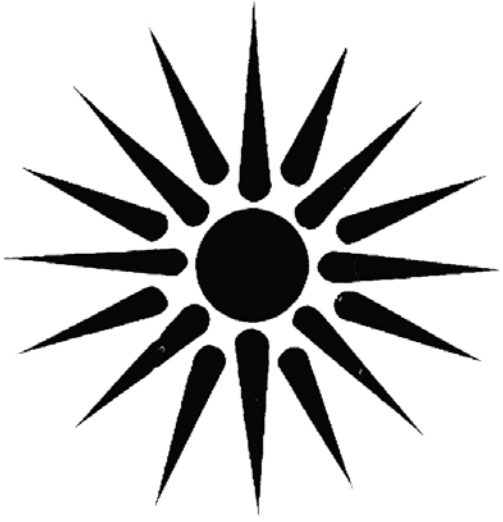
Macedonian Struggle For Independence



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Index

Index 3
Part 1 – Introduction 5
Part 2 – Roman Occupation 7
Part 3 - A New Beginning 12
Part 4 – Cultural Revival 17
Part 5 - Establishing a Macedonian State 23
Part 6 - Uprisings against Byzantine Rule 31
Part 7 – The Hrs, Strez and Dragota Uprisings 37
Part 8 – Ottoman Occupation 44
Part 9 – Early Uprisings against Ottoman Rule 51
Part 10 – The Karposh Uprising 61
Part 11 – Macedonians in the Diaspora 74
Part 12 – Turn of the 19th Century and the Negush Uprising 81
Part 13 – The Razlovtsi Uprising 89
Part 14 - The Kumanovo-Kriva Palanka, Pijanets and Kreshna Uprisings 96
Part 15 - Formation of the Macedonian Provisional Government and the Macedonian League 104
Part 16 – Birth of the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization 111
Part 17 - Preparations for a National Uprising 119
Part 18 – The Ilinden 1903 Uprising 129
Part 19 – The Smilevo Uprising 138
Part 20 – The Krushevo Uprising 142
Part 21 - The Kichevo, Karbunitsa, Dushegubitsa and Gjavato Uprisings 147
Part 22 - The Demit Hisar, Prilep and Margara Uprisings 153
Part 23 - The Ohrid and Resen Uprisings 159
Part 24 - The Kostur Uprising 167
Part 25 - The Lerin Uprising 172
Part 26 - The Skopje and Strumitsa Uprisings 177
Part 27 - The Solun Uprising 185
Part 28 - The Seres Uprising 191
Part 29 - The Ilinden Aftermath 195
Part 30 – The Nozh Uprising 203
Part 31 – The Young Turk Uprising 207
Part 32 – Prelude to the Balkan Wars 218
Part 33 – The First Balkan War 227
Part 34 - Macedonians in the Greek, Serbian and Bulgarian Armies 235
Part 35 – Macedonia's Occupation by the Allied Armies 242
Part 36 – The Tikvesh Uprising against Serbian Occupation 249
Part 37 – The Second Balkan War and Macedonia's Partition 254
Part 38 – The Ohrid – Debar Uprising 261
Part 39 – Macedonian Involvement in WW I 266

Part 40 - Macedonia between the Great Wars 277
Part 41 - Macedonian involvement in pre-World War II.....285
Part 42 - Conclusion 293

Part 1 – Introduction

Macedonia's history begins 1,000 years before Christ with a tiny kingdom located near modern day Kostur. It has been said that its first king was Karan (Caranus), most likely a tribal king.

The tiny kingdom was obscure and backwards until about the fifth century BC when Alexander I became king and made considerable expansions adding both territory and people to his kingdom.

Macedonia however, was still an ordinary place until the fourth century BC when Philip II became its ruler. In his short life Philip II expanded Macedonia's territory, unified the various tribes he conquered and made great political, economic and military strides which transformed Macedonia from an ordinary state into a super power.

Then under Alexander III's rule, better known as Alexander the Great, Macedonia was transformed into an empire spanning from Eastern Europe to the western borders of China and engulfing most of the then known world.

Unfortunately after Alexander III's death the Macedonian empire broke up and several centuries later, it fell into foreign hands.

Ever since then Macedonia has been invaded and occupied many times by many conquerors and subsequently the Macedonian people have been struggling to free themselves.

This is a story of a long struggle that begins with the Roman occupation in the first century BC and continues to this day. It has been a silent struggle drowned out by the louder voices of Macedonia's neighbours who now hold Macedonian lands and proclaim the Macedonian struggles never happened because Macedonians don't exist.

In the chapters that follow the reader will discover that Macedonians do indeed exist and have existed for many centuries not only in name but also as actors in a never ending struggle for freedom and the desire to live unconstrained lives.

Macedonia's history includes wars, battles, rebellions and uprisings waged by ordinary people which more often than not have resulted in tragedy. Yet the Macedonian spirit persists over and over again as history has shown, believing that it is better to struggle and fail than to forever live in bondage. This sprit was never more alive than during the 1903 Ilinden National Uprising when ordinary people came together and took up arms against a greater foe, throwing themselves into battle under the slogan "Liberty or Death".

"The Ilinden rising, declared on 2nd August 1903, will always arouse admiration in the hearts of later generations since its powerful exploits and romantic heroism are above all expressions of that intense will for freedom and the desire for national and political independence which sum up all the

Macedonian ethnic characteristics." (Pages 43 and 44, Nurigiani, Giorgio. Macedonia Yesterday and Today)

"The Ilinden rising is an achievement of great importance for the Macedonian people. There are things in it which stagger the imagination and cause this general insurrection to be ranked as a great historical event.

The whole people rose with a frenzied, irresistible urge for immediate freedom. The Macedonian people's faith made them believe in their creative possibilities, for only a people strong in spirit is able to pluck up courage and with full confidence venture on a historic undertaking. Through this courageous rising, unique of its kind for noble daring, the Macedonia people expressed not only its love of freedom and justice, but also its moral power. This rising remains even today an unrepeatable human attack and an act of supreme self-sacrifice for a people's freedom." (Page 46, Nurigiani, Giorgio. Macedonia Yesterday and Today)

The Macedonian spirit rose again in the 1940's and Macedonians again took up arms to liberate and reunite their Macedonia. Unfortunately that struggle too went unrewarded, not for lack of trying on the part of the Macedonian people but simply because it was not to be. Macedonians however, did succeed in one respect, they formed their own republic inside the Yugoslav federation and thanks to that success today they have their own sovereign and independent state, the Republic of Macedonia. This however is not the end of the story, it is only the beginning.

"Although they have suffered greatly, Macedonians know no fear before storms and precipices. Their determination to attain their aspirations has been tried and proved inflexible. In their drive towards the future and in their development, firmly rooted in their glorious past, the Macedonians stride forward with sure steps, proud and self-confident. Their heads are held high, their moral strength is great, their faith is invincible." (Page 31, Nurigiani, Giorgio. Macedonia Yesterday and Today)

Long live all true sons of Macedonia who fight for justice and freedom!

Part 2 – Roman Occupation

In the beginning, having lived free for centuries, Macedonians found life very oppressive under Roman occupation.

The last battle for the Macedonians to fight as free men was on June 22nd, 168 BC at a city called Pydna near present day Solun where the Roman forces lead by Paullus fought the Macedonians lead by King Perseus. In the style of his predecessors, Perseus struck first by unleashing the full might of the Macedonian phalanx. This was not the usual phalanx. It was reinforced with spears all round like a hedgehog, especially at the flanks. "Paullus, a veteran commander, declared afterwards that this advance was the most terrifying thing he had ever witnessed." (Page 430, Peter Green, Alexander to Actium The Historical Evolution of the Hellenistic Age)

The Macedonians did their best and fought bravely to the last soldier but the disciplined Roman military machine and its fighting style proved to be superior and the battle was lost. It was the end of Macedonia and Macedonian independence. Perseus was taken to Rome as a prisoner of war, or as Peter Green puts it, "to adorn Paullus's treasure rich triumph". The Macedonian monarchy was abolished and Macedonia was demilitarized and partitioned into cantons so that it would never again be able to fight back. As further insurance of its passivity, Macedonian leaders were rounded up and taken to Rome.

The real horror of the Macedonian defeat was not Pydna but what the Roman army did afterwards. Before leaving Macedonia, the Roman army was unleashed on the civilian population and allowed to loot, pillage and rape uncontrollably. It has been said that an unimaginable amount of treasure, including gold, jewels and art, was carried off to Rome. A large segment of the population was taken into slavery. Severe restrictions were placed on trading commodities including lumber, and most of the state taxes were now diverted to Rome. According to Livy, Macedonia was divided into four regions, each with its own Roman council, and was forced to pay half the tribute to Rome. This would have otherwise been paid to the Macedonian king. If that was not enough, Paullus lent the Aetolians five hundred soldiers so that they too could exact their own brand of revenge on the Macedonians. What happened next is a tragedy of great proportion that not even the ancient authors dare describe. The Romans indeed proved themselves to be ruthless, the "true barbarians" that they were, but this was only the beginning.

Dissatisfaction with Roman authority forced many Macedonians to flee north, outside of Roman domain. The troublemakers that were caught were exiled and isolated at the far reaches of the Roman Empire. Some say that those shipped to the far reaches such as Scotland and Ireland refused to be assimilated and to maintain their identity and identify with one another,

they placed the word “Mac” before their names. Could the “Macs” of Scotland and Ireland be related to the ancient Macedonians? Only through further investigation and DNA studies this can be proved or disproved. As for now it will remain a mystery.

Those still living in Macedonia found it increasingly difficult to cope with being oppressed and about twenty years after the occupation, under the leadership of Andriscus the pretender, they initiated the first of many uprisings.

Andriscus claimed to be Philip VI, son of Perseus by Laodice, Seleucus IV’s daughter who was also Demetrius I’s sister. In 153 BC, with Demetrius I’s help, Andriscus went to Rome to plead his case for the Macedonian people but the Senate was not interested in a hearing. Frustrated, Andriscus returned and sought help from the Macedonian people who gave him what he needed including royal robes, a diadem, recognition and troops. He received recognition from Byzantium and troops from various Thracian chieftains.

Given the circumstances in Macedonia, rule by a pretender was preferable to being divided and ruled by Romans. When he was ready Andriscus advanced on Macedonia from Thrace and, after two battles in 149 BC, took control of Macedonia. Unfortunately, Macedonia’s freedom was short lived. Two Roman legions, under the leadership of Quintus Macedonicus, were dispatched and ironically ended Andriscus’s career at Pydna in 148 BC. After this unsuccessful revolt, Macedonia lost its independence entirely and became a Roman province.

The first century BC brought profound change in the political structure of power from northern India to Egypt. It also brought the extinction of the centuries old Macedonian ruling dynasties. The end of Macedonian rule did not facilitate the end of Macedonian culture in these regions. Far from it, once established the Macedonians continued to live on among the native populations, permanently naturalizing their customs and culture. In India at least, a great deal of the original political and administrative structure, established during ancient times, was adopted by the Indians and some remain unchanged to this day. If I may also add, it was the early Macedonians right after Alexander’s time who introduced the Indians to their present day calendar, including the division of the week into seven days, one named after the sun and one after the moon.

The Macedonian civilization exercised immense prestige not only in Asia and India but in Rome as well. Rome itself was very much infatuated with Macedonian art, architecture, sculpture, etc. that in time it too developed a Macedonian culture. Despite popular belief to the contrary Macedonian culture was never extinguished during the Roman period.

As mentioned earlier, after Perseus’s defeat at Pydna in 168 BC Macedonia was partitioned into four regions and became Roman territory. It was particularly during this period that Macedonia was robbed of its

cultural treasures including the many monuments of art located in Solun, Pella and other culturally rich cities. Macedonia's treasures were transferred to Rome and paraded as trophies of Roman victories on Roman streets during triumph festivals.

After 148 BC the four regions of Macedonia were united again but made into a Roman province with Solun as its capital.

Solun was the most important city in Macedonia not only because of its prosperous economy due to its busy harbour and its close proximity to "via Egnatia", but also because of its great cultural and intellectual growth. Solun was an industrial city that profited immensely from its marine trade and from its close proximity to the military highway, via Egnatia, which facilitated much of the goods destined to Europe. Besides being of economic and intellectual importance, Solun, because of its surrounding wall, was also a great military fortress. The Macedonian King Cassander chose its location well and fortified the city for good reason. Solun was about the only city in Macedonia to withstand and repel the barbarian invasions of the 50s and 60s BC. Even Roman dissidents like the orator Cicero fled to Solun for safety during darker times. Solun had the elements of success and was destined to become a powerful city. During the Roman Civil War of 49 to 31 BC, Macedonia was again turned into a battleground. At the time Solun backed the Imperial Army of Antony and Octavian turning the tide on the Republicans. After the Imperial victory at Philippi in 42 BC, the Macedonians of Solun erected a triumphant arch at the west gate of Vardar in honour of the victors. This show of loyalty not only saved Solun, but also allowed its citizens to earn their freedom and Solun to earn the status of a free city. A free city at the time enjoyed special privileges including the right to govern itself, hold free public meetings and to protect itself. This new found freedom allowed the city to grow and prosper, but more importantly, it attracted famous scholars, writers, philosophers, poets and teachers who made Solun their home and added to the city's intellectual wealth. By the turn of the new millennium, Solun was becoming an ethnically diverse cultural center that was beginning to rival Alexandria and Antioch.

There are some who believe that the period between 27 BC and 180 AD was a period of wasted opportunity. It was a period of spending rather than of creating, an age of architecture and trade in which the rich grew richer and the poor poorer. It was an age when man's soul and spirit decayed. There were thousands of well built cities supplied by great aqueducts, connected to each other by splendid highways and each equipped with temples, theaters, amphitheaters and markets. The citizens of these great cities were well refined in attitude and mannerism, indicative of a civilized society. All this unfortunately was achieved on the backs of slaves who came from the vastness of the empire, including Macedonia. The slaves provided the manpower to build the cities, aqueducts, roads,

temples and theaters. The slaves provided the labour to cultivate the soil and feed the masses. They also provided the bodies that fuelled the blood sport that entertained the Roman citizenry so much. It is unknown how many slaves suffered cruel deaths to civilize the glorious Roman Empire, the pride of the west, but I am certain the numbers were horrendous.

It is often asked, "Who were the Roman gladiators, who were the Christians fed to the lions, and who were the slaves that gave their lives to build the Roman Empire and entertain the Roman citizen?" Although history provides us with no answers, all we need to do is look at the aftermath of every Roman victory and count the numbers enslaved.

Macedonia was the last nation in Europe to fall into Roman hands but the first en masse to fall into Roman slavery. While the middle class Macedonian, among others, supplied the Roman Empire with enlightenment, the Macedonian slave, among others, supplied it with the necessary labour to build its civilization. Even though Macedonia, more so than any other nation in the history of the Roman Empire, had contributed to its development, modern Roman history mentions nothing of the Macedonians. The Macedonian people have received no credit for their contribution and the willing and unwilling sacrifices they made for the success of the Romans.

Even though it is well known that the Roman Empire was built on the foundation of Alexander the Greats' Macedonian Empire, its modern inheritors refuse to give Macedonia and the Macedonian people the credit they deserve. Today's modern westerner speaks of the Roman Empire's accomplishments with great pride, forgetting that without Macedonia's contributions their precious empire would be an empty shell.

