

# GREEK INDEPENDENCE DAY 2013



Greek Independence Day was conducted over a three day period, commencing with a parade on Saturday 23 March 2013 and Monday for the official commemorations commencing at the Australian Hellenic War Memorial. On both days the weather was fine, blue skies with the added breeze cool the passionate ardor of the participants and onlookers alike. The march conducted on the Saturday prior to the official day, Monday 25 March, attracted approximately 7,000 people from across the Melbourne region.



**SATURDAY.** As previously mentioned it was a fine day, with much color, loud bands, flags flying and banners stretched to their maximum extent to provide onlookers a good view of whom they represented. Some commented later that the numbers were down and could not fathom the reasons why other than that the dates were now separated from the Antipodes festival and the Greek community being reluctant to come to the city again within the times allocated.



This year for reasons unknown, the March itself appeared to have attracted a greater than normal participation of clergy, representing the various churches in the Melbourne and Victorian region. It is true that the marchers were all dressed up in their wonderful Hellenic costumes in contrast to the black flowing robes of the clergy.

But this begs the thought whether all future Hellenic Independence Days will have such an overwhelming religious presence. It is granted that orthodoxy played its part in the Hellenic struggle for freedom; but is not and never was considered an overwhelming participation in wresting control from the Ottoman overlords.



Groups, individuals and organisations along with their respective representative had lined up in St Kilda road waiting patiently for the order to line up and move forward to their respective march positions. While they were waiting, bands would play, children darting amongst the groups, teachers working feverishly to ensure that the students were ready and prepared in the manner that they had been practicing for. Laughter could be heard amongst the throng of participants. Others who had lyres and similar musical instruments did their bit and entertained the waiting crowd.



Grandfathers like Nick Bantounas from Oakleigh east strode proudly beside their grandchildren holding their hand, Emmanuel Vardakis walked with his College of students, Bill Papastergiadis for the Melbourne and Victorian Greek Orthodox community, Kon Glekas and his Laconians, Angelo Sardellis with the Oakleigh Greek Orthodox community.

The Pontians and Cretans proudly marching in their traditional costumes, and organisations across Greece from the islander in the Ionian and Aegean seas to the Thesalonikans and Kastorians in North Greece. Women organizations, Victoria Police, Charity and welfare groups and a strong contingent of college students representing their various school colours shone in the bright sunshine. A sight for sore eyes.



Community group, organisations, Colleges and a few die hard marchers took an active part in the march up towards the shrine and finally resting their flags, banner and streamers near the towards the eternal flame in preparation for the official speeches.

The organisers had gone to great lengths to ensure its success and were observed to be darting in and out of amongst the marchers to ensure that members and their organisation kept to the march schedule and in the order of precedence in accordance with agreed discussions. Kon Nikolopoulos as usual was seen to be both instructive a guiding hand throughout the whole parade including the official parade of officials and others invited to stand on the steps of the shrine for the official photograph.



At the conclusion of the official speeches by the Greek Ambassador and clergy the taking of photographs and lying of wreathes; the dignitaries, officials, marchers, organisers and observers mingled with each other thus creating a mosaic of colours that that would make any Hellene proud.

The clergy with their long and black robes, holding flags moved among the crowd of people, whilst the crowd with its myriad of bright costumes and civilian attire met with friends and relatives, taking photographs, exchanging contact details, thus creating an atmosphere of congeniality and unity seldom see on any other days except on religious festivals and commemoration events.



Many began the long trek home after having being out for at least five hours notwithstanding the preparation prior to arriving on location. Some via buses hired for the occasions, others walked back to their vehicles possibly parked within a two kilometer radius of the shrine and some by public transport according to their needs. Students returned to their educational institutions and communities made their way back to their respective club rooms where light refreshments, meals and additional speeches awaited them.



**MONDAY.** On Monday the 25 March 2013 two days later the commemoration of those who died in battle during the Hellenic War of Independence were remembered by a gathering of 80 people at the Australian Hellenic War memorial. Like Saturday two days prior the weather was kind to the gathering of veterans, political leaders, from both sides of the ideological spectrum at the local and Federal level, Veteran Affairs, clergy, Australian Hellenic RSL members and their families, interested onlookers.

The day's events began in the morning with a Church Service being conducted at the St Eustathios Church, St South Melbourne followed two wreath laying ceremonies, one at the Australian Hellenic Memorial and the other within the Melbourne Shrine of Remembrance.

