitutional courts were similarly broken up by ethnic representation. Each community maintained separate educational, religious, and cultural

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<sup>27</sup> See Appendix 1, Section II, and Appendix 1, Section III, Annex B (organizational charts), Agreement for the Application of Alliance, 16 August 1960, in Macris, *The 1960 Treaties on Cyprus*, 158, 169.

<sup>28</sup> Clement Dodd, *The History and Politics of the Cyprus Conflict* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 42.

authorities. Federal posts, including police and municipal officials, were apportioned on a 70:30 ratio as well, which overrepresented Turkish Cypriots.<sup>29</sup> The army was even more skewed with a 60:40 ratio imposed on it. This rapidly became an irritant to the Greek Cypriot community.

Archbishop Makarios served as the republic's first president in 1960 and exercised political control over the island as well as moral authority over the Greek community. Seen generally as a peacemaker and a compromiser, Makarios was widely respected and held in esteem by Greek Cypriots and the international community but not the Turkish Cypriots. Dr. Fazıl Küçük, a leader in the Turkish Cypriot community, became the first vice president. Unfortunately, in daily operation, Makarios and the Greek Cypriots discriminated against the Turkish Cypriots, while Küçük became an obstructionist. The first governmental crisis erupted in December 1961 when the Turkish Cypriots refused to vote for the budget in reprisal for Greek failures to fulfill certain constitutional obligations. The government entered gridlock and became completely dysfunctional.

What the Greek government and other interested parties did not anticipate was Makarios transforming into an independent actor after becoming president. First, he established good relations with the Cypriot Communist party *Anorthotikó Kómma Ergazómenou Laou* (Progressive Party of Working People or AKEL). Not only did the AKEL party enjoy the support of one-quarter of Greek Cypriots, but it also had very good relations with the Soviet Union and its allies. Second, Makarios carefully created a web of informal alliances with Third World countries and the Communists by using AKEL and other similar organizations. These domestic and international alliances carried many benefits to Makarios

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<sup>29</sup> Dodd, *The History and Politics of the Cyprus Conflict*, 44.

to reinforce his position in Cyprus, especially against Greece and ultra-nationalists in Cyprus. However, his opposition to the inclusion of Cyprus in the Western camp and increasing relations with the Communists would become a serious problem according to the Americans and other anti-Communists who were fearful of a Cuba in the Mediterranean.

In terms of paramilitary groups in Cyprus, there were some encouraging developments giving a wonderful advantage to the new republic to establish law and order. The EOKA became defunct and a disappointed Grivas had to return to Greece, while Vuruşkan was removed from his position in January 1961, not because of his performance in Cyprus but due to seismic political and military changes in Turkey. On 27 May 1960, a group of well-organized military conspirators launched a successful coup d'état against Adnan Menderes's Turkish government, arresting key government and military figures, including the president, prime minister, all government ministers, the chief of general staff, and some high-ranking generals. The new military-led Turkish government then deliberately and systematically targeted the SOD and purged most of its personnel.

The SOD had been a joint initiative of the Menderes government and the new military-led government, mirroring the opinion of the United States, which saw it as something of a private and partisan army. There were serious repercussions for the TMT when, eight months after the coup d'état, the SOD officers assigned to Cyprus were withdrawn, leaving the TMT leaderless. Even more damaging to the effort, Vuruşkan and many other Turkish officers were implicated as supporters of the previous government. To make matters worse for the TMT and the nationalist Turkish Cypriots, the new Turkish ambassador to Nicosia, Emin Dirvana, a Turkish retired general staff lieutenant colonel of Cypriot origin, adamantly advocated giving the Republic of Cyprus and peace a chance. Am-

bassador Dirvana, with the support of the Turkish government, effectively stopped armed agitation by the Turkish Cypriot community.

On the other side of the hill, despite the absence of centralized command, EOKA paramilitary groups remained active at the local and regional level, and their weaponry and military capabilities remained intact. More importantly, some key EOKA leaders and operatives became members of the new security forces, and Greece initiated a clandestine effort to send military officers to fill other positions within the security forces in 1962. Makarios, now president, saw the entirety of the agreements and communal dualism as imposed by outsiders and was reluctant to implement the new constitution as unjust and artificial. Although he established good relations with Dirvana, Makarios never gave him a chance to be successful and, unsurprisingly, Dirvana faced serious pressure from nationalists in Turkey and Cyprus and was dismissed on 12 September 1962. Contrary to popular opinion, Makarios would prove time and again that no one, not even the government in Athens, controlled him. One of the last nails in Cyprus's coffin came in November 1963, when Makarios proposed an amendment to certain articles of the constitution despite the possibility of a Turkish military intervention. His proposal was aimed at the establishment of a unitary state with majority rule. For obvious reasons, Vice President Küçük rejected this proposal.

With the constitutional crises, the atmosphere was now ripe for open communal confrontation. The Turkish Cypriots withdrew from government and set up a separate administration that preordained the physical separation of the two communities. The Turks then moved into Turkish-dominated quarters and villages. By December 1963, major attacks on Turkish enclaves began by armed groups of former EOKA members who had now, with the support of the Greek government, recreated a suc-

cessor militant and ideologically based organization called the Sacred League of Greek Cypriot Fighters (*Ieros Desmos Ellinokypriou Agoniston* or IDEA). The first of these attacks were triggered by seemingly routine police control point activity in Nicosia the night of 20–21 December. The Greek Cypriot police stopped and tried to search a Turkish family. During the following scuffle, two Turks were killed. The next day, the police opened fire on Turkish high school students demonstrating in front of their school, wounding two of them. Law and order would completely collapse afterward.

An extreme group led by former EOKA member Nikos Sampson took control of a Turkish village north of Nicosia. The group killed and wounded dozens of Turkish Cypriots, including women and children, and held dozens more hostage while another group raided the house of an officer from the Turkish Regiment, killing his wife and three children. The TMT and other Turks struck back while the Turkish Regiment established a defensive perimeter around the Turkish Cypriot quarters of Nicosia and nearby villages. Unable to intervene directly and under serious domestic pressure, the Turkish government dispatched military jets, which flew low-level warning flights over the conflict zones, and ordered military vessels in Turkey's Mersin and İskenderun harbors to prepare for operations. These unilateral Turkish military moves finally forced the British and Greek governments to act. Joint intervention by British, Turkish, and Greek security forces soon brought an end to the clashes and a cease-fire was declared on 28 December. This event eventually became known as the Christmas Massacre (Bloody Christmas).

Reacting to international and domestic pressure coming from all sides, Makarios orchestrated an uneasy truce in January and invited British forces from the sovereign bases to create a permanent cease-

fire line (a.k.a. the Green Line) in Nicosia and Larnaca, Cyprus.<sup>30</sup> The establishment of the Green Line between the two communities in Nicosia resonated strongly with international observers because of its symbolic resemblance to another capital city, Berlin. The Greeks used the cease-fire to import a large number of weapons onto the island. The cease-fire quickly broke down, and April and May were marked by violence perpetrated by both the TMT and IDEA.

In Athens, Colonel Grivas created the Cyprus Special Mixed Staff in February to plan for a military return to the island. About the same time, Makarios announced plans to increase his armed police forces from 2,000 to 5,000 personnel and also to form a 12,000-strong Greek Cypriot reserve force. In fact, Makarios's plans were a strategy to counter British and American pressure to place peacekeepers on the island using the pretext that, although the republic had an army, it needed more internal strength to maintain order. In this way, Makarios hoped to legitimize the Greek Cypriot irregulars.<sup>31</sup> In May, the Greek government sent 2,000 soldiers from their elite Mountain Commando Regiment to Larnaca as well as enough weapons to equip a brigade. Horrified with developments and having limited options, the Turkish government reassigned Colonel Vuruşkan to Cyprus to organize and lead the defense of Ágios Nikólaos, the only Turkish enclave in Cyprus with an opening to sea. With this policy change, TMT and its SOD controller reentered the Cyprus conflict with power. Both the American and British governments attempted to calm those on the island and reassure the Turkish government but tensions continued to rise. The numerical superiority of the Greek Cypriots gave

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<sup>30</sup> Crawshaw, *The Cyprus Revolt*, 367.

<sup>31</sup> Brendan O'Malley and Ian Craig, *The Cyprus Conspiracy: America, Espionage and the Turkish Invasion* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1999), 103.

them the upper hand in clashes, which their leaders increasingly used against vulnerable Turkish enclaves and positions. Initially, they proposed NATO-led peacekeepers, but Makarios blocked this move effectively and opted for a UN-led mission, thinking that he would have the support of nonaligned nations and the Soviet Union. With the most to lose, Britain pushed UN Security Council Resolution 186 through on 4 March, which called for the establishment of a peacekeeping force on Cyprus. The UN then established the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) on 27 March 1964 and began operations in the summer; however, this effort failed to halt the militarization of the island. Without consulting Makarios, the Greek government sent Colonel Grivas back to the island in June 1964 and increased their forces there as well. By August, 957 Hellenic Army officers and 7,236 soldiers were stationed on Cyprus, organized as a small division, in camps from Nicosia to Larnaca and the Troodos Mountains.<sup>32</sup>

The developments in Cyprus caused an immense domestic backlash in Turkey. Unable to stop international intrusions in Cyprus, the government of veteran politician and retired general İsmet İnönü came under attack from all circles. Reluctantly, İnönü ordered the Turkish General Staff to prepare for an armed intervention. However, the Turkish armed forces were completely unprepared for an amphibious operation—lacking not only landing ships, helicopters, and other hardware but also trained cadres to plan and carry out the operation. American intelligence operatives and officers soon became aware of the Turkish preparations, and it was quite a shock to the American decision makers in Washington, DC, to see their loyal ally turning to rogue-like unilateral action. Moreover, the Soviets gave assurances to Makarios that they were ready to assist him in case of a Turkish intervention.

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<sup>32</sup> Makarios Drousiotis, *Cyprus 1974: Greek Coup and Turkish Invasion* (University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns, an imprint of Penn State University Press, 2009), 28.

In an attempt to stop unilateral Turkish military action, American president Lyndon B. Johnson sent a strong but harshly worded letter to the Turks on 5 June 1964. Johnson warned the Turkish government that the Americans and NATO might not be under any Article 5 obligation to support Turkey if the Soviets attacked in support of Cyprus and Greece. Additionally, he admonished the Turks not to use any of the weapons and equipment that had been provided by America in military operations against Cyprus. Johnson's letter successfully deterred the Turks but with a terrible cost of national humiliation at the hands of the American president. What has come to be known as the Johnson Letter served as a turning point in Turkish-American relations. The Turks recognized the price of total political and military dependence on the Americans and vowed not to make that mistake again. The effects of this hard-learned lesson continue into the twenty-first century with the Republic of Turkey creating a nearly indigenous and independent armaments industry today.<sup>33</sup>

Encouraged by the poor Turkish position in international affairs, Grivas wanted to test his new force and eliminate the Ágios Nikólaos pocket. What he did not know was that the Turkish limitations were not absolute and the TMT had already concentrated more than 700 fighters—most of them Turkish Cypriot university students—in the pocket under the command of Vuruşkan and Turkish officers. Grivas besieged the area and blocked it from the sea for several months, but his main offensive started in August after pushing the UN observers from their positions. This time, Grivas employed armored units, field artillery, gunboats, and observation planes—most of them operated or under the command of serving Greek officers. Under fire both from sea and land, Vuruşkan requested air support from Turkey. After

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<sup>33</sup> See Edward J. Erickson, "Turkey as Regional Hegemon—2014, Strategic Implications for the United States," *Turkish Studies* 5, no. 3 (Autumn 2004): <https://doi.org/10.1080/1468384042000270317>.

much deliberation, the Turkish Air Force flew presence missions with jet fighters on 7 August that failed to stop the Greek attacks. The next day, after the failure of a tactical demonstration flight over the pocket as a direct warning, 34 Turkish jet fighters machine gunned and bombarded the Greek positions and sank a patrol boat. However, one Turkish jet was shot down and its pilot, Cengiz Topel, was captured alive but killed later. On 9 August, the Greek Air Force launched a small air raid on the *Ágios Nikólaos* enclave with two jets causing significant damage and two casualties. The situation was now completely out of control and the possibility of a Turkish-Greek military clash loomed large. Under American pressure, the Greeks gave up while the Turks ended air raids after receiving confirmation of the safety of *Ágios Nikólaos* and its fighters. The Turkish Cypriots suffered 48 casualties (including civilians) whereas the Greek Cypriots lost around 200 casualties (including 53 dead).

Open warfare between Greek Cypriot forces led by Colonel Grivas, reinforced secretly by regular Greek soldiers, and the TMT broke out again in late August. By the end of the year, the constitutionally guaranteed government collapsed when Turkish Cypriot representatives refused to sit in the legislature, leaving only the Greek Cypriots in government. The period between 1964 and 1967 remained relatively calm, though low-level armed clashes and demonstrations continued. During this uneasy calm, the separation of the two communities was more or less finalized with the remaining Turks from mixed villages taking refuge in the enclaves and only some elderly couples remaining to protect their properties. By moving into the enclaves, the Turkish Cypriots increased their personal security but suffered economically not only because of losing their livelihood but also because of a strict economic blockade enforced by the Makarios-led all-Greek Cypriot government. A sizable portion of the refugees had to depend on relief sup-

plies from Turkey, which became a serious burden to the Turkish economy. In addition to the economic burden, Turkey eventually lost its faith in the UNFICYP to maintain order. Cold War tensions also increased in an order of magnitude when the Soviet Union vigorously supported Greece against Turkey and the United States in the United Nations. This led to a rift between the politicians and the Greek officer corps, most of whom were staunchly pro-American. In December 1966, the Greek government collapsed and, in April 1967, Colonel Georgios Papadopoulos led a coup seizing power and installing a junta of army colonels to rule Greece. The rump Greek Cypriot legislature in Cyprus voted for immediate *Enosis* in June 1967.

Not surprisingly, Grivas acted at once by attacking a symbolically important target—the Turkish Cypriot enclave of Kofínou, Cyprus, on the road between Nicosia and Limassol on 14 November. The TMT had not let Greek Cypriot police conduct patrols in the enclave for a period of time and Grivas used this as justification to launch a coordinated attack with a sizable force, including heavy weapons. The Turkish positions were overrun and defenders surrendered after suffering approximately 50 casualties (28 of them killed). To make matters worse, the Greek Cypriots celebrated their victory with much fanfare and publicity. The Turkish government saw the whole affair as a well-orchestrated provocation, which caused public outcry and large demonstrations in Turkey. Turkish popular opinion swung in favor of intervention and the Turkish government made plans to invade Cyprus. The Turks issued a *démarche* demanding the recall of Colonel Grivas to Greece, the withdrawal of the excessive number of Greek troops (above the number authorized by the treaty), compensation for Turkish Cypriot victims, and assurances for their safety.<sup>34</sup> Concerned with the rapidly dete-

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<sup>34</sup> Dodd, *The History and Politics of the Cyprus Conflict*, 84–86.

riorating situation, the Americans stepped in and brokered a deal between the Greeks and the Turks, which withdrew the bulk of the regular Hellenic Army division but left the Cyprus National Guard intact.<sup>35</sup> The junta also recalled the reckless and aggressively nationalist Colonel Grivas to Greece.

Between 1968 and 1971, Cyprus remained relatively quiet. The departure of Grivas and Greek troops played into the hands of Makarios, who became the real decision maker in Cyprus. He skillfully made use of the disenchantment of most Greek Cypriots from the military-led Greek government and the long-standing aspirations to achieve *Enosis*. Counterintuitively, the Greek coup actually helped cool tensions on the island, which were already lowering due to the post-independence economic boom and prosperity that mostly benefited the Greek Cypriots. Unfortunately, Makarios made two serious mistakes. First, he continued to insist on the rule of the majority, which made reconciliation with the Turkish Cypriots impossible. Second, he seriously underestimated the power of pro-*Enosis* nationalists and their backers in Greece. In 1969, the Greek Cypriot nationalists founded the National Front. Although they failed in the 1970 elections, they nevertheless started a violent campaign to eliminate any obstacle to realize *Enosis*, including removing Makarios himself.

On the Greek mainland, Grivas, a committed monarchist, attempted to start an opposition against the ruling junta but failed. At the beginning of 1970, Grivas declared publically his renewed intention to foment an armed *Enosis* struggle on Cyprus.<sup>36</sup> Greek officers on Cyprus attempted unsuccessfully to assassinate Makarios, who was regarded as an obstacle to *Enosis*.<sup>37</sup> On 12 March 1971, the Turkish General Staff removed the island's

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<sup>35</sup> Dodd, *The History and Politics of the Cyprus Conflict*, 84–86.

<sup>36</sup> Drousiotis, *Cyprus 1974*, 33.

<sup>37</sup> James F. Clarity, "Gunmen in Cyprus Attempt to Murder Prominent Supporter of Makarios," *New York Times*, 31 August 1974.

prime minister and installed a man who was more sympathetic to the military's views. As summer approached, Grivas made plans to return secretly to Cyprus to form what he called EOKA B. Grivas reached the island on 31 August 1971 and immediately resurrected the dormant Greek Cypriot paramilitary forces into EOKA B. The island remained temporarily quiet as Grivas launched a public relations campaign for self-determination and *Enosis*.

The Cypriot National Guard (*Ethnikí Frouá* or EF) was armed and equipped with mostly British Second World War-era weapons, including Marmon-Herrington armored cars, 2-pounder antitank guns, and 25-pounder artillery pieces. However, an agreement in late 1964 with the Soviet Union led to the importation of 32 T-34/85 medium tanks (Yugoslav import configuration), 32 BTR-152 armored personnel carriers, 20 100mm field guns, 200 heavy anti-aircraft machine guns, 100 trucks, and 6 patrol boats.<sup>38</sup> In January 1972, the Cyprus government took receipt of a large quantity of small arms and crew-served weapons from Czechoslovakia (287 tons in all), which were transported in secret mostly to Nicosia where they were stockpiled for Grivas's cadres.<sup>39</sup> However, a reckless EOKA B guerrilla unit raided the stockpile that spring and this lost weapons supply soon became known publicly. The Greek junta attempted to use this incident, asserting that the government of Cyprus was incapable of protecting its own arms, to force Makarios to resign, but this effort failed. In turn, Grivas plotted a coup against Makarios, which he codenamed Apollo.<sup>40</sup> The situation was becoming so volatile on Cyprus that some individuals on both sides, including Turkish foreign minister Osman Olcay and Greek foreign minister Christos Palamas, began to consider *Double Enosis*, or

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<sup>38</sup> Ioannis S. Mamounidakis, *Armor on Cyprus: Evolution and Operations* (Athens: Trojan Horse, 2008), 17–18.

<sup>39</sup> Drousiotis, *Cyprus 1974*, 67.

<sup>40</sup> Drousiotis, *Cyprus 1974*, 107.

the partition of the island and the incorporation of the north into Turkey and the south into Greece.<sup>41</sup>

On 7 February 1973, Grivas sent EOKA B into action to blow up 17 Cypriot National Police stations (almost all Turkish Cypriots had left the national police force by 1970) across Cyprus. The island appeared on the brink of civil war as the TMT mobilized its forces and prepared to fight. However, Grivas's main target was Makarios, not the Turkish Cypriots, and EOKA B launched an assassination and intimidation campaign against the archbishop's supporters. American and British diplomats on Cyprus attempted to discourage Grivas and the National Guard, which leaned heavily toward *Enosis*, from conducting a coup.

## THE 1974 COUP D'ÉTAT

Throughout the late spring and summer, internecine Greek-on-Greek civil war raged on Cyprus. Makarios maintained a tenuous grip on the island and survived yet another assassination attempt. In November 1973, the Greek junta was overthrown by Brigadier General Dimitrios Ioannidis, who then led a new junta governing Greece. About the same time, a democratically elected coalition after the 1971 military intervention took control of the Turkish parliament and Bülent Ecevit became prime minister of Turkey. Unfortunately, the discovery of small but valuable oil reserves in the northern Aegean Sea in 1971, in territorial waters disputed by Greece and Turkey, led to increased tensions between the two neighbors during this critical period.

In late January 1974, Grivas died from cancer, thereby launching a battle to succeed him within the ranks of the EOKA B *Enosis* adherents.

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<sup>41</sup> Nasuh Uslu, *The Cyprus Question as an Issue of Turkish Foreign Policy and Turkish-American Relations, 1959–2003* (London: Nova Science Publishers, 2013), 105.



Photo courtesy of Dimitris Tsiourlas, author's collection  
Greek Cypriot T-34/85 medium tank. The mixed equipment sets of the CNG are evident in this image with an ex-Soviet Yugoslav T-34/85 parked next to an American M151 jeep light utility vehicle.

Grivas's heir apparent was Colonel Georgious Carousos; however, Nikos Sampson, an aggressively nationalist and charismatic EOKA B leader, ousted him in a peaceful takeover of the organization.<sup>42</sup> Grivas's death and the subsequent power struggle changed the balance of power in Cyprus by strengthening Makarios's position, which then accelerated Ioannidis's desire to resolve the situation quickly.

By June, the new Greek junta decided that Makarios had to be removed from power and actively plotted a coup d'état. Many of the commanders of the Cypriot National Guard were solidly behind the Greek junta

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<sup>42</sup> Uslu, *The Cyprus Question as an Issue of Turkish Foreign Policy and Turkish-American Relations*, 147–49.

and secret meetings were held in Athens and Nicosia to hammer out the details so that the least amount of blood would be shed in the event of a takeover. The Cyprus National Guard commander, Lieutenant General Georgios Denissis, however, was not a supporter of instigating a coup, and he was in Athens when he learned of its imminent materialization. General Denissis immediately resigned and refused to return to the island. EF Brigadier General Mihail Georgitsis, who had been in personal contact with Ioannidis throughout the period, stepped in and assumed command of the EF. Georgitsis acted decisively to put the plans for a coup into effect and launched it early on the morning of 15 July 1974, with Hellenic Army and Greek Cypriot commandos and armored units taking control of the presidential palace, police headquarters, and the broadcasting stations.<sup>43</sup> Makarios was out of the capital and took refuge in the Kykkos Monastery. After going off the air for 10 minutes, the Cyprus Broadcasting Corporation began to play martial music at 0830. This was followed by an announcement at 0945 that the National Guard was in control of the government and advised citizens to remain calm in their homes. The radio announced incorrectly that Archbishop Makarios was dead.<sup>44</sup> According to one author, "It appears that Nicos Sampson had no involvement in the organisation of the coup, but expected it to happen and offered his help from the very beginning."<sup>45</sup> In any event, Sampson made the rounds with the key players behind the coup and in the government, and at 1500 that afternoon, was sworn in as the island's president.

One of Sampson's first actions was to order the call-up of Greek Cypriot reserve officers and begin the distribution of the previously stock-

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<sup>43</sup> Mamounidakis, *Armor on Cyprus*, 34–36.

<sup>44</sup> Jan Asmussen, *Cyprus at War: Diplomacy and Conflict during the 1974 Crisis* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2008), 23.

<sup>45</sup> Drousiotis, *Cyprus 1974*, 181.



Photo courtesy of the *Cyprus Mail*  
T-34/85 medium tank in Nicosia during the coup. Elite CNG units such as the 23d Tank Battalion were regarded as an instrumental part in executing the 15 July 1974 coup d'état, which overthrew the Cypriot government. This T-34/85 is parked outside a government building during the coup. Note the machine gun nests at the corners of the roof.

piled Czech weapons to EOKA B groups. A company of the army's tanks remained in Nicosia where they had been used as a show of force during the coup. Additionally, the coup leaders more or less nationalized the Cyprus police under the control of the National Guard by installing National Guard officers as local police commanders. The conspirators began a hunt for Makarios, who remained at large, and it appeared to the world that Sampson was poised to implement *Enosis*.

## **THE MILITARIZATION OF CYPRUS**

The conditions were now set for Turkish intervention on the island. The smaller Turkish Cypriot community maintained the TMT, which by 1974

was a mature, heavily armed, and well-oiled organization of perhaps 10,000 men. The larger Greek Cypriot community maintained EOKA B, which was smaller in size than the TMT but no less heavily armed. Both organizations were politically committed to their ideological interests; for the Turkish Cypriot TMT that meant protection and self-determination, and for the Greek Cypriot EOKA B that meant *Enosis*. Sampson, a committed adherent of Grivas's ideas, and the Cypriot National Guard controlled a regular standing force of some 12,000 soldiers armed with aging weapons but backed by about 20 reserve battalions (*Tagma Epistratefseos* [TE] or Mobilized Battalion [of reserve infantrymen]). The reserve was theoretically composed of about 35,000 men, of whom perhaps 10,000 of the younger men could be mobilized within 24 hours.

The Cypriot National Guard—the EF—was founded in 1960 and initially composed about 2,000 officers and men in a ratio of 40:60 Turk to Greek Cypriots. But, by 1963, Turkish Cypriots were already being eased out of key command and staff billets and the composition of the force gradually became almost entirely Greek Cypriot. It is fair to say that, in 1974, the EF was a Greek Cypriot army under the command of Greek officers from Greece in all ways. The EF was organized with a general headquarters supervising five geographic brigade-level commands, which were designated as higher tactical commands. Additionally, the general headquarters supervised an Artillery Command, a Commando Command, and held its elite armored and mechanized units in an Armored Command. The Armored and Commando Commands constituted the EF General Headquarters Reserve. Table 2.1 shows the EF's structure in July 1974 according to the Turkish General Staff's Intelligence Directorate.

The EF infantry battalions maintained a peacetime strength of 350–400 soldiers, making them about half the strength of a regular Turkish

Army infantry battalion. Cypriot National Guard reserve infantry battalions (TE) carried about 250 soldiers on the rolls when mobilized, essentially making them oversized infantry companies. It appears that the elite units of the EF—commando, tank, and mechanized infantry battalions—were maintained at full authorized strength. The Greek Cyprus Regiment (the Hellenic Contingent in Cyprus or *ELiniki DYNami Kyprou*, hereafter ELDYK) was composed of 1,200 men organized in two small infantry battalions, and there were about 2,500 Greek Cypriot policemen who could be mobilized as well. There was also an unofficial partially trained Greek Cypriot reserve organization (*Ethniki Organosis Kyprou* or the EOK but more

<b>Table 2.1. Cypriot National Guard</b>	
<b>EF GENERAL HEADQUARTERS—NICOSIA</b>	
<b>Armored Command</b> Kokkinotrimithia	23d Tank Battalion (T-34/85 tanks)
	286th Mechanized Infantry Battalion (BTR-152V1 armored personnel carriers)
	21st Armored Reconnaissance Battalion (Marmon-Herrington scout cars)
	2d Armored Reconnaissance Coy
<b>Commando Command</b> Nicosia	31st, 32d, and 33d Commando Battalions
	34th Reserve Commando Battalion
<b>First Higher Tactical Command</b> Famagusta (or Ammochostos), Cyprus	201st and 291st Infantry Battalions
	232d, 331st, 336th, 341st, 376th, 386th, and 399th TE Battalions
	173d Anti-Tank Battalion (18–6 pounder/57mm)
	199th Anti-Aircraft Battery (4–3.7 inch/94mm)
<b>Second Higher Tactical Command</b> Mórfou, Cyprus	231st, 251st, 256th, 276th, and 282d Infantry Battalions
	216th, 261st, 305th, 316th, 321st, and 326th TE Battalions

**Table 2.1. Cypriot National Guard (continued)**

<b>Third Higher Tactical Command</b> Nicosia	211th, 241st, and 361st Infantry Battalions
	212th, 301st, 305th, 306th, 336th, and 371st TE Battalions
	70th Engineer Battalion
	120th Heavy Weapons Company
<b>Fourth Higher Tactical Command</b> Limassol	216th and 226th Infantry Battalions
	242d, 252d, 346th, 351st, 391st, 395th, and 396th TE Battalions
<b>Fifth Higher Tactical Command</b> Paphos, Cyprus	356th Infantry Battalion
	304th and 397th TE Battalions
<b>Artillery Command</b> Nicosia	181st, 182d, 183d, and 185th Artillery Battalions (12–25 pounder/84mm)
	184th Artillery Battalion (6–25 pounder/84mm)
	187th and 189th Artillery Battalions (12–100mm)
	190th Anti-Tank Battalion (18–6 lb/57mm)
	191st and 198th Mountain Artillery Batteries (4–75mm)
	195th Light Anti-Aircraft Battalion (18–40mm)

Sources: Muzaffer Sever, *20 Temmuz 1974 Kıbrıs Bitmeyen Gece* (Istanbul, Turkey: Kastaş Yayınevi, 2010), 53. Additionally, the authors are grateful to well-known Greek publisher and defense journalist, Savvas D. Vlassis, for his review and corrections to the EF order of battle.

commonly known as *Organosis* and sometimes *Organosis Akritis*) on the island. Additionally, the republic also maintained a tiny navy of six navy torpedo boats and six police patrol boats.

The Turkish Army maintained the Turkish Cyprus Regiment (*Kıbrıs Türk Kuvvetleri Alayı*, hereafter KTKA) of 650 men on the island, which was a battalion-size force allowed under the 1960 agreements.<sup>46</sup> The TMT was composed of about 9,000 men who actively could be counted on in an emergency and potentially another 9,000–10,000 men stood in reserve. The TMT was organized into 10 regional districts, which commanded var-

<sup>46</sup> Macris, *The 1960 Treaties on Cyprus and Selected Subsequent Acts*, 137–38.

iously armed TMT units of company and battalion strength, and its battalions were led by regular army officers from the mainland.

In a 30-year period, Cyprus had gone from a peaceful and well-ordered British colony to an armed camp of Turkish and Greek Cypriot communities pitted against one another. The coup of 15 July 1974 provided the spark that ignited Turkish intervention. The results of the intervention were predictable and its effects persist to this day.

## **CHAPTER 3**

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# **PLANNING FOR THE ASSAULT, G-5 TO G-1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Turkish operational planning for an amphibious invasion of Cyprus followed doctrinal templates developed by the United States Marine Corps, and the staff effort may be characterized as Joint planning (two or more Services) brought to a high degree of resolution. As an operational concept, the Turks planned to secure air and sea supremacy and create a lodgment on Cyprus with amphibious, airborne, and air mobile forces. Once the lodgment was secure, the Turks planned to bring in conventional army forces for an advance to what was called “Phase Line Attila,” which encompassed the northern one-third of the island. Turkish planning was years in the making and was constantly evolving. The final variant was known as Yıldız Atma-4. In contrast to the Turks, the planning efforts of the Hellenic General Staff and the Cypriot National Guard were incomplete and unrealistic. It is hard to understand today why this was so and, in turn, why the Greeks were unready to repel an invasion that most knew would eventually come.

### **TURKISH OPERATIONAL PLANNING**

The idea of military intervention on Cyprus was first voiced and speculated

as early as 1955. However, at this early stage, the political and military leadership in Ankara saw overflights of military planes, naval displays, or limited bombardments as more viable alternatives than amphibious attack. The Turkish armed forces simply did not have the necessary military hardware and amphibious training to carry out such an operation. Although some officers proposed acquiring landing ships and cargo planes suitable for amphibious and airborne operations, no concrete decisions were made until the 1964 crisis. The crisis put the military leadership into the terrible dilemma of initiating the invasion of an island without the means to land troops and keep them alive. Controversially, the humiliating Johnson Letter actually saved the Turkish military from a possible debacle and more humiliation. It also became a turning point in which the government and armed forces unanimously decided to build an amphibious and airborne capability. The American administration refused to include landing craft in its annual military aid package or to sell them to Turkey. Efforts to acquire them from other sources also failed. Undeterred, the government mobilized its shipyards and managed to construct eleven 405-ton landing craft, utility (LCU) and sixteen 113-ton landing craft, mechanized-8 (LCM) in two years.<sup>1</sup> On 30 August 1965, Landing Craft Command (*Çıkarma Gemileri Komutanlığı*) was activated.

The 1967 crisis offered another incentive to acquire more large landing ships. Due to the explicit American ban, the Turkish government had to purchase two 650-ton landing craft, tanks (LCT) from Britain and an 8,500-ton carrier ship from Denmark in 1967. Challenges in acquiring

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<sup>1</sup> These Turkish ships were larger than their American World War II counterparts. LCUs C205/C215 displaced 405 tons full load, while American LCUs (of which the Turks had four) displaced 320 tons full load. The Turkish LCMs were roughly the same displacement (113 tons full load) as their American counterparts. Capt John E. Moore, ed., *Jane's Fighting Ships, 1975–76* (London: MacDonald and Jane's, 1975), 341–42.



Photo courtesy of Selçuk Karaman, author's collection  
Fully loaded LCTs in Mersin. Like their larger LST cousins, landing craft, tanks (LCTs) were extremely crowded when combat-loaded for war.

landing ships were so immense that the Turks were forced to buy two former-American minelayer ships from Germany and converted them back to their original landing ship, tank (LST) configuration in 1972. Meanwhile, the Turkish shipyards managed to increase their technological capacity and began constructing 600-ton LCTs in 1971. Twelve locally constructed LCTs joined the navy before the summer of 1974.<sup>2</sup> Another benefit of the 1967 crisis was the activation of amphibious units; the Navy Amphibious

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<sup>2</sup> Moore, *Jane's Fighting Ships*, 341. In addition, the Turkish Navy had previously acquired five American LCTs.

Regiment (*Deniz Amfibi Alayı*; hereafter called the Marine Regiment) and a new corps of naval infantry (*deniz piyade*, affectionately called *levant* by the Turkish) in the winter of 1967. It took longer than expected to activate the regiment due to lack of trained cadres and its precarious position as a new land force competing with the army. The activation of the first battalion started nearly one year later on 1 September 1968 and the second had to wait until 1973. The planned third battalion was founded well after the Cyprus operation.

The Turkish armed forces did not neglect the airborne and air mobile operations capacity. Although the Turkish Army was one of the first armies to activate parachute units in the early 1930s with the help of the Soviet Union, these units were largely neglected for the next two decades until 1964. During the Cyprus crisis, a special parachute company was activated under the Presidential Guard Regiment (*Cumhurbaşkanlığı Muhafız Alayı*) in 1964. By using this special company, a parachute battalion was created and then the Commando Brigade (*Komando Tugayı*) was activated by combining commandos from the Eğirdir Mountain Commando School and parachute troops in Ankara on 7 June 1965. In a relatively short time, two airborne and two commando battalions were manned and trained. The brigade moved to Kayseri, Turkey, in 1971. In parallel with the planning for the Cyprus operation, the Airborne Brigade (*Hava İndirme Tugayı*) was activated from the two battalions of the Commando Brigade on 16 June 1973. The Commando Brigade was transferred to Bolu, Turkey, where it activated its third battalion while the Airborne Brigade increased its battalions to four.

