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Phase Line Attila: The Amphibious Campaign for Cyprus, 1974

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BOOK REVIEWS

STRATEGY IN MANY FORMS

Phase Line Attila: The Amphibious Campaign for Cyprus, 1974, by Edward J. Erickson and Mesut Uyar. Quantico, VA: Marine Corps Univ. Press, 2020. 235 pages. Free hardcover and e-book.

Although a wealth of scholarly literature exists on various political, military, intelligence, and intercultural aspects of the 1974 Cyprus crisis, an authoritative English-language history of the actual Turkish campaign and Greek Cypriot resistance was lacking heretofore. Now, *Phase Line Attila* assesses Turkey's July–August 1974 invasion of Cyprus, an operation officially dubbed YILDIZ-ATMA 4 (STAR-DROP 4); this was the fourth revision of an invasion plan drawn up in 1970. The book is recommended for anyone interested in either eastern Mediterranean military history in particular or the strategies and tactics of modern amphibious assaults in general.

The authors of *Phase Line Attila* are eminently qualified for the project. Dr. Edward J. Erickson is a retired U.S. Army officer and noted historian of the late Ottoman and early Turkish militaries. His coauthor, Dr. Mesut Uyar, is dean of the School of Business and Social Sciences, Antalya Bilim University, and a retired Turkish army officer.

Structurally, the book begins with introductory background material on other examples of post–World War II amphibious assaults. Its eight chapters

then narrate events chronologically, beginning with discussion of a simmering crisis from the 1940s (when Cyprus was still a British colony) through independence in 1960 and the gradual increase in tensions between Greek and Turkish Cypriots, as well as between Greece and Turkey themselves, both of which were under military governments during parts of the 1960s and early 1970s. This retelling is supported by eleven tables on air, land, and naval deployments, plus twelve maps of the operational zones of the time. This cumulative presentation will be very helpful for academics desiring visual accompaniments for teaching the military campaign.

The book does come with certain caveats—which are somewhat paradoxical. While the authors generally are objective and remind readers that other works also should be consulted for a wider appreciation of the Cyprus crisis, their attempt to limit their treatment strictly to military history does not succeed entirely. Where encountered, this is more a sin of omission than anything worse. This is because of the still extremely controversial nature of the military operation itself, which made

Turkey an international pariah, including incurring a U.S. arms export ban that lasted until 1978. In effect, the authors have written an apologia for Turkey's intervention, emphasizing the elements of strategic genius and battlefield bravery necessary for them to make the case for it as a model military operation.

While there certainly is some truth to the depictions, the authors never critically assess the likelihood of Cyprus uniting with Greece, as no great powers of the time would have allowed this, and Greeks themselves were divided on it. Nevertheless—as the authors note—the Greek Cypriot military coup that overthrew Archbishop Makarios in 1974 provided Turkey with a useful pretext for its long-planned invasion, as it could point to the 1960 treaty negotiated among itself, Greece, and Britain, which stipulated that these guarantor powers of Cypriot independence could prevent the island from uniting with another country. So, if the truism holds that every battle is over before it has been fought, it can be said that the British-led negotiations created a military confrontation that only required time to be fulfilled. A similar omission is the lack of detailed discussion of Turkish or Turkish Cypriot leaders and their contributions.

Perhaps the most baffling omission is the book's lack of critical inquiry regarding what happened—and why. Many historians, especially Greek ones, have suspected tacit Anglo-American support for the Turkish invasion as a way to solve the island's pesky interethnic issues—even if it meant a potentially disastrous rift within NATO. Of course, the British military also retained two sovereign base areas and an important signals facility, so it would be laughable to presume that

both it and the UN, which had had a peacekeeping mission in place since the early 1960s, could be caught off guard.

Nevertheless, this is what the authors claim: that the Turkish military used the element of surprise, along with overwhelming air superiority, to defeat the well-entrenched Greek Cypriot resistance. Nowhere do they ask why Greece reacted so weakly, or whether it was possible that certain individuals (such as the deposed Makarios) had sold out the country. In any case, Greece already had pulled out the bulk of its military in the mid-1960s, whereas Turkey had not.

The major surprise of the campaign was the choice of landing beaches. Whereas the Greek Cypriots (and, according to the authors, Henry Kissinger) had believed the intelligence of a Turkish defector that pointed to one location, the actual Turkish landing took place at another port, with only ghost vessels sent toward the former. The authors mention this as a point of fact, but again they ask no further questions that could lead to even more interesting findings—for example, to confirm whether the informant was indeed an actual defector or just someone sent to provide the enemy with disinformation.

However, this is the kind of conundrum the reader is happy to encounter. The presence of such conundrums in the work speaks to the level of detail the authors have presented—on strategy, tactics, and the vital ground-level information on troop movements—that fuels and inspires further research. While *Phase Line Attila* sometimes is a one-sided work, it is a necessary one for anyone interested in Cyprus or the history of amphibious assaults in the modern age.

CHRIS DELISO