Every historian knows that the only contribution that the lumbering Roman Empire should be credited with is the construction of roads, cities and aqueducts. In terms of government it had none. At its best it had a bureaucratic administration that kept the peace but failed to secure it. The typical Roman was so overly preoccupied with pursuing "the loot" that he forgot to implement any free thinking and apply knowledge. He had an abundance of books but very few were written by Romans. He respected wealth and despised science. He allowed the rich to rule and imagined that the wise men could be bought and bargained for in the slave markets. He made no effort to teach, train or bring the common people into any conscious participation of his life. He had made a tool of religion, literature, science and education and entrusted it to the care of slaves who were bred and traded like animals. His empire, "It was therefore, a colossally ignorant and unimaginative empire. It foresaw nothing. It had no strategic foresight, because it was blankly ignorant of geography and ethnology." (Page 397, H.G. Wells, The Outline of History) This is only a tiny sample of what an eminent western scholar and author thinks of the contributions of the Roman Empire.

Ironically we refer to the Romans as civilized and to the Macedonians as barbarian, knowing full well that Macedonia employed no slaves and Rome built its empire on the backs of slaves.

"Civilize: bring out of barbarous or primitive stage of society; enlighten, refine and educate." (Page 127, The Oxford Dictionary of Current English) I guess 19th century modern historians forgot to consult the dictionary for the word "civilized" when they wrote the modern history of the Roman Empire.

Without getting into the grossness of the Roman excesses and coliseum blood lusts, I believe I made my point that "the Roman Empire was neither civilized nor did it contribute as much as its proponents would have us believe".

The start of the new millennium witnessed the death of the Roman Republic and the birth of Imperial Rome. The Augustan emperors may have brought peace to the empire but with it they also brought neglect, decline and decay. As mentioned earlier, by 180 AD there were unmistakable signs of decay. Besides the agricultural and economic decline, the empire opened its doors to anarchy when the adoptive system of choosing emperors was abandoned in favour of personal appointments.

The following century witnessed bloodshed, misrule and civil war. The erosion of central power opened the doors for barbarian invasions.

Part 3 - A New Beginning

After their unsuccessful attempt to liberate Macedonia from the Roman occupation, the Macedonian people soon lost their abilities to lead renewed military struggles and begrudgingly accepted Roman dominion. Due to the military and strategic importance of Macedonia the Romans made it their main military base for campaigns against the Tribilians and Maesis in the north and the Thracians in the east. Then with the building of the Via Egnetia military highway in the second century BC, the Romans rearranged and renovated the ancient trade routes and turned Macedonia into a significant Roman economic power.

The Macedonian people had their own traditions of civilized life, and were less open to Romanization. Here the Romans wisely maintained local traditions and allowed existing Macedonian administrations to function provided they collected imperial taxes and fulfilled other imperial responsibilities.

Though class distinctions in Roman society were sharp, social barriers were not rigid and as the Empire expanded it became possible for the Macedonian freemen to acquire wealth and join the nobility. The educated Macedonians who unfortunately fell into slavery became schoolmasters or clerks. Even with their skills, slave schoolmasters were not exempt from abuse. “Under the Republic the treatment of slaves had been appalling. When a slave was sold on the great markets of Capua or Delos he could look forward to the horrors of gladiatorial schools or to back-breaking labour in the mines or on large plantations. The fortunate few with some education became schoolmasters (regularly flogged by their students) or clerks.” (Page 149, Fishwick, The Foundation of the West)

Even under such harsh rule however, the Macedonian people remained cultured and continued to live civilized lives.

Rome itself was a city state and did not have the large population required to control its vast territories so Macedonians were often employed over the centuries to perform some of the functions in civil administrations and even fill the positions of Emperors.

It is well known that the Romans loved Macedonian culture and allowed Macedonians to practice their lesser vocations such as sculpting, artisan work, philosophy, teaching and other skills. Unfortunately the Romans did not love the Macedonians and in spite of their skills they bought and sold them as commodities in the slave markets. It is no wonder Christianity took root in Macedonia so early and so eagerly.

When it came to philosophical debates about the nature of the gods, Solun was right up there with Alexandria and Antioch. Why was there such a preoccupation with the gods and why at this time?

There were two main factors that influenced the creative thinking of the time. The first was the sophistication of an intellectually evolving

society which, with the accumulation of knowledge, matured and grew out of its beliefs in the "mythical gods" of Homer. The second was the intellectual disgust in elevating mere humans, and cruel ones at that, to divinity. After Caesar was deified, deifications of emperors became common practice and even the cruelest men were made into gods. Worse were expectations that people of various races, cultures, religions and intellect would pay homage to these cruel men as if they were truly gods.

Was it not burden enough to live under their harsh rule, let alone pray to them for spiritual guidance? This callous Roman behaviour led many to question their faith in such false gods. In time it became increasingly less likely that an educated man would support the cult of his parents, let alone that of his grandparents.

The spiritual teachings of Jesus were like a breath of fresh air not just for the intellectuals who began to support monotheism but for the ordinary people, slaves included, who saw hope in an otherwise hopeless world.

After losing its ability to fight back, Macedonia's spirit was channeled through intellectualism and its rebelliousness manifested itself in art, philosophy and religious debates, a prerequisite to Christianity. It was by no mere accident that the apostle Paul went to visit Macedonia.

For some time it was rumoured that Macedonia was visited by Jesus' mother Mary. Expecting to find uneducated and primitive people living on the rocky shore of Mount Gora (Athos) and fearing for her life, Mary was pleasantly surprised at the welcome she received from the local inhabitants. They were not only civilized, but they knew of her and of her son's plight. In thanks for the hospitality she received from these people she blessed their mountain and as such, turned it into the holiest place in Europe.

"The Blessed Virgin excluded all other women from Holy Mountain, when she claimed it as 'Her Garden' after she was driven ashore by storms near the site of the present monastery of 'Iviron' USPENIE." (Page 41, Vasil Bogov, Macedonian Revelation, Historical Documents Rock and Shatter Modern Political Ideology, Western Australia, 1998) Holy Mountain, or Sveta Gora as it is known in Macedonia, is the holiest place in Europe and one of the greatest monastic centers of Christendom.

Hearing of Mary's visit and acceptance, Paul know he would be welcomed in Macedonia and set out on his mission to spread the good word of Jesus. His missionary journey took him to the beautiful Macedonian city of Solun where, in 50 AD, he established what later came to be known as the "Golden Gate" church, the first Christian church in Europe. (Page 9, John Rekos, Monuments of Thessaloniki)

The central and eastern Mediterranean, for the 1st and 2nd centuries AD, swarmed with a multitude of religious ideas struggling to be spread out. Jesus' message was being rapidly propagated over large geographical areas and his followers were divided right from the start over elements of

faith and practice. The new faith may have had spirit but it lacked organization and many Christian churches sprang up and practiced a kind of diverse Christian faith. Each church more or less had its own "Jesus Story" based on oral traditions and the personal biases of its founders. It would not be until Constantine's time, a very long time indeed, before the Christian faith would be amalgamated into a single religion and achieve unity. "Constantinople was to be the new capital of the Roman Empire; it was also planned as the first capital of Christianity and the outward symbol of Constantine's final recognition of the Christian Church in 313 A.D." (Page 161, Fishwick, The Foundation of the West)

In time Christianity introduced the gospel to every race in every corner of the Roman Empire and with it came the written word, formalization and later the institutionalization of the modern written languages. The Macedonian language, to which history refers to as the language spoken by Alexander's soldiers, was no exception.

The start of the new millennium witnessed the death of the Roman Republic and the birth of Imperial Rome. The Augustan emperors may have brought peace to the empire but with it they also brought neglect, decline and decay. By 180 AD there were unmistakable signs of decay. Besides the agricultural and economic decline, the empire opened its doors to anarchy when the adoptive system of choosing emperors was abandoned in favour of personal appointments.

The following fifty years witnessed bloodshed, misrule and civil war. The erosion of central power opened the doors for barbarian invasions. Besides attacks from the various Germanic tribes and Franks on the west, a more serious push came from the Goths in the east. The Goths were a maritime people who lived in southern Russia and controlled the waterways from the Baltic, across Russia to the Black and Caspian Seas.

Unable to withstand their advance, the Romans lost the eastern seas and allowed the Goths to enter the Aegean coastline and advance on Macedonia. Another group crossed the Danube in a great land raid in 247 AD.

Further east, under the powerful Sassanid dynasty, the Persian Empire was revived and it too attacked the Romans.

One of the main failures that led to the decline of the Roman Empire was poor communication. Rome's geographical position in relation to its empire made it unsuitable as a world capital. Every order and official document had to travel northward for half the length of Italy before it could turn east or west. Even though some of the more capable emperors set up their headquarters in the hub of activity this still did not solve the communication problem in its entirety.

One of Constantine's priorities after seizing power was to find a suitable location for his capital where communication would not be so much of a problem. Although Solun was contemplated for its

cosmopolitan Macedonian culture, economy and defenses, Constantine opted for the city of Byzantium. After all was it not Byzantium that withstood Philip II's siege and survived?

From a strategic point, Byzantium offered some advantages over Solun. Byzantium was located on the waters of the Bosporus, linking the Mediterranean with the Black Sea. It was the center of the Roman world, linking east with west. From a military perspective, ships could easily be dispatched east or west up the rivers and outflank every barbarian advance. Even Mesopotamia, Egypt and the Aegean and Adriatic coastlines were within a reasonable striking distance from Byzantium. From a commercial perspective, Byzantium was a lot closer to the eastern trade routes than Rome or Solun. In other words, Constantine chose Byzantium by careful planning and design, which in the long term gave his empire the advantage it needed to survive for nearly a millennium and a half, until 1453 AD.

The Koine language, in which the bible was translated, was the international language of commerce, introduced to the vastness of the world by Alexander the Great. This was the language of the educated and elite; not of the masses. For the most part, the native people of all parts of the Macedonian empire, who took part in the affairs of the empire, were educated in Koine. However that did not preclude them from speaking their native language. It is well documented that non Europeans in the ranks of the European elite not only spoke a second language, their native language, but were also known by a different name, their local native name.

While the Macedonians and later the Romans had no interest in local affairs, other than harvesting taxes, Christianity showed great interest in everyone irrespective of social status. In Jesus' eyes all men were created equal, in the image of God. The common people could identify with the Christian God and this had appeal for them. In contrast, deities of the Roman faith imitated "the all-powerful" Roman emperor sitting on his throne, a frightening figure and far removed from the common man.

By making contact directly with the native people of the empire, the Christians began to institutionalize the local languages by giving them life through the written scriptures and through educating priests to read and write in them. Unfortunately at the turn of the new millennium, in Europe at least, there were only three scripts available upon which to base the written word and these were Aramaic, Koine and Latin which the vast majority of common people did not understand. Besides, most common languages had far richer sounds than the existing Aramaic, Koine or Latin written alphabets could accommodate. For the Macedonians, it would take a few centuries but eventually a single refined universal script, the Cyrillic script, would emerge and bring Macedonians back to their former intellectual and cultural glory.

As Rome collapsed and the West fell into darkness, the East continued to flourish and with time began to shed its Roman veneer exposing the Macedonian persona whose foundation was laid by the ancient Macedonians.

One of the first Roman contributions to be phased out over time was the Latin language used by institutions and the government. Latin was replaced by Koine, a more familiar and known language to the region. Although useful for administrative and high level functions Koine too was a foreign language and unfamiliar to the common people.

After institutionalizing Christianity as the religion of the Empire in Constantinople or Tsari Grad (City of Kings) as it was known to the Macedonians, Christian Churches soon began to spring up all over Macedonian cities. Solun being the second largest city and cultural center of the Empire soon also became the second center of Christianity.

Christianity unfortunately was not as successful in taking root in rural Macedonia as it was to the urban centers. This was mainly due to the political instability in the region caused by various invasions and attacks on the Empire. Eventually however, Christianity did spread to rural Macedonia and Macedonia became the center of Christianity in Europe from where the great Christianization of Eastern Europe began.

Part 4 – Cultural Revival

When we speak of struggles for independence we often think of uprisings, rebellions and insurrections but struggles are not always violent, they can also be peaceful. When people are prohibited from expressing their desires politically they often turn to the arts, even to religion.

Even though centuries had past and much was forgotten, Macedonians still remembered the glory of Philip II and Alexander the Great, a constant reminder of who they once were and who they could again become. Unfortunately they also remembered the Roman shackles from which they still bore scars.

After its consolidation as the official religion of the Byzantine Empire, Christianity began to gain strength in Macedonia giving the Macedonian people hope and reasons to live. In Christianity Macedonians found a voice and a common cause to unite not as warriors but as bearers of an ancient culture expressed through religion.

Christianity and its interpretations soon became the talk of the town as it took deep root in every facet of Macedonian culture. Christianity in Macedonia became an expression of art.

As Macedonian priests preached the word of Jesus to their parishes, Macedonian artists painted beautiful murals, icons and frescoes. As Macedonian craftsmen crafted the amazing church interiors, altars and carvings, Macedonian architects and builders built the churches and cathedrals. These spectacular works of art propelled Christianity into a new dimension giving it appeal and a life of its own. It is no wonder Macedonia became the center of Christian culture and the source of the Christian religion in all of Europe.

The power of this new faith projected through artistic beauty began to influence worlds beyond Macedonia as Macedonian priests, iconographers, sculptors and church builders alike were called upon to teach and replicate Christianity and its beauty beyond Macedonia even beyond the domain of the Byzantine Empire.

In addition to the artistic beauty of its Churches, Christianity needed a language of expression, a language by which the true meaning of the words of Jesus could be articulated. This language had to be the language the masses understood by which priests could read and eloquently articulate their message from Jesus.

Although the Macedonians had a language, it was an oral language which served the people well in their oral traditions but the story of Jesus recorded in the gospels and in the bible was far too complicated to entrust to oral traditions. Therefore a written language was needed.

By the fourth century AD the Latin language had almost disappeared from the institutions in Macedonia and was replaced by Koine. Koine unfortunately was a language of the educated and although sufficient to

use in the cities and larger towns where the population was schooled, it was inadequate to use in the villages and smaller towns where the population did not understand it.

It is unclear when first attempts were made to devise a script but there are indications that it was done as early as the fourth century AD. This information comes to us from Tsrnorizets Hrabar the defender of the Macedonian peoples' language whose work has been preserved but not yet fully investigated. According to Tsrnorizets Hrabar there existed certain native characters consisting of "lines and incisions" in which the Macedonian language was committed to writing. Unfortunately this was a far too primitive and complex language to use to teach and express the complexities of the gospels.

By the 5th century AD Macedonia was the center of Christianity controlled by a Metropolitan with its center in Solun. Subordinate to the Metropolitan were the Bishops of eighteen Macedonian cities and towns among which were Lerin, Voden, Kostur and Serres.

The real push for a written script came around the 8th century AD with the need to Christianize the many Slavic speaking tribes beyond the empire's borders.

Failing to create a written language using the runic and primitive "lines and incisions", scholars soon began to look at the Koine and Latin alphabets but also found them exceedingly difficult to record the complex sounds of the Slavonic language.

Although there are varying opinions among scholars as to who created it and when, the next script to be put into use was the Glagolic script.

The Glagolic script received its name from the Macedonian word "glagol" which in English means "word" and the word "glagolati" meaning "to speak". For those who had never seen a book before it appeared as though the letters spoke to the reader and told him what to say.

Even though the Glagolic script was complete and capable of delivering the complex sounds of the Slavonic speech, it was abandoned for the newer Cyrillic script.

Because of the varying scholarly opinions on the origins and development of these scripts we will not get into their history but rather emphasize that both alphabets were developed in Macedonia by Macedonian scholars to serve one purpose; Christianize the Slav speaking people of Eastern Europe.