The master of Ceremonies was Major Terry Kannelos, assisted by Manny Karvelas, Father Dimitrios Papakyriakopoulos (representing His Grace Bishop Dervis IEZEKIL) and overseen by the President of the Hellenic RSL, Steve Kyritsis. One worthy of interest for the 2013 attendee was Sergeant Kyryiakos (ken) Tsirigotis in uniform representing the Australian Regular Army and his current unit the 8/7<sup>th</sup> Battalion The Royal Victoria Regiment.

Sergeant Tsirigotis has seen operational service and late last year complete a service in Afghanistan with his unit 3rd Royal Australian Regiment. Dignitaries who gave a speech were: Elias Tsonis (Representing the Greek Consul General, Eleni Lianidou) and Murray

Thompson MP (Representing the Premier, Dennis Napthine). This was followed by the laying of wreaths in the order shown below.



Murray Thompson (Centre)  
Mr Dimitri Paraskevopoulos (left) and Mr Theo Spanos (right)

**Wreaths.** Wreaths were laid by the following members representing their various organisations:

Elias Tsonis , (on behalf of Greek Consul General, Eleni Lianidou), Sandro Cardinali, (for John Geary, Dep. Veterans Affairs), John Cullen (representing MAJ GEN David McLachlan President Returned & Services League - Victorian Branch), Steve Kyritsis (President Returned & Services League Hellenic Sub-Branch), Dennis Patisteas (for The Australian Hellenic Memorial Foundation), Sergeant Kyriako's Tsirigotis, on behalf of the Royal Australian Regiment & Royal Victorian Regiment), Murray Thompson MP, (for DR. Dennis Napthine, Premier of Victoria), Jenny Mikakos MP, (for the Leader of State Opposition and Daniel Andrews).

Other notable guests included: Kelly O'Dwyer MP, (Member for Higgins), Tammy Iliou (on behalf of Bill Papastergiadis , President G.O.C.M.V), K: Dimitris Saratsiotis (for George Rahovitsas, President Greek Ex Servicemen Association), CR Kris Pavlidis, (South West Ward, City of Whittlesea), Anthony Drakopoulos President & Past President Peter Paxinos (for the Ithacan Philanthropic Society Victoria), Spiros Robotis (President, Ahepa Victoria), George Verginis President, (for Dodecanese Federation of Australia), Dimitrios Varnas President, (on behalf of Pan Iperotiki Omospondia of Australia) and Pantazis Amaxopoulos President, (for Halkidikeon Association)

At the conclusion of the speeches by the various dignitaries, political representatives and RSL members, the lying of wreathes was conducted with pomp and ceremony fitting the occasion. The Ode was read by Senior Vice President Manolis Karvelas followed by the last post being played.



Parliament House function

Dignitaries, guests and Veterans made their way towards the shrine to pay their respects and honour the fallen and those who sacrificed their lives for the price of freedom. At the conclusion of both ceremonies, dignitaries, veterans and Guests were invited to the Hellenic RSL for dinner and light refreshments.

Officials, organizational representatives and veterans who had been invited, made their way for an official function within the premises of the Victorian parliament in the large hall. Although many had been invited, last minute changes were made restricting their involvement in the final commemoration of the Hellenic War of Independence. The only logical explanation that could be derived is that there may have been a lack of staff to handle the crowd of participants and or for reason of security.

Whatever the case may have been, these last minute changes left a sour note in the minds of the veterans and their families. It is worthy to note that the freedoms we taken for granted this day was not earned easily and veterans do not take freedom lightly. Therefore it is not unusual when veterans are always vigilant in accordance with their code. **Peter Adamis**



Peter Kalla and friends celebrating Greek independence day at Parliament house.

**Material sources and photographs:** Kon Glekas, Greek Beat, Peter Roumpos. Ken Tsirigotis, Peter Kalla and John Giannikos



*The Voice from the Pavement* - Peter Adamis is a (not for profit) Journalist/Commentator. He is a retired Australian military serviceman and an Industry organisational & Occupational (OHS) & Training Consultant whose interests are within the parameters of domestic and international political spectrum. He is an avid blogger and contributes to domestic and international community news media outlets as well as to local and Ethnic News. He holds a Bachelor of Adult Learning & Development (Monash), Grad Dip Occupational Health & Safety, (Monash), Dip. Training & Assessment, Dip Public Administration, and Dip Frontline Management. Contact via Email: [abalinx@netspace.net.au](mailto:abalinx@netspace.net.au) or via Mobile: 0409965538