**How ANZAC Day Unites Australia and Macedonia**

***By Victor Bivell***

*ANZAC Day provides some unexpected and deep links between Australians and Macedonians.*

It says a lot that in 2015, the 100th anniversary of Gallipoli, there are still parts of the ANZAC Day story that are relatively unknown or little explored. One of these are the many and surprisingly strong connections between Australia and Macedonia, between the Australian people and the Macedonian people.

A key connection is that Kemal Ataturk, the commander of the Turkish army who defeated the ANZACS and went on to found modern Turkey, was born and grew up in Macedonia. He was born in Salonica in 1881 in what was then Ottoman Macedonia.

By then Macedonia had been under Ottoman control for about 490 years, and Ataturk's family had roots in Macedonia. His paternal grandfather was from the village of Kodzadzik, and for three years as part of his training Ataturk attended the military academy in Bitola. These days Salonica is in Greece and both Kodzadzik and Bitola are in the Republic of Macedonia. These territorial changes occured with the Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913 when Ottoman Macedonia was divided by Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria. By then Ataturk was a commander in the Ottoman army and saw service in both wars. In the First Balkan War his role was to defend the Gallipoli Peninsula. So it could be that the experience he gained defending Turkey's territories in Macedonia and Thrace helped him to defeat the ANZACS only two years later.

The Ottomans lost the First Balkan War and Ataturk saw Salonica, along with half the territory of Macedonia, fall to the Greek army. He also saw Kodzadzik and Bitola fall to the Serbian army. It is not hard to imagine that he may have felt the loss of his birthplace as keenly as the native Macedonians who had been born there.

Australia and Macedonia are connected by Turkey in another strong way as the main day of remembrance for both countries is based on their military defeat by Turkey. People sometimes remark it is odd that Australians have made a military defeat the cornerstone of their national commemorations. If so then Macedonians are odd in the same way. That both military defeats were by Turkey and were only 12 years apart makes the coincidence even more remarkable.

The Ilinden Uprising, or just Ilinden, is named after St Ilija's Day and is commemorated on 2 August, the day in 1903 when the Macedonian people began their dash for independence after centuries of Ottoman domination. The Uprising had been planned for 10 years with its centre at Salonica where and while, as it happens, Ataturk was growing up. The uprising had widespread support from the native Macedonians and reached its zenith in the town of Krushevo which for 10 days became the independent Krushevo Republic.

But that was as good as it got. The Ottoman reprisals were immediate and massive. Krushevo and another 200 villages, a total of over 12,000 houses, were destroyed. Jeffrey Dixon and Meredith Sarkees in their book Guide to Intra-State Wars – An Examination of Civil Wars, 1816 to 2014 put the number of deaths at 8,816.

Another coincidence is that these fatalities are similar to the number of Australian soldiers who died at Gallipoli. The Australian War Memorial says 5,482 Australians died in action. Wounds and disease brought the final total to 8,709.

These were big numbers for nations with small populations. The emotional circumstances around these deaths - particularly the futile loss of lives for Australians and the unsuccessful bid for freedom for Macedonians - have given those who fell and the events around them an even greater status.

So perhaps it is not surprising that the meaning of both days has grown with time. At Ilinden, Macedonians now also remember all Macedonians who fell for freedom in all wars, just as Australians remember all Australians who served and fell in all wars.

To the Macedonian people Ilinden represents the struggle for freedom, self determination, and nationhood. For Australians ANZAC Day represents the respect for service and sacrifice, the importance of mateship, and the making of Australian nationhood.

Ilinden is the most important day in the Macedonian non-religious calendar as ANZAC Day is the most important day in the Australian secular calendar. Australians and Macedonians both commemorate a tragic military defeat, and they do it to honour the same high principles and their people who died for them.

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