As a part of increasing amphibious and airborne capacities, the Turkish armed forces designed and introduced new training programs and courses. Navy officers were dispatched to amphibious operations cours-



Photo courtesy of Selçuk Karaman, author's collection  
A fully combat-loaded Turkish LST at sea demonstrates the density of wheeled vehicles carried on the upper deck. Not shown is the internal main deck, which was reinforced to carry tanks and heavy tracked vehicles.

es in America for the first time in 1970. The guerrilla course that had been created as a part of American military aid in 1948 was transformed into commando and parachute courses in the early 1960s. A special unconventional warfare course (*Özel Harp Kursu*) under the control of the SOD was introduced to train military personnel for warfare behind enemy lines. In a sense, it was specially tailored for the requirements of Cyprus. Therefore, in addition to training individual military personnel, the course provided a means for testing various requirements of operational plans created by the Special War Plans Section of the Turkish General Staff (TGS).

After this, full-scale landing exercises were conducted in Iskenderun Bay in Turkey every fall by the Turkish Army and Navy. Moreover, the Turkish armed forces joined and organized NATO multinational amphibious and airborne exercises. For example, the 1st Amphibious Battalion showed its newly gained capacity during NATO's Exercise Dawn Patrol in Sardinia in May 1974.

By March 1970, the Operations Division of the Turkish General Staff had developed a plan to land on the island of Cyprus known as Yıldız-70 (Star-70). According to this plan, the Turkish VI Corps (Second Army) in Adana would command Turkish Marines, commandos, and the 39th Infantry Division to conduct an amphibious assault on three beaches north of Famagusta (Magosa) supported by Turkish air and naval forces. By the evening of G+2 (G-day being the day of the landings), an initial beachhead lodgment needed to be secured, and by G+7, the Turks would land a brigade of the 28th Infantry Division as a reinforcement. On G+10, both infantry divisions would then attack toward Nicosia and push beyond to secure what the Turks called the Attila Line (*Atilla Hattı*), roughly comprising the northern one-third of the island.

The campaign design of the initial Yıldız-70 plan leveraged favorable military geography by landing on the long, flat beaches of eastern Cyprus and conducting airborne and armored operations on the open terrain between Famagusta and Nicosia. Moreover, landing on the eastern part of the island put the invading forces closer to large pockets of Turkish Cypriots' enclaves. Yıldız-70 seemed to be the obvious operational solution to a strategic problem for most but not all staff planners. General Suat Aktulga, who was in charge of the operational planning, was especially critical of the landing site, and he proposed instead a landing near Kyrenia, Cyprus. Fate intervened in the form of an unexpected incident, much

like the Mechelen incident in January 1940, which changed the planning parameters drastically when a Turkish SOD captain assigned to TMT defected to the Greek Cypriots with some secret documents in May.<sup>3</sup> A few weeks later, telltale signs of the Greek Cypriot awareness of the plan were observed. Fresh information collected by the General Staff's Intelligence Division on 19–20 July 1971 concerning a Greek plan to take control of the southern Cypriot port of Larnaca and rapidly reinforce the roads to Famagusta caused the general staff to reevaluate the proposed landing place. Turkish staff analysis showed that, in addition to six infantry battalions at the coastline, heavy Greek Cypriot National Guard reserves appearing between Famagusta and Nicosia posed a serious tactical threat to the Turkish operation.

In turn, the general staff scrapped the old, apparently compromised plan, and developed a new plan known as Yıldız-70 Atama-1 (or Star 70 Drop-1), which envisioned a much more robust and powerful operation from a different direction.<sup>4</sup> Atama-1 was a major revision to the operational design that shifted the landing area from Famagusta on the island's eastern coast to beaches near the small port of Kyrenia on the northern coast. There were advantages and disadvantages to the new plan. The primary advantage of the new concept was that it would surprise the enemy (much like Douglas MacArthur's 1950 landing at Inchon, Korea). The main disadvantage was the presence of the rugged Pentadáktylos Mountains between the coast and Nicosia, which made it impossible to rapidly establish a contiguous lodgment. Like MacArthur, the Turks believed that

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<sup>3</sup> This incident had much of the same effect on forcing a change in operational concepts as the Mechelen incident (10 January 1940), in which the German operational directive for the invasion of France fell into Allied hands. Karl-Heinz Frieser, *The Blitzkrieg Legend: The 1940 Campaign in the West* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2013), 62–68.

<sup>4</sup> Muzaffer Sever, *20 Temmuz 1974 Kıbrıs Bitmeyen Gece* (Istanbul: Kastaş Yayınevi, 2010), 35–37.

surprise could overcome unfavorable geography to their advantage. They believed the limited capacity of the tiny port of Kyrenia (as opposed to the larger Famagusta port) would slow down the debarkation of the follow-on forces. However, Kyrenia's relative proximity to the capital city of Nicosia meant that Turkish paratroopers could drop next to the capital on the first day of the operation to support the Turkish Cyprus Regiment.

Airborne forces then became an integral part of the strategy and the general staff planners established a plan for an airhead of two drop zones (DZs) and a helicopter landing zone (LZ) designated together as the Triangle Area (*Üçgen Bölge*). Paratroopers from the Airborne Brigade were to be dropped commencing at S-hour on G-day simultaneously with commandos from the Commando Brigade air landing from helicopters. At the same time, amphibious landing teams of Turkish Marines would land at designated beaches near Kyrenia. In this way, a beachhead would be established simultaneously on the coast with an airhead established immediately inland near Nicosia. The Turks planned to bring the 230th Infantry Regiment from the 28th Infantry Division into the airhead as an immediate reinforcement. After the amphibious and airborne forces linked up and consolidated a secure lodgment, the remainder of the 39th and 28th Infantry Divisions—and the 23d Infantry Brigade—would be brought in to conduct the second phase of the operation—a major offensive to the Attila Line. However, the small size of the port of Kyrenia limited the capacity of unloading, unavoidably delaying the start of the second phase.

The Turkish General Staff could also count on the support of the Turkish Cyprus Regiment, which remained under their direct control. They could also depend on the support of the TMT, which had grown stronger in the towns, villages, and neighborhoods inhabited by Turkish Cypriots. The Turkish Cyprus Regiment was balanced against the counterpart

ELDYK regiment and the partially trained EOK Greek Cypriot reserve organization. Importantly, most of the regular units of the EF were massed on the northern part of the island and the EF's elite battalions clustered in Nicosia and the hinterlands toward Kyrenia.

One of the most neglected parts of the Turkish operation in the available literature is the role played by the TMT. Under the command of Turkish SOD serving officers, TMT had the capacity to field approximately 15,000 fighters organized in 10 *Sancaks* (Turkish Cypriot county areas). Organizationally, the TMT strength totaled 20 small battalions (each around 250 strong) and 19 small, independent companies (each around 50 strong) with the remainder in smaller local contingents.<sup>5</sup> In the larger towns, the battalions were organized into small regiments (table 3.1). Although the total number of fighters looks impressive, the TMT had several serious shortcomings. The fighters were distributed in some 130 enclaves all around the island. Only the Nicosia and Boğaz Sancaks had the means to operate together while others were completely isolated. Additionally, they were mostly armed with old British Lee-Enfield .303 rifles and Sten 9mm submachine guns. Some fighters had to use hunting rifles or homemade weapons. They had limited numbers of machine guns and some light mortars. In other words, their offensive and defensive capabilities were limited. Last but not least, there were many civilians in these enclaves who were particularly vulnerable to heavy and prolonged bombardment. During the previous crisis in 1964 and 1967, the TMT fighters prematurely surrendered to save their families. Against these serious constraints, the TMT still had significant potential to support an amphibious and airborne operation.

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<sup>5</sup> The ability of the TMT to form organized units was dependent on the particular population of the Turkish Cypriot enclaves scattered around the island.

**Table 3.1. Turkish Cypriot enclaves and TMT units**

<b>Enclave</b>	<b>TMT Units</b>
Famagusta (Mağosa Sancağı)	TMT Regiment
Boğazköy (Boğaz Sancağı)	TMT Headquarters and TMT Regiment
Kókkina (Erenköy Sancağı)	TMT Battalion
Larnaka (Larnaca Sancağı)	TMT Battalion
Limnitis (Yeşilirmak Sancağı)	TMT Battalion
Lefka (Lefke Sancağı)	TMT Battalion
Nicosia (Lefkoşa Sancağı)	TMT Regiment
Limassol (Limasol Sancağı)	TMT Battalion
Paphos (BAF Sancağı)	TMT Battalion
Statós (Serdarlı Sancağı)	TMT Battalion
Galinóporni (Kuruova)	TMT Battalion
Kofinou (Geçitkale)	TMT Battalion
Louroukína (Akıncılar)	TMT Battalion
Mandriá (Yeşilova)	TMT Battalion
Avdímou (Evdim)	TMT Battalion

Source: Sever, *20 Temmuz 1974*, 30. Turkish names for the enclaves in the table are in parenthesis.

To capitalize on this potential, Turkish General Staff planners prepared a separate plan in accordance with Yıldız-70, which was named Bozkurt-70 (Gray Wolf 70). According to this plan, the first and most im-

portant duty of the TMT was to defend their enclaves as long as possible in order to divert and fix as many Greek Cypriot troops as possible from the main area of operation. Secondly, the TMT units within the Triangle Area, in addition to their duty to fix Greek Cypriot units, were to mark and secure the landing zones and provide assistance to the Turkish troops, such as guidance and transportation. Due to the limits of Turkish air drop capacity, the airborne and air-mobile units would have no vehicles for at least three days. Therefore, Nicosia and Boğaz Sancaks were tasked to provide buses and trucks with qualified drivers and guides to transport them to their objectives as much as they could. Although it was not written specifically, the plan tasked the TMT to provide emergency logistical assistance such as ambulances. The Bozkurt-70 Plan was updated regularly in parallel to the Yıldız-70.

In June 1973, based on updates from the VI Corps chief of intelligence as well as from its own intelligence staff, the Turkish General Staff prepared its fourth version of the base plan (the Turkish word *Atma*, which translates to throw, launch, or shoot, is best used in this context as “Drop”). Together, these comprised a family of plans updated in serial order as follows:<sup>6</sup>

- Yıldız-70: the base plan to conduct joint amphibious and airborne landings near Famagusta (on the east coast of Cyprus).
- Yıldız Atma-1: changed the landing to beaches near Kyrenia (on the north coast of Cyprus) and included an aircraft staging and bed down plan.
- Yıldız Atma-2: included alternate plans for bad weather.

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<sup>6</sup> Deniz Harp Akademisi [Turkish Naval General Staff College], *1974 Kıbrıs Barış Harekatı (Deniz Harekatı)* (Yenilevent, Turkey: T. C. Harp Akademileri Komutanlığı, undated), 6. For a full description of the family of plans, see also Halil Sadrazam, *Birinci Harekât Temmuz 1974* (Lefkoşa, Northern Cyprus: Söylem Yayınları, 2013), 1065–70.

- Yıldız Atma-3: included an updated logistics plan for Kyrenia port.
- Yıldız Atma-4: the final operations plan for a landing near Kyrenia and the establishment of an airhead north of Nicosia.

Detailed operational planning for a major military intervention in Cyprus began in early 1974 by updating or revising these older plans that had been prepared since 1963.<sup>7</sup> The architecture of command for Yıldız Atma-4 mirrored American amphibious doctrines and the Allied experiences in the Second World War. The Turkish Second Army commander, whose area of responsibility included the south coast of Turkey, was the operational-level commander charged with the design of the campaign on the island itself. His subordinate VI Corps commander was the tactical commander charged with the detailed planning and execution of the ground operation itself. In terms of amphibious doctrines and practice, the Turkish Navy commanded the amphibious operation until the troops landed, whereupon the Turkish Army took over. Joint planning was conducted in Ankara at the Turkish General Staff between the commanders of the Turkish Land Forces, Air Forces, and Naval Forces Commands, supported by the Jandarma Command.<sup>8</sup>

In March, the commander of Turkish Land Forces Command (TLFC), General Eşref Akıncı, held coordination meetings with representatives from the Navy, Air Force, and the Second Army. General Suat Aktulga, the Second Army commander, had two concerns: that the Air Force “soften” enemy targets in the airhead before paratroopers landed and that commandos could be air landed at Saint Hilarion Castle (*Kástro Agíou*

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<sup>7</sup> Deniz Harp Akademisi, *1974 Kıbrıs Barış Harekatı (Deniz Harekatı)*, 6.

<sup>8</sup> A militarized and well-trained *gendarmarie*, which in peacetime fell under the Ministry of the Interior but, like the United States Coast Guard, transferred to the Ministry of Defense in wartime.

*llaríonos*) overlooking Kyrenia's port.<sup>9</sup> These issues were taken on by the plans officers as the joint planning processes went forward.

Faced with a deteriorating situation on the island, General Aktulga soon turned over the responsibility for detailed tactical planning to the VI Corps commander, Lieutenant General Nurettin Ersin, who called for a review of the plans on 28 May 1974.<sup>10</sup> The plans had been put together by a small operational planning cell (Americans today would call this an operational planning team) and included tactical, fire support, and movement and logistics annexes. However, planning had not been disseminated widely to avoid compromise, and very little distribution of the concepts was allowed outside of the general staff's planning cell. After the review, Ersin recognized that the men who would execute the plan needed the time and the opportunity to prepare and train, so he sent the operational plan to the units involved.

On 30 May, the commanders of the Commando Brigade, Airborne Brigade, Navy Amphibious Regiment, 50th Infantry Regiment, Mediterranean Area Command, 39th Infantry Division, 5th Armored Brigade, VI Corps Artillery, and the corps headquarters staff submitted their opinions and recommendations to General Ersin, who was particularly concerned with logistical shortfalls.<sup>11</sup> Coordination meetings were conducted to iron out conflicts and solve the problems of shortfalls. Final opinions and assessments were submitted to the Second Army on 11 June 1974.

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<sup>9</sup> Sever, *20 Temmuz 1974*, 40.

<sup>10</sup> Sever, *20 Temmuz 1974*, 34.

<sup>11</sup> Occasionally, the Turkish Marine Infantry Regiment is listed in the extant literature as the 6th Marine Regiment. This is incorrect—the regiment had no numerical designator and the authors do not know how this error originated. The forces were activated as follows: 1st Amphibious Infantry Battalion activated 15 September 1966; Force Headquarters (in Mersin) activated in April 1971; 2d Amphibious Infantry Battalion activated 1973; and the Navy Amphibious Regiment activated on 18 April 1974. See *Amfibi Deniz Piyade* (Foça, Turkey: Amfibi Deniz Piyade Tugay Komutanlığı, n.d.).

As the situation on Cyprus worsened, the Turkish General Staff began to alert and move some of the key units that were earmarked for participation in Yıldız Atma-4.<sup>12</sup> The 50th Infantry Regiment, 39th Infantry Division, was put on 24-hour notice for departure to Mersin, Turkey, where it would begin joint training with the 2d Marine Infantry Battalion. Seventy-two helicopters (mostly Bell 204 and AB205 but also some Bell UH-1 Iroquois) from all Army aviation units and the Air Force were assembled under the command of the Second Army Aviation Regiment at the Konya, Turkey, airfield. Plans were laid to transfer the Commando Brigade in two stages from Bolu to the Ovacık Airfield, near Silifke, Turkey. The Airborne Brigade was authorized to begin detailed coordination with the 12th Tactical Air Transport Command in Kayseri, Turkey, so that overlays for loading and air drops could be produced. Importantly, General Ersin organized the VI Corps tactical command post (TACCP), which he planned to take to Cyprus on G-day.<sup>13</sup> Ersin's TACCP consisted of the corps' G-3 (operations and training) and G-2 (intelligence), representatives from the G-1 (personnel), G-4 (logistics), and G-6 (command, control, communications, and computer operations), the corps artillery officer, battle staff officers (majors and captains), and 15 soldiers for security and communications.

## **YILDIZ ATMA-4 (STAR DROP-4)**

Operation Star Drop-4 was a two-phase joint campaign involving elements of the Turkish land, sea, and air forces as well as units from the gendarmerie. The first phase of the campaign was a joint airborne and amphibious assault designed to create a lodgment on Cyprus. After a buildup of

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<sup>12</sup> Sever, *20 Temmuz 1974*, 43.

<sup>13</sup> The TACCP is a tiny "slice" of the corps staff containing a handful of key officers that the corps commander may take forward into the battle area to closely control combat operations.



Photo courtesy of Selçuk Karaman, author's collection  
LST in Mersin. Men from the Turkish Amphibious Regiment and ship's crew drawn up on the deck of the TCG *Ertuğrul*. Since the ship is not combat loaded with equipment, the image was likely taken sometime before the campaign.

ground forces, the second phase of the campaign was a breakout to seize the northern half of the island up to the Attila Line, which would conclude the operation. In terms of tactical coordination and effort, the first phase was particularly difficult because the amphibious and airborne forces faced known opposition on the beaches and in the interior of the island. Once ashore, the amphibious force had to link up with the airborne forces and consolidate a tactical area large enough to accommodate the assembly of two army divisions. At the same time, tactical command and control of the landing forces would then pass to the VI Corps commander as well.

There was considerable risk involving the Greek Navy and Air Force, which possessed the capability to interdict communications between the Turkish forces on Cyprus and their sources of supply on the mainland. There was also considerable risk in the fact that the rugged Pentadáktylos Mountains stood between the beaches and the interior of the island.

A single road from Nicosia to the northern port of Kyrenia went through circuitous and narrow mountain passes at Ağırda, which small groups of enemy forces could easily block. Failure to connect the airborne forces with the amphibious forces would spell disaster for the Turks. The plan involved considerable uncertainty and risk, and any number of things could go wrong in such an operation.

Detailed planning for the Yıldız Atma-4 concentration of forces picked up in earnest as June rolled into July 1974; however, final staging could not happen until the government reached a political decision to intervene. After receiving news of the coup on 15 July, Turkish president Fahri Korutürk, Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit, Chief of the General Staff General Semih Sancar, and the joint forces commanders met to discuss the situation on Cyprus. As a guarantor of the 1960 treaty, the government felt obligated to call the intervention the Cyprus Peace Operation (*Kıbrıs Barış Harekâtı*), and it authorized the final concentration and readying of forces. General Sancar advanced the idea that his forces were ready and able to execute Yıldız Atama-4.<sup>14</sup> Turkish president Fahri Korutürk, Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit, Chief of the General Staff General Semih Sancar, and the joint forces commanders reached a decision at 2150, setting the date for intervention as 20 July (G-day) and targeted to terminate the military operation in less than seven days. The Turkish civilian and military leaders were aware that the United Nations would immediately ask for a cease-fire. To extend the available time frame, they decided to initiate the operation on Saturday because the UN secretary general and his staff would be away for the weekend and the UN Security Council would not assemble before Monday, which would give them at least 48 hours to achieve initial objectives and

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<sup>14</sup> Erol Mütercimler, *Satılık Ada Kıbrıs, Kıbrıs Barış Harekâtının Bilinmeyen Yönleri* (Istanbul: Alfa Basım Yayım Dağıtım Ltd., 2007), 215.

another three days to reach final objectives. In the early hours of 16 July (G-4), Turkish Land Forces Command alerted Second Army Commander General Suat Aktulga, who exercised overall command and control of the operation, to prepare for naval movements to the island commencing on 19 July. As finally configured for the G-day (20 July) assault, the Turkish armed forces had a significant joint force concentrated for amphibious and airborne operations on Cyprus (tables 3.2, 3.3, and 3.4).

<b>Table 3.2. Turkish ground forces</b>	
<b>VI CORPS, TURKISH SECOND ARMY</b>	
<b>Task Force Çakmak First Wave Amphibious Force</b>	Navy Amphibious Regiment (two battalions)
	50th Infantry Regiment (three battalions)
	3d Battery, 1st Battalion (105mm) 39th Field Artillery Regiment
	1st Tank Company (from 49th Mechanized Infantry Regiment)
	Cobra Anti-Tank Company
	One engineer company; and signals, medical, and support detachments
<b>Airborne and air landing forces</b>	Airborne Brigade (four battalions, artillery battery, and pathfinder detachment)
	Commando Brigade (+) (three commando battalions reinforced by the Nevşehir Jandarma Commando Battalion and the 1st Battalion [Airmobile], 230th Infantry Regiment)
<b>Second Army Aviation Regiment (+)</b>	1st Army Helicopter Battalion (Bell 204/205)
	2d Army Helicopter Battalion (Bell 204/205)
	3d Army Helicopter Battalion (Bell 204/205)
	Jandarma Helicopter Battalion (Bell 206A)
	Army Flying School Battalion (UH-1B/H, Bell 206A and Dornier Do 28 A twin-engine utility aircraft)
	Turkish Air Force Squadron 224 (UH-1H)

**Table 3.2. Turkish ground forces (continued)**

<b>Cyprus Turkish Regiment</b> (available on 20 July to support the air landings)	One battalion-size force
<b>Turkish Resistance Organization TMT</b> (available on 20 July to support the air landings)	Nicosia and Boğazköy TMT Regiments
<b>39th Infantry Division</b> <b>Follow-On Amphibious Force</b>	<b>Second Wave Amphibious Force</b> 49th Mechanized Infantry Regiment (two mechanized and one tank battalions)
	<b>Third Wave Amphibious Force</b> 14th Infantry Regiment (three battalions)

Source: Mütercimler, *Satılık Ada Kıbrıs, Kıbrıs Barış Harekâtının Bilinmeyen Yönleri*. The (+) and (-) are commonly used military symbols meaning that a unit is reinforced by adding combat elements or depleted by taking away combat elements.

**Table 3.3. Turkish naval forces**

<b>AMPHIBIOUS MISSION GROUP/FLEET COMMAND</b> (Amfibi Görev Grubu Komutanı [GGK] 50.0)	
<b>Amphibious Landing Group</b> (Amfibi Görev Birliği Komutanlığı [GBK] 50.0.1) Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Gemisi (Ships of the Republic of Turkey or TCG)	TCG <i>Ertuğrul</i> (LST)
	TCG <i>Bayraktar</i> (LST minelayer)
	TCG <i>Sancaktar</i> (LST minelayer)
	12 LCTs
	16 LCMs
	11 LCUs
	1 tug
	1 hydrographic survey ship
<b>Naval Gunfire Support Group</b> (Deniz Ateş Destek Birliği Komutanlığı [GBK] 50.0.3) (5 destroyers [DDs])	TCG <i>Adatepe</i>
	TCG <i>Tınaztepe</i>
	TCG <i>Kocatepe</i>
	TCG <i>Mustafa Fevzi Çakmak</i> (hereafter <i>MF Çakmak</i> )
	TCG <i>İçel</i>

**Table 3.3. Turkish naval forces (continued)**

<b>Covering and Security Force</b> (Emniyet ve Perde Birliği Komutanlığı [GBK] 50.0.4)	TCG <i>İzmit</i> (DD)
	TCG <i>Berk</i> (frigate [FF])
	2 patrol craft [PC]
<b>Minesweeping Force</b> (Mayın Karşı Tedbirler Görev Birliği Komutanlığı [GBK] 50.0.5)	4 Coastal MSC
<b>Deception Force (Amfibi Aldatma Birliği)</b>	<i>Truva</i> (civilian motor ship [M/S])
	<i>Milas</i> and <i>Mordoğan</i> (civilian coastal M/S)
	<i>Aygaz</i> (civilian tanker)
	1 car ferry
<b>Logistics Support Group</b>	3 support oil tankers
<b>Underwater Beach Group</b>	2 Underwater Demolition Teams (UDT)
	1 EODT (explosive ordnance disposal teams)
	3 J-Boats: <i>J14</i> , <i>J18</i> , and <i>J20</i> (150-ton, 22-knot, large patrol craft)

Source: Deniz Harp Akademisi, *1974 Kıbrıs Barış Harekatı (Deniz Harekatı)*, 12–13. J-Boats are fast patrol boats used by the Jandarma.

**Table 3.4. Turkish air forces**

<b>FIRST TACTICAL AIR FORCE</b> (task organized for air superiority missions)
Fighter Squadrons 141st and 191st (F-104G), 142d and 182d (F-102A), and 161st and 162d (F-5A)
Reconnaissance Squadrons 114th (RF-84) and 192d (RF-5)
Fighter Bomber Squadron 112th (F-100C/D)
<b>SECOND TACTICAL AIR FORCE</b> (task organized for close air support missions)
Fighter Bomber Squadrons 111th, 131st, 132d, 171st, 172d, and 181st (F-100C/D)
Reconnaissance Squadrons 152d and 184th (RF-5 and RF-84)
<b>12th Tactical Air Transport Command</b>
Air Transport Squadrons 221st (C-160D), 222d (C-130E), 223d, and 224th (C-47)
<b>Naval Air Squadron 301</b> (S-2E) (maritime surveillance)

Source: Ole Nikolajsen, "Turkish Air Force Operations on Cyprus July, 1974," Ole-nikolajsen.com.



Photo courtesy of Selçuk Karaman, author's collection  
Turkish Air Force F-100s. By 1974, the F-100 Super Sabre was considered obsolete. However, in an uncontested environment of complete air superiority, the F-100 remained a capable and powerful ground attack aircraft. Ninety-nine of these fighter-bombers were on hand on 20 July.

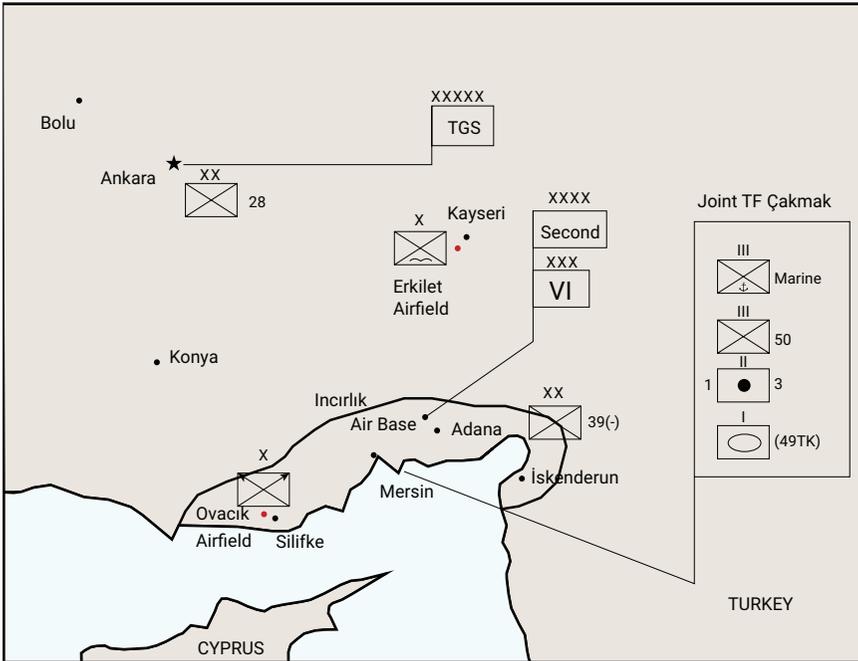
## **ORGANIZING AND STAGING TURKISH FORCES**

The Commando Brigade, which would conduct the air landing operation, was already trained in helicopter operations, but the Turkish General Staff decided in May 1974 to augment the air landing force. On 25 May, the general staff alerted the 230th Infantry Regiment (two battalions) in Çubuk, Turkey, to prepare its 1st Infantry Battalion for this role—and at the same time tasked the Second Army's Helicopter Battalion to support the effort.<sup>15</sup> The infantry regiment was a subordinate unit of Major General Osman Fazıl Polat's 28th Infantry Division. The regiment began an immediate training program to prepare the battalion for airmobile operations.

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<sup>15</sup> "230. Piyade Alayı Komutanı Piyade Kurmay Kıdemli Albay M. Nezh Sıral'ın Anıları," in *Mütercimler, Satılık Ada Kıbrıs*, 584, document 1.

**Map 3.1. Turkish concentration of forces, July 1974**



Map by authors, adapted by MCUP

The concentration of Turkish armed forces for Operation Yıldız Atma-4 went smoothly and rapidly because years of staff coordination had gone into the planning. The Turkish armed forces had the advantage of the close proximity of air and naval bases.

The infantry battalion operations officer procured classified 1:25,000 military maps of Cyprus for staff planning. However, the regiment was on peace establishment (meaning it was not at full wartime establishment) and did not receive replacement personnel on time. Consequently, two battalions were merged to create a special battalion combat team (1st Infantry Battalion, 230th Regiment). On 18 June, the first actual airmobile training began between the infantry and helicopter battalions on terrain north of Çubuk that was similar to the expected landing zones on Cy-

prus.<sup>16</sup> The battalion conducted three actual airmobile training operations over a three-day period.

On 17 July at 2300, Major General Polat and his division operations officer came to the regimental headquarters followed an hour later by the commander and operations officer of the special landing forces. Full command briefings were conducted the next day and the visiting officers learned that the battalion staff, three rifle companies, the 106mm (U.S. 4.2-inch) mortar platoon, and 106mm recoilless rifle platoon were judged combat ready (about 700 soldiers altogether). At 1430, the commanders and key staff travelled to Ovacık Airfield for a similar briefing regarding the state of helicopter training. That night, at 2330, the battalion commander, Major Turgut Aksoydan, loaded his men and equipment on 18 buses and 9 trucks for the eight-hour trip to the airfield.

On the morning of 16 July, the 50th Infantry Regiment moved to the port of Mersin. At noon, the Commando Brigade departed Bolu in 280 trucks for the airfield at Ovacık.<sup>17</sup> It was an 1,100-km journey that took three and a half days to complete. The last commandos of the brigade would arrive just in time for an evening meal of beans and rice before loading into helicopters.

The landing force commander at Mersin shut down the Turkish Navy Amphibious Training Regiment and put every trained marine he could find into the operational regiment preparing for the landing.<sup>18</sup> Marine officers teaching at the Turkish Naval Academy on Heybeli Island were unexpectedly pulled out of their billets and put on fast ferryboats to the ferry port of Çanakkale on the Dardanelles.<sup>19</sup> The Navy Amphibious Regiment's

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<sup>16</sup> "230. Piyade Alayı Komutanı Piyade Kurmay Kıdemli Albay M. Nezi̇ir Sıral'ın Anıları," 585.

<sup>17</sup> Mütercimler, *Satılık Ada Kıbrıs*, 221.

<sup>18</sup> Mütercimler, *Satılık Ada Kıbrıs*, 221.

<sup>19</sup> "Deniz Piyade Albay İlhan Alođlu'nun Anıları," in Mütercimler, *Satılık Ada Kıbrıs*, 662, document 3.

headquarters had only been recently activated in April 1974, and its 2d Battalion had been activated in August 1973. Both deployed to Mersin on 18 July to join the 1st Battalion, which had already arrived from its garrison at Gölcük, Turkey. At the port of Mersin, key Marine commanders and staff officers, together with their army counterparts of the 50th Infantry Regiment, met with the captain of the landing ship TCG *Ertuğrul* to begin detailed coordination for the combat loading of their equipment.

The men of the 1st Amphibious Battalion were intimately familiar with the TCG *Ertuğrul* which, in August 1973, already conducted several training exercises with the ship. During the exercises, they had loaded onboard the TCG *Erkin*, a 10,000-ton submarine tender, and then transferred at sea to the TCG *Ertuğrul*. This battalion was experienced and very well trained in the conduct of amphibious movement and assault while the newly activated battalion was not.<sup>20</sup>

To provide effective command and control for the landing forces, the Turkish Land Forces Command activated the special joint Task Force Çakmak (*Çakmak Özel Görev Kuvveti*) on 16 July and ordered the Turkish First Army to release Brigadier General Süleyman Tuncer, who was serving as the army's assistant chief of staff for operations, as the task force commander. Turkish Land Forces commander Lieutenant General Akıncı, while previously serving as IV Corps commander, had taken notice of this promising young officer. Tuncer, who had then been commanding the 61st Infantry Regiment in Kırıkkale as a colonel, showed great promise and Akıncı had the highest confidence in his abilities. Tuncer left Istanbul on 17 July for briefings in Ankara and arrived in Adana at 0600 the morning of 18 July (G-2). Tuncer assembled his ad hoc staff, composed

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<sup>20</sup> Mesut Günsev, *20 Temmuz 1974 Şafak Vakti Kıbrıs'ta* (Istanbul: Kastaş, 1975), 140.

by assigning handpicked officers from the general staff and army staffs, for briefings in Adana, Turkey, with the VI Corps commander but shortly thereafter moved to Mersin. Tuncer then conducted full command briefings in Mersin that night for the Second Army commanding general.

On the evening of 18 July, the Second Army Aviation Regiment, reinforced by the Second Army and Third Army Helicopter Battalions, training command, Jandarma, and air force helicopters moved to positions on Ovacık Airfield with a combined strength of 74 UH-1 Iroquois helicopters available for tactical operations.<sup>21</sup> These helicopters would airlift the commandos to Cyprus. As a reinforcement, the general staff ordered the Nevşehir Jandarma Commando Battalion to Ovacık to join the commando brigade. The Second Army's antiaircraft battalion deployed from Konya, Turkey, to the airfield for its protection.

