

Conflict III: Canadian (UN) Peacekeeping in Cyprus – 1963 to the Present

In 1959 British rule of Cyprus ended and the Mediterranean island became an independent nation. But fighting soon broke out between the Greek and Turkish factions and both Greece and Turkey prepared to invade the island. Although United Nations troops were called in to separate the two sides (with Canadian soldiers marking up a significant part of the force) sporadic fighting continued. In the summer of 1974 Greek officers in the Cypriot National Guard overthrew the president of Cyprus, the Archbishop Makarios, and proposed to bring Cyprus under Greek control. A week later 40 000 Turkish troops invaded the island, quickly capturing significant territory. When the Turkish army moved to capture the airport of the capital city, Nicosia, the leadership of the UN forces decided to stop the advance. Canadian soldiers were ordered to defend the airport. Greek Cypriots fought off the first Turkish attack before the Canadians were fully deployed. The Canadian Chief of Staff, Colonel Clay Beattie announced that his forces would actively defend their positions in any further attacks on the airport. He also reminded the combatants of the serious consequences of attacking UN forces whose sole purpose was to prevent an escalation in violence. The Turks, respecting the neutrality of the Canadians, withdrew. Two Canadian soldiers were killed and more than 100 wounded. Since 1959 Canadian soldiers have been continually present in Cyprus to ensure that new fighting does not break out.