

Eyewitness account

Greek tanks no match for Turk guns

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ON THE LARNACA Road on Cyprus, Aug. 17 - It was Turkish army and American-made artillery against Cypriot National Guard's Russian-made tanks today, and the artillery won.

For the Greek Cypriots the loss was more than just a hard-fought Battle. It cost them the highway southeast to Larnaca. Nicosia today has exits only to Limassol to the southwest and the Troodos Mountains to the west. AU other roads are now in Turkish hands.

On a ridge, I joined British paratroopers, loaned to the United Nations, to watch Greek Cypriots and Turks fight it out for the village of Pyroi, 10 miles south of Nicosia.

AT STAKE FOR the Greek Cypriots was control of the road. For the Turks, it simply meant that Louroujina, one of the largest Turkish villages of the rich Larnaca plain, will be swept into the Turkish enclave, still growing despite Turkey's agreement to a cease-fire yesterday.

The battle began before the cease-fire, when 350 Turkish soldiers climbed the rear slope of a flat - topped hill that stands guard over the highway. In proper military fashion, Turkish artillery laid down an advance barrage.

About 10 Greek Cypriot guardsmen atop the bluff were hurt. The rest re-treated down the steep western slope to Pyroi, which straddles the road south.

THERE THEY joined 30 commandos, the best of the Greek Cypriot troops, who have pledged themselves to hold Pyroi at all costs.

This morning, 400 Turks came down the hill toward the village. The guards-men fled. The commandos dug in deeper. Three tanks, which had been loitering south of Nicosia, hurried to their aid. They were World War II tanks equipped with modernized 85 mm. guns.

One tank was hidden in a haystack, another behind some trees, a third in the yard of a small factory.

"Suicide," muttered a paratroop sergeant, veteran of many a fight.

They should keep moving."

The tanks began shelling the troops still on the hill. From beyond the hill Turkish guns, guided from the hilltop, took on the tanks.

AS WE WATCHED. the puff of dust and smoke closed in. Suddenly there was an orange burst. The guns had found the tank in the haystack. Three minutes later they got the one in the trees. Burning oil sent smoke into the sky.

The third tank kept banging away at the hilltop.

It took the guns two to get the third tank. By then the sun was sinking low. Then things happened fast. We saw the third tank crew jump out. They ran through harvested grainfields, to the west, away from the Turks.

"The bloody Turks must be damned close," the sergeant said.

In seconds, 10 commandos joined them.

The British sergeant slid into his armoured scout car and darted down to the village.

All was quiet.

He hurried back to the ridge to report to U. N. headquarters.

"You are very faint," the voice came back.

Can anyone relay?"

FROM THE BACK of the hill. four Turkish tanks came into view from behind a row of low buildings.

We had seen shells from the third Greek gun burst in that area, but had not seen the tanks.

With complete confidence, the four tanks churned along the side of the hill, down to the plain.

Pyroi village was gone. The Larnaca road was cut.

The Turkish road to Louroujina was open. The highway to Limassol was 15 miles ahead.

On our ridge, the Cypriot National Guardsmen muttered: "I always said you couldn't trust the bloody Turks.

"They take what they want. Cease-fire or no cease-fire. I wonder how much more they will take before they are satisfied."