On Erkilet Airfield near Kayseri, the 12th Tactical Air Transport Command marshalled 15 Douglas C-47 Skytrains, 5 Lockheed C-130 Hercules, and 10 Transall C-160 transport aircraft for dropping the paratroopers. The Turkish Air Forces Command reinforced the Second Tactical Air Force, which by the day of invasion totaled 8 Republic F-84F Thunderstreaks, 8 Northrop F-5 Freedom Fighters, and 99 North American F-100 Super Sabre aircraft available for close air support of the ground troops. All 115 aircraft were produced in the United States and the F-100 Super Saber was a particularly well-proven close air support aircraft. Also, on this day, Lieutenant General Akıncı and Second Tactical Air Force commander Brigadier General Hulusi Kaymaklı arrived at Incirlik Air Base in Adana, with four other general officers and two general staff officers. These officers activated the Joint Operational Headquarters in the head-

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<sup>21</sup> Sever, *20 Temmuz 1974*, 46–47. See also Nikolajsen, "Turkish Air Force Operations on Cyprus July, 1974."

quarters buildings of the garrison of the Adana Artillery Command the next day (G-1).<sup>22</sup>

The Turkish Navy put some of its smaller supporting components of Yıldız Atma-4 in motion. The navy flew two underwater demolition teams (UDTs comprising 21 men altogether) and naval EODTs (10 men) from Yeşilköy Airport to Mersin on 18 July. There, these teams linked up with the Turkish Navy Amphibious Regiment, which had deployed from Iskenderun the previous day. Brigadier General Tuncer, who had also arrived in Mersin, met with the Amphibious Landing Group commander, naval staff Captain Ahmet Özön, to discuss and make the final decision on the landing beach itself.<sup>23</sup> Based on several planning exercises conducted in late June and early July, the navy remained very uncertain about the ability of its UDT and EODT to properly clear all three heavily mined separate beaches simultaneously. However, the exercises revealed that the beach-clearing teams did possess the capacity to clear a single large beach, leading to a recommendation to concentrate the teams and land the amphibious force at one location. On the evening of 18 July, Tuncer and Özön decided to conduct the landings on a single beach west of Kyrenia, which was known locally as the Pentemili or Pladini Beach.<sup>24</sup> This was a significant decision that was made just 11 hours before the fleet was scheduled to sail from Mersin but for which the naval planners had prepared branch plans to accommodate the change.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Mütercimler, *Satılık Ada Kıbrıs*, 229.

<sup>23</sup> Deniz Harp Akademisi, *1974 Kıbrıs Barış Harekatı (Deniz Harekatı)*, 12–13.

<sup>24</sup> Deniz Harp Akademisi, *1974 Kıbrıs Barış Harekatı (Deniz Harekatı)*, 14. The landing beach was subsequently renamed after tank Lt Yavuz Sokullu, who was killed in action when hand grenades on him went off accidentally as soon as he set foot on the beach.

<sup>25</sup> *Joint Planning*, Joint Publication 5-0 (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2017), GL-6. Branches are contingency options built into the base plan used for changing the mission, orientation, or direction of movement of a force to aid success of the operation based on anticipated events, opportunities, or disruptions caused by enemy actions and reactions.

## ELDYK AND EF PLANNING AND DEPLOYMENTS

As a matter of record, neither the Hellenic General Staff nor the National Guard had conducted serious defensive planning designed to repel a Turkish invasion. Colonel Grivas had drawn up the first defensive plan called the Aphrodite Plan in 1964 when there was still almost a division of Greek regular army soldiers on the island.<sup>26</sup> In the event of war, Grivas's plan called for unifying the Hellenic Army forces with the EF under a single Greek lieutenant general. The Aphrodite Plan was sporadically updated and went through several revisions. Starting in 1967, the Greek Cypriot government initiated a major construction plan to build concrete bunkers and defense positions around possible landing sites. Although the plan and poor quality of the bunkers were heavily criticized, nevertheless a substantial defense system was finalized. After the withdrawal of the Greek division, the Aphrodite Plan was converted into what the EF general headquarters called the Cyprus Defense Plan.<sup>27</sup> Unfortunately the plan was conceptually unrealistic because it was dependent on full mobilization and it also assumed that full military support, including fighter aircraft, from mainland Greece would materialize. Moreover, matters of command and control concerning whether Greek Cypriots or Hellenic officers were in charge were never fully resolved.

Finally, the Cyprus Defense Plan was fundamentally flawed because its planners misinterpreted Turkish intentions. This was a result of both the Hellenic General Staff and the Cyprus National Guard Staff's assumption that, in all cases, the Turks would land on the eastern beaches near Famagusta rather than the northern beaches near Kyrenia. The defection of a Turkish SOD officer tremendously reinforced the already well-

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<sup>26</sup> Deniz Harp Akademisi, *1974 Kıbrıs Barış Harekatı (Deniz Harekatı)*, 211.

<sup>27</sup> The Cyprus Defense Plan is sometimes called the Aphrodite 1973 Plan.

established belief of an amphibious landing around Famagusta. This likely resulted in the planners estimating that the EF had more time available for reaction than it did. Interestingly, well-known Turkish efforts to activate and train airborne and airmobile units and acquire helicopters (mostly from Italy) and cargo planes were completely ignored and only small-scale airborne operations were expected. Because of these beliefs, the planners placed the operational focus of the Cyprus Defense Plan on the rapid elimination of the Turkish Cypriot enclaves rather than on decisive action against a Turkish invasion.

The rapidity of the Turkish joint aero-amphibious invasion caught the republic's National Guard poorly positioned and unready for conventional combat against the Turkish Army. The elite units of the National Guard were stationed in and around Nicosia and most had participated in the coup, including the 23d Tank Battalion, 21st Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, and the battalions of the Commando Command. After the coup, most of these battalions as well as the 286th Armored Infantry Battalion remained in the vicinity of Nicosia as a show of force in support of Nikos Sampson. To this day, given the high probability of a Turkish invasion after the coup, it is unclear why the National Guard failed to deploy or alert its forces for the impending war.

The most highly visible EF battalion was its 23d Tank Battalion, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel (Armor) Grigorios Lambrinos, based in Camp M. Pournaras at Kokkinotrimithiá (16km west of Nicosia). The battalion's 32 Soviet World War II-era T-34 tanks (Yugoslav configuration) had been on the island since 1965 and had never received a comprehensive overhaul or modernization of any sort. In the early 1970s, the initial stockages of repair parts were expended and the tankers used expedient methods to keep their machines running. On 20 July, the battalion was





Photo courtesy of Dimitris Tsiourlas, author's collection Tanks of the CNG 23d Tank Battalion. This could be an image of the Soviet Army in the Second World War, but it is actually a CNG T-34/85 medium tank platoon on maneuvers.

badly affected the tactical capability of the tank crews to communicate in combat and had dire consequences as the days unfolded. However, the principal tactical dilemma facing Lambrinos on the morning of 20 July was the physical deployment of his battalion. In support of the coup and as a show of force to enforce civil order, the tanks of the 23d Tank Battalion had been widely scattered across the northern part of the island.

## **DEPLOYMENT OF THE 23D TANK BATTALION ON 20 JULY<sup>29</sup>**

- One company (+) with 18 T-34/85s and an assault company (6 BTR-152V1 armored personnel carriers) concentrated on Agía Paraskeví Hill in the area of the Nicosia Hilton Hotel

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<sup>29</sup> Mamounidakis, *Armor on Cyprus*, 51.



Photo courtesy of the Cyprus National Guard Museum  
A Marmon-Harrington of the 21st Reconnaissance Battalion. The Marmon-Harrington scout car, produced in South Africa, was obsolete by 1974, but these hardy vehicles proved critical in covering CNG tactical withdrawals.

- One platoon of three tanks under command of I Higher Tactical Command in Famagusta and one platoon of five tanks under command of III Higher Tactical Command in Kyrenia
- Two tanks at Nicosia International Airport, two tanks at Nicosia central prison, one tank at the Cyprus Telecom Authority (ATHK), and one tank at the National Guard headquarters

The 21st Armored Reconnaissance Battalion was considered one of the best units in the EF and, in July 1974, comprised a headquarters company, three reconnaissance companies of 12 Mk IVF Marmon-Herrington armored reconnaissance vehicles each, and an assault company of four



Photo courtesy of militaryhistories.co.uk

BTR-152s of the 286th Mechanized Battalion. By 1974, the BTR-152 armored personnel carrier was obsolete, but it did provide some measure of lightly armored mobility to the CNGs mechanized infantry companies.

BTR-152V1 armored personnel carriers. The battalion was stationed in the old British military hospital compound in eastern Nicosia. Like the T-34/85s, the Marmon-Herringtons were reaching the end of their life expectancy, breakdowns were frequent, and they also had serious problems with their obsolete radios. The EF planned an upgrade program to replace engines, rearm, and replace the radios in a program that began in June 1974, but the repair facilities had only completed work on a couple of vehicles.<sup>30</sup> In spite of this, compared to the ex-Soviet machines, the seven-ton Marmon-Herringtons, assembled in South Africa with American Ford engines and British 2-pounder (40mm) guns, were considered fairly reliable combat vehicles. On 20 July, two platoons of four Marmon-Herringtons each were stationed in Mórfou and Famagusta, respectively.

On 20 July, the 286th Mechanized Infantry Battalion was concentrated in the stadium of the Protagoras Gymnastics Club in Nicosia. This battalion was organized into three companies and equipped with 16 Soviet

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<sup>30</sup> Mamounidakis, *Armor on Cyprus*, 28–29.

BTR-152V1s, which had been shipped brand new to the island in 1965. These armored personnel carriers weighed eight tons each and were built on a six-wheeled truck chassis. They were lightly armored, open topped, and had side doors to allow the infantry to dismount. Most of them carried a 12.7mm antiaircraft machine gun (American-manufactured M2 .5-caliber). Additionally, the battalion had five 106mm and four 57mm recoilless rifle antitank guns as well as 81mm mortars.<sup>31</sup>

The headquarters of the EF Commando Command was in Nicosia as were the home garrisons of its three regular battalions. However, several of its battalions occupied training camps along the Pentadákylos Mountains that ran east to west overlooking the northern coast and were in position to interfere directly with the invasion. The 31st Commando Battalion encamped near the Saint Hilarion Castle and 33d Commando Battalion was encamped near Bélapaïs, Cyprus.<sup>32</sup> However, the TMT Boğaz Sancak had managed to occupy and control the key village of Boğazköy and the pass leading from it through the mountains to Kyrenia several years ago, which tremendously disorganized the Greek Cypriot capability to defend the Pentadákylos Mountains. The remaining conventional combat units (infantry and artillery) of the Cypriot National Guard remained in the cantonment garrisons scattered across the island.

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<sup>31</sup> The recoilless rifles were American weapons but the origin of the mortars is unknown.

<sup>32</sup> Francis Henn, *A Business of Some Heat: The United Nations Force in Cyprus Before and During the 1974 Turkish Invasion* (Barnsley, UK: Pen and Sword, 2004), 258.

## **CHAPTER 4**

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# **THE G-DAY ASSAULT**

### **INTRODUCTION**

It is difficult in the twenty-first century to understand the political and emotional impact of the Turkish Cyprus peace operation of 20 July 1974 on world affairs. With the exception of the Republic of Cyprus itself, the parties involved—Greece and Turkey—were alliance partners of the United States in NATO. Both were also allied with the United Kingdom, which maintained sovereign base areas on Cyprus. The deteriorating situation on Cyprus leading up to and after the coup established conditions that made Turkey's actions consistent with its interpretation of its 1960 treaty obligations. Very few were surprised by the Turkish invasion, which was exceptionally well executed in three dimensions on a very compressed time line. If there was a surprise, it came in the form of extremely weak and uncoordinated Greek Cypriot National Guard countermeasures and operations. By the end of the first day (G-day), under the cover of their tactical air forces, the Turks had put ashore an amphibious regiment and an infantry regiment, and they had dropped an airborne brigade and air landed a commando brigade. An operational level, corps-size, aero-amphibious landing using specialized equipment against a well-armed opponent had not been attempted since the Anglo-French landings in 1956 during the Suez Crisis (Operation Musketeer).

## DAY G-1

At 1035 on 19 July, Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit and General Semih Sancar notified the waiting forces that they had decided to execute the Star 70 Drop-4 plan.<sup>1</sup> The military then shut down the Turkish postal, telephone, and telegraph (PTT) lines to Mersin to ensure the operational security of the amphibious force, and communications were then conducted exclusively using encrypted military communications. Turkish intelligence reported that Greek destroyers had put to sea and a Greek McDonnell Douglas F-4 Phantom II squadron had been placed on high alert. Accordingly, Task Force Çakmak put to sea at 1130, embarking from Mersin, which was behind schedule due to the change of embarkation from Erdemli, Turkey, to Mersin, where it linked up with the naval covering and gunfire support groups. At noon, the deception force (five empty merchant vessels), led by the motor ship *Truva*, departed for its position off the eastern Cypriot port of Famagusta. The UDT and EODT left Mersin in their fast J-boats (150-ton, large patrol boats armed with two 40mm guns) at 1700, passing the slower-moving amphibious convoy in the late evening. Now behind schedule, Rear Admiral Emin Göksan took a serious risk and sped up the ships to their maximum limits in order to compensate for the lost time.

The headquarters of the Commando Brigade at Ovacık went to full alert when the VI Corps attached the colocated Jandarma Commando Battalion and 1st Battalion (Airmobile), 230th Infantry Regiment, to it. This gave the air landing force five full maneuver battalions for the air assault. Brigadier General Sabri Demirbağ, the commander of the Commando Brigade, ordered the movement of the Bolu commandos to assembly areas

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<sup>1</sup> Cumhur Evcil, *Yavru Vatan Kıbrıs'ta Zaferin Hikâyesi* (Ankara, Turkey: Genelkurmay Basım Evi, 1999), 13.



Photo courtesy of the Pakistan Defence Force  
The Airhead Tactical Commanders. LtGen Nurettin Ersin, the IV Corps commanding general (standing third from the left), and BGen Sabri Evren, the Airborne Brigade commander (standing fifth from the right holding a captured Greek Czech-made rifle) are shown here with their staffs.

adjacent to the helicopters waiting on the airfield to begin loading shortly after midnight. There were enough helicopters to carry one entire battalion from Ovacık for the 45-minute flight to the LZ in the northern parts of the Triangle Area airhead.

At 1900 on the Erkilet Airfield in Kayseri, Brigadier General Sabri Evren, the Airborne Brigade commander, alerted his 1st and 2d Battalions to begin marshalling for an 0500 takeoff on 20 July for the DZs in the central and southern parts of the Triangle Area.<sup>2</sup> There were enough air force

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<sup>2</sup> Turan Erdem, *Kıbrıs Barış Harekâtı'nda 3 ncü Paraşüt Taburu* (Ankara, Turkey: Genelkurmay Basım Evi, 1999), 7.

transport aircraft available to drop two airborne infantry battalions and one airborne artillery battery simultaneously. The airborne staff planned to drop the paratroopers from a combat height of 750 feet rather than the peacetime standard jump of 1,200–1,500 feet. While this sacrificed several minor safety concerns over malfunctioning parachutes, it enabled the paratroopers to reach the ground faster in the event of enemy anti-aircraft fire.<sup>3</sup> Including the midair marshalling of the 30 aircraft for the mass tactical jump formation, the flight from the airfield near Kayseri to Cyprus would take two hours. Evren's remaining two airborne battalions would stand ready to load a second wave at 1100 on 20 July after the returning transport aircraft had refueled.

The Turkish Air Force was also in the final stages of repositioning its aircraft to support the operation.<sup>4</sup> The all-weather Convair F-102A Delta Dagger interceptors of Squadron 142 from Mürted Air Base redeployed to Balıkesir Air Base while the Lockheed F-104G Starfighters of Squadron 191 performed the same movement in reverse. The F-102As of Squadron 182 departed Mürted Air Base for Eskişehir Air Base while the F-5A Freedom Fighter daylight interceptors of Squadron 142 dispersed from Merzifon Air Base to Yenişehir Air Base, Turkey. The North American F-100C/D Super Sabers of Squadron 181 were moved from Diyarbakır, to Antalya, Turkey, to be closer to Cyprus. Reconnaissance Squadron 184 went to İncirlik Air Base in Turkey. The navy's Grumman S-2E Trackers from Marine Patrol Squadron 301 flew from its base at Bandırma, Turkey, to a forward airfield at Antalya, and the air force placed mobile radar units along the southern coast. These moves allowed the Turkish Air Force to fulfill two

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<sup>3</sup> Evcil, *Yavru Vatan Kıbrıs'ta Zaferin Hikâyesi*, 29.

<sup>4</sup> Ole Nikolajsen, "Turkish Air Force Operations on Cyprus July 1974," Ole-nikolajsen.com. The material in the following paragraph is derived from Nikolajsen's web page.



Photo courtesy of Mesut Uyar, author's collection  
Turkish destroyers in port. The TCG *Adatepe* (D 353) sits at anchor with an unidentified ship and landing craft in the background. This is the launching of the naval task forces in the port of Mersin on 19 July 1974.

critical objectives. By repositioning its first line air superiority fighter aircraft into its western airfields, the Turkish Air Force could intercept Greek Air Force aircraft attempting either to intervene over Cyprus or attack Turkish airfields. In this way, the Turkish Air Force planned to maintain air superiority over the island. Moreover, by moving its tactical aircraft and reconnaissance aircraft to airfields closer to Cyprus, the Turkish Air Force assured the ground forces of responsive and continuous close air support.

The Turkish General Staff alerted the Turkish Cyprus Regiment and the Turkish Resistance Organization at 1230 on 19 July that hostilities were imminent and requested that they prepare available forces to assist

the airborne and air landing forces in accordance with the plan.<sup>5</sup> This generated the assembly of both regular and irregular Turkish units, which had been in readiness on the island since 15 July. The regiment concentrated a battalion-size force at Kíóneli, Cyprus, a suburb northwest of Nicosia, where the regiment maintained a cantonment and garrison. A second TGS message requested that the Turks on the island take control of the mountain passes of the Pentadákylos Mountains and Nicosia early on the morning of 20 July; however, as will be seen, this proved tactically impractical.

## **G-DAY: THE AMPHIBIOUS ASSAULT**

The coordinated Turkish joint amphibious-airborne assault on Cyprus was a masterpiece of careful planning and orchestration of battlefield operating systems. At the operational level of war, Operation Yıldız Atma-4 stands as the only successfully completed amphibious and airborne landing conducted against a determined defender since 1945. Although it was not without problems, it still stands as a textbook case of timing, coordination of battlefield operating systems, and joint cooperation between the army, navy, and air force. Altogether, the Turkish General Staff planned to land approximately 13,500 men on Cyprus in the first 24 hours of the operation.

On the night of 19–20 July 1974, the Turkish naval squadrons neared the northern coast of Cyprus. Weather conditions were superb with calm seas, low winds, and temperatures ranging from 38–40 degrees Celsius. At 0300, two of the fast J-boats carrying the UDT and EODTs (*J18* with 11 UDT and 5 EODT men, *J20* with 10 EODT and 5 UDT men) detached from

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<sup>5</sup> Muzaffer Sever, *20 Temmuz 1974 Kıbrıs Bitmeyen Gece* (Istanbul, Turkey: Kastaş Yayınevi, 2010), 51.

Map 4.1. Amphibious and air landings on 20 July 1974



Map by authors, adapted by MCUP

The sequencing of the aero-naval landings is shown on this map. By 0900, the Turks had successfully landed two paratroop battalions, one commando battalion, and the Amphibious Marine Regiment. By the end of G-day (20 July 1974), they would successfully bring in eight more battalions, solidly securing a beachhead and an airhead on Cyprus.

the convoy and sped toward the beach. The two beach-clearing parties had a planning window of only four hours, starting at 0330, to clear and mark the beach for the incoming landing craft. At 0440, a general alert to commence hostilities went out to all commanders, followed nine minutes later by the launch of the first air sorties from the bases in Turkey.<sup>6</sup> At 0500, Rauf Denктаş (the de facto leader of the Turkish Cypriots) went on Turkish Cypriot Bayrak Radio announcing the landings in three languages (Turkish, Greek, and English) and warning civilians to remain in their homes.<sup>7</sup> This announcement would be the first misstep of the operation.

The Turkish military liaison simply forgot the time difference of an hour between Turkey and Cyprus because of different applications of European summer time. So Denктаş, in fact, informed everyone an hour before he was supposed to. Luckily for the Turks, Denктаş's announcement was treated as simply another propaganda ploy by most of the Greek Cypriots. Denктаş's announcement was followed at 0610 by Prime Minister Ecevit announcing the Cyprus landings on the TRT government-owned Turkish radio station. These broadcasts explicitly warned civilians on the northern coast to avoid what was called the Five Mile (Pentemili) Beach Road, which was a long stretch of road with five to seven beaches that included the Pladini Beach, to the west of Kyrenia. Although most Western tourists had departed after the coup, the military planners still expected more than a thousand tourists around Kyrenia. In between these broadcasts, the UDT and EODTs cleared 25-meter lanes and marked them with nylon ropes. At about the same time as Ecevit's broadcast, the J-boats

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<sup>6</sup> Deniz Harp Akademisi, *1974 Kıbrıs Barış Harekatı (Deniz Harekâtı)* (Yenilevent, Turkey: Harp Akademileri Komutanlığı, n.d.), 15.

<sup>7</sup> Rauf Denктаş (1924–2012) was a Turkish Cypriot lawyer, jurist, and politician, who became the first president of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus in 1985. In 1974, Denктаş was well known to the Turkish Cypriot community and was prominent in the TMT.



Photo courtesy of Selçuk Karaman, author's collection  
TCG *Ertuğrul* (L 401). The LST *Ertuğrul* was the ex-USS *Windham County* (LST 1170) and was transferred from the U.S. Navy to the Turkish Navy in June 1973. It was commissioned in 1954 and served the United States in the Atlantic, the Mediterranean, and the Pacific as well as serving in the Vietnam War. The USS *Westchester County* (LST 1170) was commissioned with the Turkish Navy on 27 August 1974 as the TCG *Sedar* (L 402).

came under Greek Cypriot artillery fire, to which the destroyer TCG *MF Çakmak*, from the now on-station naval gunfire support group, responded to their call for fire and quickly returned 5-inch gunfire, silencing the Greek Cypriot artillery battery.<sup>8</sup> This did not prevent the clearing teams from reporting that they had completed the clearing and marking of the beach to the command group on the TCG *Ertuğrul*. This success enabled the TCG *MF Çakmak* and the TCG *Kocatepe* to open up a more thorough preplanned naval bombardment of Greek Cypriot positions at 0615.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Deniz Harp Akademisi, *1974 Kıbrıs Barış Harekâtı (Deniz Harekâtı)*, 16.

<sup>9</sup> Erol Mütercimler, *Satılık Ada Kıbrıs, Kıbrıs Barış Harekâtının Bilinmeyen Yönleri* (Istanbul, Turkey: Alfa Basım Yayım Dağıtım, 2007), 269.

Coastal artillery was not the only threat to the Turkish landing force. In response to Ecevit's broadcast, the EF naval staff ordered the torpedo boats *T1* and *T3* to sortie from Kyrenia and attack the Turkish fleet. These small boats left the port at 0648 in a heroic attempt to inflict damage on the enemy. They were immediately seen by the Turks and taken under fire by the destroyer TCG *Adatepe* as well as strafing by the Turkish combat air patrol. The *T1* sank first after severe damage from aircraft attacks and the *T3* followed it to the bottom shortly thereafter as a result of gunfire and aerial attack. Most of the Greek Cypriot crews did not survive the Turkish attacks. Meanwhile, naval gunfire support from the destroyer TCG *Kocatepe* focused on a building known as the white hotel, a vacation spot that overlooked the Yavuz Beach. This continued until Greek Cypriot artillery fire landed within 400 meters of the ship, forcing it into evasive maneuvers. Around 0700, the fleet observed Turkish Air Force transport aircraft to the east carrying paratroopers to their inland DZs, and an hour later Turkish Army helicopters carrying commandos to their inland LZs appeared almost directly overhead as well. Swarms of Turkish Air Force F-100 Super Sabres were also visible, pounding targets on land and providing combat air patrol over the fleet.

The amphibious ships of GBK 50.0.1 were now cleared to land the first wave, composed of the Marine Regiment that carried in 10 LCM-8s and three landing craft, vehicle, personnel (LCVP or Higgins Boats). According to the plan, they should have landed at 0700, but despite the squadron's acceleration en route—reckless in the eyes of some naval officers—the first ship hit the beach at 0831 and the last ships of the first wave grounded out at 0857 (LCM 314).<sup>10</sup> Having successfully completed their mission,

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<sup>10</sup> Mütercimler, *Satılık Ada Kıbrıs*, 262.



Photo courtesy of the Pakistan Defence Force  
Turkish F-100 bombing and sinking the CNG's R-151 patrol boat 8 August 1964. The T1 and T3 were ex-Soviet p-4 motor torpedo boats and were also sunk in similar attacks.

the UDTs returned to the TCG *Ertuğrul* on the *J18*, while the EODT men remained ashore. The first amphibious wave was almost exclusively composed of marines (except a combat engineer platoon), who would establish a beachhead large enough to accommodate the safe landing of the larger tank landing craft carrying the heavy equipment of the main body. The tactical plan called for the marines to seize two objectives to establish an initial beachhead on the island. The 1st Battalion, Amphibious Regiment, landed on the east flank of the beach while the 2d Battalion, Amphibious Regiment, landed on the west flank. Both battalions quickly advanced inland to the higher ground overlooking the beach and established a secure perimeter.<sup>11</sup> Although the 2d Battalion captured two abandoned Cyprus National Guard 25-pounder artillery pieces as it advanced (evidently the origin of the earlier firing), there was no resistance at the water's edge. The combat engineers started bulldozing the small beach to create dry landing positions for the incoming echelons of reinforcements.

Enemy mortar and artillery fire on the beachhead began about 0900 and continued on a sporadic basis throughout the day. The second, third, and fourth waves landed at 0940, 1017, and 1125, respectively, carried by eight LCTs and nine LCUs.<sup>12</sup> These waves comprised of the three bat-

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<sup>11</sup> Mütercimler, *Satılık Ada Kıbrıs*, 256 (map).

<sup>12</sup> Deniz Harp Akademisi, *1974 Kıbrıs Barış Harekâtı (Deniz Harekâtı)*, 32. See also Mesut Günsev, *20 Temmuz 1974 Şafak Vakti Kıbrıs'ta* (İstanbul, Turkey: Kastaş, 1975), 52.

talions of the 50th Infantry Regiment and its attached units, which was the main body of Tuncer's Task Force Çakmak. In addition to infantry, regimental commander Colonel İbrahim Karaoğlanoğlu landed four tanks (M47 Pattons), three armored personnel carriers (M113 armored personnel carriers [APCs]), and a Cobra anti-tank company in the second wave as well. Karaoğlanoğlu established his tactical command post in a motel near the beach, where he also colocated his first aid station. However, he soon moved his command post to the more secure villa nearby. Although the temperatures were soaring, Turkish morale in the beachhead remained sky-high. Karaoğlanoğlu received a message from Rear Admiral Emin Göksan, who reported that he had completed his mission of landing the task force. Karaoğlanoğlu happily replied that it would be nice if Göksan could send him some beans and rice for lunch.<sup>13</sup>

In order to expand the beachhead more rapidly, Karaoğlanoğlu's soldiers requisitioned a number of civilian trucks and automobiles from the local residents, who were mostly Greek Cypriots or expatriates. As the infantry pushed outward, wounded Turkish soldiers and prisoners of war (POWs)—some of whom were also wounded—began arriving on the beach and were taken to the field hospital, which had replaced the aid station at the beach hotel. Brigadier General Tuncer and his tactical headquarters staff came ashore at 1243 in an LCVP and established their command post near Karaoğlanoğlu's. This attracted heavy enemy mortar fire, which the Turks were able to suppress using a 105mm artillery battery that was now ashore and operational.<sup>14</sup> In the late afternoon, the three battalions of the 50th Infantry Regiment conducted a successful forward passage of lines through the marine battalions to establish a larger perimeter on the

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<sup>13</sup> Mütercimler, *Satılık Ada Kıbrı*, 284.

<sup>14</sup> Mütercimler, *Satılık Ada Kıbrı*, 286.



Photo courtesy of the Pakistan Defence Force LCTs approaching the beach. Two loaded LCTs are inbound while an LCU is outbound from the beach.

high ground overlooking the beach. The main problem at this stage, which was destined to be the second major mistake, was that Karaođlanođlu did not push hard enough to reach his allocated objectives; a semicircle roughly 3km in radius in time because of continuous artillery fire coming from the slopes of the mountain. The naval guns were unable to destroy the Greek Cypriot guns, most of which sat securely in concrete bunkers. By the time Karaođlanođlu felt he was ready to advance, the Greek Cypriots were already launching their counterattack.





Photo courtesy of Selçuk Karaman, author's collection  
Turkish landing ships coming ashore. The LCUs Ç-214 and Ç-212 are captured leading an unidentified LCT into the western side of Pladini Beach.



Photo courtesy of Selçuk Karaman, author's collection  
LCM and LCUs going in at Pladini Beach. This is most likely the first wave of the Amphibious Regiment landing taken about 0900, 20 July 1974. The confusion involved in a landing operation is evident. The Pentadáktylos Mountains appear in the background.

## **G-DAY: THE AIRBORNE ASSAULT**

Brigadier General Sabri Evren's planners located two battalion-size drop zones, which would support the overall operational plan. In turn, Evren tasked his 1st Airborne Battalion (528 officers and men) to drop in the center of the Triangle Area near a disused airstrip at Kriní, Cyprus (in Turkish sources it is generally named as Kriniör Aghirda). Three modern C-130 Hercules and six Transall C-160 transports carried the battalion as well as the airborne artillery battery (75mm M8 pack howitzers with 53



Photo courtesy of Selçuk Karaman, author's collection  
M113s going ashore. The date of this image is unknown, but LCTs carried the tanks and APCs ashore on 20 July 1974.

officers and men). Evren tasked his 2d Airborne Battalion (440 officers and men) to drop near Mándres (also known as Hamitköy and, for the Airborne Brigade planners, Hamitköy DZ) just to the east of Kióneli.<sup>15</sup> Twenty older and slower C-47 Dakotas would conduct this mass tactical jump, and Evren and his tactical staff accompanied and jumped in with the 2d

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<sup>15</sup> Evcil, *Yavru Vatan Kıbrıs'ta Zaferin Hikâyesi*, 37.

Battalion's fifth "stick" (the fifth aircraft). These choices of the two tactical DZs gave the Turks a small airfield in the center of the Triangle Area and an airhead adjacent to the main force of the Turkish Cyprus Regiment as well as a position near the main Nicosia International Airport. However, the DZs were about 10km apart and not mutually supporting. This problem was solved with the second wave of paratroopers later in the day.

Normally, pathfinders would drop well before the main airborne assault to prepare the DZs and report wind conditions on the ground. Pathfinders on the ground also radioed the command to the incoming paratroopers aloft precisely when to jump from (or exit) the aircraft. However, because the KTKA was already on the island and able to report weather and tactical conditions, Evren considered a preliminary pathfinder drop unnecessary. He took a risk and relied on the very experienced jumpmasters of the 1st and 2d Airborne Battalions to be able to make the decision independently of when to exit from the aircraft.<sup>16</sup> Although a pathfinder team was dispatched at the last moment, they did not manage to land in time to guide the first drop but were on hand for the following drops. Once on the ground, the pathfinders would establish positive tactical air control to assist the incoming second wave of paratroopers. Evren was also influenced by the fact that the jumpmasters of the recently activated 3d and 4th Airborne Battalions were less experienced and having pathfinders on the ground would improve the odds of a successful second mass tactical drop.

Evren's battalions took off around 0500 and began the simultaneous airborne drops on both DZs at 0710. The last elements dropped were the howitzers and ammunition of the airborne artillery battery, which landed

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<sup>16</sup> Mütercimler, *Satılık Ada Kıbrıs*, 273–75.



Photo courtesy of Selçuk Karaman, author's collection  
Turkish paratroops landing. The unobstructed terrain on the Cyprus DZs in the Triangle Area is apparent in this image. Without trees, buildings, or rocky outcroppings, Mándres, Krini Airfield, and the Kalpuzan farm made ideal drop zones.

about 0720 in the northern drop zone. Evren and his command group accompanied the Hamitköy DZ where Evren expected he could easily link up with the KTKA commander, General Staff Colonel Mustafa Katircioğlu, and the TMT commander, General Staff Colonel Arif Eryılmaz (better known on the island by his nom de guerre Azmi).<sup>17</sup> Wind conditions were favorable but the paratroopers encountered sporadic anti-aircraft and rifle fire from the ground causing light casualties (three killed, only one of them from a parachute accident, and 18 wounded). Occasional Greek Cypriot artillery and mortar fire landed in the vicinity but had minimal impact on the consolidation of the DZs. The KTKA, already waiting nearby on the ground at

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<sup>17</sup> Sever, 20 Temmuz 1974, 57.



Photo courtesy of the Pakistan Defence Force Paratroops landing on 20 July 1974. With a machine gun team already deployed and set up on the ground, this is likely the second drop on the Hamitköy DZ at 1310.

Kióneli, secured the DZ and the southern perimeter of the airhead. The northern and eastern perimeter appear to have been secured by Colonel Eryılmaz's Boğaz's TMT Regiment. This relieved the 2d Airborne Battalion of defensive responsibilities and its commander made use of trucks and buses that had been organized by the TMT. By midmorning, the battalion was on the road and moving north to the Pentadáktylos Mountain chain

between Kyrenia and the interior plains. While these actions were playing out, the wounded men were transported by buses operated by the TMT to the KTKA hospital near Kióneli.<sup>18</sup> Three more men were wounded on the ground by mortar fire and taken to the hospital as well.

After securing the Krini DZ, the 1st Airborne Battalion pushed out and moved to secure defensive positions on the western perimeter of the airhead. The airborne artillery battery, composed of four 75mm/18cm pack howitzers, unpacked and assembled its howitzers, which had been disassembled into component parts for the “heavy drop.” By 0950, the artillery battery, now supported by civilian vehicles and four infantry squads, moved out to its assigned area, where it established firing positions. Supported by infantry manpower, the gunners of the howitzer battery dug protective berms and firing pits for their four howitzers as well as two ammunition bunkers.<sup>19</sup>

The transport aircraft tasked for the second wave returned to the Erkilet Airfield at Kayseri, landing about 0900. The 3d Airborne Battalion (519 officers and men) began loading the C-130s and C-160s, while the 4th Airborne Battalion (459 officers and men) loaded into C-47 Dakotas.<sup>20</sup> These forces took off just after 1100, and the simultaneous mass tactical drops of the second wave began at 1310. Wind conditions had picked up to 18–20 knots (about 40km an hour), which greatly exceeded the peacetime safety regulations and the DZs were far from flat and unobstructed.<sup>21</sup> There were also enemy fires coming from nearby Greek Cypriot posi-

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<sup>18</sup> Mütercimler, *Satılık Ada Kıbrıs*, 274.

<sup>19</sup> Mütercimler, *Satılık Ada Kıbrıs*, 274.

<sup>20</sup> Evcil, *Yavru Vatan Kıbrıs'ta Zaferin Hikâyesi*, 37.