We know that the brothers Kiril and Metodi instituted a revision of the written Macedonian language during the 8th and 9th centuries AD. This statement may be rather controversial, but we can say that the brothers did not invent but renovated the Macedonian alphabet, based on old Macedonian traditions, to properly capture the natural evolution of the spoken language. The Macedonian oral language always existed and naturally evolved. Unfortunately, due to prolonged Roman influence, the

written form was neglected and in need of reformation. What the Macedonian brothers began was later taken up by their students. Kliment being the brightest was credited with the final reformation of the alphabet which became known as the Cyrillic alphabet. Kliment updated the written part of the Macedonian language to take advantage of its natural evolution and made it simpler and phonetic. Kliment was also credited for translating the gospels and other works and making them available in the Macedonian language commonly referred to as "Old Church Slavonic".

The brothers Kiril and Metodi were Macedonians, natives of Solun, who were acclaimed as the apostles of the southern Slavs and the fathers of Slav literary culture. Kiril, the younger of the two, was given the name Constantine when he was baptized. It was much later that he received the name Kiril.

Macedonian scholars not only solved the problem of writing in the common Macedonian language in a relatively short period of time but they also managed to successfully promote and teach it to the entire Slav speaking world. This kind of success was not only paramount but unprecedented in the history of the world.

Since there was no one to speak on behalf of the Macedonian people when Balkan histories were written after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, foreigners such as the Greeks and Bulgarians usurped parts of Macedonia's history and took credit for Macedonian deeds and accomplishments.

What is important here is that these deeds and accomplishments originated in Macedonia, not in Greece and not in Bulgaria and as such must be attributed to the people of Macedonia.

It is a well known fact that the Bulgars never defeated, conquered or invaded Solun so how can modern Bulgarians claim that Kiril and Metodi, the Solun bothers, the very same people who are credited with "inventing" the Cyrillic alphabet be Bulgarians?

Similarly, even though the Slavs never conquered Solun, according to Byzantine Emperor Michael III, the people of Solun spoke pure Slavonic. How is possible that they spoke "pure Slavonic" in Solun when no Slav ever set foot on that city?

"The 'Salonika Brothers', the 'Apostles to the Slavs', as they are variously called, are claimed by different sources such as Greeks, Bulgarians or Macedonians. Such categories are inappropriate for the middle ages, before the formation of modern nations. Cyril (Kiril) and Methodius (Metodi) were Byzantine missionaries. They may have been of East South Slavonic stock or they may have learned the Salonika dialect from peasants in the area. When the Moravian Emperor Rastislav appealed to the Byzantine Emperor Michael III in Constantinople for missionaries to teach the gospel to the Slavs of Moravia, Michael chose Constantine and Methodius, who were well known as Byzantine scholars and diplomats.

Michael justified his choice with the famous sentence: 'You are Thessalonians, and all the people of Salonika speak pure Slavonic'." (Peter Hill. The Macedonians in Australia. Carlisle: Hesperian Press, 1989. Page 2)

Again, if the Slavs never entered Solun, how was it that all the people of Solun spoke "pure Slavonic" and not Greek as the Greeks today want us to believe?

Debates as to who the Macedonians were are absurd and counterproductive since it is well known that the Macedonian people were not only a dominant factor in the affairs of the Byzantine Empire but also major contributors to the world's civilization.

Macedonians took the initiative to create a written language not only for themselves as some cultures had done in the past, but also to educate a vast part of the world. If anyone should be credited for spreading their language and culture it should be the Macedonians. Christianizing and educating the entire East European world and part of Asia all the way to Siberia is an example of what the Macedonians had accomplished in a relatively short period of time. Today we have the following languages using the Cyrillic alphabet: Abaza, Abkhaz, Adyghe, Avar, Azeri, Belorussian, Bulgarian, Dungan, Kazak, Kyrkhyz, Komi, Macedonian, Moldovan, Mongolian, Old Church Slavonic, Russian, Ruthenian, Serbian, Slavio, Tajik, Tatar, Turkman, Ukrainian, Uzbek and Yakut.

There are two questions that arise from the above: 1) why would Macedonians be willing to create a language and spread it so far away from their own domain? And 2) why would foreign tribes and nations as far north as Siberia accept a foreign language from a foreign people thousands of miles away?

This is indeed an enigma to which, to this day, very little thought has been devoted, especially from academics and scholars. This however does not preclude us from theorizing.

Angelina Markus always believed that the modern Macedonians are the natural inheritors of the entire Macedonian heritage from the day Macedonia came into being which according to her extends to Neolithic times. According to Markus "many of the people from the Balkans to Siberia today who are called 'Slavs' owe that title to the Macedonians". When Alexander conquered Eastern Europe he created cities and populated them with Macedonians. These cities remained intact and vibrant even after the Macedonian empires disappeared. History has also recorded that when Rome attacked Macedonia half of the Macedonian population fled north beyond the Roman domain. The people that fled were mostly educated and prominent Macedonians who would have found it difficult to survive under Roman oppression and were invariably civilized and capable of spreading the Macedonian language and culture to the new worlds they settled. It is estimated that half a million people fled

Macedonia some 2,100 years ago and since then have been populating and spreading the Macedonian language and culture to Eastern Europe and Asia all the way to Siberia.

When the so called "Slav tribes" from the Danube to Siberia were Christianized during the 8th, 9th and 10th centuries AD, they were Christianized by teachers from Macedonia, a foreign world, a world that should have been alien to the Slavs. Yet this demand for Macedonian teachers did happen and lead to the formation of the Ohrid University, the first University in Europe.

"The reason that these people were asking for teachers from Macedonia" explains Markus "is because they were themselves or believed to be themselves akin to the Macedonians". This also explains why when the so called "Slavs" came to Macedonia they found a familiar culture and language.

Angelina Markus also pointed out that: "To have a complete Macedonian History, Culture, Philosophy, we need to open the archives of the Vatican because old Rome was the last to take everything from Macedonia, and those documents today are hidden away in a secret place. The other places that need to be opened are the archives of the universal Constantinople (Istanbul) patriarchy. In these archives are kept most highly treasured things about the writing and history of ancient Macedonia." (Zac I)

While Ohrid experienced a boom in the field of education and enlightenment, Solun experienced a golden age of its own not only in the arts and literature but also in commerce and industry. Celebrated scholars, orators, philosophers, mosaicists, wood carving craftsmen, hymnologists, architects, hagiographers, etc., all gathered together in Solun not only to build the most magnificent churches the world had ever seen but to also open schools and teach their crafts to foreign students for export.

Besides the immense Macedonian contribution to the arts, crafts, literature and architecture, Macedonians also served the Byzantine Empire as soldiers, statesmen and even Emperors. Macedonians occupied the Empire's throne during the period from 867 AD to 1081 AD in what came to be known as the Macedonian Epoch. The following Macedonian Emperors and Empresses served on the Byzantine throne: Basil I the Macedonian (867-886), Leo VI the Philosopher or the Wise (886-9I2), Alexander (886-913), Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus (913-959), Romanus I Lecapenus (919-944), Romanus II (959-963), Nicephorus II Phocas (963-969), John Tzimisces (969-976), Basil II the Macedonian 976-1025), Constantine VIII (1025-1028), Romanus III Argyrus (1028-1034), Michael IV (1034-1041), Michael V Calaphates (1041-1042), Zoe and Theodora 1042, Constantine IX Monomachus (1042-1055) and Theodora (1055-1056). (A. Vasiliev. "History of the Byzantine Empire (324 - 1453)". The University of Wisconsin Press. 1952. Pages 300-303)

According to Vasiliev, the Macedonian dynasties fall into two periods. The first extends from 867 AD to 1025 AD with the death of Basil II. The second but brief period extends from 1025 AD to 1056 AD with the death of Empress Theodora.

Historians have often referred to these periods, especially the first, as the most productive and politically successful in the Empire's existence. The Empire was particularly productive under the leaderships of Nicephorus Phocas, John Tzimisces and Basil II.

During Basil II's reign the empire achieved its greatest accomplishments and glory. Among its successes were the suppression of the separatist movements in Asia Minor, its increased influence in Syria, its partial annexation of Armenia, its annexation of Bulgaria and its successful Christianization of Russia. Upon adopting Christianity from the Byzantines, Russia entered into closer religious, political, commercial, and cultural ties with the Byzantine Empire.

After Basil II's death the Empire slowly slid into anarchy and entered a troubled period until the Comneni seized the throne in 1081 AD at which point the Empire regained its strength, internal order was re-established and intellectual and artistic activities once again began to flourish.

It seems that everything that is Macedonian has been contested and so is the identity of Emperor Basil I the Macedonian. Only recently scholars have determined that Basil was born in the city of Chariopolis in Macedonia.

Although Basil did not directly contribute to the Macedonian struggle for independence, as a powerful Macedonian historic figure he did contribute to the shaping of the Byzantine Empire and through the dynasty he founded he preserved the name Macedonia and Macedonian in the annals of history.

As a young man Basil went to Constantinople to seek his fortune and by his good looks, tall stature, enormous strength and ability to break the wildest of horses, attracted the attention of many onlookers. Stories about him even reached the Emperor Michael III who invited him to be his guest at his court. They soon became drinking buddies and in no time Basil's charm and charisma took the best of the Emperor who proclaimed him co-ruler and crowned him in the temple of St. Sophia. Basil unfortunately became tired of Michael and within a year of their relationship he had him assassinated and proclaimed himself Emperor thus giving birth to the Macedonian dynasty which lasted for two centuries.

Part 5 - Establishing a Macedonian State

At the same time certain segments of Macedonian society were experiencing cultural prosperity other segments were taxed to death to pay for it and for the Empire's achievements of glory.

Even though Bulgarian expansion in the 10th century had halted, Macedonia was still occupied by both the Bulgar and Byzantine Empires.

With neither empire having access to resources outside of their own territories, both empires were dependent on internal means to support their administrations and military campaigns. Macedonia's economy at the time was mostly rural agriculture consisting of communes operated independently and co-operatively by clan and tribal relationships. Tribal lords, who for the most part were leaders of the co-operatives, ruled over the principalities.

As the need for more resources increased in order to support both empires, so did Byzantine and Bulgar control over Macedonian principalities. The Tribal lords who governed Macedonia independently or semi-independently soon became obedient tools of the occupiers. With time these lords were appointed and dismissed at the will of their rulers and only existed to serve them. In addition to the appointed lords, the Bulgars brought their own judges, tax collectors and church officials.

With the strengthening of Byzantine and Bulgar rule in Macedonia the decline of tribal self-government among the Macedonians was accelerated. At that time both the Byzantine and Bulgar Empires had well-formed feudal social relations. More and more agricultural co-operative communes were transformed into territorial communes, which accelerated the division of co-operatively held property. As a result of the clan-link breakdown in Macedonia, new and numerous feudal lords began to appear, taking over lands and people. Among them were foreigners and the church. Foreigners from other parts of the empire were granted Macedonian lands and privileges to use the Macedonian population to do their work. Church and monastery land holdings were formed and in time increased through gifts and by means of confiscations. Many Macedonian peasants lost their lands to the church due to defaulting on loans or to accusations of religious crimes.

The establishment of feudal social structures in Macedonia opened the way for mass exploitation not only of the feudal principalities but also of the free peasants who still lived in rural communities. The situation worsened around the middle of the tenth century when the profitable Bulgar wars of conquest came to an end. Having no other substantial sources of income to support the Bulgar military, administrative, court and church systems, the Bulgars turned to feudal exploitation. After everyone took their cut, the Macedonian peasant was left with nothing. Pushed to the brink of starvation, the Macedonian peasants revolted in what later became

known as the Bogomil movement. Even though it was religious in nature, the Bogomil movement was predominantly a class struggle between the poor Macedonian peasant and his rich foreign rulers. The Bogomil movement was initiated in Macedonia by a Macedonian priest named Bogomil.

The Bogomil movement, in reality, was a rebellion against secular feudal lords, the state body and the empires themselves. Foreign rule brought higher taxes, more violence and additional punishment for the common people. Villages grew poorer and peasants lost their properties and means of livelihood. Many were taken prisoner and became serfs and slaves, sometimes on their own lands.

It is said that at the dawn of medieval Macedonia two great men arose, Kliment of Ohrid and a priest named Bogomil. The first was an educator and writer whose distinguished work is the pride of Macedonia. The second was an idealist whose heretical theory became a rallying cry for the oppressed in Macedonia and later throughout Europe.

Bogomil was the first to teach religious elements adopted from the Paulician and Marsalian teachings. These beliefs, which forbade taking sacraments, worshipping images, including the cross, and refuted much of the Bible, were probably introduced to Macedonia by the Armenian colonists deposited in Thrace by past Byzantine emperors. Many of the dualistic, anti-ecclesiastical and anti-feudal characteristics of these movements found their expression in the Bogomil ideology.

Under feudal ownership the peasants were fully dependent upon their feudal lords. Some historians argue that Kliment of Ohrid's visit to the Bulgar capital and his resignation as bishop a few months before his death was in response to the violence and devastation the Bulgars inflicted on the people in the territory of the Bishopric of Velika.

The swift spread of the Bogomil movement prompted Petar, the Bulgar king, to take measures for its suppression but he did not succeed. Bogomilism was strongest in the territory defined by the triangle of the Vardar River, Ohrid and Mt. Shar. His intervention, however, did cause the Bogomils much suffering. But even the cruelest of methods did not stop the insurrection, which in time spread and became a general people's movement. Petar's death and the Russian campaigns against the Bulgars drastically reduced Bulgar control over Macedonia allowing the Bogomil movement to flourish, at least for a while.

In the meantime, eager to exploit the situation, a new force of power was emerging in Macedonia. In 976 AD, the year emperor John (Tsimisces) died, the four Komitopuli brothers, David, Moses, Aaron and Samoil raised a rebellion. With the collapse of Bulgar rule and in the absence of Byzantine forces which were leading a campaign in Syria, the rebellion was successful and the brothers decided to rule their newly established state jointly. Unfortunately, the joint rule did not last long as

three of the brothers died one after another leaving Samoil as the sole heir of the new state.

According to military historian Vanche Stojchev, the Komitopuli brothers organized two rebellions, one in 969 and another in 976. According to John Scyilitzes who was one of the best sources of that period, the Komitopuli organized the first rebellion against the Bulgarian brothers Boris and Roman, sons of Emperor Petar and the second rebellion against the Byzantine Empire. (Vanche Stojchev. "Military History of Macedonia". Military academy. Skopje, 2004. Page 63)

According to Byzantine sources, Nikola the father and the four brothers belonged to a class of prominent and powerful dignitaries called bolyars who were very influential in Petar's Bulgarian court. Nikola was a member of the royal council and served Petar faithfully until the end of his life.

As with many prominent Macedonians the identity of the Komitopuli family is contested by various academics. The Bulgarians claim that Nikola and his wife Ripsimia were Bulgarians. Historians Prokic and Petrovic on the other hand claim the Komitopuli were royals from the tribe of Brsjaks. Yet other sources believe that Nikola and his family originated from the Persian colonists who were moved to Macedonia by Emperor Theophilus. The strongest arguments however are in favour of Nikola and Ripsimia being Armenians in origin because of their children's names David, Moses, Aaron and Samoil being Armenian names which are used in the Armenian Church to this day. The name Ripsimia, which in Armenian is Hripsime, is also a respected Armenian name.

According to Armenian sources, Samoil and his brothers were born in the Derjan canton in Armenia and were brought to Macedonia by Emperor Basil I the Macedonian, as a regiment to fight against the Bulgarians but during the first battle they changed sides and joined the Bulgarians. Armenian sources also say that David, Moses, Aaron and Samoil are actually Biblical names given to prominent people such as patriarchs, princes, priests, philosophers, etc. (Vanche Stojchev. "Military History of Macedonia". Military academy. Skopje, 2004. Page 63)

Regardless of the origin or ethnic backgrounds of the Komitopuli, what matters here is that they seized power from both the Bulgars and Byzantines and formed a state in the heartland of Macedonia and later turned it into a vast empire that rivaled that of Philip II.

