



Italian Navy's school ship 'Amerigo Vespucci' sails into Cretan port

One of the world's biggest and most impressive saiboats and the pride of the Italian Navy, the 'Amerigo Vespucci', sailed into the port of Heraklion, Crete, on Sunday, where it will remain docked until Wednesday.

The Amerigo Vespucci, which is used as a training vessel by Italy's Navy Cadets Academy, sails annually around the world as an ambassador of the arts, culture and maritime tradition of the neighboring country.

Heraklion is the final stop of the Amerigo Vespucci's training journey this year, during which it also visited ports in Bulgaria, France, Romania, Tunisia, Turkey and the Ukraine.

The sailboat's skipper paid courtesy calls on the Heraklion political and military authorities.

The vessel is the tall ship of the Marina Militare, named after the explorer Amerigo Vespucci, and its home port is Livorno, Italy.

The Amerigo Vespucci is the second of two school ships ordered in 1925 by the Regia Marina, inspired by the style of the large late 18th-century 74-cannon ships. The first was the Cristoforo Colombo.

The Amerigo Vespucci was built in 1930 at the (formerly Royal) Naval Shipyard of Castellammare di Stabia, and was launched on February 22, 1931. It has been carrying out journeys since then, with the exception of the the period during World War II, mostly throughout Europe, but it has also traveled in the past to America and the Pacific, while in 2002 it sailed around the world.

Fathi meets Yiannis, the man he 'killed' in Cyprus

LEFKA, Cyprus — Meeting on a sun-baked hillside amid olive trees and stubble, Fathi and Yiannis both have clear memories of dawn on July 21, 1974, when the Turkish Cypriot shot the Greek Cypriot in the head.

"I shot him but I am not guilty. If I didn't kill him, he would have killed me," said 59-year-old Fathi Akinci, prompting a nod of agreement from Yiannis Maratheftis, who he believed for 35 years to be dead.

It was not until he read a translation into Turkish of witness accounts of the 1974 Cyprus war that the former soldier for the Turkish Cypriot forces realised the Greek Cypriot ex-fighter was still alive. He lived just 30 kilometres (20 miles) from him across the Green line which still divides the Mediterranean island. Akinci contacted Panicos Neocleous, compiler of "The Ignored: 1974", and the author suggested to Maratheftis, 56, that he should meet the man who left him for dead.

"For a few seconds, they were in shock," reported Neocleous of the encounter at a restaurant on Ledra Street in Nicosia. "After a few seconds they embraced each other and started to talk like friends."

The two former enemies decided to return together last weekend for the first time to the field where their lives became entangled 35 years ago at Lefka, a community in the north of the island under Turkish



Turkish Cypriot Fathi Akinci (left), 59, explains how he shot in 1974 Greek Cypriot Yiannis Maratheftis (right)



Cypriot control.

On July 20, 1974, Turkey invaded Cyprus in response to an Athens-engineered coup in Nicosia seeking to unite the island with Greece. Maratheftis, then just 21 and on his last day of military service as a radio operator, received an order to go with 140 troops to capture the enclave of Lefka "whatever the cost."

Armed with old British Martini rifles, the Greek Cypriots launched their assault at dawn the following day.

"In the beginning of the battle the sun rose (lighting us up), so we didn't know where to go," Maratheftis recalled, pointing to the

bare hill where the Turkish Cypriots had been dug in with locally-assembled British Sten guns and machineguns. Akinci, who was helping to defend his home village, took over the story.

"I saw two people running in front of us. I shoot. His friend falls. He lies down but his helmet is shining, so it is easy."

"A few hours after, I went to check and found his radio and his helmet with a hole in it and blood and hair."

Shortly afterwards Lefka fell in a second Greek Cypriot offensive and Akinci, then 24 who had joined the Turkish-speaking fighters at 14, spent several months in jails in the south of the island until returning to the north in a prisoner swap. Akinci has often thought about the man he thought he had killed. "I was feeling sad for his mother, because it's hard to lose a son. Every 21st July, I have a pain in the heart."

Maratheftis also believed his life was over. The shooting left him gravely wounded and he was alone for two or three hours as he tried to find his comrades. "I

thought I was going to die," he said. He finally managed to locate other Greek Cypriot fighters and was whisked to hospital, where he remained for 40 days.

Initially wary about the chance to meet Akinci, he refused in July for the reunion to take place in the north. However, he said he has no bitterness about being shot, though eight bits of bullet remain in his head.

Neocleous, who says he's "proud" to have brought the two together, sees the story as bearing a message of peace for the island, where negotiations on reunification continue.

"If these people who shot each other can become friends, can you imagine how easy it will be for people who did not experience such things," he said. Akinci invited the whole Maratheftis family to lunch and in return has been promised a visit to the Greek Cypriots' holiday home. Marios Heraclides, a friend of Maratheftis and also a 1974 veteran, summed up the situation: "Each one says he was fighting for his own country, but they have the same country. We are the last who fought in 1974. It's time for peace."

Neocleous's book, published in Greek last year and in Turkish in June, tells the story of 50 Greek Cypriot veterans of the 1974 fighting.

"A few years after the war, politicians and historians change history. This book is like a document. It's time to tell the truth about the war," he said.



Greek Cypriot Panicos Neocleous (right) holds the Greek and Turkish versions of his book "The Ignored: 1974"