<sup>21</sup> High winds cause a higher incidence of paratrooper injuries on landing as well as causing uncontrollable drift into obstacles on the DZ.

tions but the drops went ahead as planned.<sup>22</sup> The 4th Airborne Battalion dropped on the Hamitköy DZ, but the 3d Airborne Battalion dropped on a new DZ at the Kalpuzan Farm (Kalpuzan Çiftliği). The new DZ was midway between the Kriní DZ and the Hamitköy DZ and served to consolidate the brigade area of operations on the ground. The choice of a new DZ was also driven by the fact that the Commando Brigade had taken control of the Kriní airstrip and had turned it into an active LZ for waves of incoming helicopters, making it impossible to drop paratroopers there. After landing and organization, Evren sent his 3d Battalion north to join his 2d Battalion, and he brought his 4th Battalion into reserve in the center of the airhead.

## **G-DAY: THE AIR ASSAULT**

The first lift of General Demirbağ's Commando Brigade, composed of his 1st Commando Battalion and his tiny personal staff, flew from the Ovacık Airfield in Turkey at 0730 and landed at the Kriní Airfield in Cyprus 45 minutes later. Although the airstrip was not completely secured other than a presence of a weak TMT screening force, the unloading took a leisurely two and a half minutes.<sup>23</sup> The helicopters then took off for the return flight to Ovacık. Demirbağ, who had accompanied the first lift, immediately organized trucks, buses, and automobiles provided by the TMT in order to send commandos north into the mountains. He also notified the VI Corps commander at 0835 that the LZ was secure enough to bring General Ersin's TACCP element into the airhead.

After returning and refueling at Ovacık, the helicopter crew chiefs of the 2d Army Aviation Regiment loaded the men of the 2d Commando Battalion into their Agusta turbine helicopters. Included in the second lift

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<sup>22</sup> Erdem, *Kıbrıs Barış Harekâtı'nda 3 ncü Paraşüt Taburu*, 8.

<sup>23</sup> Mütercimler, *Satılık Ada Kıbrıs*, 279.



Photo courtesy of the Pakistan Defence Force  
Paratroopers on the DZ. A machine gun team likely watching the second drop at Mándres DZ.



Photo courtesy of Selçuk Karaman, author's collection  
Commandos landing at Krini LZ. Looking north from the Krini LZ toward the Pentadáktylos Mountains. The Bell 205 helicopters are a variant of the American UH-1 Iroquois or Huey helicopter. Commandos previously unloaded from the two departing helicopters can be seen moving south of the LZ.

was the VI Corps commander, Lieutenant General Nurettin Ersin, and the corps tactical staff. This lift departed the airfield at 1000 and landed at the airhead at the Krini LZ at 1045. The remaining elements of Demirbağ's brigade tactical headquarters also accompanied the second lift, enabling him to exert full command and control over his incoming brigade.<sup>24</sup> The helicopters returned to Ovacık and loaded the 3d Commando Battalion, which departed at 1500 and landed at Krini 45 minutes later. Demirbağ's

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<sup>24</sup> Mütercimler, *Satılık Ada Kıbrıs*, 278; and Sever, *20 Temmuz 1974*, 62.

final lift was delayed and instead of taking the 1st Battalion, 230th Infantry Regiment, as planned, at the last moment it was decided to load the Nevşehir Jandarma Commando Battalion (less one company), which did not arrive in the airhead until 1845.

After arriving at the airfield, VI Corps commander Lieutenant General Ersin established his field command post in the nearby village of Boğazköy using, surprisingly, a Land Rover owned by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) to transport his staff. As a reward, the BBC reporters got the opportunity to interview the command staff well before any other news agency. Shortly after arriving at Boğazköy, two Greek jets appeared out of nowhere and dropped napalm bombs near the command post but, luckily for the Turks, were too distant to endanger the staff. This was the only reported case of Greek air attack on the Turkish ground troops. A tactical air control party, led by Turkish Air Force pilot Captain Tuncay Özman, arrived at the VI Corps command post to coordinate tactical air operations, and at 1330 Ersin issued attack orders to Demirbağ and Evren. Under the ground maneuver plan (*Kara Manevra Planı*), Ersin's principal task after establishing secure base areas was to link up the beachhead with the airhead; however, the craggy Pentadáktylos Mountains lay between him and General Tuncer's Task Force Çakmak on the Pladini Beach. Moreover, Cypriot National Guard commando units held key high ground positions overlooking the passes in the mountain range. Evren already had his 2d and 3d Airborne Battalions heading north, and Ersin ordered Demirbağ to send his 1st and 2d Commando Battalions to link up on the paratroop battalion's left flank for the push into the mountains. Regrettably, the 1st Commando Battalion was slower to organize for marching and instead took over the responsibility of Karatepe-Dağyolu ridgeline to the north of the Nicosia International Airport from the Boğazköy TMT units. This inac-



Photo courtesy of Metin Aktuna, author's collection  
Bell 205 helicopter at Krini LZ. Looking north from the Krini LZ toward the Pentadákylos Mountains. These men are wearing British-style helmets and are likely soldiers from the 1st Battalion (Airmobile), 230th Infantry Regiment (28th Infantry Division).

tion by the 1st Battalion was the third major misstep in the plan, which the Greek Cypriot commandos would exploit during the night.

## **G-DAY: COUNTERATTACKS ON THE AIRHEAD**

The Cyprus naval administration's radar station on Cape Apostolos Andreas spotted and reported an incoming fleet in Famagusta Bay at 2015 on 19 July.<sup>25</sup> These were the ships of the GCK 50.0 Deception Force, whose purpose was to persuade the National Guard high command that the invasion fleet was heading toward Famagusta. Task Group 50.0 was

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<sup>25</sup> Makarios Drousiotis, *Cyprus 1974: Greek Coup and Turkish Invasion* (Mannheim und Möhnese, Germany: Bibliopolis, 2006).

spotted again by the radar 30 minutes later heading toward the northern coast. Receiving these reports in the National Guard General Staff Headquarters was coup leader Brigadier Mihail Georgitsis, commander of the National Guard, who had replaced General Georgios Denisis (who had opposed the coup). Vice Admiral George Papayiannis briefed Georgitsis regarding interpreting the implications of the radar reports, which by 0200 on 20 July clarified that the ships heading toward Famagusta had turned back toward Turkey. At 0400, the radar station confirmed that a larger number of ships were heading toward Kyrenia. Georgitsis was in contact with the Hellenic General Staff in Athens throughout the night but, in the end, failed to issue any kind of an alert or war warning to the National Guard.<sup>26</sup> With the exception of the ELDYK, which was alerted by Greek officers in the National Guard headquarters and dispersed to alert areas, the National Guard was literally caught sleeping when the Turks landed.

The weight of the Turkish paratroop assault fell on the Third Higher Tactical Command headquartered in Nicosia. Alerted by the Turkish paratroop drops to the north of Nicosia, the National Guard battalions belatedly went on full alert and moved to dispersal areas. The ELDYK organized a counterattack, supported by 19 T-34/85 medium tanks from the 23d Tank Battalion, an EF infantry company, and a battery of 25-pounder guns from the 184th Artillery Battalion.<sup>27</sup> This force began an attack on Kióneli, the garrison town of the KTKA, which blocked the main road north from Nicosia to Kyrenia. The town was fortified by the Turks and strongly held by the 2d and 3d Infantry Companies and the Heavy Weapons Company. The attack began with the EF artillery and tanks shelling the Turkish positions, which were well dug in and surrounded by an antitank ditch. The

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<sup>26</sup> Drousiotis, *Cyprus 1974*, 208.

<sup>27</sup> Ioannis S. Mamounidakis, *Armor on Cyprus: Evolution and Operations* (Athens: Trojan Horse, 2008), 52.

shelling was ineffective due to smoke, which obscured the battlefield, and the Greek attack foundered when Turkish planes destroyed two tanks and two more were trapped in the antitank ditch. During the counterattack, the Turks called in air strikes on the EF artillery base at Camp Andreas Karvou, destroying 5 of the 12 25-pounders from the 185th Artillery Battalion. The Greeks called off the counterattack and withdrew to their camps.

While the ELDYK was organizing these attacks, the EF high command ordered further supporting counterattacks on the airhead. The EF 361st Infantry Battalion, reinforced by the 399th TE Battalion, were ordered to move to assembly areas south of Káto Díkomo, Cyprus. This force would attack south toward Kióneli in conjunction with the ELDYK's northern attack to trap the Turkish paratroopers from two directions. However, because of the delayed mobilization, the EF was able to concentrate only the 3d Company from the 361st Infantry and a part of the 399th TE Battalion for the counterattack. These forces were launched south about the same time as the ELDYK counterattack but were immediately halted by the Turkish Cyprus Regiment's defenses north of Kióneli.

A final Greco-EF counterattack was organized by the ELDYK with the objective of striking north from Nicosia to take the village of Kióneli (the main base of the Turkish Cyprus Regiment). The regiment task organized the ELDYK's 1st Infantry Battalion (-) reinforced by a three-tank T-34/85 platoon and a four-APC BTR-152V1 assault platoon from the EF 23d Tank Battalion as the 1st Tactical Battle Group.<sup>28</sup> The regiment also task organized a 2d Tactical Battle Group composed of the ELDYK 2d Infantry Battalion (-), a four-tank T-34/85 platoon from the 23d Tank Battalion, and four Marmon-Herrington armored cars from the EF 21st Armored Recon-

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<sup>28</sup> Mamounidakis, *Armor on Cyprus*, 42.

naissance Battalion. The bulk of the 21st Armored Reconnaissance Battalion remained behind for the defense of the Nicosia International Airport, where it had earlier that day shot down a Turkish Air Force F-100. The counterattack began at 1845 with the 1st Tactical Battle Group on the right flank and the 2d Group on the left flank. The attacking units immediately encountered strong resistance from the Gönyeli Group, under the command of General Staff Major Cengiz Varol, composed of the KTKA's 2d and 3d Infantry Companies.<sup>29</sup> Led by T-34 tanks, the ELDYK and EF hit Varol's lines at 2000 but were held off. Colonel Katırcıoğlu, the regimental commander, sent his 3d Infantry Company to reinforce Varol and asked for help from VI Corps. In response to the dangerous situation, VI Corps moved the 4th Airborne Battalion into positions behind the Turkish Cyprus Regiment as an immediate reserve.

Unfortunately for the EF, the ELDYK commanders were unable to coordinate operations effectively or to call in artillery support.<sup>30</sup> Supporting flank attacks in the west by the 231st Infantry Battalion were ineffective as were the eastern supporting flank attacks by the 361st Infantry and 399th TE Battalions. As dusk fell, the ELDYK abandoned the counterattack, withdrawing at 0300 the following morning. Later in the evening, the remainder of the 21st Armored Reconnaissance Battalion moved from the Nicosia International Airport to the ELDYK camp. However, unaware of the ELDYK's withdrawal at 2315, Colonel Katırcıoğlu—in a panic—went to the VI Corps tactical command post and asked for help from General Ersin. To his credit, Ersin acted confidently and, after reprimanding Katırcıoğlu, sent him back to defend his positions at all costs.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Sever, *20 Temmuz 1974*, 69.

<sup>30</sup> Mamounidakis, *Armor on Cyprus*, 44.

<sup>31</sup> Sever, *20 Temmuz 1974*, 87.

## **G-DAY: COUNTERATTACKS ON THE BEACHHEAD**

The Turkish amphibious assault struck the EF's Second Higher Tactical Command that was headquartered near the western end of the Pentadáktulos Mountains at Mórfou. Although the EF had a contingency plan (Aphrodite) to defend and defeat a Turkish attack from the north, the EF's Second Higher Tactical Command's reactions along the northern coast were not nearly so rapid or vigorous as the Third Higher Tactical Command. There were substantial EF forces available in and around Kyrenia, but they had not been placed on alert until 0415, and many reservists were still in the process of reporting to their garrisons when the Turks came ashore at 0830. The Turks landed in the sector that was the responsibility of the 190th Anti-Tank Artillery Battalion, commanded by Major Dokos, who managed to get 12 57mm antitank guns on the road at 0515.<sup>32</sup> He deployed three batteries into their battle positions but two were ambushed by Turkish reconnaissance units. The EF gunners fled, abandoning four guns and losing a number of men as POWs. The principal EF artillery unit responsible for the beaches west of Kyrenia was the 182d Artillery Battalion, which managed to get 10 of 12 25-pounder guns out of its garrison and on the road, where 2 more guns were lost in a road accident. The remaining guns were set up in prepared positions at Ágios Pávlos, Cyprus, and were fired at the beachhead. These were hit by naval gunfire shortly thereafter by Turkish destroyers and forced to fire intermittently.

The EF's principal defending unit near Kyrenia was the 251st Infantry Battalion based in the Glykiotissa camp. At 0730, the commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Pavlos Kouroupis, ordered two companies and an attached tank platoon from the 23d Tank Battalion to move toward the

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<sup>32</sup> Drousiotis, *Cyprus 1974*, 210–11.

Pentemili beach.<sup>33</sup> This small task force, reinforced with a platoon of three 81mm mortars and two 57mm recoilless rifles, took up positions east of the Turkish beachhead where its soldiers watched the Turks unload more men and equipment. At about 1000, the men of the 251st Infantry Battalion opened fire on the Turks and a firefight developed. To the relief of Greeks, the Turkish Cobra antitank wire guided missiles turned out to be useless due to heavy vegetation and electricity and telephone wires. However, other than exposing their own position and destroying two Turkish 57mm recoilless rifle positions, the result was inconclusive because the EF battalion was unable to coordinate its attack with supporting artillery or synchronize its own tank-infantry operations.<sup>34</sup> Simultaneously, Turkish Air Force fighter bombers pounded the EF bases along the northern coast, destroying several Marmon-Herrington armored cars at the Kokkinotrimithiá base and BTR-152 APCs at the Kyrenia stadium. Turkish aircraft also blasted the artillery bases, destroying ammunition magazines, howitzers, and vehicles.

In the meantime, the Turks organized a counterattack of mechanized infantry and sent a company of M113 APCs against the EF's 251st Task Force at noon. Fire from four well-placed T-34/85s destroyed two M113s, forcing the Turks to withdraw.<sup>35</sup> An hour later, the outnumbered EF task force withdrew to a new defensive position west of Kyrenia. Three of the original five T-34 tanks were lost to breakdowns and Turkish fire. The 251st Battalion commander deployed his remaining infantry company on the northern slopes of the Pentadákylos Mountains overlooking the beaches to seal off the Turkish beachhead. The two remaining T-34/85

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<sup>33</sup> Mamounidakis, *Armor on Cyprus*, 53.

<sup>34</sup> Mamounidakis, *Armor on Cyprus*, 54.

<sup>35</sup> Mamounidakis, *Armor on Cyprus*, 54.



Photo courtesy of the Pakistan Defence Force  
Disabled CNG tanks. The lead T-34/85 medium tank has lost its right track and would be classified as a mobility kill. A damaged tank, in this apparent condition, can be recovered, repaired, and returned to the fight in a short period.

tanks attached to the 251st Battalion had almost exhausted their ammunition and were dug in to await an attack.

The EF General Staff reacted to Turkish amphibious assault by ordering units north to destroy the Turkish beachhead. The Second Higher Tactical Command's 281st Infantry Battalion, which had been moved to Nicosia for the coup, was ordered at 0700 to return to its base by road in full daylight.<sup>36</sup> At the same time, the EF General Staff ordered Lieutenant

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<sup>36</sup> Drousiotis, *Cyprus 1974*, 210.

Colonel Georgios Boutros to take his 286th Armored Infantry Battalion north from the Greek Cyprus Regiment camp as well.<sup>37</sup> The 286th Armored Infantry Battalion was equipped with BTR-152V1 wheeled APCs and was composed of Hellenic Army regulars and EF officers and men. Boutros organized his battalion with himself in the lead, followed by his 1st, 2d, 3d, Support, and Headquarters Companies in column with 30-meter intervals between vehicles.<sup>38</sup> EOKA B fighters informed him en route that the road north to Pánagra, Cyprus, was open. However, just outside the village of Konteménos, Cyprus, Boutros began to come across destroyed vehicles and casualties belonging to the 281st Infantry Battalion, which had been caught on the road by Turkish fighter bombers and decimated. Abandoning their burning vehicles on the road, the remnants of the 281st Infantry Battalion kept moving and reached their base at Pánagra in the midafternoon.

Halting his column to assist the wounded and take stock of the situation, Boutros ordered his men to open the clogged road. As the men dismounted their vehicles, Turkish fighter bombers again swept in, strafing and bombing the halted battalion. Colonel Boutros, his S-3 (operations), and his 1st Company commander took refuge in a nearby house where they were lightly wounded by Turkish bombs until fragments from a second bomb mortally wounded Boutros, who later died on 1 August in Athens. Six BTR-152V1 APCs from the 1st Company and four new 81mm mortars were destroyed before the battalion could disperse. The lone senior officer left unscathed, Lieutenant Emmanuel Sylligaros, commander of the 3d Company, assumed command and got the battalion moving to-

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<sup>37</sup> Mamounidakis, *Armor on Cyprus*, 58.

<sup>38</sup> Mamounidakis, *Armor on Cyprus*, 59.



Photo courtesy of the Pakistan Defence Force  
The IV Corps Chief of Staff Col (GS) Mahmut Boğuşlu (standing left with helmet) and an unidentified officer examine destroyed vehicles of a Cypriot National Guard convoy.

ward Karavás.<sup>39</sup> While passing through Pánagra, two T-34/85s from the 23d Tank Battalion joined the column as did some survivors from the 281st Infantry battalion, finally reaching the village of Karavás at 1600.

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<sup>39</sup> Mamounidakis, *Armor on Cyprus*, 60.

The two T-34/85s pushed forward from the village at 1630 toward the Turkish beachhead. Unfortunately for the crews, they had no information about the precise location of the enemy, the radios of both tanks were nonoperational, and their advance was not supported by accompanying infantry. In a predictable fashion, Turkish infantry armed with American-made M72 Light Antitank Weapon (or LAWs, which held one 66mm rocket), ambushed the two isolated tanks just east of the village. The lead tank was hit in the right track and put out of action, while the second tank was also hit at close range.<sup>40</sup> The Turkish soldiers were subsequently decorated for their actions, which had left the main EF counterattack against the beachhead without supporting armor. The 286th Infantry Battalion's deputy commander, Major Spyridon Fanariotis, reached Karavás shortly thereafter with 10 trucks packed full of ammunition and supplies. Fanariotis tried to rally the dispirited battalion but with little effect. The arrival of Fanariotis finally sealed off the westward expansion of the Turkish beachhead

In Karavás, in addition to Fanariotis, there were two mobilized companies from the 316th TE Battalion, which had been ordered toward Kyrenia from Mórfou. There were also the surviving men from the 281st Infantry Battalion under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Antonios Bikos. Unwilling to remain passive, Bikos conducted the first reconnaissance of the Turkish beachhead at dusk, but the gathering and badly intermixed EF forces lacked a single commander. This was rectified with the arrival of Lieutenant Colonel Konstantinos Boufas, the G-4 (logistics) of the EF General Staff, who had been dispatched earlier by armed motorcade to organize a coherent counterattack.<sup>41</sup> Boufas arrived about the time Bikos

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<sup>40</sup> Mamounidakis, *Armor on Cyprus*, 55.

<sup>41</sup> Mamounidakis, *Armor on Cyprus*, 61.

returned and took immediate command of all of the separate units in Karavás. After talking with Bikos about the tactical situation, Boufas began planning for a night counterattack against the Turks.

## THE FIGHT FOR THE MOUNTAIN PASSES

The EF General Staff deployed the bulk of its elite Commando Command in the Pentadáktulos Mountains to maintain control of key terrain features: the Saint Hilarion Castle, the Bellapais Abbey, and the pass carrying the main road between Kyrenia and Nicosia through the mountain barrier (hereafter the Agírda [Ağırdağ] pass after the village at the southern egress to the pass but better known in Turkish as *Darboğaz*).<sup>42</sup> The possession of these features would prevent the Turks from expanding their beachhead and consolidating it with their airhead. The 31st Commando Battalion held the castle and the slopes around Saint Hilarion Castle and nearby peaks but importantly not the castle itself, which had been a main Turkish Cypriot stronghold and communications center.

On the south flank of the mountains, the 32d Commando Battalion lay near the villages of Káto Díkomo and Páno Díkomo to the east of the Kyrenia-Nicosia road, while the 33d Commando Battalion held the abbey.<sup>43</sup> The key Agírda pass itself was under the control of a TMT company (40 strong). The 34th Reserve Commando Battalion, composed of selected reservists, mobilized near a cluster of villages 5km northeast of Nicosia. The EF commandos, including the mobilized reservists, were lightly armed but well-trained and highly motivated. Regular Hellenic Army officers and sergeants led the commando battalions and companies. For reasons that

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<sup>42</sup> LtGen George Tsoumis (Ret), *Memoirs and Intelligence Documents of the Greek Intelligence Service for Cyprus and the Near East* (Athens: Doureios Ippos Publishing, 2011), see tactical map on p. 343.

<sup>43</sup> See Kyrenia map sheet N3515-E3300, 1:50,000, U.S. Army Map Service, Washington, DC, 1943.

are unclear today, the Commando Command was slow to deploy its battalions to battle positions blocking the vital Agírdá pass. This created a window of opportunity that the Turks were quick to exploit.

Although the Turkish planning assumptions included locating and impressing buses and trucks, Evren's 2d Airborne Battalion was unable to locate its allocated vehicles and had to walk all the way from Kióneli in north-central Cyprus to Bogázi on the northeast coast, arriving completely exhausted at 2000. Evren had no choice but to delay its commitment to the operation. However, on their west flank "fifty to sixty buses and large trucks" successfully brought in Demirbağ's 1st and 2d Commando Battalions.<sup>44</sup> The 1st Commando Battalion was supposed to take over responsibility of Hill 786 (Doğruyol Tepe) and release the TMT company there for another assignment and then advance near Saint Hilarion for its next mission, which was to cross the Pentadákylos Mountains and establish contact with amphibious troops. The battalion reached Hill 786 at 1630, but the battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Cemal Eruç, decided not to leave a company there as planned—instead advancing to Saint Hilarion Castle with his entire battalion where they arrived around 1800. Therefore, one of the most critical hills in the northern sector with crucial wireless repeater and long-range radios was left to be defended by a 40-man strong TMT company with no heavy weapons. The 2d Commando Battalion also arrived at Saint Hilarion Castle and General Demirbağ went up to the castle himself at 1930 to coordinate the positioning of his two battalions, after which he returned to the VI Corps tactical command post to brief General Ersin.<sup>45</sup> Major Turhan Erdem's 3d Airborne Battalion, which had arrived at the Boğaz command post at around 1500, started marching to-

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<sup>44</sup> Sever, *20 Temmuz 1974*, 67.

<sup>45</sup> Mütercimler, *Satılık Ada Kıbrıs*, 292.

ward the Alonograd Hills (Bozdağ and Delik Tepe) at 2100. This hill block contained a TMT company position on Hill 624 (better known as Turkish Bozdağ). The adjacent Hill 809 (better known as Greek Bozdağ) and Hill 953 (Deliktepe) were held by Greek Cypriot defense positions. The objective of the 3d Airborne Battalion was to capture both Greek Cypriot positions during the night. While marching toward Hill 624, Erdem heard noises from another large unit marching on the other side of the hills, but he decided not to deviate from his objective. Unknown to him, the Greek Cypriot commandos had already started their advance to counterattack. The 3d Battalion reached its jump-off position at 0015. Exhausted from carrying heavy weapons, additional equipment, and ammunition, Erdem decided to postpone the attack until dawn at 0300.<sup>46</sup>

By 2100, the Turks had established control of the southern entrance to the Ağırda pass as well as the high ground on both flanks dominating the road from Nicosia and were ready for the linkup operation the next day. Demirbağ was also responsible for the defense of the center portion of the Triangle Area, and he deployed his 3d Commando Battalion to defend the north and west of the Krini airstrip. Around 1900, he sent his last arriving unit, the Nevşehir Jandarma Commando Battalion, to the east of the airfield as a brigade reserve on the Dhikomo Hill (Dikman Tepe). This hill guarded the avenue of approach to the airfield and the VI Corps command post. There was just enough time as darkness fell for the Turkish commando and paratroopers to hastily establish defensive positions.

Belatedly, the EF Commando Command ordered counterattacks by all four commando battalions to seize the Ağırda pass itself. The EF 31st Commando Battalion and a company from the 231st Infantry Battalion,

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<sup>46</sup> Operations Order No. 1, Headquarters, 3d Airborne Battalion, 201930 July 1974, Boğaz, Kıbrıs, reprinted in Erdem, *Kıbrıs Barış Harekâtı'nda 3 ncü Paraşüt Taburu*, 15–16.

supported by the 198th Artillery Battery, made their way east making contact with the TMT company on the Hill 786 overlooking Agírda village.<sup>47</sup> The EF 33d Commando Battalion advanced west from the abbey and established contact with the Turkish 2d Airborne Battalion, while EF 32d Commando Battalion, reinforced by a company of the 361st TE Battalion, attempted to encircle the 3d Airborne Battalion on Hill 624.<sup>48</sup> The EF 34th Commando Battalion pushed northwest and overran the TMT company on Dhikomo Hill (Dikmentepe). Even worse for the Turks, the Greek Cypriots consolidated their gains in Pilerí and Fóta, Cyprus, and attacks by the ELDYK, the 361st TE Battalion, and the 399th TE Battalion continued on albeit without coordination and already running out of steam.

Unlike the other Greek attacks in the south starting about 2230 and continuing until about 0200, the four EF commando battalions conducted coordinated assaults on the Turkish positions in an attempt to establish blocking positions in the Agírda pass, which would prevent the Task Force Çakmak in the beachhead from linking up with the airborne and air-landing forces in the airhead. Moreover, the seizure of the Dhikomo Hill would threaten the very center of the Triangle Area and force the Turks into the defensive.

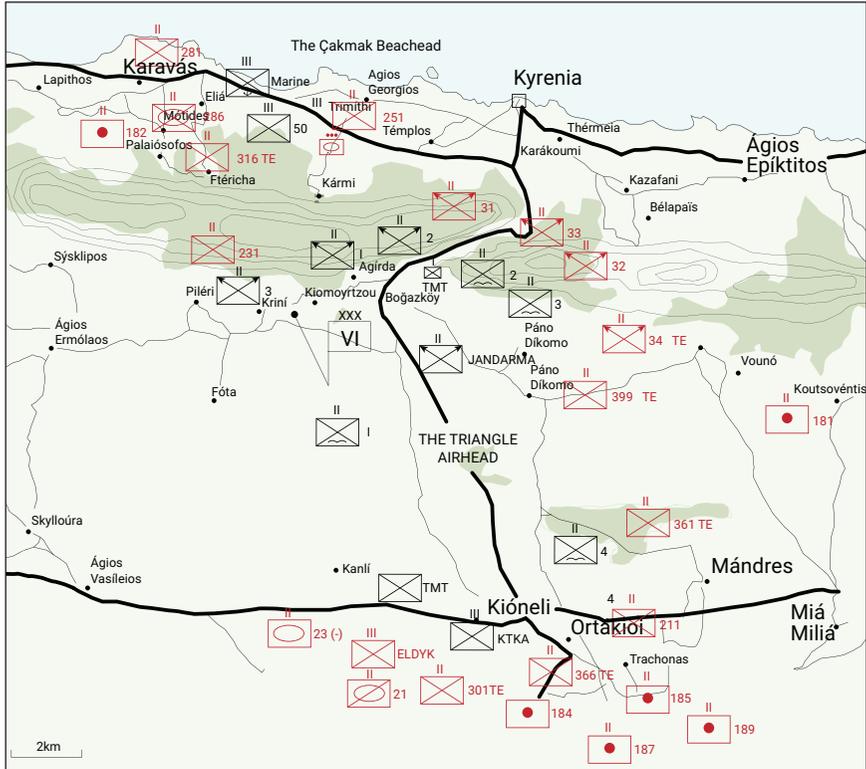
Firefights raged in the dark mountains as EF commandos fought Turkish commandos and paratroopers in hand-to-hand combat. Greek sources assert that the EF 31st and 33d Commandos Battalion seized the Kotsakagia ridgeline (including Hill 786), which directly controlled the “gut” of the pass, and destroyed the Turkish repeater station and long-range radios at

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<sup>47</sup> LtGen Eleftherios Stamatis (Ret), *Gentlemen, Go to Sleep: The Cyprus Tragedy Told by a Young Captain of 31 Commando* (Athens: Doureios Ippos Publishing, 2007), see maps on pp. 79 and 85.

<sup>48</sup> Georgios Sergis, *The Battle of Cyprus: July–August 1974, The Anatomy of Tragedy* (Athens: Afi Vlassi, 1996), see map on p. 426.

## Map 4.2. Tactical situation, end of the day, 20 July 1974



Map by authors, adapted by MCUP

The tactical objective for the Turkish VI Corps on 20 July was to achieve secure footholds along the coast and on the plains north of Nicosia. Although they had hoped to secure the vital pass through the Pentadáktylo Mountains, this was not achieved. The VI Corps Tactical Command Post had landed and exercised tactical control from Krini Airfield.

about 2330.<sup>49</sup> Both sides were able to get their mortars into the fight and casualties were heavy as a result.<sup>50</sup> Fighting tapered off in the early hours of 21 July, leaving two spent and unsupported EF commando battalions

<sup>49</sup> Stamatis, *Gentlemen, Go to Sleep*, see maps on p. 85.

<sup>50</sup> Sever, *20 Temmuz 1974*, 89–92; and Evcil, *Yavru Vatan Kıbrıs'ta Zaferin Hikâyesi*, 48–55.

in possession of the key terrain feature blocking the pass. The two other commando battalions were equally exhausted and unsupported, and it is important to consider that the EF commandos did not occupy contiguous or adjacent positions. Overall, the EF commandos had failed to push the Turks from their positions, leaving the Turks in partial possession of the vital Agırda pass.

## THE FIGHT FOR THE ENCLAVES

As a result of the intercommunal fighting in the 1960s, the bulk of the Turkish Cypriot population moved to and concentrated in what became known as the enclaves. The enclaves, which were generally built-up areas and villages, became hubs for the TMT and were lightly fortified for local defense. There were no plans to use the TMT in offensive operations and TMT plans centered around the rapid mobilization of men and deployment in defensive positions far away from landing and dropping zones to divert and fix as many Greek Cypriot troops as they could. Similar to the Greek Cypriot reserve infantry units, the use of the terms *regiments* and *battalions* reflect organizational architecture rather than combat capability and capacity. In fact, the TMT regiments possessed the fighting strength of a light infantry battalion and TMT battalions had the fighting strength of an infantry company. The overall combat strength of TMT after full mobilization was around 15,000 men.<sup>51</sup>

As the Turkish Cypriots intended to defend their enclaves, the Greek Cypriots intended to eliminate them and accordingly made plans to do so. In 1997, a British journalist asserted that a plan known as Hephaestus 1974 provided for internal security and for “mopping-up operations

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<sup>51</sup> Sever, 20 Temmuz 1974, 30.

against Turkish Cypriot villages.”<sup>52</sup> However, the basis for this was a document signed by the commander of the EF Fifth Higher Tactical Command (based in Mórfou), and it is unclear if this was part of a larger island-wide plan. It does appear that the plan for attacking the Turkish Cypriot enclaves was inclusive to the March 1974 Aphrodite Three coup plan and that the enclave plans were finalized in early July 1974.<sup>53</sup> In any event, attacks on the Turkish Cypriot enclaves began about 0800 on 20 July by both EF and EOKA B units. Every one of the enclaves was subjected to immediate attacks of varying strength and intensity.

About 450 men of the 203d Infantry Battalion (and some from other EF units) attacked the Limassol enclave early in the day, and by 1500, the enclave was in Greek Cypriot hands and its TMT garrison prisoners.<sup>54</sup> At the same time, the isolated Avidmou enclave was attacked by EOKA B units and taken as well. Other EF units attacked the Larnaca enclave, which also fell to the Greek Cypriots that day.<sup>55</sup> The enclave at Paphos was isolated and besieged early in the day but the Greek General Staff notified the captain of the HS *Lesbos* (a former U.S. Navy LST), Captain Eleftherios Handrinou, to stand by and assist the EF.<sup>56</sup> The *Lesbos* was on a routine transport mission involving the replacement of ELDYK soldiers whose enlistments were ending. On 19 July, the *Lesbos* had unloaded 450 incoming ELDYK replacements at Famagusta and picked up the same number of returning soldiers. When hostilities began, the *Lesbos* was cruising off Limassol when Handrinou was ordered to put in to Paphos.

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<sup>52</sup> Drousiotis, *Cyprus 1974*, 251. The journalist is Harry Scott Gibbons, who published *The Genocide Files* (Savannah, GA: Koch Publishers, 1997), and who Drousiotis asserts is a “recruit of the Turkish propaganda machine.”

<sup>53</sup> Drousiotis, *Cyprus 1974*, 216.

<sup>54</sup> Sever, *20 Temmuz 1974*, 65.

<sup>55</sup> Drousiotis, *Cyprus 1974*, 214.

<sup>56</sup> Drousiotis, *Cyprus 1974*, 214.

The ship anchored off the port at 1500 and unloaded the 450 ELDYK soldiers using small boats within two hours.<sup>57</sup> The local commander asked Hadrionos to lend a hand to the assault, and between 1800 and 1900, the *Lesbos* bombarded the enclave with some 900 shells from its eight 40mm anti-aircraft guns. The ship then continued on its return journey to Greece, and at 2200 that evening, the TMT forces in Paphos surrendered the enclave. The 450 returning ELDYK soldiers began to make their way northeast to rejoin their regiment at Nicosia.

In Famagusta, the EF attacked the Turkish neighborhood of Karaolos using the 201st Infantry Battalion, supported by a platoon of T-34/85 tanks. The EF's First Higher Tactical Command launched a coordinated tank-infantry assault at 1000, which was supported by the 173rd Anti-Tank Battalion (6-pounder/57mm), the 199th Anti-Aircraft Battery (3.7-inch guns), and the 25-pounder guns of A Battery, 181st Artillery Battalion.<sup>58</sup> The Greeks stopped firing around 1430 under the mistaken impression that the Turkish Cypriots were about to surrender. Later that evening, the Turks withdrew into the medieval fortress in the old city.

By the end of the day on 20 July EF, EOKA B, and ELDYK units had eliminated or were at the last stages of capturing the Turkish Cypriot enclaves in the western and southern parts of the island. The enclaves in the north and east held out and continued to resist Greek Cypriot attacks. One scholar argues persuasively that the simultaneous attacks on the Turkish Cypriot enclaves was the "most serious error committed by the National Guard General Staff and had grave military consequences."<sup>59</sup> In effect, the dispersed nature of the preplanned, island-wide attacks on the enclaves,

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<sup>57</sup> Drousiotis, *Cyprus 1974*, 215.