Initially Samoil raised his army from the Macedonian population and by the end of the 10th century he conquered the southern half of Bulgaria, Serbia, Croatia, Albania and most of the Greek territory. He created a large Macedonian state, which extended from the Black Sea to the Adriatic Sea and from the Sava River to the Ionian Sea.

Samoil proclaimed himself Tzar (Emperor) and was crowned by the Roman Pope. His first capital was Prespa and then Ohrid. Ohrid also became the center of the Macedonian Ohrid Archbishopric.

Samoil's state is of great significance to the history of the Macedonian people because it established the foundations for a separate and independent nation. What fueled the creation of such a nation were the Macedonian people who at the time found themselves exploited by all sides and sought their struggle for independence through the rebellion lead by the Komitopuli brothers and then by Samoil and his successors.

The war between the Byzantines and the Macedonians lasted for 48 years from 970 to 1018 during which time thirteen major battles and a number of minor ones were fought.

Samoil's military, political and strategic mission was to create a strong and independent Macedonian state. He started accomplishing that mission immediately after Byzantium had conquered the eastern parts of Bulgaria.

The territory on which Samoil established the medieval Macedonian state was almost the same size as the state of the ancient Macedonian King Philip II which infuriated Basil II who initiated the first campaign in 995 against Samoil.

It was by no accident that Samoil received his strongest support from the Macedonian heartland defined by the triangle of the Vardar River, Ohrid and Mt. Shar. Samoil’s success was fueled by the Bogomil movement and its distaste for foreign rule. In Macedonia the Bogomil movement was particularly influential in the creation of favourable conditions for a liberation uprising and the formation of an independent state. Samoil took full advantage of the situation and established the Macedonian state.

Samoil was not a Bogomil himself but accepted Bogomilism and its right to exist in his kingdom.

Samoil’s kingdom had completely different domestic and foreign policies than his neighbours with a number of capitals including Prespa, Ohrid, Prilep, Bitola, Pronishte and Setin which he used from time to time, all located inside the heartland of Macedonia.

Very little is known about the socio-economic conditions and organization of Samoil's state. It is likely that the majority of people were peasants, mostly freemen, but those working on the feudal estates were either serfs or churchmen. The serfs worked on both secular and church lands while churchmen worked exclusively on church lands. Being of a slightly better social class, the churchmen were exempt from heavy taxes but, on the other hand, they were obliged to donate extra labour, probably in community service, in lieu of taxes.

The noble class in Samoil’s state was made up mostly of feudal lords and aristocrats who were allied behind Samoil and supported his policies.

After his death the alliances began to erode and the nobles went their separate ways in pursuit of their own interests.

Slavery was rarely practiced but on occasion slaves were captured and sold, usually outside the kingdom. The main source of slaves was prisoners of war.

Most of Samoil's income came from imperial land-holdings, sale of livestock, judicial fines and military plunder. Samoil's treasury contained many valuables including gold and money. Having no coins of his own minted, the currency circulated in Samoil's kingdom was that of the Byzantine Empire.

As for his military makeup, Samoil was supreme commander and enlisted his forces almost exclusively from his own kingdom. He had an enormous army consisting of both infantry and cavalry. Samoil was an able strategist who personally took part not only in planning but also in executing battles. For the most part, Samoil's weaponry and military dress was similar to the Byzantine. His soldiers wore a short outer tunic, trousers and a shirt of steel. They also wore a helmet with a pivoting extension which could be lowered down to the chin to protect the warrior's face. Each soldier was armed with a defensive shield, long spear and sword. Other accessories included bugles and standards. Besides his regular army, Samoil also employed his own bodyguards. Samoil had no navy or any type of war vessel.

The official language of Samoil's kingdom was Macedonian although Koine was also used occasionally as the language of diplomacy at the imperial palace.

Samoil built some of the most significant buildings in his kingdom including the Basilica of St. Achilles, his various palaces and a number of churches situated in the southern parts of his kingdom.

The famous and historic Archbishopric of Ohrid was created during Samoil's reign. Initially the Archbishopric was seated in Prespa but when Samoil moved to Ohrid, he brought it with him. Ohrid became his capital as well as his religious center. After its consolidation, the new archbishop was given authority over all bishops who fell under Samoil's jurisdiction. Unfortunately the Byzantines refused to recognize the Archbishop of Ohrid, probably because the Roman church which crowned Samoil had consecrated it. During Samoil's rule the Macedonian church was quite popular and the clergy, especially the bishops, enjoyed their privileged positions.

By August 1018, Basil II succeeded in destroying the last remnants of Samoil's forty-two year reign (976-1018) of his Macedonian kingdom.

Once Basil II conquered Macedonia, he made it into a Byzantine province and sub-divided it into themes. He then installed a large army to keep the peace.

After Samoil's death, the Archbishopric of Ohrid was subordinated to Byzantine authority and incorporated into the Patriarchate of Constantinople. Macedonia was reorganized into thirty-two eparchies. The Bulgarian, Serbian and Albanian eparchies were also incorporated into the Ohrid Archbishopric. An Archbishop and the Church Synod were given supreme authority over the Ohrid Archbishopric. The Synod met in Ohrid once a year to elect new bishops and discipline clergy accused of various breaches and misconduct.

The Archbishop of Ohrid was no longer elected by the Synod, as it had been under Samoil's rule, but was appointed by Constantinople and confirmed by the Byzantine Emperor. The Archbishop remained autocephalous but was subject to the Byzantine state and church authorities. He was a member of the principal administration of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, attended its sittings, defended the interests and prestige of the Byzantine Church and participated in the resolution of disagreements with the western Church.

Basil II allowed the higher clergy of the Archbishopric to retain some privileges. By doing so he gained their support in strengthening Byzantine rule in Macedonia. To appear sympathetic he also appointed John of Debar, a Macedonian, head of the Archbishopric.

After Basil II's death in 1025 his successor Leo attempted to tighten control over the Macedonian church by replacing the Macedonian language with Koine. Having encountered opposition, in 1037 he removed John of Debar, one of the strongest supporters of the Macedonian language. Henceforth the Archbishops of Ohrid and the bishops of the churches in the Ohrid Archbishopric were regularly elected from the ranks of the Koine speaking clergy. The lower clergy remained Macedonian speaking because it was closest to the Macedonian people.

When Ohrid came under Byzantine control the Koine speaking hierarchs began to eradicate all documents written in Macedonian. Many manuscripts which had been preserved in Ohrid were destroyed. In the churches Macedonian liturgy began to be preached in adaptations translated from Koine. The Macedonian names of rivers, towns, etc. were also replaced by either classical Koine or Latin names. The Archbishopric of Ohrid was slowly becoming a Koine speaking institution designed to destroy the Macedonian traditions, which had been nurtured over the years. Macedonian literacy could not, however, be totally destroyed. The adaptation of Koine did not succeed in taking any deep roots among the people who continued to communicate in their native Macedonian language.

The majority of the Macedonian population after Samoil's death became subservient to the feudal lords. Serfs formed the basic category of the tied feudal population. Serfs were allowed to retain their hereditary holdings but under the authority of the feudal lords. Below the serfs were

the landless people. They lived and worked on feudal estates or on land set aside for them by the community. Below the landless people were the servants of the feudal lords. Their property was part of the feudal lord's personal demesne and they were personally bound to their lords who had the authority to sell them together with their land.

Below the servants were the slaves. Unlike classical slaves who had no rights at all, with time and services rendered, these slaves gradually received small holdings as well as certain rights from their feudal lords. The slave class consisted almost exclusively of those who either could not pay the state taxes or those who had rebelled against their exploiters or the state.

The churchmen, on the other hand, were a separate class of people. The churchmen who owned land enjoyed certain privileges which had been granted to the church by the state.

Like the churchmen, the artisans who were employed on feudal estates were a distinct and more privileged class of the tied population.

With regard to taxation, the Byzantines had instituted three types of feudal rent known as work or corvee, kind and monetary. Unfortunately the Macedonian population was burdened with all three types. The work rent or corvee was applicable to the entire population tied to or obliged to work for a feudal lord. The proportion of this unpaid labour was not defined so in times of need, particularly in the summer months, several days of a person's workweek were devoted to it. The majority of this corvee was dedicated to repairing or building fortresses, constructing roads and bridges, building boats and baking bread for the army.

The rent in kind, which varied from individual to individual, was paid with a variety of "finished products" made for the state and for the feudal lords. The customary practice of giving gifts to officials was a particularly heavy burden on the population.

Taxes in kind were also exacted by the church. The Ohrid Church, according to its established canon, exacted taxes in kind from the entire population.

Monetary rent was also exacted on a large scale during this period. After the tax reforms of 1040, regular state taxes were required to be paid with money. With the growing need to pay monetary taxes, a strong stimulus was induced to trade goods for money. This, in many ways, was good for the economy and development of feudalism. Unfortunately the transition became another burden on the Macedonian peasant population. After the feudal lords were awarded rights to collect state taxes, abuse was not far behind. Many took advantage of their position of authority and exacted extra taxes for themselves above and beyond those prescribed by law.

Besides regular taxes, Macedonians were also obliged to pay various supplementary taxes, like judicial fines, toll tax for crossing rivers, fishing

tax, water-mill tax and marriage tax. As a marriage tax the groom was obliged to pay his bishop a gold piece and the bride twelve ells (15 meters) of linen.

By 1040 the people had become very discontent with Byzantine rule and the situation in Macedonia was reaching a boiling point.

Part 6 - Uprisings against Byzantine Rule

After losing their independence to the Byzantines, the situation for the Macedonian people during the 11th century worsened. First it was the taxes levied that most people could not afford. Then there were the invasions by the Pechenegs, Uzis and Kumans who overran Macedonian territories robbing and pillaging. The Vlachs living in the mountains also took to the plains and did their deeds of robbing and pillaging. After that natural disasters followed. Severe earthquakes in 1026, 1037 and 1039 almost destroyed Macedonia. After the earthquakes came severe droughts causing rivers and springs to dry up. Later came pestilences; clouds of grasshoppers devastated the landscape. After that hail began to fall destroying whatever food remained causing unprecedented hunger resulting in epidemics. According to Scyilitzes, in 1040 many people died in Macedonia, so many in fact that the living could not bury them all. (Vanche Stojchev. "Military History of Macedonia". Military academy. Skopje, 2004. Page 84)

With all that was going on the people in Macedonia and the surrounding Balkans had just about had enough and began fighting back. Naturally they could do nothing against nature so they took their anger out on their occupiers and oppressors by rebelling against them.

Leading the rebellion was Peter Delyan, (Tsar Samoil's grandson) Gabriel Radomir's son by his first wife, the daughter of the Hungarian king. The rebellion, supported by the Hungarian king, began in the regions of Belgrade and Morava near the Hungarian border and soon spread south to Skopje. With popular support and assistance from the local Macedonian population, the rebel army invaded and took Skopje. Constantinople quickly reacted by dispatching an army in pursuit. But instead of attacking, the Byzantine soldiers defected and proclaimed Tihomir, one of their own soldiers, as their emperor. Tihomir unfortunately died in battle leaving his army under Delyan's command.

Delyan began a military campaign to recover his grandfather's kingdom. He started by sending troops to Dyrrachium and, with the support of the local people, managed to take that theme. He then sent a large army to besiege Solun. At the sight of Delyan's immense army, Emperor Michael IV, who at the time was waiting for him, fled in terror to Constantinople leaving Manuel Ivets in command of the Byzantine army. But instead of fighting, Ivets defected to Delyan's side, joining forces with the rebels.

Exploiting the panic which had risen in the ranks of the Byzantine army, Delyan dispatched armies in several directions. One, led by Anthimus, made its way south reaching as deep as the town Tiva spreading the revolt into Epirus and conquering the theme of Naupactos. Another army took Demetrias (Volos in Thessaly) and so on. Soon Delyan was in

possession of a large territory encompassing the greater part of Samoil's kingdom.

Dissatisfied with the situation in Macedonia, the higher echelons of Constantinople demanded that the Emperor do something. Not to disappoint them, the Emperor prepared for war and set out to meet Delyan in Macedonia. Unfortunately Delyan was not the emperor's only problem. Aleutian, John Vladislav's second son who was a patrician and commander of Theodosiopolis in Armenia, had also joined the rebellion. Delyan not only accepted Aleutian's services, but also made him commander of his army of forty thousand soldiers and dispatched him to Solun.

Unbeknownst to Aleutian, however, the Byzantine army stationed in Solun must have been aware of his plans and surprised him. A battle ensued and Aleutian lost about fifteen thousand men. His defeat led to discord in the ranks of the rebels and Aleutian was suspected of treason. Suspicion turned to tragedy when Aleutian turned against Delyan, blinding him in a fit of rage. He then fled to the Byzantines. Stripped of their leaders, the rebels were thrown into confusion and the insurrection was condemned to fail.

In the spring of 1041 the Byzantine Emperor again prepared for war and set out for Ostrovo, the center of the revolt. There he captured Delyan and sent him to Solun. From Ostrovo the Emperor set out for the interior of Macedonia and met up with Manual Ivets in Prilep. Ivets and his troops fought bravely but they were no match for the Byzantines. Ivets was captured and the rebellion was extinguished. After his successful campaign, the Byzantine Emperor triumphantly returned to Constantinople with Delyan and Ivets as his trophies.

Instead of bringing change for the better, the rebellion brought disaster to the Macedonian people. The Byzantine army, which consisted mainly of Norwegian mercenaries under the command of Harold Hardraga, devastated Macedonia. They enslaved most of the population and brought new state officials and feudal lords who, together with the army, introduced even more oppressive measures.

Unable to cope, the people rose again, this time in Thessaly. In 1066 the Vlach population in Thessaly rebelled under the leadership of Nikulitsa Delphin, the Governor of Larissa, whose grandfather had governed the town during Samuel's reign. Even though the rebellion was entrusted to Nikulitsa, a descendent of rebels, he personally had no interest in a successful outcome. As a result, the revolt did not succeed in spreading as well as it could have and only extended to the towns of Larissa, Trikkala, Pharsala and the fortress of Cythros.

The Byzantine Emperor Constantine X was quick to react and stopped the rebellion from spreading into the interior of Macedonia. Then, even before the year was over, with Nikulitsa's help, Constantine successfully put down the rest of the rebellion.

In 1072, five years after the Thessalian rebellion, a new revolt broke out, this time inside Macedonia. The revolt, led by George Voyteh, took place in Skopje and was sparked by new and more oppressive financial policies introduced by the Byzantine authorities. The leaders of the revolt turned for help to Michael, the ruler of Zeta, who was related to Samoil. Michael sent his son Constantine Bodin along with three hundred of his elite troops. Voyteh and his rebels met Bodin at Prizren and immediately proclaimed him emperor under the name Peter, in honour of the fallen Peter Delyan.

On receiving news that the rebels were headed for Skopje, the former and current Byzantine governors of that city, along with their armies, came out to stop them. A battle ensued at Prizren and the Byzantines were defeated. After taking the governor of Skopje prisoner, Bodin divided his army in two columns. One column he dispatched to Naissus while the second column, with Petrilo in command, he sent into the interior of Macedonia. Voyteh remained in Skopje.

Petrilo's first stop was Ohrid where he was greeted by the town's people as a liberator. When Devol, the Byzantine governor, saw him coming he surrendered without a struggle. While the town's people were running out to greet the rebel army, the feudal lords, administrators and Byzantine soldiers slipped out the back and fled to the fortified town of Kostur. There they convinced the Kostur governor to organize a strong defense. When Petrilo arrived he was met with strong resistance and a battle ensued. Combined, the Byzantine, Ohrid and Kostur armies inflicted great damage on the insurgents. Petrilo just barely managed to escape and fled to Zeta.

