

Story #487 (Tape #12, 1970)

Narrator: Sadık Erol, "Eski
Chauffeur," in 70's

Location: Pazar köy, kaza of
Mengen, Province of Bolu

Date: July 1970

Driving for Atatürk

One day Atatürk, accompanied by Ismet Pasha¹ and Fevzi Pasha², left Ankara to inspect the front lines, which were near Polatlı.³ There were cars in the group, one car for each general. This was during the part of the War of Independence, quite close to the end of that

When we approached quite close to Polatlı, we had to cross a small stream. While trying to cross that stream, our automobile became stuck in the mud. It was an old, low-horsepower Adler.⁴ Fevzi Pasha's car tried to cross below ours, and his became stuck, and still farther down, Ismet İnönü's car was also stuck. It was only a small stream, but the place along the road to it where we wanted to cross was marshy, and so all three cars were stuck.

¹ Atatürk's right-hand man for years; prominent statesman; later Prime Minister and leader of the Republican Party. He died in early 1970's.

² Fevzi Çakmak, Chief of Staff during much of the time that Atatürk led the country, from early 1920's until late 1930's.

³ Scene of crucial battle during the War of Independence, not far from Ankara.

⁴ A car not known to us, but from its name and judging from the use of German equipment by the Turks during World War I, we conclude it was a German make.

We had to get the cars out of the mud. All the aides had gotten out of the cars. Salih Omurtak⁵ was his [Atatürk's] aide, a lieutenant at the time. While we were trying to get the cars out of the mud, six peasants appeared from behind a hill. It was obvious from their clothes and behavior that they were from some nearby village. Ismet Pasha started shouting to them, "Hey! Quick! Come here!" He called them to his own car and forced them to get it out of the mud. All the rest of us--Atatürk's aide, Fevzi Pasha's aide, and I--were trying to get Atatürk's car out first. Atatürk himself was behind his car with the others, pushing from behind, and I was at the wheel. As the wheels of the car spun around, mud flew up and covered Atatürk from head to foot. Salih Omurtak took his handkerchief from his pocket and tried to wipe the mud off Atatürk's face, but Atatürk stopped him, saying: "Never mind, Salih. It is the soil of my country. Let us continue trying to free the car."

I shall never forget his words. It was a great expression.

When Atatürk saw how Fevzi Pasha⁶ was forcing the peasants to pull his car out, using threatening words to make them work harder, he said, "Salih, go quickly and tell him not to scold these men. We shall get the other cars out just as we have this one." Later when Ismet İnönü came to Atatürk, Atatürk said to him, "Ismet, what are you doing to those

⁵He was later to become a general, according to the narrator.

⁶The narrator here said Fevzi Pasha but he clearly meant Ismet Pasha.

men? Leave them alone. They are wounded at heart. Their families and children and property have all been left in enemy territory. managed to save themselves by fleeing to our side, where they are wandering about. I met these fellows here yesterday and several times before that, and I tried to console them, saying, 'We shall soon save your families and children from the enemy.' And now you are scolding them. Don't scold them!"

We finally got all three cars free from the mud, and when we got a little closer to the front lines, the generals walked the rest of the way while we waited with the cars at the rear. They returned to the cars about three hours later, and then we returned by car to Ankara.

Ahmet Uysal: What was the make of the car you drove which was stuck in the mud?

Sadık Erol: It was an old Adler touring car with a canvas top. Because inner tubes were not available, we had solid rubber tires put on by a blacksmith. He nailed them on, and we used them that way for some time.

After the war was over, the Istanbul Chauffeurs Association presented Atatürk with a Lincoln touring car [large convertible]. Abdullah of Balıkesir⁷, who had been Atatürk's driver for six years by this time, and I

⁷We have no further indication of the identity of this man. Since this was before the law requiring that all Turks have last names, it may well be that the narrator never knew this man by any other name than Abdullah of Balıkesir.

who was then driving for Parliament, drove this car. After we got the Lincoln, we realized what real and real driving were! This car is still in the Atatürk Museum at the Anıt Kabir.⁸ Each time I visit that place, I kiss the fender of that car [narrator starts to break down here] and revive within me old memories. These are my memories. [At this point the narrator broke down completely and excused himself from further discussion.]

⁸Literally "Memorial Tomb," the Anıt Kabir is the mausoleum of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk atop one of the high hills of Ankara. As the spirit of Atatürk still dominates the nation, this monument dominates the skyline of Ankara.