<sup>58</sup> Mamounidakis, *Armor on Cyprus*, 57.

<sup>59</sup> Drousiotis, *Cyprus 1974*, 215.

rather than against the invading Turkish forces, ensured that the EF-EOKA B failed to concentrate their forces to achieve decisive results. At the end of the day, the Turks held key positions around Nicosia, isolating it from the northern port of Kyrenia. Moreover, they maintained their grip on the critical garrison town of Kíóneli, which was the stronghold of the Turkish Cyprus Regiment. Although thousands of Turkish Cypriots were surrounded in their homes, the attacks on the enclaves served to rally the Turkish Cypriot population to the Turkish Army.

The fighting at the end of the day on 20 July 1974 brought a final action at the United Nations headquarters in New York City. Unnerved by frantic reports of the UNFICYP, whose observers were frequently caught under fire by every force on the island, the UN Security Council passed United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 353, which called for an immediate cease-fire.<sup>60</sup> The UNSCR 353 also asked for an immediate end to outside intervention on the island as well as for the withdrawal of outside military forces. In addition to this resolution, the UN secretary general made direct personal appeals to the prime ministers of Turkey and Greece; however, none of these efforts led to an immediate end of hostilities.

## CONCLUSION

The Turks were not really expected to do well, at least by some members of the American administration. William Colby, the director of the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), believed that the Greeks maintained the upper hand on the first day of fighting.<sup>61</sup> Colby briefed American sec-

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<sup>60</sup> United Nations Security Council Resolution 353 (1974), 20 July 1974.

<sup>61</sup> See "Minutes of the Washington Special Actions Group" (Document 110), 21 July 1974, Laurie Van Hook, ed., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976*, vol. XXX, *Greece; Cyprus; Turkey, 1973–1976* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2007), 355–64.

retary of state Henry Kissinger that the Greek Cypriots held the balance of power with 9,000 active and 30,000 reservists, while the Turks only had 6,000 troops on the island. Colby also noted that the Greeks were fighting better than expected, and they were in the process of reinforcing the island. He also noted about the Greek Cypriots that “every male over the age of 12 has a gun and lots of ammunition.” This view was reinforced by Ambassador Robert J. McCloskey, adding that “Sampson opened up all the arms caches.”<sup>62</sup>

Operations on G-day (20 July 1974), however, clearly demonstrated the proficiency of the Turkish armed forces’ joint planning systems as well as the skill of the Turkish Army, Navy, and Air Force to conduct complex joint operations. The Turks achieved all their objectives, and they were well on their way toward consolidating their lodgment at the end of the first 24 hours. Importantly, the VI Corps commander, Lieutenant General Ersin, was present in the airhead and had established effective command and control. Turkish forces had beaten off armored counterattacks on the beachhead and on the airhead.

Notably, Turkish commandos and paratroopers deployed for offensive operations aimed at opening up the mountain passes between Kyrenia and Ağırda village immediately upon landing in the airhead. This was only possible because of detailed planning and coordination to integrate the efforts of Colonel Katırcıoğlu’s KTKA and Colonel Eryılmaz’s TMT forces with the tactical needs of the airborne and air landing forces to secure the DZs.

On the other side of the hill, the Hellenic Army’s reaction at the tactical level was immediate but badly coordinated. The Cypriot National Guard’s

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<sup>62</sup> Hook, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976*, vol. XXX, *Greece; Cyprus; Turkey, 1973–1976*, 360.

reaction was episodic and delayed. In both cases, the EF and the ELDYK were unable to coordinate armor and artillery support with their infantry. This led to episodic counterattacks that never concentrated men and machines at the right place in decisive numbers. At the operational level, the EF and ELDYK failed to have a comprehensive and effective plan in place for a Turkish invasion that everyone knew was coming. Moreover, the EF's operations distributed its strength against the enclaves rather than concentrating it against the invading forces. Throughout the day, the EF high command failed to provide the effective leadership needed to coordinate the complex battlefield operations that were necessary to mount an effective defense against the Turks.

Overall, the conduct of Turkish operations was generally of a much higher order than their opponents, and Turkish commanders at all levels performed well. In particular, the coordination and synchronization of land-sea-air operations was remarkably coherent and effective. Initiative rested in the hands of the Turkish Army, and its commanders aimed to keep it.

## **CHAPTER 5**

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# **CONSOLIDATING THE LODGMENT, G+1 TO G+2**

### **INTRODUCTION**

After successfully establishing a beachhead and an airhead, the immediate tactical task for the Turks was to connect them in order to consolidate the lodgment. In addition, they needed an actual port to logistically support their rapidly growing army on Cyprus. Thus, securing the small port of Kyrenia intact was a tactical requirement of the first order. These two tactical tasks became the central elements of Turkish operations for the remainder of the first phase of the operation. For the Greeks and their Greek Cypriot comrades, preventing the Turkish from achieving these objectives was paramount. Unfortunately, for the Greek Cypriots, their forces were not concentrated and were poorly positioned for offensive operations, and their command and control arrangements were not set up to take advantage of tactical opportunities. Both sides would attempt to reinforce the island with varying degrees of success and the Turkish Navy's attempt to interdict enemy naval movements resulted in a catastrophic incident of fratricide.

### **WORLD OPINION**

There is no question that the outside world had little idea what was actually happening on Cyprus. The Americans, in particular, completely bought into the Famagusta deception operation, believing that the Turks had exe-

cuted their Yıldız-70 plan and failed to secure a lodgment on the eastern coast of the island. The following comments given in an American conference on 22 July 1974 in Washington, DC, reflect this sentiment.

General George S. Brown: I think history will show that they [the Turks] were rather inept in the whole operation. I think that analysis will show that their whole situation was amateurish. Their air support was ineffective.

Henry Kissinger: And they didn't even get their paratroopers anywhere near their enclaves.

...

Brown: The whole operation at Famagusta was a debacle. There was no pre-planning or coordination, just a debacle.<sup>1</sup>

The United Nations, with numerous observers on the ground, seemed to have a more accurate picture of what was happening. The secretary general noted that the fighting for control of the Ağırda pass had died down by the morning of 21 July.<sup>2</sup> The UN also reported that the Cypriot National Guard was retreating toward Bělapaıs and the Turkish Air Force was continuing its heavy attacks with bombs and rockets. UN observers also reported that the Turkish Cypriot enclaves in Larnaca, Limassol, and Paphos had surrendered, but that heavy fighting continued in the Famagusta enclave.

## **GREEK REINFORCEMENT EFFORTS**

On 20 July, the ruling junta in Athens decided to dispatch reinforcements

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<sup>1</sup> See "Minutes of the Washington Special Actions Group," 22 July 1974, in Laurie Van Hook, ed., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976*, vol. XXX, *Greece; Cyprus; Turkey, 1973–1976*, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2007), document 113.

<sup>2</sup> *Report of the Secretary General on Developments in Cyprus*, S/11353 (New York: United Nations Security Council, 21 July 1974), 1–2.



Photo courtesy of Selçuk Karaman, author's collection  
LCM8s Ç-303 and Ç-319 landing infantry. Because of the casual appearance of the soldiers, these men are probably reinforcements landed after the beachhead was secured.

to the ELDYK and EF forces fighting on Cyprus. The situation was hazy, but the Greek high command believed that both air and sea reinforcement of the island was possible. Greek Air Force tactical transports were not immediately available and that evening four Olympic Airways Boeing 707 airliners carrying the Hellenic Army's 2d Commando Battalion took off from Mikra Air Base in Thessaloniki, Greece, for the airbase at Souda Bay in Crete. From there, the force expected to fly onward to Nicosia and land the commandos before dawn. But while landing in Crete to refuel, four tires of the right landing gear on one of the airliners blew out. At 0040 on 21 July, the commando battalion commander cancelled the mission, likely because the length of repairs would put the vulnerable airliners over contested airspace in daylight. The commandos returned to Mikra and the junta decided to attempt a second aerial reinforcement on the following night using air force tactical aircraft to transport the Hellenic Army's 1st Commando Battalion to Nicosia.

At 1500 on 20 July, the junta also ordered the Hellenic Navy's HS *Glavkos* (S 110) and *Nereus* (S 111), which were modern Type 209 diesel submarines completed in 1971, to interdict the Turkish landings.<sup>3</sup> Overnight, however, several members of the junta recognized the danger of directly provoking Turkey and the submarines were recalled at 1300 on 21 July.<sup>4</sup> The junta also dispatched reinforcements using a large vehicle ferry named the *Rethymnon* from Piraeus, Greece. The ship set sail on the evening of 21 July carrying the 573d Infantry Battalion and some 550 Greek Cypriot volunteers under the command of Colonel Papakostalu. This operation was evidently seen as more prudent because it would not directly pit Greeks against Turks in international waters. However, in the end, like the submarines, the high command ordered the *Rethymnon's* commanding officer, naval Captain Zulias, to turn away from Cyprus to Rhodes where he unloaded the soldiers on 22 July.<sup>5</sup>

These movements did not go unnoticed by the Turks. A Turkish coastal post observed and reported increases in Greek convoy activity off Rhodes at 1100 on 20 July.<sup>6</sup> Turkish Air Force Grumman S-2 and S-2A Tracker antisubmarine aircraft were ordered to the area and increased patrols over the approaches to Cyprus. At 1900 on 20 July, the Turkish naval command ordered the amphibious fleet command to detach Destroyer Squadron Two (four destroyers from the Naval Gunfire Support Group) and send them west to hunt for the Greek Navy. These were the TCG *Adatepe* (F 251), *Tınaztepe* (D 355), *Kocatepe* (F 252), and TCG *Mareşal Fevzi Çakmak* (TCG MF *Çakmak*), while the destroyer TCG *İçel* (D 344)

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<sup>3</sup> Capt John E. Moore, ed., *Jane's Fighting Ships, 1975–76* (London: MacDonald and Jane's, 1975), 157.

<sup>4</sup> Erol Mütercimler, *Satılık Ada Kıbrıs, Kıbrıs Barış Harekâtının Bilinmeyen Yönleri* (İstanbul, Turkey: Alfa Basım Yayım Dağıtım, 2007), 310.

<sup>5</sup> Mütercimler, *Satılık Ada Kıbrıs*, 311.

<sup>6</sup> Mütercimler, *Satılık Ada Kıbrıs*, 311.

would remain on station to provide fire support for the forces ashore. Turkish intelligence had also picked up signals that the Greek fleet was at sea. At 1930, a coastal observation post of the Muğla Jandarma Battalion reported to the Turkish naval command that a Greek convoy had entered the Mediterranean from the Aegean Sea.<sup>7</sup>

## **THE SINKING OF THE DESTROYER TCG *KOCATEPE***

In Ankara, at the General Staff headquarters on İnönü Caddesi, the chief of the air force and the chief of the navy shared a building but occupied different floors. On the evening of 20 July, however, the chief of the navy, Admiral Kemal Kayacan, and the chief of the air force, General Emin Alp-kaya, were colocated together in the General Staff's combat operations center (*Genelkurmay Başkanlığı Savaş Harekât Merkezi*). At 0200 on 21 July, an S-2A Tracker, code named Panther 7 (a marine patrol aircraft), reported a convoy sailing from Rhodes toward Paphos, Cyprus.<sup>8</sup> This was confirmed by further S-2A reconnaissance and by coastal radar at 0550 to be a convoy of three to eight ships sailing toward Paphos. Both the navy and the air force believed the unknown convoy to be hostile and headed toward the western coast of Cyprus. The naval high command then separately alerted the naval covering force (GBK 50.0.4 composed of two destroyers) to be on the lookout for a Greek attempt to interdict the landings. Between 0645 and 0945, the Turkish Navy began a deliberate aerial search in a 100-mile arc south of Antalya while the air force placed its 172d Squadron on alert.<sup>9</sup> About this time, the naval staff had second thoughts about the security of the beachhead and ordered the detach-

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<sup>7</sup> Mütercimler, *Satılık Ada Kıbrıs*, 313.

<sup>8</sup> Mütercimler, *Satılık Ada Kıbrıs*, 316.

<sup>9</sup> Deniz Harp Akademisi, *1974 Kıbrıs Barış Harekâtı (Deniz Harekâtı)* (Yenilevent, Turkey: T. C. Harp Akademileri Komutanlığı, n.d.), 18.

ment of the destroyer TCG *Tınaztepe* from the intercepting force to rejoin the naval Gunfire Support Group (leaving three destroyers in the squadron). There was tough debate in the operations center between naval and air force officers, but all agreed that a joint attack should be launched.<sup>10</sup> Confusing reports from the S-2As (missions Panther 10 and Panther 11) came in regarding the number and actual location of the Greek convoy.

Tensions were high in the operations center on İnönü Caddesi as the navy alerted Destroyer Squadron Two commodore staff Captain İrfan Tınaz in his flagship, the TCG *MF Çakmak*, to plot a course to an intercept point 97km west of Paphos. At the same time, the air force put more fighter squadrons on alert for operations against ships and prepared a strike package of F-100D Super Sabres (111th and 181st Squadrons) and F-104G Starfighters (141st Squadron). Air force reconnaissance aircraft from the 184th Squadron then reported spotting two ships in the search area. At 1000, Commodore Tınaz cleared for action, and an hour later the air force F-100s were ordered aloft at a patrolling altitude of 20,000 feet. At 1230, the duty officer from 184th Squadron notified the operations center that his pilots reported seeing four destroyers 15 minutes earlier. On board the TCG *MF Çakmak*, Commodore Tınaz's radars detected what he believed was enemy naval activity near Cape Arnaoutis, and he ordered his squadron to prepare to engage at a "battle range of 14–15,000 yards."<sup>11</sup> At 1248, the Turkish squadron identified three Greek fast attack craft (*hücumbotu*) coming around Akrotirio Arnaoutis, Cyprus, into the open sea from the port of Poli Crysochous, Cyprus. Tınaz, on board the TCG *MF Çakmak*, and the TCG *Adatepe*, immediately engaged the Greeks with salvos from their 5-inch main guns. They were joined by the TCG *Ko-*

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<sup>10</sup> Mütercimler, *Satılık Ada Kıbrıs*, 314.

<sup>11</sup> Mütercimler, *Satılık Ada Kıbrıs*, 323.



Photo courtesy of Selçuk Karaman, author's collection  
This is a commemorative image of the TCG *Kocatepe* (D 354) signed by the ship's captain, Capt Güven Erkaya. This 3,500-ton ex-U.S. ship carried twin 5-inch 38-caliber rifles, as well as antisubmarine launchers and torpedo tubes. The 5-inch guns could fire a 55-pound shell out to a range of 17,300 yards and were excellent naval gunfire weapons.

*catepe*, and by 1307, Tınaz's squadron had sunk two of the Greek boats and damaged the third.<sup>12</sup>

Reports of the engagement flashed up the chain of command to the navy and air force commanders in the operations center in Ankara. General Alpkara notified the tactical air forces that a naval engagement had occurred, and at 1345, Alpkaya authorized aerial attacks on enemy ships estimated to be located about 32km southwest (on a heading of 235°) from Cape Arnaoutis. The Second Tactical Air Force (TAF) commander, Lieutenant General Hulusi Kaymaklı, notified his airmen that three ships had been reported west of Paphos and ordered the 16 F-100s of 111th

<sup>12</sup> Deniz Harp Akademisi, 1974 *Kıbrıs Barış Harekati (Deniz Harekati)*, 20.

Squadron to the area at 1415. Ten minutes later, reports from 184th Squadron's reconnaissance aircraft confirmed the presence of three warships 24–30km northwest of Paphos.<sup>13</sup> It was turning into a very confusing tactical situation, which was made even more so by the presence of a Messina Line civilian ship, American and Soviet naval vessels, unknown helicopters, and English pleasure craft in the area. At 1443, the 12 F-104s of 141st Squadron arrived overhead, and at 1500, Commodore Tınaz sent a warning to Ankara noting the confusing situation and also stating that he believed that there were no Greek warships actually remaining in the area. Twelve more F-100s belonging to 181st Squadron arrived overhead three minutes later. Unfortunately, Commodore Tınaz's cautionary warnings arrived too late in Ankara to be relayed back down the chain of command to the rapidly arriving aircraft. The stage was now set for catastrophe.

Unfortunately for the Turkish Navy during the Cold War, American military assistance packages had equipped the armed forces of Turkey and Greece with nearly identical suites of equipment. Among the ships acquired by the Turkish Navy in the early 1970s were five World War II-era American *Gearing*-class destroyers that had been converted by the U.S. Navy to Fleet Rehabilitation and Modernization (FRAM) I and FRAM II antisubmarine and radar picket configurations, four of which comprised Tınaz's squadron.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, the United States transferred four *Gearing*-class destroyers (FRAM I and FRAM II as well) to the Royal Hellenic Navy. These were identical ships in almost every respect and, certainly from the air in fast-moving fighter aircraft, indistinguishable from each other. Now authorized to attack ships, and observing three destroy-

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<sup>13</sup> Mütercimler, *Satılık Ada Kıbrıs*, 326.

<sup>14</sup> Moore, *Jane's Fighting Ships*, 336.

ers below, the F-100s of 111th Squadron began their attacks at 1505 on 21 July 1974. Reports from Tınaz and the aviators flashed separately upward through naval and air force channels, respectively, to the operations center in Ankara, which immediately fell “into a terrible silence.”<sup>15</sup>

Although all three of Tınaz’s ships were flying prominently large Turkish national flags, dozens of fighters swept down on them. It is believed today that the Turkish aviators thought that Greek ships were flying Turkish ensigns as a *ruse de guerre* (ruse of war). The Turkish destroyers began immediate evasive maneuvers and returned fire. The ships crews made frantic radio calls, but there was some confusion as to whether to use the frequencies for the First TAF or the Second TAF. There were three attacks by groups of aircraft with a second occurring at 1643 and a third attack at 1920.<sup>16</sup> The destroyers TCG *Kocatepe* and *MF Çakmak* appear to have drawn most of the fire and they, as well as the TCG *Adatepe*, were attacked heavily by aircraft. The *Kocatepe* was hit 52 times, leaving it badly damaged and adrift. Altogether, the ship suffered 3 officers, 19 petty officers, and 49 sailors killed in the attacks.<sup>17</sup> At 1139, the naval high command ordered the TCG *MF Çakmak* and the *Adatepe* to the dockyard in Anamur (a suburb of Mersin), Turkey, for repairs while the TCG *Kocatepe* finally sank at 1320 on 22 July.<sup>18</sup> The following day, an Israeli training ship picked up 42 survivors and the HMS *Andromeda* recovered another 72.<sup>19</sup> According to *Jane’s Fighting Ships* this class of destroyer carried a complement of 275 (15 officers and 260 ratings), and it is unknown to the

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<sup>15</sup> Mütercimler, *Satılık Ada Kıbrıs*, 329.

<sup>16</sup> Deniz Harp Akademisi, *1974 Kıbrıs Barış Harekatı (Deniz Harekatı)*, 21.

<sup>17</sup> İ. Neş’et İkiz, *Bir Ada, Bir Dava, Bir Savaş* (Istanbul, Turkey: Alfa Basım Yayım Dağıtım, 2007), 177.

<sup>18</sup> Deniz Harp Akademisi, *1974 Kıbrıs Barış Harekatı (Deniz Harekatı)*, 21–22.

<sup>19</sup> Jan Asmussen, *Cyprus at War: Diplomacy and Conflict during the 1974 Crisis* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2008), 113.

authors why the numbers of casualties and rescued men do not add up to the stated ship's complement.<sup>20</sup>

## **G+1—INSIDE THE PLADINI BEACHHEAD**

Based on the results of EF Lieutenant Colonel Bikos's reconnaissance of the western flank of the Turkish beachhead, Lieutenant Colonel Boufas decided to launch a night counterattack using elements of the 286th Mechanized Infantry Battalion and the 281st Infantry Battalion. Boufas was unable to contact the artillery and was forced to rely on just the 81mm mortars of the infantry battalion for fire support as well as some supporting fires from the recoilless rifles of the mechanized battalion's combat support company.<sup>21</sup> While coordinating these operations, Colonel Bikos was wounded by Turkish artillery fire and evacuated to Nicosia. Colonel Boufas's men went forward on foot at 0230 on 21 July, supported by machine-gun fire from the mechanized battalion's BTR-152V1 armored personnel carriers. After an advance of about 500 meters, the Greek Cypriots hit a well-organized defensive line of determined men from the 2d Battalion, 50th Infantry Regiment, and the attack collapsed.

Turkish success was not without cost, however. Inside the defensive perimeter, regimental commander Colonel İbrahim Karaoğlanoğlu was directing the defense from his command post located in a villa about 150 meters from the front lines. Accompanying Karaoğlanoğlu were Turkish Air Force forward air controller Major Fehmi Ercan and regimental second-in-command infantry Lieutenant Colonel Cevdet Ayken.<sup>22</sup> As the EF attack peaked at about 0300, a rocket from a bazooka (or perhaps a recoilless

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<sup>20</sup> Moore, *Jane's Fighting Ships*, 336. The TCG *Kocatepe* was the former USS *Harwood* (DD 861), which had been acquired from the United States on 15 February 1973.

<sup>21</sup> Ioannis S. Mamounidakis, *Armor on Cyprus: Evolution and Operations* (Athens: Trojan Horse, 2008), 60.

<sup>22</sup> Mütercimler, *Satılık Ada Kıbrıs*, 296–97.

rifle) slammed into the regimental command post, killing Karaoğlanoğlu and Ercan immediately and badly wounding Ayken. The origin of the rocket is unclear today, but most sources seem to agree that it came from somewhere near the Turkish perimeter.<sup>23</sup> Air Force liaison officers Major Necdet Karademir and Captain Akın Giray took immediate informal command until the 3d Battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Hasan Tek, arrived to take formal command of the regiment.<sup>24</sup>

Early the following morning, Brigadier General Tuncer met with the Marine regimental and battalion commanders and the key surviving leaders of the 50th Infantry Regiment to decide on a course of action.<sup>25</sup> Still under fire from EF artillery and mortars, Tuncer sent a request to the headquarters at Mersin asking that they dispatch all available reserves to the beachhead immediately. In accordance with the ground maneuver plan, and despite the death of the commander and the loss of the second-in-command, the officers of the 50th Infantry Regiment began organizing the advance east through the Turkish Cypriot village of Témplos. Their objective was to link up with the Commando Brigade after seizing the port of Kyrenia. As the day wore on, incoming fires decreased dramatically, but smoke from forest and brush fires ignited by the impact of military munitions made an immediate advance out of the beachhead impossible.<sup>26</sup>

Action continued along the beachhead's perimeter. Shortly after dawn, Turkish Air Force fighter bombers appeared over the area hunting for targets, causing the EF 286th Mechanized Battalion to withdraw to its

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<sup>23</sup> Mütercimler, *Satılık Ada Kıbrıs*, 296–97. Analysis of the projectile's fragments and the location of its explosive "splash" indicate that it was from a bazooka rocket launched from behind the command post rather than from the Greek Cypriot lines.

<sup>24</sup> Mütercimler, *Satılık Ada Kıbrıs*, 297.

<sup>25</sup> İkiz, *Bir Ada, Bir Dava, Bir Savaş*, 166.

<sup>26</sup> İkiz, *Bir Ada, Bir Dava, Bir Savaş*, 166.



Photo courtesy of the Pakistan Defence Force LCUs landing trucks. This well-known photograph shows the LCU Ç-206 (and an unidentified craft) unloading American trucks. Because the beach is so tidy, these are probably reinforcements.

staging area. Lieutenant Colonel Boufas established his command post in a house on the Karavás road 1,500 meters from the Turkish lines. Boufas positioned two BTR-152V1s for security next to the house; however, while he was organizing his command post, the Turks noticed the activity and the APCs.<sup>27</sup> The Turks launched a Cobra antitank guided missile, which blew one of the BTR-152V1 armored personnel carriers high into the air, causing Boufas's security platoon to organize a hasty defense. This action came not a moment too soon when a Turkish infantry platoon advanced

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<sup>27</sup> Mamounidakis, *Armor on Cyprus*, 61.

on the command post. The security platoon leader, a Greek Cypriot lieutenant, momentarily thought the advancing soldiers were friendly and did not immediately open fire. Instead, the Turks opened fire and overran the command post, capturing the remaining BTR-152V1 and some wounded EF soldiers.

On the beachhead's western flank, "thanks to signals intelligence, a daring attempt was mounted by Turkish special forces paratroopers to ambush the Greek Cypriot naval commander," who was travelling on the road from Nicosia via Mýrtou, Cyprus, to Karavás.<sup>28</sup> The EF naval commander was wounded, but the ambush failed with nine Turkish special forces paratroopers killed. On the eastern flank of the beachhead perimeter, the EF's 251st Infantry Battalion dug in and established a defensive position in the village of Trimíthi, Cyprus (between the Turks and the port of Kyrenia). To the east of Kyrenia, the EF's 241st Infantry Battalion established coastal defenses, while combat engineers mined the beaches for defense in case of another Turkish landing.

## **G+1—INSIDE THE TRIANGLE AIRHEAD**

Dawn found most of Lieutenant General Ersin's units massed in two large tactical concentrations at opposite ends of the airhead. This situation demanded minor restructuring of the existing command and control arrangements. To this end, General Ersin had already attached the 4th Airborne Battalion to Colonel Katircioğlu's Turkish Cyprus Regiment during the night, which consolidated the southern perimeter under a single commander.<sup>29</sup> Ersin detached the 1st Airborne Battalion from brigade

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<sup>28</sup> John Hughes-Wilson, "The Forgotten War: A Brief History of the Battle for Cyprus, 1974," *Military History* 156, no. 5 (2011): 88, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2011.626281>.

<sup>29</sup> Turan Erdem, *Kıbrıs Barış Harekâtı'nda 3 ncü Paraşüt Taburu* (Ankara, Turkey: Genelkurmay Basım Evi, 1999), 36.

command and gave it a defensive mission to hold the western perimeter of the airhead, which reduced Brigadier General Evren's Airborne Brigade to two infantry battalions. In the north, Ersin ordered the Commando Brigade to take first lost ground and then the Kotsakagia ridgeline and push on to Témpos. He ordered the Airborne Brigade (-) to seize Hill 809 (Greek Bozdağ) and Hill 953 (Deliktepe). At 0900, helicopters brought the leading elements of the 1st Battalion, 230th Infantry Regiment, into the central Kriní LZ of the airhead.<sup>30</sup> General Ersin attached this fresh infantry battalion as well as the Nevşehir Jandarma Commando Battalion to Evren's airborne brigade, thus unifying tactical command and control on the northeast and east flank of the airhead in the hands of his two brigade commanders.

Throughout the night, the Turkish 1st and 2d Commando Battalions launched repeated counterattacks against the EF 31st and 33d Commando Battalions to recapture lost ground, especially Hill 786. After fierce close combat, the 1st Commando Battalion managed to capture Hill 786 at around 0845. The Turks suffered 7 dead (3 officers) and 20 wounded, whereas the Greek Cypriots suffered heavy casualties, including the commander of the 33d Commando Battalion, Major Georgios Katsanis. After losing their commander, the remaining soldiers of the 33d Commando Battalion retreated back to the Bellapais Abbey, whereas the 31st Commando Battalion remained in its previous positions on Hill 845, Hill 888, and Hill 857.<sup>31</sup> However, these unexpected counterattacks by the commandos delayed the planned Turkish attack against the Hill 845–Hill 857 block for another day. Meanwhile, the 3d Airborne Battalion, after overcoming the initial shock of the EF 32d Commando Battalion, launched its

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<sup>30</sup> İkiiz, *Bir Ada, Bir Dava, Bir Savaş*, 166.

<sup>31</sup> Known as Keskin Sirt and Eski Yanık Sirt by the Turks and Kotsakagia by the Greeks.

hasty counterattack and captured critical Hill 780. Late in the morning, the Nevşehir Jandarma Commando Battalion, which had heroically captured Dikmentepe a few hours before, came as a reinforcement and Major Erdem initiated a major attack with five companies at 1430, capturing Hill 809 (Greek Bozdağ) and Hill 953 (Deliktepe) at 1900, thereby achieving his planned objectives, albeit 12 hours late.

Unable to redeploy the 1st and 2d Commando Battalions, General Evren dispatched the 3d Commando Battalion from the south of Kriní to Saint Hilarion and ordered them to advance toward Témpos. The commandos advanced toward the sea at 1400. There were only pockets of enemy resistance, but the Turkish commandos, without knowing the terrain and their respective objectives, became lost in the dense vegetation. Moreover, occasional enemy artillery and mortar fires slowed the Turkish advance to a crawl. As dusk fell, their lead elements had made it through the mountain defiles and creeks and were about 500 meters north of Témpos, but they were unable to contact the amphibious forces.<sup>32</sup> Although the linkup between the beachhead and the airhead was not yet achieved by the beginning of 22 July (G+2), the vital road through the Pentadáktulos Mountain passes was firmly in the hands of the VI Corps.

In the adjacent Airborne Brigade sector, Brigadier General Evren prepared his paratroopers on the morning of 21 July for continuing the offensive against the EF's 33d Commando Battalion, which held the Belapais Abbey—the ruins of a monastery in Cyprus—by making use of the 3d Airborne Battalion's success. However, the 2d Airborne Battalion failed to reach its assault position in time and the attack had to be postponed. The reinforcing 1st Battalion, 230th Infantry Regiment, on the other hand,

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<sup>32</sup> Cumhuriyet Evcil, *Yavru Vatan Kıbrıs'ta Zaferin Hikâyesi* (Ankara, Turkey: Genelkurmay Basım Evi, 1999), 64.

suffered some difficulty assembling for battle because of a disorganized landing under enemy fire. Therefore, rather than commit them to combat, Evren ordered them to secure the northern perimeter of the airstrip and prepare to march north on the following day.

## **G+1—ON THE OTHER FRONTS**

The EF's 21st Armored Reconnaissance Battalion remained the principal opponent of the KTKA on the Kioneli–Nicosia line. Many of the battalion's vehicles had returned to operational status by the first and second level support elements and Major Ioannis Alexiadis, the battalion's second-in-command, had completed the replacement of the Marmon-Herrington's No. 19 radios with new Racal radio sets, which had a range of 20km.<sup>33</sup> The Hellenic Army conscripts, who had returned to the island from the *Lesbos* (L 176), arrived that morning and Alexiadis took them immediately in hand. After briefing them, he placed five of the conscripts who were NCOs in command of five Humber "Pig" APCs, which the battalion had seized from the police during the coup. The Humber was an obsolete six-ton wheeled 4X4 APC that carried 6–8 passengers. It was lightly armored and armed with a .30-caliber machine gun. In addition to the Hellenic Army APC commanders, Alexiadis's Humber crews were composed of a Hellenic Army NCO as a machine gunner with the remainder being EF reservists. Major Alexiadis sent the Humber platoon to support EF reserve units in the Kaymaklı district of Nicosia, where it disembarked its infantry squads. The Humber platoon and the dismounted infantry then attacked the Turkish line, destroying outposts and occupying four of them.

Their opponents—Colonel Katircioğlu's KTKA with the 4th Airborne

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<sup>33</sup> Mamounidakis, *Armor on Cyprus*, 46.

Battalion attached, and Colonel Yilmaz's Nicosia TMT Regiment (around 300 strong)—conducted minor counterattacks throughout the day of 21 July. After 1800, the Turks made efforts to restore the lines and recover the lost positions. They poured fires into the Greek and EF positions until darkness imposed quiet on the front.

The main force of the 21st Armored Reconnaissance Battalion remained deployed around the ELDYK base camp of the Greek Cyprus Regiment. It spent the day dispersed to avoid air attacks from the swarms of Turkish fighter bombers constantly prowling overhead. The battalion's reconnaissance and assault platoons, however, were deployed at the Nicosia airport.

The battalion's Marmon-Herrington platoon, which was assigned to the Second Higher Tactical Command, deployed from Mórfoú to attack the Turkish Cypriot enclave at Lefka. On 21 July, the Marmon-Herrington crews, along with the 256th Infantry Battalion (-), a company of reserve infantry, and a four-gun battery of 25-pounders from the 183d Artillery Battalion, attacked the enclave but were beaten off by the defenders who were supported by Turkish Air Force fighter bombers.<sup>34</sup> The EF commander then began to shell the enclave, which resulted in its surrender at midday on 22 July.

In the Turkish Cypriot enclave at Famagusta, the defenders had retreated overnight into the old city and its citadel. The EF's surrounding forces composed the 201st Infantry Battalion and the 376th TE Battalion, supported by the 199th Anti-Aircraft Battery (3.7-inch/94mm guns). The First Higher Tactical Headquarters decided to besiege the enclave and bombard the defenders with artillery fire. The 21st Armored Reconnaissance

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<sup>34</sup> Mamounidakis, *Armor on Cyprus*, 48.

sance Battalion's Marmon-Herrington platoon, which had been assigned to that headquarters, was brought up to within firing distance of the old walls, where it engaged in direct fire against machine gun embrasures.<sup>35</sup> The platoon had the same problem with Turkish Air Force fighter bombers as the rest of the EF and had to seek cover among the buildings but continued to support the attack.

### **G+1—THE FINAL GREEK REINFORCEMENT ATTEMPT**

As previously described, in addition to the reinforcements carried in the *Rethymnon*, the Hellenic General Staff had decided to conduct a second attempt at aerial reinforcement. The Hellenic Air Force planned to launch 20 modern twin-engine Nord Noratlas military transports as well as 10 Douglas C-47 Dakotas from the 354th Tactical Transport "Pegasus" Squadron for what was designated Operation Victory (Operation Niki). The aircraft were marshalled at Souda Bay, Crete, with the Hellenic Army's 1st Commando Battalion for a planned take off time of 2230 on 21 July with all the aircraft being in the air by midnight. Unfortunately, numerous delays occurred so that only 15 Noratlas aircraft actually managed to get into the air by midnight, causing the air planners to cancel the remaining sorties.