Bodin was a little more successful and drove the Byzantines out of Naissus. However, hearing of Petrilo's defeat in Kostur deflated his enthusiasm.

By now the main Byzantine army, led by Michael Saronit, was closing in on Skopje and the mere sight of its enormity frightened Voyteh. Outnumbered, Voyteh agreed to surrender Skopje without a fight but secretly he sent for Bodin to come to his rescue. Unfortunately once again the Byzantine spies did their job and Saronit set a trap for Bodin. Bodin's army was intercepted and defeated at Kossovo Polye. Bodin was captured and sent to Constantinople, along with Voyteh, as Saronit's prisoner. Voyteh unfortunately died on the way, probably from torture. Initially Bodin was imprisoned in Constantinople but later, at the intervention of Venetian mercenaries, he was returned to Zeta.

In 1073 the Byzantines stepped up their campaign in Macedonia and brought additional forces in to rout the remaining pockets of rebel resistance. Unfortunately that was not all that they did. In pursuit of the rebels the Byzantine army destroyed Samoil's imperial palace in Prespa and looted the churches in the vicinity. These acts further inflamed the

situation and the rebels continued to resist, forcing the Byzantines to bring even more troops and take more drastic measures. Only by burning and razing everything, wherever opposition was offered, did the Byzantines succeed in putting down the rebellion. By the end of 1073 it was all over.

When all else failed the oppressed masses began to express their frustration by joining the Bogomil movement. They became particularly powerful at the end of the eleventh century and even more so during the course of the twelfth century. The struggle of the Bogomils was directed as equally against the feudal lords as it was against the Byzantine Emperor and his spiritual and ecclesiastical officials.

The Byzantine appointed Archbishop, Theophylact of Ohrid, waged a fierce war against the Bogomils of Ohrid yet, in spite of severe punishment, he did not succeed in stamping them out. Led by the priest Basil, the Bogomil apostles and women preachers spread Bogomilism throughout all the regions of the empire, even into Constantinople itself.

Confronted with this rapid spread of Bogomilism, the Byzantine Emperor Alexius I Comnenus decided to personally intervene. While making plans to eradicate the Bogomils he figured it was a good time to also attack the Paulician movement which existed on a large scale in the Balkans. His soldiers rounded up all the Bogomils they could catch, including their leader Basil, and brought them before a Synod in Constantinople. The Synod quickly condemned them to death and subsequently had them executed. The movements did not collapse as expected, however, but rather experienced a revival after Alexius I Comnenus's death in 1118.

During the 1070's, while Michael VII Parapinakes was emperor, many enemies began to descend upon Byzantine territory. The new enemies that appeared at this time seemed to emerge almost simultaneously on the northern, eastern and western frontiers. It was nothing new for the Byzantines to have to fight on multiple fronts simultaneously but that task required a soldier on the throne.

The Pechenegs, a Turkic tribe, had long been a northern neighbour and valuable ally against the Bulgars, Magyars and Russians. After the Bulgar Empire collapsed the Pechenegs began to raid across the Danube into Byzantine territory. As allies, Constantine IX allowed them to settle south of the river but by mid-11th century they were becoming a nuisance. They were threatening Thrace and Macedonia and encouraging the spirit of revolt among the Bogomils. Alexius I put their reign of terror to an end in1091.

The next to arrive, this time on the eastern frontier, were the Seljuq Turks, whose conquests would change the shape of both the Muslim and Byzantine worlds. In 1055, having conquered Persia, they entered Baghdad and their prince assumed the title of sultan and protector of the Abbasid caliphate. Before long they asserted their authority up to the

borders of Fatimid Egypt and through Byzantine Anatolia. They made their first appearance across the Byzantine frontier in Armenia in the mid 1060's and went as far west as Caesarea in central Anatolia.

The appearance of the Turkish raiders frightened the military aristocracy in Anatolia who, in 1068, elected one of their own emperors, Romanus IV Diogenes. Romanus assembled an army consisting mainly of foreign mercenaries and went on a campaign against the Turks. In August 1071 the Byzantines lost the battle at Manzikert, near Lake Van in Armenia. Romanus was taken prisoner by the Seljuq sultan, Alp-Arslan. After signing a treaty with the sultan, Romanus was allowed to buy his freedom. Unfortunately Constantinople did not want him back and installed their candidate Michael VII. Subsequently Romanus's treaty with the Turks was rejected and Romanus himself was treacherously blinded. With their treaty rejected, the Seljuqs were justified in resuming their raids.

It did not take too long before an irreconcilable rift began to form between Constantinople and the eastern themes. Civil war broke out consuming all resources and leaving no troops to defend the eastern frontier. The Turks were quick to exploit the situation and by 1081 had penetrated Asia Minor and taken Nicaea. The heart of the empire's military and economic strength was now in Turkish hands.

The next enemy, the Normans, arrived from the west and began their conquest of southern Italy early in the 11th century. Ironically the Norman conquests were made possible by Basil II's project of recovering Sicily from the Arabs. Sicily was almost recovered in 1042 by the great general of the post-Macedonian era, George Maniaces. Unfortunately, being fearful of him and his military reputation, Constantine IX had him recalled and killed as a pretender to the throne. The Normans afterwards simply filled the political void and made steady progress conquering Italy.

In 1071 after a three-year siege, the Normans, led by Robert Guiscard, finally took Bari, the last remaining Byzantine stronghold in the west. After that Byzantine rule in Italy and the hope of re-conquering Sicily came to an end.

The simultaneous losses of Manzikert, to the Turks in the east, and Bari, to the Normans in the west were a disaster for the Byzantines. The final loss of Italy put a permanent physical barrier between the Byzantine east and the Latin west.

After conquering Bari, the Normans pressed on with their campaign into Byzantine territory. In 1072 they won a resounding victory in Dyrrachium and in the following year another in Ioannina. Then they turned to Macedonia and took Ohrid, the two Pologs and Skopje. After that they made their way to Berroea and Meglen and rebuilt the destroyed fortress. The Normans then followed the Vardar River and camped for three

months in Beli Tsrkvi. Following their long rest they came back and took Pelagonia, Trikkala and Kostur. In January 1084, in an attempt to take Larissa, they suffered a devastating defeat. A year later Emperor Alexius I, making use of his victory, attacked and took back Kostur, forcing the Normans to retreat from the Balkans.

The Norman conquests had serious long term consequences for Macedonia. Outside of the Norman mayhem and looting, the Macedonians were once again subjected to new cruelties as the Byzantines returned and imposed law and order on the province.

The Norman expulsion unfortunately did not bring peace to Macedonia. As mentioned earlier, Bodin succeeded his father to the throne of Zeta in 1081 and immediately began campaigning in Byzantine territory. He seized Mokra, a part of the Ohrid district including Mt. Bagora, and then proceeded to take the district of Dyrrachium. At that time the Byzantine Emperor, Alexius I Comnenus, intervened and Bodin was forced to retreat. Later, from time to time, Bodin took the occasion to campaign in the Ohrid region but always withdrew at the presence of the Byzantine army.

Towards the end of the 1090's Vukan, the ruler of Rashka, decided to invade Macedonia and attack Skopje. Vukan's presence in Byzantine territory provoked a counterattack from the Emperor who this time personally took charge of the mission. Comnenus undertook three campaigns against Rashka in 1091, 1093 and 1094. His personal intervention not only gave the Byzantines an opportunity to take back all of Macedonia, but also sent a clear message to Bodin to keep out.

Even with all of Macedonia's possessions under Byzantine control, the empire could not replenish the military and economic resources it lost as a result of losing Asia Minor to the Turks. Its shrinking boundaries reduced the once mighty empire from the status of a world power to that of a small state fighting for survival. The loss of Anatolia forced the Byzantines to turn away from the east and start looking to the west.

The first sign of this westward interest was in 1082 after the Normans captured Dyrrachium and were about to advance overland to Solun. Alexius, the Byzantine emperor, having no resources to raise a sizable army, called on the Venetians to help him.

Part 7 – The Hrs, Strez and Dragota Uprisings

At Alexius's invitation the Venetians arrived and assisted in the expulsion of the Normans out of the Adriatic Sea but at the same time demanded large concessions for their services which Alexius I begrudgingly granted.

Alexius asked the west for help, not for the liberation of the Holy Land from the infidel but for the protection of Constantinople and the recovery of Anatolia. However when Jerusalem was lost to the Turks in 1071 all the west could think of was revenge.

One group of fearsome Crusaders traveled along the Via Egnatia route and entered Macedonia in 1096. They used force and violence to obtain food and other necessities. While passing through Kostur they seized oxen, mules and everything else they could get their hands on. In the region between Prilep and Bitola they destroyed a fortified settlement and killed its inhabitants.

After Andronicus I Comnenus died in 1185, Isaac II Angelus replaced him as emperor. It was during Isaac II's reign that the newly developed feudal powers in Serbia and Bulgaria were established and became a significant political factor in the Balkans. The sacking of Solun by the Normans weakened the Byzantines and that too created favourable conditions for the feudal lords in Macedonia to gain some independence. Among the more successful was Dobromir Hrs. Hrs had accumulated an army of five hundred men and, for the most part, maintained peaceful relations with the court in Constantinople. He was, however, an opportunist and looked for ways to expand his authority. His chance came in 1189 during the third Crusade, led by Frederic I Barbarossa, when a number of Crusaders left the main route and invaded Macedonia. While passing through Gradets they killed people and set fire to several buildings, including the town's church. After descending to Vkahija (near Strumitsa) they clashed with a rebel group and took their possessions. It was here that Hrs made contact with the Crusaders and sent them on their way. Unfortunately no sooner had the Crusaders departed for Asia Minor than Byzantines rounded up these opportunistic feudal lords and sent them to jail. Dobromir Hrs was imprisoned for a while but was then released and awarded the governorship of Strumitsa.

In 1195 Isaac II was deposed and blinded by his brother Alexius III Angelus. When unrest broke out during Alexius III's reign, Dobromir Hrs again declared his independence, first in Strumitsa and then in the naturally fortified town of Presok. After arming Presok with an elite garrison he transferred his seat and fortified the town with defensive weapons and adequate stores of food. By repealing the Byzantine laws he introduced his own brand of barbarian rule.

After consolidating his power, Hrs went on a campaign to Serres but in 1199 was met by the Byzantine Emperor and a battle ensued. Hrs's handpicked soldiers fought skillfully. By using catapults, operated by ex-Byzantine mercenaries, they inflicted severe losses on Alexius. In the course of battle Hrs's soldiers slipped out in the dark of night and destroyed Alexius's siege equipment causing him to lose the battle. Alexius's failure to defeat Hrs forced the Emperor to meet his demands, thus recognizing Hrs as the ruler of the towns of Strumitsa and Prosek.

It wasn't too long before relations between Prosek and Constantinople deteriorated. The cause of the deterioration was the Emperor's refusal to pay the agreed upon ransom for the release of Hrs's father-in-law, Kamits. Kamits was a prisoner in Bulgaria for some time and the Emperor had agreed to arrange for his release. But after Kamits was freed the Emperor refused to pay the ransom. The two hundred centenariis in gold were eventually paid by Hrs but left bad feelings and a breach in the treaty between the Emperor and Hrs.

Free from any obligations, Hrs, together with his father-in-law, renewed their military campaigns and took Pelagonia and Prilep, then entered Thessaly and sparked a massive uprising in the Peloponnesus.

While Hrs was wreaking havoc in the western provinces, the Emperor put an army together and went in pursuit. The Byzantines quickly re-took Pelagonia, Prilep and Thessaly, depriving Hrs of his latest gains. Through treachery in 1201 the Byzantines took Strumitsa, leaving Hrs isolated in Prosek.

In 1203 the crusaders, under the pretext of restoring Isaac II and his son to the Byzantine throne, drove Alexius III out of Constantinople. Instead of making good on their promises however, the Venetians and crusaders attacked, conquered and divided Constantinople and the Byzantine provinces between themselves. Constantinople fell to the Latins in April 1204.

In the west's quest for trade, Venice was becoming the leader of commerce. Venice wanted to become a great merchant power; a middleman of consumerism, but Constantinople was always in the way. Far superior to Venice, Constantinople monopolized the silk trade and prohibited Venice from realizing her dream. Finally, as fate would have it, her moment of glory was near. When the Crusaders ran out of money and couldn't afford to pay for their voyage to the Holy Lands, they turned to Venice. Venice offered them a way out but the offer came at a price. It was Pope Innocent III who turned the crusaders first against the Christian town of Zara in the Adriatic in 1202 and then against Constantinople in 1204. Principles gave away to greed and Christian turned against Christian: all this to satisfy the greed and commercial appetites of Venice. It was not a war of armies but a war of betrayal, deceit and total annihilation. The unsuspecting and trusting citizens of Constantinople gladly opened the city

gates for the Crusaders. Instead of bringing peace, however, the Latins killed the entire Constantinople population, military and civilian, and then looted the city of its possessions. The city streets were flooded with the blood of the innocent. Warriors, women and children alike were all slaughtered like lambs by the Latin crusaders. This was an act of shame that the western Church will have to bear for all eternity.

In 1204 the Latin Crusaders formed a Frankish kingdom, the Kingdom of Solun, on the eastern coast of the Aegean Sea with Solun as its capital. With Boniface of Montferrat as its first king, the Solunian people went through twenty years of unprecedented oppression and subjugation. In their seizure of Macedonia, the Crusaders took over large quantities of grain supplies, livestock and other wealth, establishing their own garrisons in various towns.

After the 1205 defeat of the Latin Emperor Baldwin and the Adrianople Crusaders, the Bulgarian army attacked and destroyed the town of Serres and invaded the district of Solun. Bulgarian pressure on Solun increased in 1207, particularly after the death of Boniface of Montferrat. The Bulgarian emperor Kaloyan laid siege to the city but soon died and the siege was abandoned.

In the period after Kaloyan's death a power struggle ensued in Bulgaria and Strez. A descendant of the Bulgarian royal line was able to establish an independent kingdom in Macedonia. With the aid of Serbia he set himself up in Prosek and extended his rule from the Solun region to Ohrid. All Bulgarian governors within these territories swore loyalty to him. After a while, agitation from the Bulgarians subsided and Strez was able to establish good relations with the Bulgarian state.

Upon consolidating his rule in Macedonia, Strez began a campaign against the Kingdom of Solun which in 1212 sparked a massive conflict in Pelagonia. Even though the conflict was between Strez and the Latins, it had support from the more powerful Despot of Epirus on one side and the Bulgarian state on the other. After losing to the Latins, Strez broke off relations with the Serbians. In 1214 he initiated a campaign against them but died unexpectedly.

After Strez’s death the Despot of Epirus conquered a large portion of Macedonia, including Skopje and Ohrid. In 1244 Solun too fell prey to the army of Epirus.

Immediately after conquering Ohrid, Demetrius Chomatianus, the Archbishop of Ohrid, crowned the Despot Theodore Angelus Ducas Comnenius, emperor. The despot had intentions of renewing the Byzantine Empire but his defeat by the Bulgarians in 1230, near Klokotnitsa, prematurely ended his great plans. Bulgaria, on the other hand, not only increased its reputation and prestige but also expanded its territory to Thrace, Macedonia and part of Albania. After it consolidated its hold on the new territories, Bulgarian governors were appointed and garrisons

were stationed in various Macedonian towns. The Byzantine bishops in the eparchies were replaced by archpriests of the Trnovo Church, which in 1235 became a Patriarchate. The power of the Archbishopric of Ohrid, which was somewhat eroded by the Serbian Church becoming autocephalous in 1219, was now further eroded with the formation of the new Bulgarian Patriarchate.

