

Fleeing Turkey: The Greek-Turkish War!

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Adana, Turkey, 1974. I am teaching courses for the University of Maryland on the American air base in Incirlik. Although it was an air base used by Americans, it is also a main Turkish air base.

And there was no mistaking that fact when, on one day, Turkish jet after jet after jet was streaking off the runway, armed to the teeth with bombs and missiles.

And they returned *EMPTY!*

It is one thing to be living there with nothing much happening; it is another thing, altogether, to witness a WAR in the offing. This not only continued into the following days, but the nearby city of Adana was now on a war footing and under a blackout. You even had to paint your car headlights blue, and citizens were required to turn their residential lights off.

Needless to say, I was quite ill at ease over developing events, wondering what I should do, if anything. The coup de grace came when one of our fellow faculty members near Istanbul (hundreds of miles to the west of us) called me on the phone to tell me that Turkey had just invaded Cyprus, and that Turkey feared an invasion by Greece to be imminent. He was going to leave Turkey as soon as he could.

It wasn't rocket science that I decided to curtail my classes and flee as well. For I did not know how quickly the University headquarters in Heidelberg, Germany would (or could) react as soon as the news distilled and they could decide what to do with us. I felt that we were all on our own and should fend for ourselves, as others might not be able to do anything for us. An evacuation could be too little, too late. And university professors stuck in Turkey in a war were not exactly the highest priority.

I had befriended a young Turkish student (Yilmaz O.) who helped out in the University's education center there at Incirlik. He and I took a few nearby driving excursions together. He was a bright guy, studying at college, working for us part-time, and became a friend. He decided on his own to help me get out of Turkey. He would accompany me the hundreds of miles to the closest Greek border on the European side of Turkey.

This was no mean task. The Turkish military manned the coastal road that we drove on and essentially CLOSED it. On my own I would have had very little possibility of fleeing. But with Yilmaz's help it turned out to be no problem at all. As soon as we arrived at one roadblock, he'd get on the phone, call the authority in charge, and get permission for us to continue through. This happened a number of times, with the result that we really had no problems at all and arrived at the border in a few days.

We arrived near the Greek border and said our good-byes. I was very appreciative of Yilmaz's generous help in getting me through and out of Turkey.

The Greek-Turkish-Cypriot war came to an end, and things returned to normal. Classes had been canceled during that period. And there were no repercussions for those of us who fled the scene.

Cyprus became divided into Greek and Turkish zones, and you could not simply cross from one side to the other.

Unfortunately, I lost track of Yilmaz, who I believe moved to the United States—to Texas, I think. I would love to reconnect with Yilmaz one day, but years later, I could not find him online.



*The author on the Trans-Siberian Railway
in 1972 with a couple of fellow passengers.*

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