The Noratlas pilots flew their aircraft at an altitude of 300–500 feet above sea level to a point off the coast where they descended to wave top altitude (40–50 feet above sea level) in an attempt to avoid the Turkish air defense radar systems. One aircraft became lost and diverted to Rhodes, Greece. The remaining 14 flew on to the Nicosia Airport where the EF gunners of the 195th Anti-Aircraft Artillery Battalion had been warned not to

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<sup>35</sup> Mamounidakis, *Armor on Cyprus*, 48.

fire on the incoming friendly transports. Sadly, as had happened to both U.S. Army Air Forces and Royal Air Force aircraft in the invasion of Sicily in 1943 (Operation Husky), overanxious gunners began to fire at the unidentified aircraft in the darkness overhead. The first three Noratlas's managed to land and unload, but the fourth aircraft (*Niki 4*) was hit and crashed 3.2km short of the runway, killing the four crew and 29 of 30 commandos on board. *Niki 7* was hit, killing two and injuring 11 commandos, but it managed to land. Two Noratlas crashed that night and the last of the 14 arrived late and was ordered not to land at all, returning instead to Souda Bay.

After unloading the commandos, 9 of the 11 remaining Noratlas aircraft returned to Crete—one was too badly damaged and one was short on fuel. The surviving men of the Hellenic Army's 1st Commando Battalion regrouped and took up defensive positions along the airport's perimeter. The weakened battalion was then redesignated as the EF's 35th Commando Battalion and participated in heavy fighting as the campaign progressed.

## **G+2—INSIDE THE PLADINI BEACHHEAD**

The second wave of the amphibious force departed Mersin on the afternoon of 21 July. Twenty-two additional combat vehicles were picked up and transported in the TCG *Donatan* (A 583), an 8,000-ton former United States Navy submarine tender.<sup>36</sup> An LCT, the *Ç-107*, carried the second wave's command group, including 39th Infantry Division commander Major General Bedrettin Demirel, his second-in-command, Brigadier General Hakkı Borataş, and his tactical command post staff officers. Overnight,

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<sup>36</sup> Mütercimler, *Satılık Ada Kıbrıs*, 405.





Photo courtesy of Selçuk Karaman, author's collection  
M47s on the LCM8 Ç-319. These Patton main battle tanks are also probably reinforcements landed into the lodgment.

a mechanized infantry company with 10 M113 armored personnel carriers both from the 49th Mechanized Infantry Regiment, a special forces team, and a signals detachment also landed on the beach.<sup>38</sup> After a short briefing and coordination meeting, Demirel ordered Borataş to launch an

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<sup>38</sup> Mamounidakis, *Armor on Cyprus*, 58.

attack from the area around Ayayorgi, Cyprus, to the east to seize Kyrenia. This was a major modification from the original operational concept. According to the original plan, Borataş was supposed to attack to the west and capture Karavás and Lápithos, Cyprus. Available documents and witness accounts do not provide the reasons behind this decision, but it seems likely that continuous Greek radio propaganda broadcasts of heroic defense of Kyrenia played some role.

The EF's 1st Company, 251st Infantry Battalion, and two companies of the 33d Commando Battalion held the defensive line west of Kyrenia and had two T-34/85 tanks, as well as an AT-1 Snapper antitank missile platoon, attached to stiffen the line. But as Borataş's attack swept through the EF lines, the tank crews expended all of their remaining ammunition and abandoned their machines at 1330.<sup>39</sup> The EF also had five TS armored vehicles, which was a locally armored Soviet ATS-712 load-bearing tractor. Known simply as the TS, it carried a commander, driver, 12 infantrymen, and one light machine gun. The TS were available in Kyrenia, which had been sent up to reinforce the 251st Infantry. These vehicles were modified ATS-712 tracked carriers designed to carry SA-2 missile launchers. The missiles never arrived and the EF had the tractors locally armored and equipped with machine guns, making them roughly comparable to the BTR-152V1.<sup>40</sup> These vehicles apparently pulled back when the EF withdrew from Kyrenia.

The surviving EF infantry withdrew to the village of Témplos but could not hold the Turks back. About an hour later, three M47 tanks and five M113 APCs rolled into Kyrenia, securing the port for the Turkish forces. The rest of Borataş's tanks and APCs remained in reserve. Almost imme-

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<sup>39</sup> Mamounidakis, *Armor on Cyprus*, 58.

<sup>40</sup> Mamounidakis, *Armor on Cyprus*, 43.

diately, Turkish radio reports announced the capture of Kyrenia, although pockets of resistance continued to hold out until the next morning. The attack had taken a little more than three hours and had covered 3.5km. At about 1700, Brigadier General Borataş launched his tanks from assembly areas in Kyrenia toward the mountain passes leading to Ağırda pass.

## **G+2—INSIDE THE TRIANGLE AIRHEAD**

About 1000 on 22 July, the 3d Commando Battalion attacked toward Kyrenia.<sup>41</sup> Several hours later they were able to seize the Témplos and Mavromatis barracks and reached the coastline, although they were several kilometers away from Pladini beachhead. As Brigadier General Borataş's tanks and APCs passed through Témplos at about 1400, they met Brigadier General Demirbağ's commandos coming down from the mountains. The Turkish VI Corps had achieved its planned link up between the beachhead and the airhead. Borataş's task force would continue advancing north that evening through the passes into Ağırda. As Borataş was conducting this operation, Evren's 2d Airborne Battalion pushed northeast on Borataş's left flank toward the villages of Ozanköy and Ágios Epíktitos, Cyprus, to secure the high ground to the immediate east of the Kyrenia port.<sup>42</sup>

General Ersin urged his subordinates to act quickly and decisively to eliminate Greek Cypriot resistance in critical terrain before the declaration of a cease-fire. Brigadier General Demirbağ ordered the 1st Commando Battalion to capture the Hill 845–Hill 857 block at once. Lieutenant Colonel Cemal Eruç received a weapons platoon (three 81mm mortars, two 57mm recoilless rifles, and two machine guns) from the First Battalion,

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<sup>41</sup> Muzaffer Sever, *20 Temmuz 1974 Kıbrıs Bitmeyen Gece* (Istanbul, Turkey: Kastaş Yayınevi, 2010), 104.

<sup>42</sup> Sever, *20 Temmuz 1974*, map 12, 122.

230th Infantry Regiment, and promises of close air support. The commando battalion initiated its attack at 1500 but immediately came under heavy enemy fires. The close air support did not materialize and supporting fires turned out to be useless against concrete bunkers. Still, 1st and 2d Companies managed to capture some portion of their objectives, but several mishaps were destined to change everything. In the heat of battle, Eruç was wounded and the 1st Company became demoralized and withdrew. The 2d Company tried to hold its gains, but came under naval gunfire from Turkish destroyers, which were unaware of the presence of Turkish troops nearby as they restarted shelling Greek Cypriot positions. The company hurriedly retreated back.

In the central sector of the airhead on the morning of 22 July, the EF held a large salient that pushed bulge-like into the Triangle airhead from the east. The salient was centered on the villages of Páno Díkomo and Káto Díkomo, Cyprus, and directly threatened the airstrip at Kriní. The EF's 32d and 34th Commando Battalions, the 361st Infantry Battalion, and the 391st TE Battalion were deployed in the defense of the salient. Fortunately for the Turks, the EF failed to bring any artillery up into the salient. The VI Corps tasked Brigadier General Evren with eliminating the salient, and Evren decided to use the newly arrived 1st Battalion, 230th Infantry Regiment, to do the job. However, moving the battalion from its LZ and staging it for combat in its assembly area took quite a bit of time. After much delay 1st Battalion, 230th Infantry Regiment (less than one and a half of a company), launched its attack at around 1400. The battalion was forced to halt within the reach of its objectives as night fell. Similar to the partially successful attack of the 1st Battalion, 230th Infantry Regiment, the 2d Airborne Battalion started late and only managed to advance north of Ozanköy but still short of the Bellapais Abbey. Due to these failures in

the north and south, the 3d Airborne Battalion (reinforced with Jandarma Gendarmerie Battalion) conducted local mop-up operations only and spent the day in rest and reorganization.

On the Kióneli front, the KTKA, the TMT regiments (reinforced with the 3d Infantry Company from the First Battalion, 230th Infantry Regiment), and the attached 4th Airborne Battalion conducted attacks in the afternoon of 22 July and were supported by the regiment's organic 81mm mortars and by fighter bombers using napalm.<sup>43</sup> In these attacks, a BTR-152V1 loaded with ammunition caught fire from napalm and exploded in the ELDYK camp. The remaining T-34/85 tanks of the 23d Tank Battalion took up positions on the ELDYK camp's perimeter. Unrelated to Colonel Katircioğlu's offensive, General Staff Colonel Eşref Bitlis, who had previously been assigned to replace Katircioğlu, led 350 replacements into the Krini airstrip on helicopters at 1400.<sup>44</sup> These personnel carried only their individual weapons and were slated to join the KTKA on the southern Kióneli front of the airhead. Upon arrival, these men were taken down by vehicle to join the regiment, bringing it up to its authorized strength, while Colonel Bitlis remained on the airstrip in order not to create command confusion and was later reassigned as the chief of operations of VI Corps.

At 1720, the reinforced KTKA renewed its attacks toward the Nicosia airport. The airport was held by infantry from ELDYK, Hellenic Army commandos (now renamed EF 35th Commando Battalion), a Marmon-Herrington platoon from the 21st Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, and a T-34/5 Tank Platoon from the EF's 23d Armored Battalion. The airport's defenders had been attacked from the air and bombarded with 81mm mortar fire throughout the day. But as darkness fell, they stoutly resisted

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<sup>43</sup> Mamounidakis, *Armor on Cyprus*, 51.

<sup>44</sup> Mamounidakis, *Armor on Cyprus*, 128.

every Turkish attempt to take the field. By the end of the day, the KTKA and TMT regiments had seized the western suburbs of Nicosia, including Omorfita, Yenişehir, and Tráchonas, Cyprus, but they were unable to take the airport.

## THE FIRST CEASE-FIRE

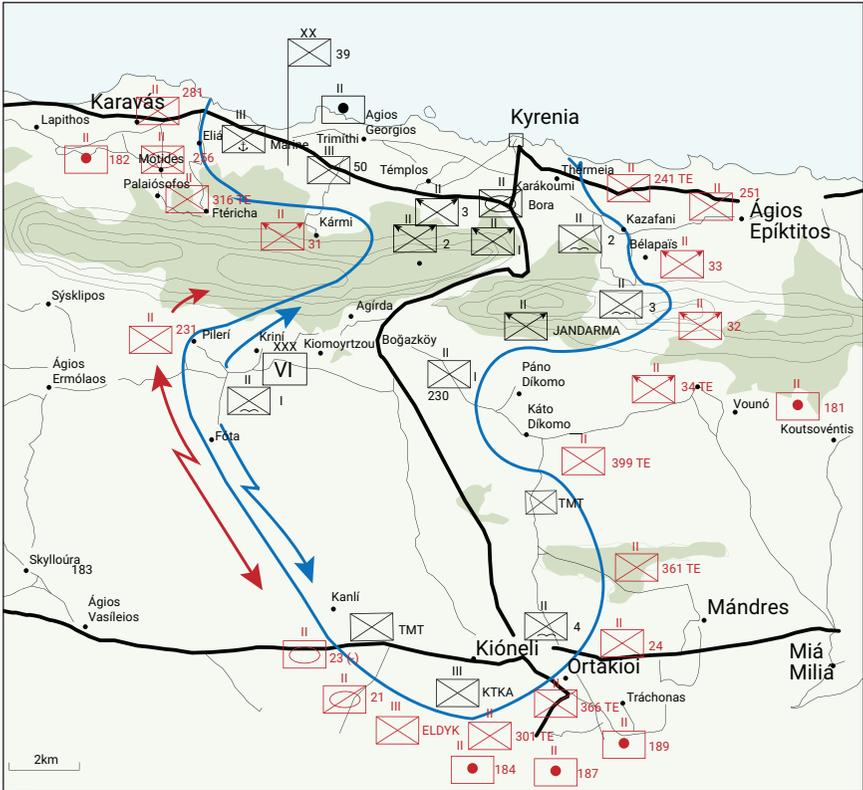
The prospect of two NATO allies going to war over the Turk's intervention on Cyprus profoundly worried and energized the diplomats of the United States and Great Britain. Reconciliation talks had been ongoing between the four NATO partners for the previous six months and intensified in July. The 15 July coup surprised the U.S. Department of State, which received a number of false reports from its embassy in Nicosia, including one that asserted that Cypriot president Archbishop Makarios had been killed in an artillery bombardment.<sup>45</sup> American secretary of state Henry A. Kissinger formed an interagency special task force and dispatched a special envoy, Joseph J. Sisco, to London on 18 July for consultations with James Callaghan, the British foreign secretary. Sisco was also able to talk to Turkish prime minister Ecevit, who was in London at the time.<sup>46</sup> By 20 July, Sisco was in Athens talking with the Greek government. During the next 36 hours, these officials conducted a hurricane of telephone calls trying to negotiate a cease-fire on Cyprus. Kissinger and Callaghan struggled for the leading role but, finally, they reached an agreement, which was to be effective at 1400 hours Greenwich mean time (GMT), 22 July 1974 (or

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<sup>45</sup> Ivar-André Slengesol, "A Bad Show?: The United States and the 1974 Cyprus Crisis," *Mediterranean Quarterly* 11, no. 2 (Spring 2000): 109–10.

<sup>46</sup> Geoffrey Warner, "The United States and the Cyprus Crisis of 1974," *International Affairs* 85, no. 1 (2009): <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2346.2009.00785.x>; James E. Miller et al., eds., *Foreign Relations of the United States 1969–1976*, vol. XXIX, *Eastern Europe; Eastern Mediterranean, 1969–1972* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2007); and Van Hook, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, vol. XXX, *Greece; Cyprus; Turkey, 1973–1976*, 136.

Map 5.2. Consolidation of the lodgment, 22 July 1974



Map by authors, adapted by MCUP

The Turkish lodgment was successfully consolidated by midday, 22 July. This was the most critical event in the first phase of Operation Yıldız Atma-4 and allowed the Turks to reinforce and resupply their isolated commandos and paratroops.

1600 local time on Cyprus). The key to securing the agreement was the cooperation of Turkish prime minister Ecevit, who had been informed by the Turkish General Staff on 21 July that satisfactory conditions for a cease-fire would be achieved by nightfall the following day.<sup>47</sup> They also

<sup>47</sup> Slengesol, "A Bad Show?," 121.

agreed to convene a conference in Geneva, Switzerland, to discuss the way ahead.

In Athens, there was extreme disagreement among the members of the junta, some of whom wanted to attack Turkey directly. The lack of cohesion and discord led to collapse of the faction on 22 July.<sup>48</sup> A new government took control, led by Konstantinos Karamanlis, who was the last democratically elected prime minister and who had been living in Paris.<sup>49</sup>

## THE TURKISH LODGMENT ESTABLISHED

At the end of G+2, the Turkish military had achieved a contiguous lodgment on Cyprus. The lodgment was about 22km deep and 15km wide and contained a force equivalent to a reinforced army division (an airborne brigade, a commando brigade, a marine regiment, an infantry regiment, the Cyprus Regiment, and a nearly complete armor battalion). However, the line of communication between Kyrenia and Nicosia was precarious due to the presence of strong Greek Cypriot detachments in the vicinity of Bellapais Abbey and the block of hills to the west. Effective command and control had been established on G-day with the deployment of the VI Corps tactical command post, which was augmented with an infantry division command post on G+2.

Lieutenant General Ersin had demonstrated firm command by rapidly task organizing his forces to seize key terrain as well as defend the airhead against enemy threats. The Turkish Air Force maintained air supremacy over the island and was instrumental in keeping the Greek Cypriots from concentrating their forces for effective counterattacks. The

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<sup>48</sup> Keith Kyle, *Cyprus: In Search of Peace* (London: Minority Rights Group, 1997), 18.

<sup>49</sup> Clement Dodd, *The History and Politics of the Cyprus Conflict* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 115, <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230275287>.

Turkish Navy demonstrated its ability to continuously support and transport new forces to the beachhead.

The Greek Cypriots, on the other hand, demonstrated a surprising ineptitude in preparing for the invasion and in concentrating their forces to crush either the beachhead or the airhead. However, at the tactical level, Hellenic Army troops and Greek Cypriot soldiers proved resilient and aggressive. Considering the large disparity in equipment capability, particularly in tanks and APCs, the EF's elite battalions handled themselves well despite being deployed in "penny packets" (a British military expression meaning to use small groups of tanks) in a number of separated locations. The withdrawal of the EF's commandos from blocking positions in the mountain passes between Kyrenia and Agírdá is inexplicable today and bears further research. With the exception of overrunning the widely separated Turkish enclaves, the overall EF performance may be characterized as professionally careless and ineffective.

## CHAPTER 6

# THE OPERATIONAL PAUSE, 23 JULY–13 AUGUST 1974

### INTRODUCTION

To consider the period from 23 July to 13 August 1974 as a so-called cease-fire is patently wrong and the term *operational pause* might be more appropriate. In fact, both sides continued combat operations ceaselessly through this time frame. From the Turkish perspective, this period is more accurately referred to as “mopping-up operations—reconstitution and preparation for new operations” (*temizleme harekâtı—yeniden tertiplenme hazırlık*).<sup>1</sup> For the Greek-Cypriots, it was a period of consolidation of defenses and minor reorganization. Both sides undertook a reorganization of their forces—the EF for defensive operations and the Turks for mobile offensive operations. Both sides conducted reorganization and reconstitution, but the Turkish VI Corps additionally task organized its units for assault operations. During this period, the Turks relentlessly expanded their lodgment and reinforced the VI Corps with the remainder of the 28th and 39th Infantry Divisions, while the Greek Cypriots finished their operations to crush the enclaves.

### G+3—INSIDE THE TURKISH LODGMENT

The start of the cease-fire put VI Army Corps in a difficult situation. Al-

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<sup>1</sup> Muzaffer Sever, *20 Temmuz 1974 Kıbrıs Bitmeyen Gece* (Istanbul, Turkey: Kastaş Yayınevi, 2010), 152. Sever used this phrase as the chapter title for the fourth section of his book.

though the airhead and beachhead were finally connected, the Turks fell short of achieving some of their important objectives. First, the line of communication between Kyrenia and Nicosia was precarious due to the presence of strong Greek Cypriot detachments on the Hill 845–Hill 857 block (Keskin Sirt-Eski Yanık Sirt), Bélapaïs, and Sicharí, Cyprus. Second, to secure Turkish holdings north of Nicosia, the Dhikomo salient had to be eliminated (see map 6.1—the salient included the villages and penetrated west into the Turkish lodgment). Last but not least was the capture of the Nicosia International Airport.

At the VI Corps command post, Lieutenant General Ersin gave orders for the final seizure of Ozanköy, although he had previously received word of the cease-fire. In turn, Evren's airborne brigade continued their attacks, seizing Dikomolar at 1100, Ozanköy at 1400, and Sicharí and Vounó, Cyprus, at 1900. But the paratroopers were unable to make the final push to Buffavento Castle near the north-central coast of Cyprus. Meanwhile, on the right flank of Evren's brigade, TMT fighters also pushed forward and solidified their hold on the southeast shoulder of the lodgment. The right flank of the resistance movement fighters connected to the left flank of the Turkish Cyprus Regiment. Overall, these efforts served to eliminate the EF's salient in the lodgment's eastern side.

Due to the previous day's failure, Ersin decided to fix the Greek Cypriots on the Hill 845–Hill 857 block with the 1st Commando Battalion, but no attack was planned for the time being. Instead, Ersin decided to concentrate his troops for the capture of Bélapaïs and Sicharí and the elimination of the Dhikomo salient. The 2d Airborne Battalion captured Bélapaïs at 1400 with relative ease. The 3d Airborne Battalion (reinforced with the Nevşehir Jandarma Battalion), which had proved its worth in previous combat actions, smoothly advanced to the Kakoskala Hill north of

Sicharí. To Major Erdem's surprise, the battalion commander's security teams spotted a large Greek Cypriot military convoy on the road between Bélapaís and Nicosia at 1430. He hurriedly organized a road ambush by moving the 1st Company to the south and the 3d Company to the north as outlying ambush groups, whereas the composite Jandarma and 2d Companies established the main group to cover the kill zone. They spotted 29 vehicles pulling nine 25-pounder field guns and carrying one quad mount anti-aircraft gun as well as the basic load of artillery ammunition. The Turkish paratroopers and commandos established complete surprise and destroyed the entire convoy, causing approximately 160 casualties and capturing around 60 prisoners at the cost of 13 casualties (including 3 dead). The ambush and following search operation lasted until 2000.

The 1st Battalion, 230th Infantry Regiment (less one and half companies), reinforced with a tank platoon, started its advance at 1000. Unlike their previous performance, the Greek Cypriots did not show serious resistance and melted away. The battalion captured Páno and Káto Dhikomos, Sicharí, and Vounó before nightfall, at the cost of nine casualties.

Against the successes at the north, things did not go as well in Nicosia. The KTKA and TMT regiments (reinforced with four Turkish Army companies and some tanks) lost valuable time in the morning to clean up isolated pockets of resistance. When they finally made it to the northern perimeter of the airport, they faced an unexpected combined arms Greek Cypriot counterattack. At 0500, the Turkish Cyprus Regiment (+), reinforced overnight with a tank platoon and APCs carrying mortars, renewed its attack toward the Nicosia International Airport.<sup>2</sup> The ELDYK infantry defending the airport was supported by a T-34/85 platoon from the 23d

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<sup>2</sup> Ioannis S. Mamounidakis, *Armor on Cyprus: Evolution and Operations* (Athens: Trojan Horse, 2008), 62.

Tank Battalion, but they could barely hold against the reinforced Turks, and the EF rushed to assist them with the 35th Commando Battalion and a Marmon-Herrington platoon, doubling the number of armored cars defending the airport to a total of eight. This improvised counterattack resulted in an intense two-hour firefight stopping the Turks, with the EF claiming to have destroyed two Turkish M47 Patton tanks. Although they failed to take the airport, Turkish tanks seized the village of Gerólakkos, Cyprus (a suburb of Nicosia), at 1600. That evening the EF withdrew their forces and turned over control of the airport to the Canadian contingent of the UNFICYP, part of a rotating UN peacekeeping mission on Cyprus.

Greek Cypriot soldiers in both uniforms and civilian clothing attacked Turkish units and positions in several waves using civilian automobiles. This caused some confusion and more delays. In the meantime, UNFICYP managed to convince the Greek Cypriot military authorities to evacuate the airport and hand over its responsibility to the UN. Shortly afterward, the UNFICYP declared the airport as a UN-controlled area. When the Turkish advance restarted at noon, they were now faced with UN troops. General Ersin had no alternative but to accept the UN *fait accompli*. Notwithstanding this setback, the KTKA and TMT's other operations in the northern Nicosia sector were carried out with success and they occupied all key locations.

The 39th Infantry Division continued to unload its vehicles and equipment from the TCG *Truva* and the *Köyceğiz* (P 1202), and by midday, its 49th Infantry Regiment was moving to its assembly area. To consolidate command in the north, General Ersin placed the Special Mission Strike Force and the Commando Brigade under Major General Demirel (39th Infantry Division commander). Ersin also attached four tanks and five APCs from Special Task Force Bora to the Commando Brigade and the



Photo courtesy of the Pakistan Defence Force M47s and M106, July 1974. A pair of Turkish M47 tanks and an M106 81mm mortar carrier advancing into the fight. The M106 is easily identifiable by the round mortar base plate attached to the right rear of the hull. The M106 is a variant of the M113 APC.

Airborne Brigade.<sup>3</sup> In doing this (combined with the previous attachment of tanks and APCs to the Turkish Cyprus Regiment), Ersin ensured that his lightly armed commando and paratroop infantry were now backed up by powerful mobile fighting units. At 1430, men from the 1st Airborne Battalion captured Pilerí, Cyprus, and about the same time, Brigadier General Borataş was wounded in the left knee while commanding the final mopping-up operations in Kyrenia. He arrived at the VI Corps command post two hours later for treatment and joked with Ersin about his wounds.

As darkness fell, the infantrymen of the Turkish Army's 50th Infantry Regiment marched through Kyrenia to take up positions on the coast,

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<sup>3</sup> Sever, *20 Temmuz 1974*, 146.

relieving the exhausted 2d Airborne Battalion, which was pulled back into reserve in the center of the lodgment.<sup>4</sup> The dangerous Greek Cypriot salient around Dhikomo was finally eliminated and the front lines of the Turks' eastern flank straightened out. Spirits were high in the Turkish command posts, and that evening Turkish journalists and television reporters could be found in the headquarters of the Commando Brigade interviewing soldiers.<sup>5</sup>

Along the Nicosia lines, the EF's 23d Tank Battalion moved back to the area of the Nicosia seminary in the city center. The battalion left one platoon of four T-34/85 tanks behind at the ELDYK Camp. The 286th Mechanized Infantry Battalion advanced its positions east of Karavás, while its maintenance section repaired several BTR-152V1s, which had been hit earlier by Turkish fire.

## **FIREFIGHTS ON THE MARGINS**

### **24 July**

Turkish memoirs record 24 July as a day that generally passed quietly (*"Genellikle sakin bir gün geçirildi"*).<sup>6</sup> However, the VI Corps commander passed orders to the Airborne Brigade to seize Buffavento Castle the following day. Brigadier General Evren decided to assault the castle with his 3d Airborne Battalion in a two-pronged attack, and his paratroopers prepared through the night. The VI Corps also passed orders to the Commando Brigade to prepare to seize the village of Sýsklipos, Cyprus, on 26 July. While these events occurred, the 49th Infantry Regiment relieved the 50th

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<sup>4</sup> Cumhuriyet Evcil, *Yavru Vatan Kıbrıs'ta Zaferin Hikâyesi* (Ankara, Turkey: Genelkurmay Basım Evi, 1999), map 1, 81.

<sup>5</sup> Erol Mütercimler, *Satılık Ada Kıbrıs, Kıbrıs Barış Harekâtının Bilinmeyen Yönleri* (Istanbul, Turkey: Alfa Basım Yayım Dağıtım, 2007), 633.

<sup>6</sup> Sever, *20 Temmuz 1974*, 152.

Infantry Regiment and took over tactical responsibility for the northeastern flank of the lodgment.

### **25 July**

Evren's paratroopers launched their attack on Buffavento Castle on 25 July at 0800, which was held by the men of the EF's 361st Infantry Battalion. The castle sat atop a mountain and dominated the surrounding approaches. The paratroopers made some progress against the stout defenders but by 1400 their attack had completely stalled. The battalion commander called off the attack but made preparations that evening to renew the assault after resting his unit. He issued final attack orders to his commanders at 0300 on 26 July.

The Commando Brigade tasked its 2d Commando Battalion to prepare the assault on Sýsklipos, and the brigade intended to employ a tank company of 10 M47 Patton tanks as well as artillery fire support from a 105mm howitzer battery. The brigade expanded the attack sector to include the 3d Commando Battalion (-) to the south of the 2d Battalion. As planned, the 2d Battalion would seize Sýsklipos and the 3d Battalion (-), supported by the armor company, would seize the village of Agios Ermolaos, Cyprus. Once this was accomplished, the 3d Battalion would swing north to seize the village of Agridáki, Cyprus.<sup>7</sup>

Meanwhile, at Kriní Airfield, the commander of the 230th Infantry Regiment, Colonel Nezihi, arrived by helicopter at the LZ with the remaining personnel of the regiment. Later, the 1st Battalion, 14th Infantry Regiment, also arrived by helicopter at the Kriní Airfield, and at the end of the day deployed into the center of the lodgment as a reserve behind the Commando Brigade.

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<sup>7</sup> Sever, *20 Temmuz 1974*, 152–56, including map 18A.

## 26 July

The commander of the 3d Airborne Battalion began his final attack on Buffavento Castle with two platoons climbing the slopes supported by machine guns emplaced in the Buffavento woods. At 1215, he notified Brigadier General Evren that his paratroopers had control of the castle.<sup>8</sup>

The Commando Brigade's attack on the three villages began at 1630 with the 2d Battalion and eight tanks assaulting Ayermola and the 3d Battalion attacking on its right flank. Both battalions encountered heavy machine-gun and 106mm fire from the high ground, and after three hours, the brigade called in a 105mm artillery barrage.<sup>9</sup> The advance continued and the brigade's objectives were secured by 1500.

At 1020, helicopters arrived at Kriní Airfield carrying the 2d Battalion, 14th Infantry Regiment. At 1830, Lieutenant General Ersin ordered the 230th Infantry Regiment and the 2d Battalion, 14th Infantry Regiment, to stand by to receive new missions. Also that evening, the landing ship, tank TCG *Ertuğrul* (L 401) returned to the beachhead with reinforcements.

## 27 July

The officers of the Turkish 2d Commando Battalion visited the former headquarters of the EF battalion at the Boğazköy garrison where they enjoyed a brief respite in the EF officer's club.<sup>10</sup>

The Turks brought in the 28th Division Tank Battalion, which landed near Kyrenia and moved to an assembly area for concentration.

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<sup>8</sup> Turan Erdem, *Kıbrıs Barış Harekâtı'nda 3 ncü Paraşüt Taburu* (Ankara, Turkey: Genelkurmay Basım Evi, 1999), map 6, 63.

<sup>9</sup> "Komando Tugay Komutanlığı'ndan Piyade Albay Salih Gülerüz'ün Anı-Raporu" (Document 2), in *Mütercimler, Satılık Ada Kıbrıs*, 634–35; and Sever, *20 Temmuz 1974*, 156.

<sup>10</sup> "Komando Tugay Komutanlığı'ndan Piyade Albay Salih Gülerüz'ün Anı-Raporu" (Document 2), in *Mütercimler, Satılık Ada Kıbrıs*, 636.

## **28 July**

The first helicopter sorties bringing in the 61st Infantry Regiment to Kriní Airfield landed at 0855. The regimental commander, Colonel Şinasi Can, accompanied the first element. Lieutenant General Ersin ordered the 14th Infantry Regiment into the line east of Kyrenia to relieve the 50th Infantry Regiment, which was pulled back into reserve. The 1st Company, 28th Division Tank Battalion, reached Kriní Airfield at 1230 and an hour later formed a task force with the 61st Infantry Regiment.<sup>11</sup>

## **29 July**

This was a quiet day along the front lines as 296 individual replacements from the Turkish Third Army arrived at Kriní Airfield and were distributed to subordinate units by the VI Corps G-1 (the personnel/administration officer on staff).<sup>12</sup> At 1625, Major General Fazıl Polat, the commander of the 28th Infantry Division, arrived at Kriní Airfield with his command group. He established the divisional command post colocated with the headquarters of his 61st Infantry Regiment. Meanwhile, along the northwest front, the Marine Regiment coordinated fire plans and defensive positions with its supporting artillery and engineers.

## **30–31 July**

The EF 23d Tank Battalion moved to an assembly area east of the village of Latsiá, Cyprus, and continued its reorganization and refit. The battalion had 21 tanks remaining at this time and reorganized them into seven 3-tank platoons. One T-34/85 platoon remained in Famagusta and three more moved to Skyllouúra, Makedonítissa (a suburb of Nicosia), and

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<sup>11</sup> “Deniz Piyade Albay İlhan Aloğlu’nun Anıları” (Document 3), in Mütercimler, *Satılık Ada Kıbrıs*, 598.

<sup>12</sup> Mütercimler, *Satılık Ada Kıbrıs*, 599.

Aglantziá, Cyprus, respectively, to counter flanking attacks by Turkish armor against Nicosia.<sup>13</sup>

By 30 July, all of the VI Corps combat units and headquarters elements had arrived on the island, although additional forces of M48 Patton tanks from the 5th Armored Brigade would arrive in early August. The American-made M48s were the most modern tanks in the Turkish Army's armored forces. These forces would be used to break out from the lodgment to the Attila Line. The original Yıldız Atma-4 campaign plan envisioned the 39th Infantry Division (Reinforced) breaking out toward Famagusta and the 28th Infantry Division (Reinforced) breaking out in the west toward Lefka, Cyprus.<sup>14</sup> However, the northern coastal sector of the lodgment itself was still not as wide as planned, and this drove the VI Corps planners to continue operations aimed at pushing the EF away from the Kyrenia harbor. These operations would last for two weeks and, in that time, Lieutenant General Ersin would significantly change the operational concept for the breakout.

To support the westward expansion along the coast, Lieutenant General Ersin ordered the 61st Infantry Regiment (+) to deploy to assembly areas in the Láþithos-Karavás woods, and at 0830, civilian buses departed with the first load of the regiment's infantrymen. Ersin's intent was to use the combined arms task force to seize the village of Láþithos. Countering Ersin's concentration of armor, the EF regrouped the 286th Mechanized Infantry Battalion, which had been reinforced by the improvised TS tracked carriers from the 21st Armored Reconnaissance Battalion's Assault Company.<sup>15</sup> The following day passed quietly without major changes or activity while both sides prepared for combat.

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<sup>13</sup> Mamounidakis, *Armor on Cyprus*, 71.

<sup>14</sup> Sever, *20 Temmuz 1974*, 151 (see Annex 17-1 map).

<sup>15</sup> Mamounidakis, *Armor on Cyprus*, 71.

## EF REORGANIZATION—EARLY AUGUST

By early August, the EF General Staff, which moved its headquarters south to Kórnos, Cyprus, had reorganized the basic configuration of its forces into three tactical sectors. Confronting the Turks in the east, the EF established the Eastern Sector Command, with five battalions holding the line, from north to south these were: the 361st Infantry Battalion, the 346th TE Battalion, the 351st Infantry Battalion (+), the Markos Battle Group, and the 399th TE Battalion.<sup>16</sup> The frontline infantry was backed up by mobile reserves that included the provisional 9th and 12th Tactical Groups, and the 226th and 241st Infantry Battalions. The 32d Commando Battalion held the beaches of the northern coast. The Markos Battle Group held the vulnerable open terrain west of the village of Mia Miliá, Cyprus, and had laid three large minefields, which were well covered by four vehicle-mounted 106mm recoilless rifles, a GAZ-69 light truck with four Snapper antitank missile launchers, and a 6-pounder/57mm antitank battery from the 173d Artillery Battalion.<sup>17</sup>

The Western Sector Command held the lines from Láþithos to the Nicosia International Airport. From north to south, the Western Sector Command was composed of the 316th TE Battalion, the 281st Infantry Battalion (+), the 231st Infantry Battalion (+), and the 216th Infantry Battalion holding the front lines, with the 256th Infantry Battalion in northern reserve and the 33d Commando Battalion in central reserve.<sup>18</sup> The Western Sector Command positioned the 286th Mechanized Infantry Battalion in the village of Mýrtou as its mobile reserve. It also retained the 33d (-) and 34th Commando Battalions in reserve.