Another less known uprising termed the Dragota uprising named after its leader, took place in 1255 in the Melnik Region during Nicaean rule. In 1246, the Nicaean ruler John III Vatatzes conquered Melnik and the surrounding region and established Nicaean rule. The City of Melnik and its vicinity being in mid-course of the Struma River always played a geopolitical role in Macedonia's history. Important roads passed through there and connected the coast of the Aegean Sea with the Danube including Salonica with Sofia. On the road from Melnik to Seres, near Melnik, is the Rupel Gorge, a very important strategic position which allowed rulers of the city to control the main roads from north to south and from east to west. As a result Melnik developed through the centuries as a strong fortress, and has served as capital city many times through history reaching its zenith in the 13th century when it became Alexeus Slav's capital.

Dragota was originally from Melnik but because of his military achievements in the Bulgarian army, he was appointed military commander of Seres. After Emperor Ka1iman's death in 1246 the Nicaeans invaded Macedonia. Dragota unable to resist their attacks allowed the region to fall in 1246. Afterwards he surrendered Seres to the Emperor John Vatatzes, and some time later helped the Nicaeans conquer the city of Melnik. He was greatly awarded for his help, and as a Nicaean Vassal was formally appointed commander of Melnik and the surrounding region.

Unfortunately with the new rulers also came new taxes and a much stricter regime clamping down on the Macedonian people. Being unable to forgive himself for what he did, Dragota initiated an uprising against the Nicaeans. He hand picked his soldiers for the rebellion from the armed forces he was given to command which consisted mostly of Melnik citizens from the local population. He attacked the Nicaean garrison in Melnik, and tried to destroy the fortress but was unsuccessful so he blockaded it and established his rule in Melnik. Soon afterwards he took control of the Strumitsa Region extending as far south as the Rupel Gorge and as far north as Sandanski. News of the uprising and of the blockade of the Malnik fortress spread far and wide reaching Emperor Theodore Lascaris who at the start of the summer of 1255 with a strong army personally departed for Melnik to suppress the uprising.

It took him 20 days, to march his army from Constantinople to Seres where he spent the night before marching north, down the valley of Struma for Melnik.

Upon finding out that a large army lead by the Emperor himself was coming for them, the rebels made preparations to defend their city. They first reinforced the Rupel Gorge through which the Nicaean army had to pass. An ambush was set up in the narrowest passage of the Gorge which successfully slowed the army's advance.

Being unable to pass, the Nicaeans developed a new strategy, similar to that of Basil II when he attacked Samoil in 1014, to surprise the rebels from behind.

While the bulk of the Nicaean army was conducting a frontal attack another part of the army attacked from the rear surprising the rebels; sending them in flight, in a panic in every direction. Sensing this, the frontal army broke through the pass barriers and went in pursuit. In the chaos, many rebel soldiers including their leader were run over by horses. Dragota died three days later.

During the same day, by nightfall the Niceans had taken over the Rupel Gorge and Emperor Theodore Lascaris marched into Melnik and liberated his Nicaean soldiers besieged in the fortress.

Unfortunately as had been a cruel habit of invaders in Macedonia, the Nicaeans took severe revenge against the uprising participants and their families.

After the eviction of the Latins in 1261, the seat of the Nicaean government was moved from Nicaea to Constantinople. To the Byzantines, Constantinople was "the Jerusalem" and they were not about to leave it in foreign hands. Unfortunately, after the damages inflicted by the Fourth Crusade the city was no longer the focal point of an integrated empire. It was more like an immense city-state in the midst of a number of more or less independent provinces. Much of Peloponnesus and the islands remained in French or Italian hands and the Byzantine rulers of Epirus and Thessaly refused to recognize Michael VIII as their emperor.

The regime change in Constantinople was good for Macedonia. During its initial rule the Macedonian people experienced two decades of life without external harassment. Then in 1282 the Serbian feudal army of king Stephen Urosh II Milutin invaded northern Macedonia and took Lower and Upper Polog, Skopje, Ovche Pole, Zletovo and Piyanets. Shortly afterwards, the Serbs initiated a new campaign and invaded Poreche and the Kichevo and Debar regions. After that a Serbian detachment was dispatched along the lower course of the Struma River and penetrated as far as Krstopol.

About four decades later the Serbians, under the rule of the Serbian King Stephen Urosh III Dechanski, launched another campaign against the Byzantines. During their first wave of attacks they invaded and captured

the towns of Shtip, Chreshche on the River Bragalnitsa, Veles and Prosek on the Vardar. Then in 1328 they took Prosek and the Serbian army invaded the regions of Demir Hisar and Debartsa, coming face to face with the Byzantines in Ohrid.

Ohrid was an important Byzantine stronghold and the threat did not go unnoticed in Constantinople. Emperor Andronicus III Palaeologus immediately prepared a counter-offensive and went in pursuit of the invaders. By 1330 the Emperor had recaptured the towns in the Demir Hisar and Debartsa regions, including Zheleznets.

Four years later, under the leadership of their new ruler Stephen Urosh IV Dushan, the Serbs renewed their offensive in Macedonia. With the capture of Serres in 1345, Serbian rule was extended over virtually all of Macedonia. The same year the Serbian ruler Stephen Urosh IV Dushan proclaimed himself emperor and elevated the Serbian Archbishopric to a Patriarchate. The coronation took place in Skopje on April 16, 1346 but the Byzantines refused to recognize it along with Serbia's territorial gains and the Serbian Patriarchate.

During the course of the late 1340's Serbian rule was expanded to Thessaly and Epirus. But in 1350 the towns of Serres and Voden rebelled and severed links with the Serbs. After that opposition became common everywhere and the Serbs found it very difficult to hang on to their conquered territories.

After Stephen Urosh IV Dushan's death in 1355 the central government's authority quickly eroded, leaving the feudal lords to rule independently. The most notable of the feudal lords in Macedonia at the time were the brothers Volkashin and Uglesha. Volkashin proclaimed himself king in 1365 with Emperor Urosh as co-ruler.

In Constantinople, meanwhile, Michael's son, Andronicus II who reigned from 1282 to 1328, unwisely attempted to economize by cutting down the size of the army and disbanding the navy. This forced unemployed soldiers and sailors to seek service in foreign and enemy states. It has been said that many of Michael's sailors ended up in the service of the new Turkish emirs, raiding the Aegean islands.

Unable to afford his own, the emperor contracted the Genoese to provide him trade ships and a navy to defend Constantinople by sea. This unfortunately made the Venetians very jealous, to the point of declaring war, which in 1296 led to the first of a series of naval battles off Constantinople.

Michael's cost cutting measures weakened the empire's ability to adequately defend itself and the Turks did not hesitate to take advantage of it. The empire's downslide began in 1302 when a band of Turkish warriors, under the leadership of Osman I, defeated the Byzantine army near Nicomedia in northwestern Anatolia and, for the first time, penetrated

Europe. Osman I was the founder of the Osmanli, or Ottomans as they would later be known by westerners.

Unable to beat the Ottomans back, a year later in 1303, Andronicus hired a professional army of mercenaries known as the Grand Catalan Company. The Catalans made one successful counterattack against the Turks in Anatolia but after that they became unruly and unpopular. After their leader was murdered they turned against their employers. Having failed to conquer Constantinople they headed for Macedonia and stopped in Solun, looting and plundering everything in sight. Even Sveta Gora (Mount Athos), Macedonia's Holy Mountain was not spared by the Catalan's ferocious greed. Solun, however, held out and succeeded in repelling the Catalan invaders who were forced to push further southwards.

For some years the Catalans used the Gallipoli Peninsula as a base from which to ravage Thrace, inviting thousands of Turks to come over and help them. The Catalans finally moved west and in 1311 conquered Athens from the French and established the Catalan Duchy of Athens and Thebes. The Turks who were left behind were not ejected from Gallipoli until 1312.

The Catalans were only a minor problem for the Byzantines in comparison to their own internal strife and civil wars. The trouble started around 1320 when Andronicus II disinherited his grandson Andronicus III. The cause of the young emperor was taken up by his friends, who periodically fought against the old emperor. The civil strife lasted from 1321 to 1328 until the older Andronicus yielded the throne to the younger. Unfortunately this internal fighting took attention away from needed economic reforms and gave the enemy new opportunities to gain more ground.

Part 8 – Ottoman Occupation

By the middle of the fourteenth century, the Ottomans had consolidated their power in Asia Minor and were becoming a threat to the Balkan states. Their first serious campaign for the conquest of Europe began in 1352 when they took the fortress of Tzympe, on the Gallipoli Peninsula. Two years later, taking advantage of a devastating earthquake, they took the fortress of Gallipoli, thus creating a convenient bridgehead for their forthcoming penetration of the Balkans.

Among the first to be threatened by the Ottoman forces was Uglesha's rule, the feudal lord in Macedonia. Confronted with danger he persuaded his brother King Volkashin to take joint actions. Hostilities broke out in September 1371 near Chernomen followed by a fierce battle on the River Maritsa. The river turned red as casualties mounted, among them the brothers Volkashin and Uglesha. It was a major victory for the Ottomans and a catastrophe for the Macedonian people, not only for the loss of life but also for the terrible change of fate. Its outcome had disastrous significance for Macedonia as the balance of power was about to be destabilized.

The battle at the Maritsa River was the first battle to take place during the Ottoman penetration of the Balkan Peninsula. Even though the danger of the Ottomans at this stage was remote, its threat was nevertheless seen as real by Emperor Dushan who attempted to create a Christian alliance to stop the Ottoman encroachment. Unfortunately
Pope Innocent VI did not consider Dushan's attempts serious as Dushan was requesting to be appointed captain of an army in a joint crusade against the Ottomans. By the time the Pope finally saw the need for intervention, Dushan had died and his plan died with him.

After Dushan's death, the Byzantine Emperor John V Paleologus resurrected the idea of a Christian alliance and in 1364, contacted Dushan's widow Jelena but the messenger Patriarch Callistus from Constantinople who was expected to deliver the idea died before accomplishing his mission. Failing that, in the spring of 1366, Paleologus appealed to the Hungarian King who gave him several of his own detachments and several from the west. Unfortunately Paleologus used that army to fight against the Bulgarians. The following year (1369) Paleologus went west again looking for military help but without success and two years later he returned disappointed and humiliated.

After Dushan's death, one of his followers the despot Jovan Uglesha, with his domain being closest to the Ottoman threat, began to take the Ottoman encroachment seriously. Uglesha's territory extended from the Struma and Maritsa Rivers to Poros Lake at the Rodopi Coast with Seres as his capital.

One of the Ottoman tactics was to encroach at one's borders, set up a base and then launch a penetrating attack. The Ottomans chose to amass at the eastern and southern border of Uglesha's territory which was close to the Aegean Sea.

As their numbers were amassing the Ottomans were a constant threat and during the 1360's continuously attacked and pillaged the Sveta Gora (Mount Athos) monasteries.

Unable to ignore this threat Uglesha decided to wage war on the Ottomans in an attempt to drive them out of the Balkans. He was well aware that he could not do this without help so he made it his mission to rally his neighbours. His first objective was to improve relations with the Byzantines which of course he failed because Dushan had made enemies when he broke away from the Byzantine Church. Dushan had created his own Patriarchy and declared himself Emperor against the wishes of the Byzantines.

Being persistent and in a desperate situation, Uglesha agreed to meet all Byzantine demands. His first act was to recognize the Constantinople Patriarchy in his own territory. He did this by announcing the recognition of his charter in March 1968. Unfortunately it would appear that this was not enough of a commitment for the Byzantines to gain his trust so no military assistance was offered. Having failed with the Byzantines, Uglesha knew it would be hopeless trying to convince the west so he turned his attention inwards in an attempt to unify the feudal lords of Dushan's former Empire. Unfortunately he failed even at that; the only one that came to his aid was his own brother King Volkashin who also ruled parts of Macedonia.

Upon joining forces the brothers mobilized the Macedonian people in preparation for war. There were two places where they could attack the Ottomans; one was at Plodvid and Odrin (Dardanelles) the new Ottoman capital, and the other at Seres and Drama. Odrin was less fortified and at the time was defended by Shashin Pasha with only 15,000 untrained and inadequately prepared soldiers.

Shashin Pasha was well aware of Uglesha's plans but kept stalling in offering resistance and at the same time refused to retreat. In the meantime, in May 1371 King Urosh appointed King Volkashin ruler of the City of Skopje and immediately began mobilizing people for the final battle. The most active mobilization took place in Skopje, Bitola and Prilep and the mobilized people were assembled in Ovche Pole near Stip. Uglesha meanwhile carried out mobilizations in the Seres, Drama, Kavala and Mosinople Regions amassing an army of about 20,000 soldiers . The army consisted mostly of Macedonian cavalrymen from the smaller feudal landowners. Most of the soldiers were armed with spears arrows, sabers and swords. The more prominent soldiers also carried shields and armor.

As soon as mobilization was complete both armies left their bases and headed for Odrin to do battle. The army from Ovche Pole, lead by Volkashin, took the road through Velbuzhd (Kyustendil), Samokov, Pazardzhik, Plovdiv to Odrin. Meanwhile the army led by Uglesha took the road from Drama to Plovdiv to Odrin. The two armies met at the Chemomerski Lugovi in the wide plain near the Maritsa River.

Both armies were equipped with supplies which included food, wine and brandy and while on the road they set up camp, drank and had fun. Unfortunately they also had quarrels and constantly fought each other resulting in wounding and even death. Inexperienced, the leaders of the armies thought this was normal behaviour for traveling armies and ignored the lack of discipline. It was expected that discipline would improve before the battle as camp was set out on the wide plain near the River Maritsa, 40 km north of Odrin.

When Volkashin and Uglesha announced that the Ottoman army they were about to face had no more than 15,000 untrained Ottoman men, the lack of discipline in the Macedonian camp widened as the men started drinking even more and celebrating their victory even before the battle started.

During the night of September 25 Ottoman negotiators arrived in the Macedonian camp. Their arrival started a rumour that Shahin Pasha sent the negotiators to negotiate peace by offering gold and there wasn't going to be a battle.

Even though King Volkashin reassured everyone that the peace offer was turned down and that the Macedonian army's goal was to free Odrin, the celebration continued as the soldiers drank even more wine, ate roast meat and celebrated the victory of a battle they had not yet fought.

With no guards at their posts and with very few sober soldiers it was a disaster waiting to happen. On their return the negotiators informed Shashin Pasha of the situation and Shashin Pasha lost no opportunity and attacked the camps from three different directions.

On September 26, 1371 Shashin Pasha, under the cover of rain and thunder with a significantly smaller force, struck at the Macedonian army delivering a crippling blow. The sudden appearance of enemy soldiers from every direction created chaos among the Macedonian soldiers who were still drunk from the previous night. In its disarray the Macedonian army was cut to pieces as soldiers fought bravely but not enough to save the day. Both Volkashin and Uglesha were severely wounded and soon afterwards died.

The Macedonian army faced a terribly defeat at the Maritsa battle mainly due to lack of discipline, obstinacy and lack of knowledge about enemy tactics. Basic principles of combat were ignored and lack of combat experience, reconnaissance, intelligence and guard duty enabled the Ottoman army, although smaller and ill-equipped, to take advantage of the

situation and deliver a catastrophic blow. The consequences of this defeat were permanent and significant for all nations in the Balkan Peninsula. The loss of this battle allowed the Ottomans to set foot in the Balkans and in twenty years to conquer all of Macedonia.

The defeat at the Maritsa River and the death of Volkashin and Uglesha signified the beginning of a permanent Ottoman penetration into Macedonian territory. Immediately after the battle, the Ottomans conquered the eastern regions of Uglesha's territory and directed their attacks towards the eastern part of the Balkan Peninsula. The Byzantines in the meantime, in the absence of Uglesha, decided to expand their own territories by annexing part of Uglesha's.

In November 1372 the Solun despot Manuel entered Seres and in the spring of 1373 the Byzantine Emperor John V Paleologus was forced to accept Ottoman domination and become an Ottoman vassal. The same year, the Byzantine Emperor personally took part in the Ottoman campaign in Asia Minor alongside Sultan Murad. Above all the Byzantine Emperor had to also pay the sultan vassal tax in gold.

Besides the Byzantines becoming vassals of the Ottomans the brothers Dejanoviki, the rulers of Eastern Macedonia, and Volkashin's son King Marko also became vassals of the Ottomans.

Marko, better known as Marko Krale to the Macedonians, was a legendary folk hero in western Macedonia who after his father's death inherited his throne and title. Unfortunately as part of the treaty with the Ottomans Marko had to recognize Ottoman authority and pay tribute to the Ottoman Sultan. It is believed that Marko was born in 1335. His name was discovered in a document establishing him as one of Volkashin's delegates to Dubrovnik. His name was also discovered in some chronicles of his time establishing him as the son of Volkashin and later as Marko the king. In another document dated 1370 Volkashin makes mention of his sons Marko and Andrew and of his wife Elena.

With its capital in Prilep, Marko inherited a state that lay between the Vardar River and Albania, stretching from the Shar Mountain range down to Kostur excluding the cities of Skopje and Ohrid. After becoming king, Marko minted his own coins and placed the inscription: "King Marko faithful to Lord Jesus Christ" on them. Marko Krale was killed on May 17, 1395 in Craiova Romania, during a battle against the Vlach military leader Mircho. Marko was obliged to fight for the Ottomans as part of his treaty agreement with Sultan Bayazit.

Even though Marko Krale had been an Ottoman vassal and fought on the side of Bayazit's army he was a devout Christian and just before he died he begged God for forgiveness and prayed out loud, asking God to help the Christians. And thus a legend was born. Marko Krale, the fearless legend, has been enshrined in the Towers of Prilep where he was born by his frescoes and paintings in various churches and monasteries.

King Marko and his brothers Andrejash, Dimitar and Ivanis divided Volkashin's kingdom and each became a ruler of a smaller kingdom. Marko Krale unfortunately left no heir and after his death his state reverted to the Ottomans.

As the Ottomans gradually penetrated Macedonia, instead of uniting against the enemy, the rulers and inheritor's of Volkashin's and Ugljesha's kingdoms and of Dushan's Empire fought against one another to grab more territory. The brothers Dejanovikj, Jovan, Dragash and Konstantin, grabbed the western parts of Ugljesha's kingdom and extended their kingdoms to Strumitsa. The Balshich brothers grabbed Prizren and Kostur while Vuk Brankovich grabbed Skopje and Andreja Gropa took Ohrid.

After fighting among themselves, impervious to the new situation, the new rulers continued to rule the same old way.

With the death of King Urosh on December 2, 1371, right after the Maritsa battle, central power in Macedonia deteriorated and so did the unity of the country as every ruler fought for himself for a bigger land grab. This enabled the Ottomans to move freely all through Macedonia establishing their garrisons in the cities and achieving their goals without significant armed combat. This way the Ottomans slowly but surely continued to annex Macedonian territory which was of strategic significance for further conquests to the north, west and south.

Seres was attacked on September 19, 1383 and after its fall in the next two years the entire southern part of Macedonia also fell into Ottoman hands. In 1387 Solun was attacked but not completely occupied. A military border was created under the leadership of the famous commander Evrenos. In 1392 Skopje was conquered and another military border was erected and served as an Ottoman base for further penetration towards Albania, Serbia, Zeta and Bosnia.

When the Ottomans drove deeper into Macedonia, the Serbs organized a counteroffensive but were overwhelmed at Kosovo in 1389.

The loss of Solun and the Battle of Kosovo unfortunately cut off access to Constantinople by land. By 1393 the Ottomans had completed their conquest of Bulgaria and returned to lay siege to Constantinople.

The Byzantine collapse and Ottoman triumph followed swiftly as the Ottomans laid siege to the walls of Constantinople in April 1453. Ottoman ships were obstructed by a chain that the Byzantines had thrown across the mouth of the Golden Horn but the Ottomans dragged their ships overland to the harbour from the seaward side, bypassing the defenses. The Ottoman heavy artillery continually bombarded the land walls until, on May 29, 1453 Ottoman soldiers forced their way in.

As a final note, in the glory of the Byzantine Empire, I want to add that had it not been for the advent of the cannon the Byzantine Empire might still exist to this day. It was not the might of the Ottomans but the might of

the new Ottoman cannon that brought the walls of Constantinople tumbling down.

The material structure of the Byzantine Empire, which had long been crumbling, was now under the management of the Ottoman Sultan. But the Byzantine faith was less susceptible to change. The Sultan acknowledged the fact that the church had proved to be the most enduring element in the Byzantine world and he gave the Patriarch of Constantinople an unprecedented measure of temporal authority by making him answerable for all Christians living under Ottoman rule. The last scattered pockets of Byzantine resistance were eliminated within a decade after 1453.

The Ottoman Empire's expansion increased in both territory and people which caused frequent reorganization of the army. After each new territorial conquest the Ottomans colonized the nations they occupied and imposed Islam on them. After Islamizing the population they drew their soldiers from it. The nucleus of the Ottoman army consisted of spahi (landowner) feudal cavalry. As more men were needed new regular infantry formations were organized consisting of janissaries. At first the janissaries were convicts but later as demand for men increased, the janissaries came from abducted Christian children, known as the "blood tax".

After sacking Constantinople the Ottomans adapted much of the Byzantine administration and feudal practices and began to settle the Balkans. The conquered people of the new Ottoman territories became subjects of the empire, to be ruled according to Muslim law. At the head of the Ottoman Empire sat the Sultan who was God's representative on earth. The Sultan owned everything and everyone in the empire. Below the Sultan sat the ruling class and below them sat the Rajak (protected flock). Everyone worked for the Sultan and he in turn provided his subjects with all of life's necessities.

The Sultan was the supreme head of the empire and his power was unrestricted. Initially his capital was in Bursa, then it was moved to Odrin and finally to Constantinople in 1453.

Initially at the head of the Ottoman state administration stood a single Vizier but by 1386 a second Vizier was appointed, elevating the first one to Grand Vizier. The number of viziers continued to increase with time and by the middle of the 16th century there were four.

After the Balkan conquests, the Ottoman Empire was divided into two large Bejlerbejliks, or administrative units. The rulers of these provinces, the Bejlerbejs, were appointed directly by the Sultan. The Bejlerbejs were the highest local military commanders in the Bejlerbejliks or Pashaliks as they later came to be known. The Rumelia or European Bejlerbejlik incorporated the territories of the Turkish provinces of Europe. This Pashalik was further divided into smaller units called Sanjaks or Jivi, which made up the basic military and territorial administrative components

of the empire. Each Pashalik was also divided into kazas where each kaza represented a judicial district for which a qadi or judge was responsible. With time and with the extension of the empire's frontiers the number of Bejlerbejliks grew and their nature began to change. Bejlerbejliks became Elajets or Pashaliks and during the 1470's two Kaziaskers, or Supreme Military Judges, were appointed: one in Rumelia and the other in Anatolia in Asia Minor. There was also a Nichandji, or Keeper of the Imperial Seal, who sat at the head of the administration and, on behalf of the Sultan, placed the seal on all acts issued by the central government. Financial affairs were handled by the Defterdars.

The Divan, or State Council, headed by the Grand Vizier consisted of the highest state officials, including viziers, kaziaskers and defterdars, who regularly met to discuss and resolve important state matters.

The legal system was created around the Seriat which had its basis in Islam. The Koran and Hadith were the books from which the ideals and fundamental principles for the construction of the legal system were drawn. No law could be passed which in principle contradicted the Seriat. Only the supreme religious leader, the Sejh-ul-Islam, had the right to interpret and assess the legal norms and only from the point of view of Islamic law.

Part 9 – Early Uprisings against Ottoman Rule

As soon as the Ottomans consolidated their control over parts of Macedonian territory they began a process of Islamization where people generally, by choice or by force, were encouraged to accept the Islamic religion and become Muslims.

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The Ottomans did not have the numbers to maintain control over the vast ranges of territory they had occupied so they depended on the local Islam converts to aid them. In return they were allowed, by Muslim law, to maintain some control over their properties and possessions. So naturally those who had a lot to gain, such as large landholders, quickly converted to Islam. This however was not the case with everyone, some stubbornly refused and paid with their lives while others became outlaws and fought back.

Ottoman occupation of Macedonia not only brought loss of property and land but more devastatingly it attacked the core of the Macedonian people's Christian faith. Even so the process of Islamization was not always enforced and many people were allowed to practice their own religions.

In the beginning Ottoman rule proved to be tolerant of feudal relations and the subjugated people to some degree were allowed to practice their own culture, folk customs and traditions and speak their language. But as Ottoman expansion came to an end with a number of military failures

during the 16th century, anarchy, inflexibility and corruption became rampant in the Ottoman administration. As a result the Macedonian people began to experience social problems, more than usual economic exploitation and religious and ethnic differences became reasons for discord. This of course created discontentment in the exploited and abused leading them to resist and even struggle for liberation.

It is important at this point to look at the initial development of the resistance process because it later served as a model for the 19th century revolutionary movements, including the Ilinden National Uprising and the Antifascist National Liberation War.

Resistance to forced Islamization began around the mid 16th century when people had had enough of injustices perpetrated by their rulers. In 1555 Gorgi, from the town of Kratovo, was burnt to death in Sofia because he did not want to become a Muslim. Zlata Meglenska lost her life because she did not want to convert to Islam and marry a prominent Muslim. Both these people were later granted sainthood by the Orthodox Church for their devotion to Christianity and for their martyrdom.

The first resistance to Ottoman occupation came from the so called haiduks, a Turkish word meaning "outlaws or bandits". People who refused to become Muslims by force, people who fought in their defense against authority, even people who committed punishable crimes and ran away to avoid severe punishment or death went into hiding and became haiduks. Unable to work and earn a legitimate living the haiduks resorted to stealing in order to survive. As more and more haiduks went into hiding they began to organize into small gangs and attacked travelers, robbing them of their possessions. The haiduks had a particular distaste for authority and usually targeted wealthy Muslims, not just for the loot but also in revenge for the injustices done to them.

As the life of the haiduk became common practice more and more individuals began to band together and formed larger groups. As these groups grew, they began to arm themselves not only for defense but to oppose Ottoman violence, economic exploitation and to acquire resources for their survival. Some people joined the haiduks purely for profit because it was easier to rob than to work.

As the haiduks became shrewd survivors and skilled warriors they began to branch out and conducted revenge killings and supported village rebellions. Later the haiduk movement became the first form of struggle for national liberation.

To keep themselves save from the law, the haiduks hid in forests, mountains, swamps and other places where it was difficult for the law to pursue them. Even though they lived a lawless life, most haiduks kept in touch with their families and their villages. They may have been bandits and outlaws to the Ottomans but they were not evil men and most

oppressed Christians saw them as heroes who stood up to the Ottoman tyrants in defense of rights and justice.

When the haiduk movement became more than just men running from the law, family members began to join in an effort to defend the family and the village. In essence the haiduks became a mini-army fighting battles to protect families and villages. The haiduk tradition was passed on from generation to generation and so were haiduk weapons. Weapons were passed from generation to generation and were regarded as the most prized equipment in the haiduk's possession. Weapons provided self-confidence and personal independence which is why a good weapon was passed from one haiduk to another; usually carrying a story with it. It was a special honour to have won a weapon in battle. If a haiduk was killed, or left the haiduk movement, his weapon was given to another haiduk. The glory of the predecessor was always considered, as well as the capabilities of the one inheriting the weapon of glory. The most common way for a haiduk to acquire a weapon was to take it from the enemy during battle.

In the beginning haiduk groups were disorganized and lacked discipline and planning but with experience they became resourceful. The first forms of organization were units of a dozen or two men lead by an arambasha or leader. It is interesting to note here that the arambasha was an elected member who came from the haiduk unit and whose leadership abilities were most prized. The arambasha's responsibilities were paramount not only in leading the unit but in arming, training, planning and providing for it. Besides providing for his own men, it was the arambasha's responsibility to also provide for the families, widows and orphans of the men who lost their lives under his command. That is why the bravest, most responsible and smartest were elected to the position of arambasha.

After an arambasha was elected every man in his unit had to pledge allegiance to him by taking the "Haiduk Oath" of obedience and loyalty which was done under the flag.

Each haiduk unit had its own flag which was custom embroidered by young maidens; most often relatives of the haiduks.

When conducting missions or exercises the flag was carried on a flagpole by the bairaktar or flag carrier, usually the arambasha's deputy. Each unit had its own flag decorated with a red background symbolizing the blood of those who lost their lives for freedom. The flag symbolized the haiduks' collective conscience and was the signature of the haiduk unit. The flag was flown ahead of the unit while songs were sung to lift the spirits of the fighters and inspire enthusiasm among the Macedonian population.

Some of the larger units even had scribes who, in Alexander the Greats' tradition, recorded their missions for posterity. Besides training for combat, haiduks were also trained for leadership skills, reconnaissance and

intelligence work. A unit was a well disciplined functional organization formed on the basis of friendship and trust.

As mentioned earlier most haiduks were recruited from volunteers but if there were specific needs to be met the arambasha recruited from trusted contacts in the villages under his protection.

Haiduk companies were usually created in the spring and dismissed before winter. Those unable to go home spent their winter in hiding.

The strength of the haiduk unit was its ability to react at lightning speed. Successful units were renowned for their physical and mental readiness, courage, fellowship, resourcefulness and endurance.

Despite the strict discipline requirements which called for total obedience, the haiduks practiced a sort of military democracy where decision making for major missions was done with input from each individual haiduk. Once a final decision was made every man had to follow the arambasha's exact orders unconditionally. In this way the arambasha had absolute authority and for this responsibility he was amply rewarded with a larger share of the plunder. Naturally the most successful units not only prospered but became a magnet for new recruits which allowed them to expand into a small army.

Haiduk units did not always operate alone. Sometimes they combined forces for more difficult missions. In such cases one of the existing arambashes was raised to chief arambasha and given responsibility of the entire company. The most famous of these were Karposh and lljo Maleshevski.

Second in command and importance in a haiduk unit was the bairaktar whose responsibility above carrying the flag was to assist the arambasha and during critical missions take command of the unit in the absence of the arambasha. This meant that he too had to possess good leadership qualities to qualify for the job. That is why the bairaktar was also voted by the unit and approved by the arambasha.

The internal structure of a haiduk company was not very different from that of military organizations. Although each unit may have been no larger than 40 haiduks, a company may have been as large as 4,000 haiduks. The larger numbers usually came together in times of crisis when they were required to repeal bandits, to fight off the Ottoman army, or during planned rebellions. The smaller units were more versatile and easier to deploy.

To be a haiduk one had to be in constant readiness because the haiduk's survival was dependent on his ability to act fast to escape a trap or to carry out a mission. That is why it was imperative that the haiduk's saber had to be sharp at all times and the haiduk had to be in a good physical and mental condition.

The kind of tactics haiduk units could carry out largely depended on the weapons they possessed, so they had to choose their weapons

carefully. In the beginning choice weapons were crude such as sticks, various knifes, pitchforks, hatchets, spears, arches, arrows, sabers, maces, swords, sickles, scythes, yataghans, armour and shields. These weapons were usually handmade by the haiduks themselves and were carved with various inscriptions and designs fitting for the cause. Some of the weapons that were made in workshops had ornaments of gold, silver, pearls, etc. added to them. Although the quality of the blade determined the value of the weapon, the handle was usually especially dressed with various ornaments and prayers.