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<sup>16</sup> Mamounidakis, *Armor on Cyprus*, map "Eastern Sector Operations," 73.

<sup>17</sup> Mamounidakis, *Armor on Cyprus*, 70.

<sup>18</sup> Mamounidakis, *Armor on Cyprus*, map "Western Sector Operations," 79.



Photo courtesy of Mesut Uyar, author's collection  
Turkish infantry advancing. The round plate that is open on the rear of the abandoned T-34/85 tank allows access to disconnect the final drives. Combined with the towing cable on the ground behind the tank, it appears that the Cypriot National Guard was about to recover this tank from the battlefield when it was abandoned.

A third EF command remained responsible for the Nicosia front. In the city itself, the 211th Infantry Battalion held the front lines and the 1st and 2d ELDYK Battalions held the front lines west from the city to the Nicosia International Airport where they were flanked by the UN contingent. A Marmon-Herrington platoon and a company from the 33d Commando Battalion constituted the tactical reserves. The 21st Armored Reconnaissance Battalion (-) remained on this front; however, the EF General Staff dispersed three of its Marmon-Herrington platoons, placing one west of Nicosia and two more deploying to join the Eastern Sector Command to become the mobile reserve of the 9th and 12th Tactical Groups.

The general reserve composed most of the remaining 23d Tank Battalion (-), the 35th Commando Battalion, and a company of the 31st Commando Battalion, which were grouped about 4km southeast of Nicosia. The Artillery Command was positioned to support EF units holding the major enemy avenues of approach.<sup>19</sup> In the eastern sector, the 181st and 185th Artillery Regiments (25-pounders) and the 189th Artillery Regiment (100mm guns) delivered direct support to the EF units concentrated along the Mia Miliá-Famagusta Road. The 182d and 183d Artillery Regiments (25-pounders), as well as the 187th Artillery Battalion (100mm guns) and the 198th Artillery Battery (75mm guns), gave direct support to the western sector. The ELDYK Regiment in the Nicosia suburbs near the airport received direct support from the 25-pounders of the 184th Artillery Regiment (table 6.1).

Greek historian Ioannis Mamounidakis noted that “chaos and insubordination reigned in the ranks of the National Guard, at this time, while unit manning levels were low, due to a high number of desertions.”<sup>20</sup> Reservists abandoned their units, especially if they came from areas already controlled by the Turks. Moreover, Mamounidakis continued, “Morale was at its lowest and there was suspicion toward Hellenic Army officers serving in the National Guard because of their participation in the coup, and on the other because of the idleness exhibited [by the leadership] during the Turkish invasion.” However, Mamounidakis also noted that the elite units, particularly the 21st Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, remained cohesive and battle-worthy.

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<sup>19</sup> Georgios Sergis, *The Battle of Cyprus: July–August 1974, The Anatomy of Tragedy* (Athens, Greece: Afi Vlassi, 1996), see p. 580 for a map of eastern artillery range fans and p. 601 for a map of eastern artillery range fans.

<sup>20</sup> Mamounidakis, *Armor on Cyprus*, 64.

**Table 6.1. Cypriot National Guard—reorganized forces**

<b>EF GENERAL HEADQUARTERS—Kórnos (20km east of Larnaca)</b>	
<b>Armored Command</b>	23d Tank Battalion (-)
	286th Mechanized Infantry Battalion (-)
	21st Armored Reconnaissance Battalion (-)
<b>Eastern Sector Command</b>	9th Tactical Group: 346th and 361st TE Battalions; 32d Commando Battalion
	12th Tactical Group: 251st Infantry Battalion (+), Markos Battle Group (a.k.a. 305th TE Battalion), 399th TE Battalion, and 173d Anti-Tank Battalion (-)
	15th Tactical Group: 291st Infantry Battalion
	398th TE Battalion (fixing the Turkish Tziaos enclave)
	Reserve: 241st and 226th Infantry Battalions
<b>Western Sector Command</b>	11th Tactical Group: 231st and 256th Infantry Battalions, 281st Infantry Battalion (+), 216th TE Battalion, 316th TE Battalion (+), and 70th Engineer Battalion (-)
	Reserve: 33d and 34th Commando Battalions
<b>Nicosia Sector Command</b>	1st and 2d Infantry Battalions
	ELDYK Regiment
	211th, 212th, and 336th TE Battalions
	31st and 35th Commando Battalions
<b>Famagusta Command</b>	6th Tactical Group: 201st Infantry Battalion
	331st and 341st TE Battalions
<b>Artillery Command</b> Nicosia	181st, 182d, 183rd, 184th, and 185th Artillery Battalions
	187th and 189th Artillery Battalions
	198th Mountain Artillery Battery

Source: Sever, *20 Temmuz 1974* Kibris Bitmeyen Gece. Additionally, the authors are grateful to well-known Greek publisher and defense journalist Savvas D. Vlassis for his review and corrections to the EF order of battle.

## FIREFIGHTS ON THE MARGINS

### **1 August**

On 1 August, General Eşref Akıncı, the Turkish Land Forces commander, and General Suat Aktulga, the Second Army commander, flew into the lodgment and were given a situation briefing by Lieutenant General Ersin at the corps command post.<sup>21</sup> After the briefing adjourned, the generals very likely discussed the operational situation and future plans.<sup>22</sup> Afterward, General Ersin ordered the 1st Battalion, 230th Infantry Regiment, returned to its parent unit, the 28th Infantry Division, from attachment to the Commando Brigade.

### **2 August**

An extremely unusual event happened on this day in 1974 that is widely remembered by Greek Cypriots today. On the afternoon of 2 August, a mixed battle group of Turkish paratroopers and a mechanized infantry company with M113 APCs, supported by a platoon of M47 Patton tanks, pushed west through the lower southern spurs of the Pentadákylos mountain range. They advanced toward Lapíthou along a single lane road, which had on one side a cliff face and a precipitous drop off into the forest below on the other. The battle group's objective was to cut the route from Vasíleia and Pánagra, Cyprus. The Turkish task force ran into a well-prepared ambush set up by the men of the EF 316th TE Battalion, who had laid antitank mines in the road.<sup>23</sup> They established an overwatch position on the heights of Kórnos and covered the minefield with a 106mm recoilless antitank rifle. As the Turks came down the road, the 106mm missed

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<sup>21</sup> Sever, *20 Temmuz 1974*, 163.

<sup>22</sup> This is speculation on the authors' part, but the subsequent change in the VI Corps concept of operations as reflected in the TGS *Amended Directive* of 10 August 1974 suggests this is a likely conclusion.

<sup>23</sup> Mamounidakis, *Armor on Cyprus*, 66–67.



Photo courtesy of the Pakistan Defence Force  
The operational commanders. Gen Suat Aktulga and LtGen Nurettin Ersin discussing the situation. The Second Army commander flew into the lodgment on 1 August 1974 for briefings by LtGen Ersin.

a shot on the lead M47 tank, but the tank soon ran into the minefield, hitting an antitank mine, which blew off one of its tracks and immobilized it. The alert Greek gunners then hit the fourth vehicle in the Turkish column, which was an M113 APC, with another 106mm round, completely destroying it. The Turkish column was now trapped on the narrow mountain road between the immobilized lead tank and the demolished M113 APC. Caught in an ambush and unable to extricate themselves, under the threat of renewed 106mm fire, the Turkish crews abandoned their vehicles and withdrew.

The surprised reservists of the 316th TE Battalion now found themselves in possession of a completely intact M47 main battle tank and an

M113 APC, both of which were fully armed and equipped. They informed their high headquarters and requested that tank recovery specialists be dispatched to assist in the retrieval of the captured vehicles. In their haste to recover the intact vehicles, the recovery team accidentally pushed the damaged M47 tank over the edge of road but then set it on fire to prevent its recapture. The captured M47 and M113 were driven to Ayios Vasilios, Cyprus, where the EF incorporated them immediately into a special composite platoon, under armor Captain Konstantinos Haralambous. It included the M47, the M113, five Marmon-Herringtons, and a vehicle-mounted 106mm recoilless rifle.<sup>24</sup> Although Haralambous's platoon belonged to the 21st Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, it was attached to the 286th Mechanized Infantry Battalion. The next day, the platoon redeployed to Skilloúra, where it joined the three-tank platoon from the 23d Tank Battalion, creating a small tactical concentration of armor.

### **3 August**

Lieutenant General Ersin issued VI Corps *Operations Order Number 5*, which attached the 2d Battalion, 50th Infantry Regiment, to the Turkish Cyprus Regiment in order to withdraw the 4th Airborne Battalion.<sup>25</sup> The paratroopers needed to rest and refit for future operations with their brigade. *Operations Order Number 5* also reorganized the 39th Infantry Division for future operations by assigning to it the 14th and 49th Infantry Regiments, the Nevşehir Jandarma Commando Battalion, and the 3d Battalion, 50th Infantry Regiment, effective at 1100 that day. Ersin designated the 28th Infantry Division, minus the 61st Infantry Regiment, as the VI Corps reserve. The Commando Brigade continued to plan for offensive

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<sup>24</sup> Mamounidakis, *Armor on Cyprus*, 66–67.

<sup>25</sup> Sever, *20 Temmuz 1974*, 163.

operations, and its commandos managed to take some of the important high ground overlooking the village of Lápthos. Additionally, on this day, the 4th Airborne Battalion arrived in the airborne brigade's assembly area near the Dhikomo villages. The next day passed quietly.

### **5 August**

Lieutenant General Ersin issued VI Corps *Operations Order Number 6* at 0630 to the 28th Infantry Division, the Commando Brigade, and the Marine Regiment.<sup>26</sup> According to this order, these forces would attack to seize the villages of Lápthos and Karavás the next morning. Ersin's plan envisioned the two Marine battalions attacking west to seize Karavás, simultaneously attacking north and seizing Lápthos with the 61st Infantry Regiment, while on the left flank the Commando Brigade advanced north to the coast. This operation was the last significant tactical operation conducted by the Turks before the resumption of full-scale hostilities 10 days later. The purpose of the operation was to eliminate the last remaining EF salient that protruded deeply into the Turkish lodgment.

## **THE SEIZURE OF LÁPITHOS AND KARAVÁS**

Ersin's attack began at 0315 on 6 August with the Commando Brigade attacking in its assigned sector of the front. The Turkish artillery fired brief preparatory fires, after which the 61st Infantry Regiment attacked at 0630 but immediately ran into the lines of the EF 256th Infantry Battalion, which had laid minefields in front of its positions. The EF Western Command had reinforced the 256th Infantry Battalion with the 2d Company, 286th Mechanized Infantry Battalion (three BTR-152V1s and one TS APC), an

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<sup>26</sup> Sever, *20 Temmuz 1974*, 164.

ELDYK company, three companies of reserve infantry, an engineer company from the 70th Engineer Battalion, and a Marmon-Herrington platoon.<sup>27</sup> The Greek Cypriots were unable to hold back the overwhelming Turkish force, but slowly retreated under intense pressure toward Vasíleia, Cyprus. The commander ordered the armored vehicles of the 2d Company to provide cover for the withdrawing EF infantry, but the company commander disappeared in the fighting. In the chaotic withdrawal, the company lost all of its BTR-152V1 armored personnel carriers and, as it withdrew into Vasíleia, a Turkish M72 LAW rocket hit the remaining TS, forcing its abandonment as well. The Marmon-Herrington platoon maneuvered with great dash, giving fire support to the retreating infantry as well as conducting timely casualty evacuation. The platoon withdrew behind Vasíleia, suffering no losses.

By the end of the day, the Turkish Marine battalions had neither completely secured Karavás nor had the 61st Infantry Regiment completely secured Láþithos. A Turkish memoir noted that the weather was unusually hot, which may have been a factor affecting offensive operations.<sup>28</sup> The failure to take Láþithos particularly concerned Brigadier General Demirbağ, whose well-rested and aggressive Commando Brigade had already reached the coast and, as a consequence, now had an exposed left flank. That night, however, infantrymen of the 61st Infantry finally cleared Láþithos, and the next morning were able to advance to the coast. The following days were generally quiet as the Turks consolidated their gains and the Greek Cypriots continued to harden their defensive lines. On 9 August, Major General Polat organized the 230th Regimental Combat Team

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<sup>27</sup> Mamounidakis, *Armor on Cyprus*, 72.

<sup>28</sup> "Komando Tugay Komutanlığı'ndan Piyade Albay Salih Gülerüz'ün Anı-Raporu" (Document 2), in Mütercimler, *Satılık Ada Kıbrıs*, 642.

composed of the infantry regiment, the 2d Artillery Battalion, the 1st Combat Engineer Company, and a Cobra antitank company.<sup>29</sup>

## PLANNING THE VI CORPS OPERATIONAL OFFENSIVE

On 10 August 1974, the Turkish General Staff issued an *Amended Directive (Tadil Direktifi)* to the Yildiz Atma-4 plan and ordered revisions to the operational offensive.<sup>30</sup> An earlier directive from Ankara specified that only the Serdarlı District would be taken as the operational objective; however, the *Amended Directive* was far more ambitious and was probably the outcome of the 1 August meeting between Generals Ersin, Akıncı, and Aktulga. General Ersin envisioned an operational offensive that secured the Attila Phase Line as the Turkish VI Corps' overall objective. In addition to seizing the Serdarlı District, the *Amended Directive* also established the deep operational objectives of the city of Famagusta and the Karpasía Peninsula. The Turkish General Staff's new directive also specified that the VI Corps must be ready to execute the operation on 14 August. Lieutenant General Ersin assigned the code name Victory (*Parola Zafer*) to the operation and set a planning and preparations deadline of 13 August 1974. Ersin's operational plan concentrated the 39th and 28th Infantry Divisions to seize the Serdarlı District and Áskeia and Sínta, respectively, and then exploit to the Karpasía Peninsula and Famagusta. General Ersin ordered both divisions to form armored battle groups to pursue the defeated enemy forces, and he also motorized two airborne infantry battalions as the VI Corps reserve.<sup>31</sup> As an operational concept, the VI Corps' main effort is known in contemporary military terminology as a *breakout*

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<sup>29</sup> "230. Piyade Alayı Komutanı Piyade Kurmay Kidemli Albay M. Nezih Sıral'ın Anıları" (Document 1), in Mütercimler, *Satılık Ada Kıbrıs*, 609.

<sup>30</sup> Sever, *20 Temmuz 1974*, 171.

<sup>31</sup> Sever, *20 Temmuz 1974*, 171.

*and exploitation. Exploitation* is a doctrinal term meaning an offensive operation that usually follows a successful attack and is designed to disorganize the enemy in depth.

As a supporting effort on the offensive's right flank, General Ersin ordered the Turkish Cyprus Regiment to seize the Turkish Cypriot neighborhoods of Nicosia and the villages to the west of the Nicosia International Airport. Having taken away the airborne battalion from Colonel Katircioğlu, General Ersin had already reinforced the Turkish Cyprus Regiment with the 2d Battalion, 50th Infantry Regiment, and believed it to be strong enough to launch attacks on the suburbs of Nicosia. But, as an added precaution, Ersin planned to send an armor company or two to augment Katircioğlu's combat power.

Finally, General Ersin designated Brigadier General Demirbağ's Commando Brigade as the VI Corps reserve. However, Ersin assigned Demirbağ an "on order" mission to conduct a secondary effort using the reinforced Commando Brigade to seize Mórfou in the west and, if successful, continue the offensive toward Lefka.<sup>32</sup> This was contingent on the eastern offensive's success so that a corps reserve was no longer required.

### **12–13 August**

Major General Polat organized his 28th Infantry Division for combat by turning the 14th Infantry Regiment into a provisional Armored Battle Group (*zırhlı muharebe grubu*). He loaded the infantrymen of its battalions into M113 APCs and attached two M47 tank companies and two M48 tank

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<sup>32</sup> *On order* means that all preparations for an operation are completed and the commanders are awaiting the order from above to execute the operation.

companies from the 5th Armored Brigade to it as well.<sup>33</sup> The Armored Battle Group would be followed by the 61st and 230th Infantry Regiments. To his north, Major General Demirel organized the 39th Infantry Division in a similar fashion by putting a battalion of the 49th Infantry Regiment into M113 APCs and likewise attached two companies of M47 tanks and two companies of M48 tanks to the regiment. The 49th Infantry and its attachments were designated as Special Task Force Bora and would drive into the center of the division's sector with the Jandarma Commando Battalion and the 3d Battalion, 50th Infantry Regiment, on its north.<sup>34</sup>

In the west, Brigadier General Demirbağ also spent the time preparing his attacks, but he had more time available because General Ersin had decided to launch the western offensive a day later than the initial eastern offensive. His main effort was aimed at Mórfoú, and he organized a task force composed of the 28th Division Tank Battalion (-), his own 1st Commando Battalion, and Erven's 4th Airborne Battalion.<sup>35</sup> Demirbağ's 3d Commando Battalion would attack on the task force's right flank and assist in seizing Mórfoú. The 2d Commando Battalion lay to the north and was tasked with seizing the coastal village of Akdeniz, Cyprus.

## THE GENEVA CONFERENCES

While the diplomats went to Geneva, Switzerland, the soldiers continued to plan and fight. During the operational pause, Lieutenant General Ersin proved especially vigorous in cleaning up the Greek Cypriot salient, which

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<sup>33</sup> Mamounidakis, *Armor on Cyprus*, 75. Sever, in his memoir *20 Temmuz 1974*, asserts that the 28th Infantry Division's Armored Battle Group was composed of the Turkish Army Demonstration Training Regiment (*Gösteri Tatbikat Alayı*). See *20 Temmuz 1974*, 179. The M46/48 series American tanks were all called Patton tanks. The M48 was an improved version of the M47.

<sup>34</sup> Sever, *20 Temmuz 1974*, map 21A, 176.

<sup>35</sup> Sever, *20 Temmuz 1974*, map 22B, 182.

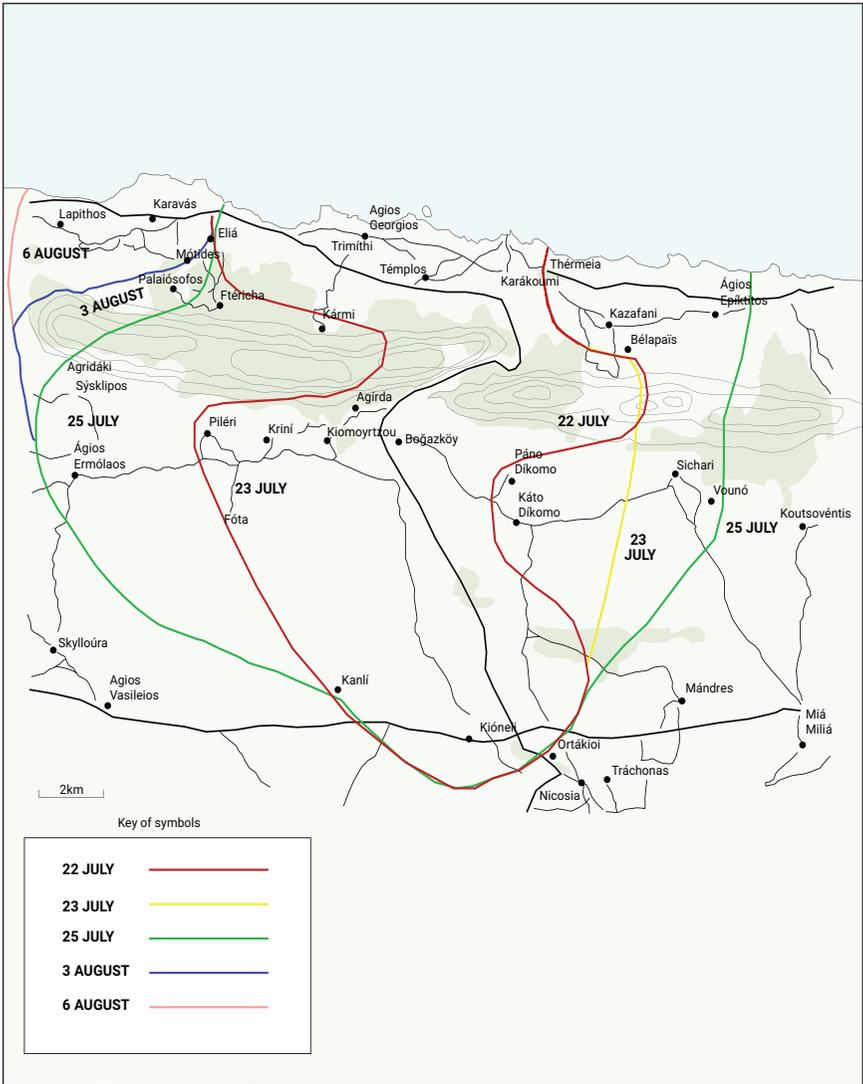


Photo courtesy of the Pakistan Defence Force  
Turkish M48s. A pair of M48 Pattons facing the camera. These tanks were the most modern and capable on the island. They are easily distinguishable by the dome-shaped turret, while the older M47 version had a more rectangular turret.

intruded into the VI Corps lodgment. He was diligent and prudent in attaching tanks and APCs to his lightly armed commando, airborne, and infantry units in order to provide them with heavy mobile firepower. Ersin constantly reorganized his forces to achieve local concentrations of combat power to seize key terrain and important objectives.

The EF General Staff used the time to reorganize its defenses into three tactical sector commands. Its scarce pool of T-34/85 tanks were scattered rather than concentrated, with a platoon in the west at Skyllouúra, a platoon at Famagusta, a platoon at the ELDYK camp, and the remainder near the village of Aglantziá (southeast of Nicosia). In theory, the gener-

**Map 6.1. Eliminating the CNG salients, 23 July–14 August 1974**



Map by authors, adapted by MCUP

Much of the original lodgment lay within easy range of the Cypriot National Guard's powerful artillery. To protect the Turkish build-up required for the second phase of the operation, the VI Corps continually expanded the lodgment. This was accomplished mainly by eliminating CNG salients that intruded inside the Turkish perimeter.

al reserve established southeast of Nicosia was positioned to attack the right flank of any Turkish attack toward Famagusta. Overall, the EF lost much of its positional advantage along the coast during this phase.

In Geneva, the diplomats met for the first time on 25 July 1974. Great Britain sent its foreign minister, Sir James Callaghan, while American secretary of state Henry Kissinger remained in Washington, DC, sending instead a personal representative. This arrangement enabled Britain to take the lead in steering the conference.<sup>36</sup> Turkey and Greece sent their foreign ministers, Turhan Güneş and George Mavros, respectively. The first conference lasted through 30 July and ended in failure. Their differences were irreconcilable and the gap between the countries too vast to bridge. The Turks feared international intervention, both military and diplomatic, while the Greeks feared an enlarged permanent Turkish presence on the island. All parties were concerned with the status of the Turkish and Greek Cypriot communities in the combat zones, and there were a host of additional issues complicating resolution, including revising the 1960 constitution. The conference ended on 30 July with a joint declaration pledging a phased reduction of armed forces and war materiel and, in practice, accepting two autonomous administrations.<sup>37</sup>

The second conference began on 8 August and, in addition to the same representatives from the first conference, Cypriot leaders Rauf Denктаş and Glafkos Clerides (a prominent Greek Cypriot politician) arrived two days later. The conference was divisive with issues such as demographics and percentages of people relative to land being brought up constantly. The British thought that the Americans were not bringing

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<sup>36</sup> Clement Dodd, *The History and Politics of the Cyprus Conflict* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 115–16, <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230275287>.

<sup>37</sup> Dodd, *The History and Politics of the Cyprus Conflict*, 118–19.

enough pressure to bear on the Turks to force them to cooperate. Considerations for rewriting the 1960 constitution and evacuating military forces dominated the Greek Cypriot dialogue.<sup>38</sup> In the end, Turkish prime minister Ecevit gave the conference a time limit to establish broad principles for going forward, which would expire at 2000 on 13 August. Unable to reach consensus, Ecevit relented and the final sessions began at 2115 on 13 August but were also unsuccessful and, after a break, resumed at 0140. The final sessions began at 2115 on 13 August and, after a break, resumed at 0140. Final agreement on anything could not be reached and the conference adjourned at 1525 on 14 August 1974.<sup>39</sup> The stage was now set for what the Turks would later come to call the Second Peace Operation (*İkinci Barış Harekâtı*) and which General Ersin called Operation Victory.

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<sup>38</sup> Dodd, *The History and Politics of the Cyprus Conflict*, 124.

<sup>39</sup> Dodd, *The History and Politics of the Cyprus Conflict*, 127.

## CHAPTER 7

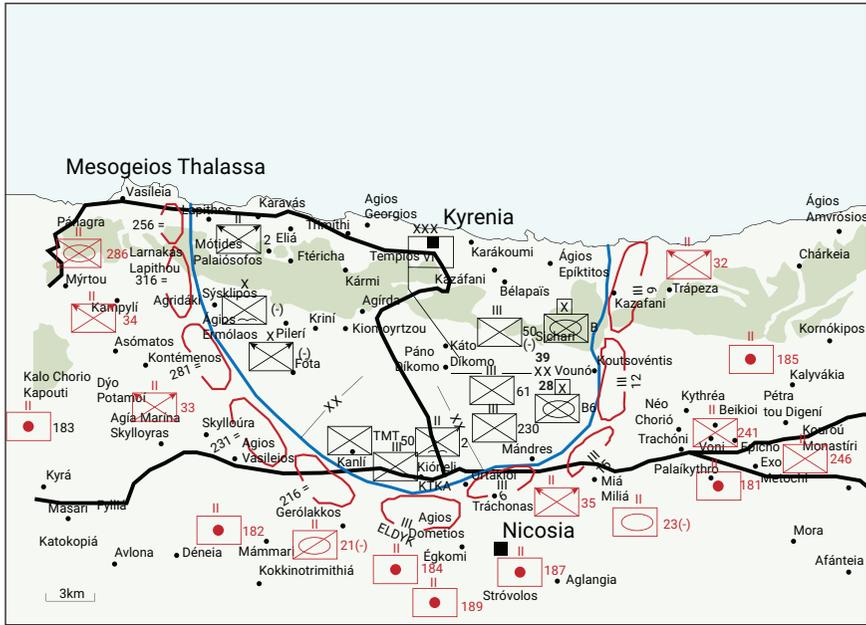
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# BREAKOUT TO PHASE LINE ATTLA, 14–16 AUGUST 1974

### INTRODUCTION

Unable to bring the four-power Geneva Conferences (Greece, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States) to a favorable conclusion, the Turkish government decided to undertake a full military campaign to occupy the northern one-third of Cyprus. The operational area supporting this had already been delineated by establishing a military limit of advance called “Phase Line Attila.” The two infantry divisions of the Turkish VI Corp stood ready to open the offensive in the east toward the Karpasía Peninsula and Famagusta, where the Turkish Resistance Organization still held the old city. In the west, the VI Corps’ Commando Brigade prepared to seize Mórfou on order should conditions be favorable. The operation was conducted in two operational phases on 14 August in the east and on 15 August in the west. The Greek Cypriot National Guard and the ELDYK, for its part, stood on the defensive in a hopeless battle to stop the armored might of the Turkish Army. Turkish combat operations were completed by the night of 16 August (with several very minor exceptions) when the VI Corps achieved its objective of reaching Phase Line Attila.

Map 7.1. Tactical situation, 13 August 1974



Map by authors, adapted by MCUP

The VI Corps concentrated two reinforced infantry divisions on the eastern flank of the Turkish lodgment. The flat and open terrain there accommodated armored and mechanized formations. Lighter airborne and commando forces on the western perimeter faced a much hillier and rolling terrain.

## OPERATION VICTORY—14 AUGUST 1974

At 1620 on 14 August 1974, all VI Corps units were put on alert, and at 0500 General Ersin, with his chief of operations and chief of intelligence, went to the Dikmen Tepe, a high hill overlooking the massed VI Corps armored formations. Units like the 230th Infantry Regiment moved forward to the line of departure at 0530 and tactical air strikes began at 0610.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “230. Piyade Alayı Komutanı Piyade Kurmay Kıdemli Albay M. Nezhir Siral’ın Anıları” (Document 1), in Erol Mütercimler, *Satılık Ada Kıbrıs, Kıbrıs Barış Harekâtının Bilinmeyen Yönleri* (Istanbul, Turkey: Alfa Basım Yayın Dağıtım, 2007), 610.

**Table 7.1. Turkish ground forces—Operation Victory**

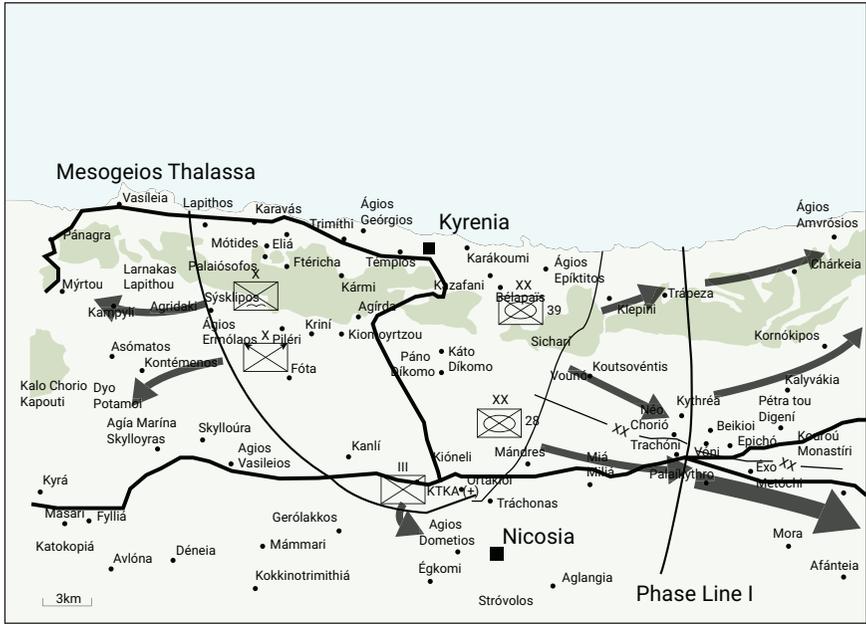
<b>VI CORPS, TURKISH SECOND ARMY</b>	
<b>Eastern Offensive 28th Infantry Division (+) Main Effort</b>	Provisional Armored Battle Group: 14th Infantry Regiment (+); two tank companies from 28th Tank Battalion; two tank companies from 5th Armor Brigade
	61st Infantry Regiment
	230th Infantry Regiment (+)
	2d Airborne Battalion
<b>39th Infantry Division (+) Supporting Effort</b>	Special Task Force Bora: 49th Infantry Regiment (+); two tank companies from 39th Tank Battalion; and two tank companies from 5th Armor Brigade
	50th Infantry Regiment (-)
	Jandarma Commando Battalion
<b>Western Offensive Commando Brigade (+)</b>	1st, 2d, and 3d Commando Battalions
	3d and 4th Airborne Battalions
	28th Tank Battalion (-)
<b>Koneli Front Katircioğlu Group</b>	Turkish Cyprus Regiment
	2d Battalion, 50th Infantry Regiment
	Two tank companies from 5th Armored Brigade; Kióneli and Nicosia TMT Regiments

Source: Mütercimler, *Satılık Ada Kıbrıs*.

Ersin’s divisional and corps artillery joined the bombardment at 0655.<sup>2</sup> Counterfire from the EF artillery and mortars began almost immediately, but Ersin’s VI Corps ground units crossed the line of departure at 0710 and Operation Victory was underway (table 7.1).

<sup>2</sup> Muzaffer Sever, *20 Temmuz 1974 Kıbrıs Bitmeyen Gece* (Istanbul, Turkey: Kastaş Yayınevi, 2010), 174.

Map 7.2. The breakout, 14–15 August 1974



Map by authors, adapted by MCUP

Operation Victory saw an extremely fast breakthrough of the Cypriot National Guard's front lines in the east. This was followed by the VI Corps' pursuit and exploitation to the port of Famagusta. In the west, Turkish armored companies reinforced the commandos and para-troops, who pushed to the town of Lefka.

The VI Corps staff planned a three-phase assault with two numbered phase lines as control measures for the eastern offensive. In the first phase, the 28th Infantry Division's objective was the village of Týmvou, Cyprus.<sup>3</sup> For this, Major General Polat planned to use the Armored Battle Group (the reinforced 14th Infantry Regiment) as his spearhead and follow it with the 61st Infantry Regiment, the Airborne Battalion, and the

<sup>3</sup> Sever, 20 Temmuz 1974, map 21-A, 176.



Photo courtesy of Selçuk Karaman, author's collection  
Turkish mechanized forces advancing. This image captures an M47 Patton tank and Turkish Army trucks. Task Force Bora (39th Infantry Division) would appear in this configuration for the breakout on 14 August 1974.

230th Infantry Regiment. In Major General Demirel's 39th Infantry Division sector, Task Force Bora (the reinforced 49th Infantry Regiment) was assigned the villages of Kythréa and Trachóni, Cyprus, as its objectives, while the Jandarma Commando Battalion and the 3d Battalion, 50th Infantry Regiment, were to seize the village of Klepíni, Cyprus, and the high ground to its south. Seizure of these objectives would put the two divisions abreast on Phase Line 1.

In the second phase, Polat's Armored Battle Group would seize Áskeia and Demirel and unleash Task Force Bora to seize Kiádos, while the Jandarma Commandos and the 3d Battalion, 50th Infantry Regiment, took Platymátis, Cyprus. This would put the two divisions abreast on Phase Line 2, which was beyond the EF's defensive belts.<sup>4</sup> Once the divisions were poised on Phase Line 2, they would enter the third phase to exploit their success by rapidly pushing the Armored Battle Group east to seize Sínta and Task Force Bora east toward Gýpsou, Cyprus.<sup>5</sup> From those locations, the 28th Infantry Division would swing southeast to seize Famagusta and the 39th Infantry Division would swing northeast to seize the Karpasía Peninsula.

Almost immediately, the Turks ran into the EF's defenses. Twenty M47 Patton tanks of the 39th Infantry Division's Armored Battle Group approached the EF's Markos Battle Group's heavily mined position near Mia Miliá. The Turkish tankers immediately found and followed the track prints made by United Nations' peacekeeper vehicles through the antitank mines and overran the position with overwhelming combat power.<sup>6</sup> The Greek Cypriot lines quickly collapsed with Marmon-Herrington platoons screening the remnants, which withdrew behind the reserve lines of the 226th Infantry Battalion. By about 1030, the Turks had seized their initial objectives, and by late afternoon, stood on Phase Line 1. As darkness fell, Polat and Demirel's men refueled and rearmed, preparing to resume the attack at dawn.

At 0800, the EF ordered a platoon of the 23d Tank Battalion's T-34/85 medium tanks and a company from the 33d Commando Battalion from

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<sup>4</sup> Sever, *20 Temmuz 1974*, map 21-A, 176.

<sup>5</sup> Sever, *20 Temmuz 1974*, map 22-A, 181.

<sup>6</sup> Ioannis S. Mamounidakis, *Armor on Cyprus: Evolution and Operations* (Athens, Greece: Trojan Horse, 2008), 75.

Aglantziá to counterattack the left flank of Major General Polat's 28th Infantry Division as it rolled east.<sup>7</sup> But Turkish combat power was overwhelming and the counterattack was called off. In the afternoon, the 23d Tank Battalion was ordered to send a second T-34/85 platoon with a company of the 31st Commando Battalion to the village of Pyrógi, Cyprus, as a blocking force. The small EF force occupied the abandoned village but later pulled back to a new position.

On the Kíoneli front, the three combat groups from the Turkish Cyprus Regiment opened up their attacks on three avenues of approach. The Airport Group attacked toward the old grammar school; the Ortaköy Group toward Ortákioi, Cyprus; and the Gönyeli (Kioneli) Group toward the Kilise Tepe (Church Hill).<sup>8</sup> Colonel Katircioğlu's intent was to encircle the airport—and perhaps a major part of the Greek Cyprus Regiment as well—from the north.<sup>9</sup> Fighting near the airport was fierce and the 2d Battalion, 50th Infantry Regiment, had 24 soldiers killed in a two-hour period.<sup>10</sup> By 1700, the Ortaköy Group had seized the Bayrak Tepe, and as darkness fell the front lines grew quiet.

As previously described, General Ersin designated the Commando Brigade as the VI Corps reserve and its western offensive was an on order mission, which was to take place after the success of the eastern offensive was judged successful. At 2330 on 14 August, General Aktulga, the Second Army commander, assessed that the conditions for the release of the reserve had been met and authorized Ersin to execute the western offensive.<sup>11</sup> A flurry of messages between the VI Corps headquarters and

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<sup>7</sup> Mamounidakis, *Armor on Cyprus*, 84.

<sup>8</sup> Sever, *20 Temmuz 1974*, 172.

<sup>9</sup> Sever, *20 Temmuz 1974*, 172.

<sup>10</sup> Sever, *20 Temmuz 1974*, 185.

<sup>11</sup> Sever, *20 Temmuz 1974*, 187.

the Commando Brigade headquarters quickly followed, primarily regarding motorization assets that would be needed to transport the commandos, as well as the best way to subordinate two airborne battalions from General Evren's Airborne Brigade and a tank battalion belonging to Major General Polat to Brigadier General Demirbağ's command.<sup>12</sup> However, by 0300 on 15 August, everything was ready and General Demirbağ was authorized to launch his attack.

During the course of the night, General Ersin notified Generals Demirel and Polat as well as Colonel Katircioğlu that he had released the VI Corps reserve for the western offensive and that immediate reserves were unavailable. However, General Ersin had a trick remaining up his sleeve, and he ordered the 1st Marine Battalion to move up from Kyrenia to the Krini Airfield to act as an expedient VI Corps reserve.<sup>13</sup> In any case, Ersin realized that this movement would take an unspecified period of time to execute because every available vehicle had been mobilized to support the offensives, and the Marines would have to march 30km on foot.<sup>14</sup>

## **OPERATION VICTORY—15 AUGUST 1974**

The VI Corps second offensive in the west began on the same early morning time schedule as the offensive in the east the previous day. At dawn, Turkish Air Force fighter bombers pounded the EF positions at Skylloura, where the EF's small armor concentration was located.<sup>15</sup> This was followed by a barrage of artillery and 4.2-inch mortar fire, after which Brigadier General Demirbağ's battalions crossed the line of departure. Not everyone went forward because Demirbağ had retained the 3d Airborne

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<sup>12</sup> Sever, *20 Temmuz 1974*, 187.

<sup>13</sup> Sever, *20 Temmuz 1974*, 187.

<sup>14</sup> "Deniz Piyade Albay İlhan Aloğlu'nun Anıları" (Document 3), in Mütercimler, *Satılık Ada Kıbrıs*, 690.

<sup>15</sup> Mamounidakis, *Armor on Cyprus*, 78.



Photo courtesy of the Pakistan Defence Force  
Moving under mortar fire. Turkish mechanized infantry react as incoming Cypriot National Guard mortar fire impacts in the center of the image.

Battalion as his tactical reserve.<sup>16</sup> The advance was slower than planned, possibly because of burning grass and brush, which obstructed normal observation. This particularly affected Turkish offensive operations as it had previously at the beachhead on 20 and 21 July. This did not seem to affect the commandos attacking the EF 281st Infantry Battalion on foot in the north and the 2d Commando Battalion seized the outskirts of Mófou, cutting the Nicosia-Pánagra road at 1140.

As the armored task force moved west, it ran into EF minefields, which had to be cleared by Turkish engineers. This delayed the main effort substantially so that the armored task force did not actually come in contact with the EF until about 1300. Two tank companies of the 28th Division Tank

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<sup>16</sup> Turan Erdem, *Kıbrıs Barış Harekâtı'nda 3 ncü Paraşüt Taburu* (Ankara, Turkey: Genelkurmay Basım Evi, 1999), 84–86.

Battalion (consisting of 15 M47 Patton tanks) led Demirbağ's main effort, which also included the 1st Commando Battalion, the 4th Airborne Battalion, and a battery of 105mm howitzers through Skyllouúra toward Mórfoú. They met and were slowed down by the ever-present Marmon-Herringtons and a squad from the EF 286th Mechanized Infantry Battalion. The EF's defense force facing the Turkish armored task force's axis of advance was the 231st Infantry Regiment (+), which had a mechanized infantry platoon and the provisional armored platoon attached to it.

Around 1500, the Turkish M47s and M113 APCs were held up 600m east of the Skyllouúra village, crossing a small stream where an EF 106mm recoilless rifle put one of the Turkish tanks out of action.<sup>17</sup> This much is known and verified in the Turkish record. However, what happened next is contested history. Indeed, the ensuing actions in the Greek Cypriot narrative becomes nearly mythological.

Greek Cypriots related the following story.<sup>18</sup> Captain Haralambous, who had been waiting in Skyllouúra in the captured M113 APC, saw an opportunity to lead his mixed platoon into action. Haralambous sent the captured M47 tank forward, covered by the rest of the platoon and entered into "a peculiar tank guerrilla war."<sup>19</sup> The EF M47 engaged a Turkish M47 at close range with its 90mm main gun, completely destroying it. Apparently, the Turkish tank crews had not been warned that the Greek Cypriots had captured one of their own M47 Pattons and mistook Haralambous's tank for one of theirs. During the next two hours, according to Greek historian Ioannis Mamounidakis, the EF M47 destroyed five more Turkish main

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<sup>17</sup> Halil Sadrazam, *İkinci Harekât ve Sonrası Ağustos 1974* (Lefkoşa, Northern Cyprus: Söylem Yayınları, 2014), 1,826.

<sup>18</sup> While the veracity of this story is contested by the Turks, it is a fact that the Cypriot National Guard has possession of, and conspicuously displays, the captured Turkish M47 Patton tank to this day.

<sup>19</sup> Mamounidakis, *Armor on Cyprus*, 80–81.

battle tanks and mowed down accompanying infantry with machine-gun fire.<sup>20</sup> Mamounidakis asserts that one important advantage the EF M47 had was that its electrical turret traversing gear had been repaired by the 23d Tank Battalion's support element while the Turkish M47s' electrical traversing gear was inoperable, forcing much slower manual turret traverse. Late in the afternoon, Haralambous successfully withdrew his armored vehicles, and today the EF's captured M47 has achieved legendary status on display in the Greek Cypriot National Guard's museum, where it is still in working condition. The Turkish advance continued at 1730.<sup>21</sup>

On the Turkish side, the incident is mentioned in only one narrative available to the authors. According to Turkish historian Halil Sadrazam, what occurred east of Skyllouúra was a very small and brief encounter. Sadrazam mentions the tank encounter and the 106mm fire but does not list any Turkish losses beyond the initial main battle tank that was put out of action.<sup>22</sup> According to Mamounidakis, this was the only actual armored engagement during the campaign, and he states that Demirbağ's task force lost eight M47 Pattons that day—five to armor piercing shells, two to incendiary shells from the EF M47, and one to a 106mm recoilless rifle. These claims seem wildly excessive and the authors believe that such a dramatic and unusual event would surely have achieved wide notice.

The Turks pushed on through the village, and in the evening Haralambous pulled his platoon and the infantry survivors back into Mórfoú. The tank battle near Skyllouúra resulted in a tactical pause for the Turkish offensive, and General Demirbağ's armored task force settled in laagers for the night between Skyllouúra and Mórfoú. To the north, the 2d and 3d Com-

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<sup>20</sup> Mamounidakis, *Armor on Cyprus*, 80–81.

<sup>21</sup> Sadrazam, *İkinci Harekât ve Sonrası Ağustos 1974*, 1,826.

<sup>22</sup> Sadrazam, *İkinci Harekât ve Sonrası Ağustos 1974*, 1,826.

mando Battalions had successfully pushed the EF 281st Infantry Battalion out of its lines and seized the Karpaşa woods, creating a deep salient. Demirbağ then brought his reserve 3d Airborne Battalion into the salient for follow-on operations.

To the south, on Demirbağ's left flank, operations were not going especially well in the Turkish Cyprus Regiment's sector. EF artillery and mortar fire began about 0600 and continued throughout the day. Greek and EF counterattacks recovered most of the gains that the Turks made during the day. In the afternoon, a group of M48 Patton tanks attempted to outflank the ELDYK camp from the west, but EF Major Achillidis noted the threat and requested reinforcements.<sup>23</sup> About 1600, a three-tank T-34/85 platoon was rushed to his aid and opened fire against the Turkish M48s. The Turkish tanks withdrew, and the T-34/85s remained in place until darkness fell, when they returned to their assembly area. As a result, the decision was made to relieve Colonel Katırcıoğlu of command of the Turkish Cyprus Regiment, and Staff Colonel Eşref Bitlis, who had served on the staff at the Kriní Airfield since the third day of the operation, was sent down to Kióneli to take command.<sup>24</sup>

In the east, VI Corps resumed the offensive at 0600 with both divisions conducting attacks in their assigned sectors of the front. Civilian refugees clogged the roads, causing some delays, as did securing the increasing numbers of EF soldiers that the corps took prisoner that day. There was very little opposition as the 28th Infantry Division pushed forward past Phase Line 2 and seized Sínta. To the north, the 39th Infantry Division, also facing slight opposition, advanced through Kiádos and pushed beyond the phase line as well. At the same time, the 50th Infantry

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<sup>23</sup> Mamounidakis, *Armor on Cyprus*, 86.

<sup>24</sup> Sever, *20 Temmuz 1974*, 188.



Photo courtesy of the Pakistan Defence Force

This image from behind a T-34/85 tank shows that the engine compartment and turret are burned out, making this a catastrophic kill. Such damage cannot be repaired on the battlefield and a tank in such condition would require a complete rebuild at a factory workshop.

and the Jandarma commandos took Gözübüyük on the coast road and advanced to Ágios Amvrósios, Cyprus.<sup>25</sup> As darkness approached, the 39th Infantry Division's leading units occupied the town of Lefkónoiko, Cyprus, and were poised to drive to the sea. The rapidly moving Armored Battle Group of Polat's 28th Infantry Division closed to a position about 5km west of Famagusta but was blocked by the EF 341st TE Battalion and a three-tank platoon of T-34/85s from the 23d Tank Battalion. The EF tankers opened fire about 0500 to screen the disengagement of the infan-

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<sup>25</sup> Sever, *20 Temmuz 1974*, 184–86.

try but shortly thereafter abandoned their tanks and fled into the nearby UNFICYP camp.<sup>26</sup>

## **OPERATION VICTORY—16 AUGUST 1974**

The day of 16 August proved to be the culmination of the Turkish Army offensive campaign for Cyprus. In the east, the 28th Infantry Division stood poised to seize Famagusta, which was held by the EF's 201st Infantry Battalion and the 331st TE Battalion, with the 341st TE Battalion in reserve.<sup>27</sup> A reconnaissance platoon of four Marmon-Herrington's from the 21st Armored Reconnaissance Battalion provided an additional small armored reserve and provided covering fires.<sup>28</sup> General Polat gave orders for his commanders to relieve the fighters of the Turkish Resistance Organization, who were still holding out after 27 days in the old city and its citadel.<sup>29</sup> Polat's Armored Battle Group attacked in the morning and broke through to the old city at about 1430. From there, a Turkish tank company pushed through the city until it was finally stopped in the southern suburbs at about 1800 by an infantry company of the 341st TE Battalion. The EF Marmon-Herrington platoon was trapped against the perimeter of the British Dhekelia Base and abandoned its vehicles while the crews escaped on foot through the base to Larnaca.

To the north, the leading units of the 39th Infantry Division broke through the thin defenses of the EF 291st Infantry Battalion and seized Tríkomo and Bogázi on the coast of Cyprus. From there, Major General

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<sup>26</sup> Mamounidakis, *Armor on Cyprus*, 86.

<sup>27</sup> LtGen George Tsoumis (Ret), *Memoirs and Intelligence Documents of the Greek Intelligence Service for Cyprus and the Near East* (Athens, Greece: Doureios Ippos Publishing, 2011), tactical map, 350.

<sup>28</sup> Mamounidakis, *Armor on Cyprus*, 78.

<sup>29</sup> Cumhur Evcil, *Yavru Vatan Kıbrıs'ta Zaferin Hikâyesi* (Ankara, Turkey: Genelkurmay Basım Evi, 1999), 106.



Photo courtesy of Mesut Uyar, author's collection  
Turkish mechanized infantry squad. This is likely a mechanized infantry company commander who would have an M151 jeep as well as his own M113 APC.

Demirel planned to launch his units northeast and overrun the Karpasía Peninsula.

In the west, General Demirbağ's offensive got off to a late start because two fuel tankers arrived at 0700—much later than planned—which forced a two-hour delay to fill up the almost-empty M47 tanks in the main effort.<sup>30</sup> Each M47 Patton needed 700 liters of fuel, which took 20 minutes each to complete the refuel. However, shortly after 0900, the armored units leading the advance got underway and, against no opposition, seized Mórfou in conjunction with the 3d Commando Battalion.

<sup>30</sup> "Komando Tugay Komutanlığı'ndan Piyade Albay Salih Gülerüz'ün Anı-Raporu" (Document 2), in Mütercimler, *Satılık Ada Kıbrıs*, 649.

Captain Haralambous had already withdrawn his platoon from Mórfou to Ágioi Trimithiás, Cyprus, after having refueled his tank and armored vehicles from a civilian gas station.<sup>31</sup> In Ágioi Trimithiás, the platoon returned to the command of the 21st Armored Reconnaissance Battalion.

General Demirbağ's armored units now exploited the tactical situation and, without opposition, raced west into Lefke at 1230 and then finally halted at about 1600 in Limnítis, Cyprus.<sup>32</sup> In the northern part of the Commando Brigade's sector, General Demirbağ's commandos seized the village of Kormakítis, Cyprus, at about 1230, clearing the peninsula of the remnants of the EF 256th Infantry Battalion.

Under the command of Colonel Bitlis, the Turkish Cyprus Regiment continued its assault with the 2d Battalion, 50th Infantry, to encircle the Gregoriou Grammar School west of the Nicosia International Airport. The assault was supported by six M48 tanks from the 5th Armored Brigade. This attack ran into the strong defenses of the EF 212th Infantry Battalion, backed up by a group of two 90mm recoilless rifle antitank teams from the 35th Commando Battalion.<sup>33</sup> The antitank teams destroyed two of the Turkish Patton tanks, bringing their advance to a halt. Colonel Bitlis called off the regiment's attacks at about 1800.<sup>34</sup>

## **OPERATION VICTORY—CONCLUSION**

The renewal of full combat operations on Cyprus triggered a frenzy of activity in the United Nations, and the UN Security Council unanimously passed United Nations Security Council Resolution 358 (1974) on 15 August 1974,

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<sup>31</sup> Mamounidakis, *Armor on Cyprus*, 82–83.

<sup>32</sup> Tsoumis, *Memoirs and Intelligence Documents of the Greek Intelligence Service for Cyprus and the Near East*, tactical map, 351.

<sup>33</sup> Mamounidakis, *Armor on Cyprus*, 84.

<sup>34</sup> Sever, *20 Temmuz 1974*, 196.



Photo courtesy of Mesut Uyar, author's collection  
From the Turkish Cypriot perspective, the Turkish Army arrived as a liberating force and its soldiers were treated as heroes. Turkish soldiers, TMT members, and Turkish Cypriots celebrate the arrival of an M113 APC.

which insisted on the immediate and strict observance of the cease-fire agreement.<sup>35</sup> Two subsequent UN Security Council resolutions called for the protection of UN peacekeepers and for an end to the fighting. These declarations were moot, because having nearly reached Phase Line Attila, the Turkish General Staff successfully concluded its campaign and, on the evening of 16 August 1974, the Turks unilaterally declared a cease-fire.<sup>36</sup>

However, some operations continued on 17 August. Notably Major General Demirel's 39th Infantry Division advanced past Galáteia, Cyprus, to complete its occupation of the Karpasía Peninsula. The last battle of the campaign broke out on 17 August when Turkish infantry, backed up by 4.2-inch mortars and 106mm recoilless rifles, attacked Pyrógi, Cyprus, which had been reoccupied by commandos from the EF 33d Commando Battalion and the T-34/85 platoon from the 23d Tank Battalion.<sup>37</sup> These were the same soldiers who had briefly occupied the village on 15 August. The commandos and tankers repulsed the Turks by firing high-explosive 85mm shells, causing the Turkish attack to collapse. Later that day, they observed a Turkish M47 tank company beginning a flanking maneuver around Pyrógi, and they abandoned the position leaving an immobilized T-34/85 medium tank behind.

Operation Victory was an unqualified success that was completed in three days. It might have been accomplished earlier, but the reader should remember that Cyprus was crawling with civilians, UN peacekeepers, and the press. What we now call *collateral damage* (the unintentional killing of noncombatants) was potentially a disastrous international cause célèbre for the Turks. Moreover, the Turks probably did not want to lose any more

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<sup>35</sup> Resolution 358 (1974) of 15 August 1974, United Nations Security Council.

<sup>36</sup> Mütercimler, *Satılık Ada Kıbrıs*, 504–6.

<sup>37</sup> Mamounidakis, *Armor on Cyprus*, 88–89.

men than they already had, and time was on their side. Bringing overwhelming combat power to bear in order to avoid casualties was likely more important for them than concluding the operation a day or two early.

In Operation Victory, Lieutenant General Ersin showed great operational planning skill in reorganizing his subordinate units to create fast-moving armored task forces to lead his attacks. He also employed tactical control measures that allowed him to make decisions effectively and rapidly. It is easy to speculate today that the Turks had a decisive superiority in armor and air power, but quantitative superiority does not always lead to victory. The qualitative edge that his officers and men enjoyed over their dispirited and poorly equipped Greek Cypriot National Guard opponents was a significant factor as well. General Ersin's subordinate division and brigade commanders performed very well and proved effective in confronting the uncertainties and chaos of modern combat. In the end, it was the joint institutional proficiency of the Turkish armed forces that provided the decisive combat edge that enabled the victory.

## CHAPTER 8

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# REFLECTIONS ON AMPHIBIOSITY

### INTRODUCTION

The Turkish amphibious campaign for Cyprus in the summer of 1974 lasted 28 days and led to a decisive operational outcome. During the following year, the Turkish General Staff withdrew its airborne, commando, and Marine units but left the 28th and 39th Infantry Divisions on the island as a permanent garrison called the Turkish Cyprus Peace Force (*Kıbrıs Türk Barış Kuvveti* or KTBK)—where they remain to this day. Phase Line Attila, the limit of the Turkish operational advance on 16 August 1974 (and now known as the Green Line), was taken over and demilitarized under United Nations supervision. The UNFICYP still patrols the Green Line and remains on peacekeeping duty on the island to this day.

### AFTERMATH

Although history records a Turkish victory, the war did not solve the numerous core issues that were so divisive between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots and, by extension, between the Greeks and Turks themselves. In fact, it may be argued that, like many wars, the 1974 Cyprus War did not really solve much of anything. The war simply stopped the

Map 8.1. Cyprus today—the Green Line/Phase Line Attila





Map by authors, adapted by MCUP  
 The Turkish VI Corps ended the amphibious campaign for Cyprus by advancing to Phase Line Attila, which subsequently became the UN Green Line. The UN-supervised cease-fire demilitarized line is still actively patrolled by UN observers today.

internecine and intercommunal fighting that had plagued Cyprus since its independence. There have been numerous attempts at reconciliation negotiations since 1974 by the United Nations, various world powers, and the Greeks and Turks themselves, with no resolution. Cyprus is still divided today, and it remains heavily militarized as well.

In addition to the unsolved geopolitical issues, military casualty statistics from the 1974 Cyprus War are unresolved and contested. There are several statistical variants according to what sources the reader prefers. The following are the casualty figures that the current authors accept as reasonable (table 8.1).

An accurate tally of Cypriot civilian casualties is impossible to determine because authors sympathetic to a particular narrative inflate or deflate the numbers according to their beliefs and sources. Table 8.2 shows examples of the range of *maxima* and *minima* statistics available.

The Turkish intervention and subsequent occupation of the northern one-third of the island also forced a massive displacement of the Turkish Cypriot and the Greek Cypriot populations. Estimates are varied, but approximately 250,000 Cypriots were forced, by both expulsion and circumstance, to relocate to the altered geopolitical reality of a divided island.<sup>1</sup> The Turkish Cypriot residents of the enclaves in the south moved to the north, abandoning their property and most of their possessions, while the Greek Cypriot residents of the north similarly abandoned their homes and moved south.<sup>2</sup> To this day, the issues of property loss and right of return afflict and impede reconciliation and reunification. Further issues appeared in the way of refugees from both communities who had fled to

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<sup>1</sup> Vassilis K. Fouskas, "Reflections on the Cyprus Issue and the Turkish Invasions of 1974," *Mediterranean Quarterly* 12, no. 3 (2001): 98–127, <https://doi.org/10.1215/10474552-12-3-98>.

<sup>2</sup> Asmussen, *Cyprus at War*, 266–73.

**Table 8.1. Military casualties, 20 July–16 August 1974**

Force	Reported killed	Reported wounded/missing
Turkish Armed Forces	498	1,200
Turkish Resistance Organization (Cypriots)	70	1,000
Hellenic Armed Forces	88	148/88
Cypriot National Guard	309	1,141/909
UNFICYP	9	65

Sources: For Turkish figures, see Mesut Günsev, *20 Temmuz 1974 Şafak Vakti Kıbrıs'ta* (Istanbul, Turkey: Kastaş, 1975), 184. For Greek figures, see Jan Asmussen, *Cyprus at War: Diplomacy and Conflict during the 1974 Crisis* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2008), 274–77.

**Table 8.2. Civilian casualties, 20 July–16 August 1974**

Force	Reported killed maximum/minimum	Reported missing
Turkish Cypriots	965/500	803
Greek Cypriots	3,000/192	1,493

Sources: Asmussen, *Cyprus at War*, 266–93; and Keith Kyle, *Cyprus: In Search of Peace* (London: Minority Rights Group, 1997), 19.

the British Sovereign Bases to escape the fighting and who had to also be repatriated to the appropriate side.

Another important but little-remembered outcome is the effect of the American arms embargo on the Turkish psyche and on Turkish military policy. Under pressure from the Greek-American lobby after the fighting stopped, the United States Congress passed arms embargos on the ex-

port of American weapons, munitions, and spare parts to Turkey.<sup>3</sup> Since almost all of the Turkish armed forces' major end items of equipment, such as tanks, armored personnel carriers, artillery, trucks, fighter aircraft, and warships were manufactured in the United States, Congress and President Gerald R. Ford felt that the arms embargo would force the Turks to withdraw their military forces from Cyprus and abandon the occupation. However, the Turks refused to cooperate and withstood the embargo.<sup>4</sup>

The embargo lasted until 1978, and in addition to severely crippling the operational readiness of the Turkish armed forces, it badly damaged Turkish-American relations. In the short term, the embargo damaged operational readiness, which was actually easily and rapidly recovered. However, the embargos initiated profound negative, long-term consequences for the United States by developing within Turkey and its military a national imperative to attain industrial and strategic autonomy.<sup>5</sup> This resulted in a far-reaching Turkish military-industrial policy designed to secure independence from political pressure imposed by the United States. By 2018, the Republic of Turkey produces, for example, its own armored personnel carriers, military helicopters, armed drones, warships, and training aircraft. Moreover, Turkey is on the cusp of developing its own fifth-generation fighter aircraft.<sup>6</sup> American interventions in Iraq and Syria in support of the Kurds, as well as American support for Israel, have further exacerbated this decline in the American-Turkish strategic partnership,

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<sup>3</sup> Edward J. Erickson, "Turkey as Regional Hegemon—2014: Strategic Implications for the United States," *Turkish Studies* 5, no. 3 (2004): <https://doi.org/10.1080/1468384042000270317>.

<sup>4</sup> David Zierler and Adam M. Howard, eds., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1977–1980*, vol. XXI, *Cyprus; Turkey; Greece* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2014).

<sup>5</sup> Mahmut Durmaz, "The United States Arms Embargo of 1975–1978 and Its Effects on the Development of the Turkish Defense Industry" (master's thesis, Naval Post Graduate School, 2014), 22.

<sup>6</sup> See "Turkey Domestic Arms Industry," Global Security.Org, accessed 23 October 2018; and Dorian James, "Turkey's Syria Operation Showcases Domestic Weapons Industry," Voice of America News, 22 February 2018.

which began at the end of the amphibious Turkish campaign for Cyprus. Increasingly, the American administration finds itself unable to secure the cooperation of Turkey in regional and international matters of strategic importance to the United States.

## **OPERATIONAL-LEVEL COMPARISONS**

As a case study in operational-level amphibious warfare, the Turkish campaign for Cyprus (Operation Yıldız Atma-4) may be directly compared to five other operational-level amphibious campaigns that occurred in the second half of the twentieth century: Chinese Communist landings on Hainan Island in 1950; the American landings at Inchon, Korea, in September 1950 (Operation Chromite); the Anglo-French landings at Suez in 1956 (Operation Musketeer); the British landings on the Falklands in May 1982 (Operation Corporate); and the American landings on Grenada in October 1983 (Operation Urgent Fury).

In terms of planning, Operation Yıldız Atma-4 was the only operation of the six that was the product of a long-term deliberate military planning process. The Turkish staffs worked on the plan for a number of years, changing the operational design dramatically—from a landing near Famagusta to a landing near Kyrenia as a result of a compromised plan—and refining the plan through four variants. The Chinese, American, Anglo-French, and British plans may all accurately be called hasty campaign planning efforts at the operational level. These campaigns were expedient, using the forces at hand, and often cut corners to execute the landings on time. Conversely, the Operation Yıldız Atma-4 planners created a predesignated force package tailored to meet the needs of the operational design and the military, air, and naval forces required for the operation were marshaled accordingly.

As an operational design, Operation Yıldız Atma-4 shared the principle of surprise with Operation Chromite. In both cases, the Turks and the Americans landed where the enemy did not expect them to land. In this regard, both incurred considerable geographical risk; Operation Chromite because of the limitations of the Inchon estuary and its tides, and Operation Yıldız Atma-4 because of the Pentadákylos mountain chain that separated the beachhead from the airhead. Both the Turks and the Americans sought to bring enough forces ashore before the enemy could react with clarity and speed. Moreover, the Turks had to fight ashore and move actively to seize the mountain passes necessary to connect sea and air parts of the lodgment. Operations Musketeer and Urgent Fury relied more on overwhelming force, while Operation Corporate relied on an administrative landing in an uncontested location after which land combat power slowly built up.

Operation Yıldız Atma-4 also depended on the principle of unity of command at the operational level. Unlike the badly fractured American command and control exhibited in Operation Urgent Fury, the Turkish armed forces placed joint forces into the hands of the VI Corps commander. This enabled tactical decisions to be made quickly and effectively. Likewise, interservice issues at the national level were also easily resolved through centralized command and control.

Five of the operations were dependent on air and sea supremacy so that the amphibious and airborne forces could achieve unhindered freedom of action. In only one case, Operation Corporate, was command of the air contested, and the British prevailed with the narrowest of margins. Command of the air enabled the Turks, the Anglo-French, and the Americans to employ tactical air support, which was a critical combat multiplier in support of their ground forces. Air interdiction missions were especially

important in Operation Yıldız Atma-4 and in Operation Chromite in delaying and disrupting enemy counterattacks. In the case of Hainan island, air supremacy was unnecessary because the contested shore was within range of Communist Chinese field artillery, and the Nationalists were unwilling to risk ships or aircraft in the narrow waters between the mainland and the island.

As an example of a contested forced entry operation only, Operation Yıldız Atma-4 may be examined as a mature operational design completely executed. We might note that the Greco-Cypriot defenders had much greater potential to oppose the initial Turkish aero-naval landings than they actually displayed. The Greco-Cypriot defenders relied on poorly coordinated counterattacks to contest the initial sea and air landings rather than employing beach defenses (in theory making the defense more like Salerno, Italy, rather than Saipan). Their tactics failed and, once the Turks were ashore in a contiguous lodgment, the outcome of the Turkish campaign on Cyprus was never in doubt.

In each case, the Chinese Communists, Americans, British, Anglo-French, and Turks demonstrated a mastery of the art of war. All were able to deal with the unexpected and were able to work out expedient tactical solutions when things did not go as planned. The difficulty of conducting amphibious operations should neither be misunderstood nor the possibility of failure understated. That the Turks were able to prevail on Cyprus so conclusively speaks well of the individual leadership and proficiency of their forces.

## **JOINT AND TACTICAL COMPARISONS**

In terms of the application of joint warfighting procedures, Operation Yıldız Atma-4 proved very successful. The Turks were able to execute joint opera-

tions effectively and, with the exception of the sinking of the destroyer TCG *Kocatepe*, few problems went unforeseen or unresolved. Likewise, Operation Musketeer was both joint as well as combined and was very professionally executed. Operations Chromite and Corporate were also triumphs of joint planning and warfighting, while Operation Urgent Fury became a synonym for everything that could go wrong in joint operations. Although successful at the operational level, there were so many tactical failures in Urgent Fury that the operation led to significant American legislation in 1986 known as the Goldwater–Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act, which was designed to increase the “jointness” of the American armed forces.<sup>7</sup>

With the exception of Hainan, the importance of specialized forces in the other five cases cannot be overemphasized. Highly trained amphibious Marine, airborne, air assault, commando, and special operations forces proved critical to execution in each operation. Moreover, in these operations, the effective integration of battlefield operating systems such as artillery, naval gunfire, and close air support proved extremely important in achieving dominance of the battle space.

In terms of an enemy response, there was some very minor tactical opposition in Operation Urgent Fury while Operation Musketeer was locally contested on the ground, but the operation terminated prematurely because of strategic-level political considerations. Operations Chromite and Corporate were, by design, conducted expediently in locations known beforehand to be almost completely undefended. Thus, Operation Yildiz Atma-4 should be seen as the world’s only deliberate post–Second World War operational-level amphibious campaign against a contested shore, which was successfully completed.

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<sup>7</sup> Ronald H. Cole, *Operation Urgent Fury: Grenada* (Washington, DC: Joint History Office, Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1997), 64–68.

In all cases, the professional capabilities, capacities, and motivation of the Turkish attackers far outmatched that of the defending Greek Cypriots. This is also particularly true regarding the modernity and technological equipment advantage that the attacking forces enjoyed (except in the case of Hainan) over the defenders. In each of the six cases, the Nationalist Chinese, the North Koreans, the Egyptians, the Greek Cypriots, the Argentines, and the Cuban-Grenadians all labored under severe tactical handicaps and limitations. However, the authors remind the reader that history is replete with examples of poorly equipped but well-led forces giving more modern and well-equipped forces a difficult time in the heat of combat.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Turkish amphibious campaign for Cyprus in 1974 has gone almost unnoticed in the military and naval historiography of the second half of the twentieth century. This may be because it did not involve either a superpower or one of the second-tier Western powers, such as Great Britain or Israel. But even so, the 1974 Cyprus War has been neglected by historians for a much longer period of time than the nearly contemporary Sino-Vietnamese War or the Iran-Iraq War, for example. It is the hope of the authors that this book stands as a corrective source in presenting a balanced narrative of an amphibious and expeditionary campaign before it fades even more into obscurity.

The authors end with the note that this book is a study in the application of amphibiousness at the operational level of warfare. *Phase Line Attila: The Amphibious Campaign for Cyprus, 1974* is intended to be a military history about the planning and execution of amphibious combat operations rather than a political, social, or cultural history, and readers inter-

ested in those subjects must look elsewhere. Finally, the authors, who are both experienced combat veterans, pay tribute to those officers on both sides of this conflict whose professional skill and conduct led to so many examples of courage and effective leadership under fire.

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# PHASE LINE ATTLA

## The Amphibious Campaign for Cyprus, 1974

is a study of amphibiosity with a view toward examining how the Turks successfully conducted a post-Second World War amphibious campaign in a contested environment. *Phase Line Attila* details the Turkish amphibious invasion of northern Cyprus in July 1974 and the follow-on breakout operation in August. Sometimes erroneously called Operation Attila, the operation was actually named Operation Yıldız Atma-4 (Operation Star Drop-4), and it was a carefully planned and well executed joint operational level amphibious assault against a defended island. *Attila* was the name of the phase line associated with campaign termination. Arguably, Operation Yıldız Atma-4 is one of only two deliberate amphibious campaigns conducted since 1945 against a well-armed enemy who actively contested the landings.

The Turkish amphibious campaign for Cyprus in 1974 has gone almost unnoticed in the military and naval historiography of the second half of the twentieth century. This may be because it did not involve either a superpower or one of the second-tier Western powers, such as Great Britain or Israel. But even so, the 1974 Cyprus War has been neglected by historians for a much longer period of time than the nearly contemporary Sino-Vietnamese War or the Iran-Iraq War, for example. It is the hope of the authors that this book stands as a corrective source in presenting a balanced narrative of an amphibious and expeditionary campaign before it fades even more into obscurity.



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