The most famous Macedonian weapons in earlier times were the "dimiskia" saber made in Damascus, and the "frangia" saber made in France. The haiduks are also known to have used poisoned arrow tips, lit arrows and Thracian spears. The type of weapon the haiduk's possessed was largely dependent on the type of weapons available. As technology advanced so did the weapons.

Later as the Ottoman army began to use rifles, pistols and other firearms, they too began to fall into the possession of the haiduks. Although it appeared two centuries earlier, the rifle was officially introduced as the main weapon of the Ottoman Army in the 18th century. The haiduks quickly adopted its use and began to understand its advantages in warfare over conventional weapons. Before the rifle, haiduks fought the enemy hand-to-hand but with the rifle they could set ambushes and kill from the distance. For this reason the firearm became a most valued weapon of the haiduk.

Even with rifles in their possession haiduk units, for the most part, fought guerilla warfare with speed, mobility, maneuvering capabilities, clandestineness and rapidity as their best tactics. They were very successful at ambushes and setting traps and good at avoiding getting caught. Before conducting missions they conducted reconnaissance, then avoided populated areas and unfamiliar paths, or crossing through the woods. Road ambushes were conducted with rapidity and sudden fire or in some cases by pelting their targets with rocks then followed by an assault with sticks and swords. Villages and other populated places were usually attacked by night from all sides and by making sure their retreat routes were well protected.

The most common targets of the haiduks were the spahis (feudal landlords), beys, pashas, caravans, tax collectors, janissaries and martolozes (protectors). Common targets also included traitors, collaborators, rich persons and haiduk pursuers. Before a mission, reconnaissance information was gathered by special reconnaissance patrols. Just prior to the mission the arambasha held a meeting with all the haiduks and carefully informed everyone about the mission and its retreat strategy. After that each haiduk was given his specific assignment for the mission.

The haiduk movements had become such a nuisance to the authorities that around the beginning of the 17th century, all main roads had to be patrolled and protected. The Ottoman Government set up armed patrols to travel along the roads and escort caravans and passengers. Anyone caught attempting to commit robbery on the road was severely punished. The punishment for a haiduk was beheading and impaling the head on a stake or hanging it on a metal hook. Regardless of punishment however, the haiduk movement was active in Macedonia for centuries and as haiduk tactics gradually advanced a military tradition was established.

Rebellions and uprisings were part of life in Macedonia for centuries. The despair as a consequence of hard life, merciless abuse, torture and injustice brought discontent and bitterness to the Macedonian people and on occasion drove them to stand up and fight for their rights. Life for the ordinary Macedonian was hard enough without the injustices of the occupiers and when compounded with unjust practices drove people to resort to extreme violence manifesting itself in armed rebellions and uprisings.

In the beginning uprisings were small disturbances mostly confined to villages and usually provoked by corrupt individuals working for the state. Usually lead by the village leader, a rebellion was started to bring attention to the higher authorities. Unfortunately in most cases authorities would persecute the plaintiffs instead of solving their problems, which in the long term caused the problem to simmer and erupt again with the next provocation.

A bad practice by the authorities was to allow Ottoman forces to mercilessly take revenge on the population after quelling the uprising and increase taxes to pay for the expenses incurred by engaging the military.

In the 541 years of Ottoman rule in Macedonia (from the battle of Maritsa in 1371 to the First Balkan War of 1912) the Macedonian people showed their discontent by resisting in various ways such as leaving their properties, avoiding taxes, assassinating state administration representatives, burning the houses and properties of those in charge and joining haiduk movements in armed rebellions and uprisings.

I want to say here that it was not just the Christians who suffered at the corrupt hands of the Ottomans. Poor Muslims also experienced the same fate, especially the poor Yuruk colonists from Anatolia who were transplanted in the Balkans to support the Ottoman Empire. In times of crisis the poor, regardless of religion or ethnicity, banded together to protect themselves.

The first rebellions were mainly in response to repressive measures taken to Islamize the Christian population. This is when different civilian ethnic groups banded together as Christians to lead a united front against a common enemy. In February 1560 in the region between Debar, Ohrid and Kruje Macedonians and Albanians banded together and initiated a massive

rebellion against the Ottomans by killing the spahis, torching their houses and by taking their livestock. Then they blocked all roads leading to Bitola, Solun and Skopje, the roads leading to Albania's salt-works harbours and stormed the local fortresses (except the Drevnik fortress in Brez where a large Ottoman force was stationed).

At this point the Bey of the Elbasan sanjak sent a message to the Sultan in Istanbul informing him that taxes could not be collected because of the unrest. The Sultan in return responded by ordering all forces in Ohrid, Elbasan, Kruje and Dukagjin and some of his special forces to attack and squash the rebellion. His orders were carried out brutally and mercilessly. Those who fought on the side of the rebellion were executed. Those who opposed the rebellion were Islamized and rewarded with the properties of the rebels.

In 1569, encouraged by priests from Venice, a rebellion was started in the sanjak of Ohrid. In the following years the villagers continued to oppose the Ottomans by attacking caravans and storming fortresses. On one occasion the rebels captured 50 Ottoman soldiers, prompting the Sultan to order the spahis from Bitola and Korcha to retaliate. The rebels resisted so the Sultan was forced to send troops all the way from Herzegovina to suppress them.

In 1571 a group of about 300 well-armed Christian rebels who had refused to pay taxes for the last two years banded together near the village of Ezerani and stormed the Ottomans. This rebellion too was instigated by the priests of Venice through the consultation of archbishop Atanasij I from Ohrid. This particular rebellion lasted longer than expected due to lack of Ottoman resources to quell it. So on July 25th, 1571 the vazir Ahmet Pasha issued orders to divide the Ohrid sanjak, which extended from the Adriatic Sea in the west to Gavato in the east, into two parts with one center in Ohrid and the other in Elbasan. This was done to double the authority in the region so that the situation could be monitored more closely and rebellions would effectively be quelled before they could get out of hand.

Ohrid Region is full of mountains and forests where the rebels hid and planned their raids, so it took considerable time, almost a year, and much effort on the Ottomans part to put down the rebellion. All captured rebels were killed; those who surrendered were put in chains and sent to Istanbul to serve as oarsmen in the Sultan's galleys. That was not the end of the rebellion however. Soon afterwards in 1572 it spread to the Golemo and Malo Rech villages in Ohrid Region and to Sebekren and Mastar in Akchehisar Region. Then in the spring of 1573 several villages in Prespa Region joined. All these rebellions were the result of people refusing to pay exorbitant taxes.

Some of the most prominent leaders that lead the rebellions were the priest Kara Papas and village leaders Mitre Terek and Ratko Novak.

Rebellions continued to be raised in the Ohrid sanjak until the end of the 16th century which brought Macedonians and Albanians together to fight for a common cause. This common cause was chronicled by an Albanian officer in a letter to Pope Clement VIII dated July 1593. The letter was stamped with the inscription "Stamp of the Kingdom of Macedonia and Albania". (Stojĉev, Vanĉe. "Military History of Macedonia". P.132)

While the rebellions in Ohrid Region were raging, another Macedonian-Albanian rebellion flared up in Dolni Debar. Lead by the village leader Pali Bert, this rebellion started in February 1560 when a number of rebels burned down spahi properties and confiscated their livestock. Soon afterwards a second and third group took to the streets in neighbouring villages ransacking spahi properties and blockading roads. In no time at all the number of rebels rose to over 500. This rebellion too was suppressed but as usual the problem that caused it was never addressed so it simmered for several years until it flared up again in August 1659. This time 10,000 rebels took to the streets and overpowered the authorities in Vranovce, Leunovo and Tenovo villages and then spread to the cities of Gostivar, Tetovo, Debar and Skopje. Although massive in numbers, this particular rebellion fizzled out quickly and turned into bandit attacks and robberies until it was put down in 1609. To prevent further problems the state began to implement policies of forced, large scale Islamization. People were given a choice to become Muslim or die.

Concurrent to the Ohrid and Debar rebellions another rebellion was taking place in Mariovo-Prilep lasting between 1564 and 1565. This particular rebellion began in Mariovo as a result of strict enforcement of rules instigated by the all powerful Sultan Stileyman the Magnificent (1520-1566) or the Legislator as he was then called by the Ottomans. Being the most central Ottoman province in Europe, Macedonia was severely exploited. The Mariovo rebellion, termed the first all Macedonian planned rebellions, was a result of this exploitation. Organized by Christian Macedonians this rebellion was aimed at liberating the region and is considered a precursor to all national liberations in the Balkans that began in the 16th century.

The actual date of the liberation is unknown, it is assumed to have begun sometime in August or September 1564, what is known however is that it started in Satoka, Gradeshnitsa, Besishte and Staravina in Mariovo Region, in one of the poorest, most isolated and most inaccessible places in the region. Here the haiduk tradition was well developed and the region was populated by ethnic Macedonians. Ottoman colonization and Islamization had not yet penetrated.

Organized by Dimitri Stale from Sotika, priest Dimitry from Gradeshnitsa, Matio Nikola from Beshishte and Stojan Pejo and priest

Jako from Staravina, the rebellion was timed to begin with the arrival of the Ottoman tax collectors.

The information about this rebellion and the name of its leaders comes to us from the vizier Mustafa Pasha who on October 3, 1564 sent orders to the sanjakbey Uveis in Skopje and the kadi in Prilep requesting what punishment to exact on the rebel leaders for their disobedience. (Stojchev, Vanche. "Military History of Macedonia". P.135)

Another document was issued by the Sublime Port on December 4, 1565 which pinned the cause of the rebellion on a dispute between the raya (villagers) and the manager of the has (Emperor's land). The people of Mariovo and Prilep accused the manager of taking more than prescribed by law which was disputed by the manager. The case was taken to trial and when the judge ruled against the people, they took up arms. The rebellion quickly spread from Mariovo to Prilep.

It is unknown how the rebellion was suppressed or what happened to its leaders. There were, however, letters found with evidence that the Sultan may have sentenced the leaders to death by public execution and committed the followers to life sentences to be served as oarsmen on the Sultan's galleys. In revenge the Ottomans burned down two villages.

The trials and tribulations of life in Mariovo-Prilep are forever enshrined in Stale Popov's novel "The Legend of Kalesh Andja" now translated into English by Michael Seraphinoff.

Another early rebellion that took place in Macedonia was the Gavato rebellion of June 1639. This rebellion was sparked by the arrival of Ottoman authorities looking for the famous haiduk Belche who at the time was hiding in the village Gaveto.

Even though Gaveto was a dervenijs town loyal to the Ottomans and responsible for protecting the main road and gorge, it was also a haiduk hideout. Belche was a Gaveto resident with family and friends so when the Ottoman authorities arrived the town's people refused to give him up. Forcing their way through the crowd the Ottomans, lead by Osman, called upon Belche to surrender. Unable to escape Belche was apprehended. Seeing that there was no other way to save him, Mite Nikola, a local leader called upon the crowd to attack. Soon the town reached pandemonium and fights broke out. While the crowd used pitchforks and sticks to attack, the Ottoman used their rifles and sabers to defend themselves, killing several rebels in the process including Belche. Osman cut off Belche's head and took it to the judge in Bitola as proof of Belche's death.

One hundred and twenty four years after the first rebellion in Mariovo another rebellion was started in 1688 and lasted until 1689. This one was started as a result of people in authority abusing local businesses. A law had been passed prohibiting Ottomans in authority to stay in the local inns but the beglerbeys and sanjakbeys with their escorts ignored the law and took advantage of the innkeepers by using their facilities, eating their food

and not paying. Above that they abused the local women and often beat and tortured those objecting. With time the situation became worse, prompting the businesses to rebel and abandon their places of work. The loss of business prompted Ibrahim Pasha, the Ottoman in charge of the region, to complain to the Sublime Porte requesting that it put an end to the unlawful use of the inns and to force the innkeepers to return.

As a result of this passive walkout the Sultan, in April 1665, ordered the Ottoman authorities to take appropriate measures and protect the villagers. Unfortunately as usual local authorities ignored the Sultan's orders and continued business as usual until the villages became fed-up and in November 1668 started another rebellion by quitting their jobs and joining the haiduk movement. Dissatisfied with the situation, instead of punishing the lawbreakers, the Sultan ordered that the haiduks be caught and punished. This prompted even more riots and the rebellion spread to Veles, Prilep, Voden and Bitola. One good thing about the Mariovo rebellion was that it interrupted the process of turning the Mariovo villages into Ottoman chifliks. It also prevented Ottoman settlers from moving in.

Part 10 – The Karposh Uprising

After successfully establishing itself in the Balkans, the Ottoman Empire, around the second half of the 17th century, began to stir again looking to expand westward. Then following a three year preparation it embarked on its first mission to seize Vienna, the Austrian capital. Following his arrival in Odrin with 200,000 soldiers and another 60,000 support units, Sultan Mehmed IV (1648-1687) personally took command of the mission and began his march towards Vienna. When the army arrived in Belgrade on May 12, 1683 it was joined by 30,000 Tatar and another 30,000 Nizam soldiers. Here the Sultan turned command over to Kara Mustafa, his vizier, and gave him instructions to seize Vienna. Using his Tatar soldiers as an advanced guard, Kara Mustafa with his 300,000 soldiers arrived in Vienna on July 14, 1683 and immediately began the assault. A fierce battle ensued as the Austrians fought back and managed to resist the Ottoman siege for fifty-four days before a Polish army lead by Ian Sobieski arrived and joined the fight.

By now the west had realized the danger it was facing from Islam and had begun to organize a defense strategy through a "Holy War" which was joined by several European Christian powers including the Venetians, Hungarians, Saxons, Ukrainians and Serbians. On March 5, 1684 the Holy League was established and in 1686 was joined by Russia forming a Christian military alliance capable of opposing the Ottoman Islamic onslaught.

Soon after the Polish forces arrived in Vienna the Ottoman advance was pushed back but not completely extinguished as hostilities again resumed in 1684 and lasted until 1687 with the allied forces continuing to have successes. Then in 1688 Austria decided to escalate its campaign and on September 8, 1688 invaded and occupied Belgrade and continued to push southward. Unfortunately due to an attack from the French on Germany, Austria was forced to fight on two fronts thus weakening its capabilities to fight the Ottomans. Regardless however, the Austrians decided to continue fighting on two fronts and on April 6, 1689 appointed Count Ludwig of Baden commander of the Austrian forces on the Balkans and Generals Piccolomini and Veterani as his deputies.

The Austrian army in the Balkans numbered 24,000, too small to be effective but nonetheless effective enough to stir the local Christian population into action.

This war was not a social or economic war, it was religious in nature intended to stir-up the Christians that did not want to be pushed into forcibly accepting Islam. The idea was to get them to join the "Christian" Austrians and fight against the "Muslim" Ottomans. Unfortunately the Orthodox people in the Balkans feared Catholicism just as much as they feared Islam so they did not react as expected but began to stir nonetheless.

This became apparent when a letter from the Patriarch in Constantinople was sent to the Russian Emperor informing him that the Christians in the Balkans had a force of 30,000 Christian soldiers ready to start a rebellion if Russian forces were to come to the Balkans and assist them. The Patriarch also informed the Emperor that if Russia did not come then Austria would and the Orthodox Christians would be subjected to the influence of the Catholic Church. This also proved that the Patriarch was unaware of the formation of the Holy League between Orthodox and Catholic countries in the defense of Christianity.

The Ottoman military failure against the Holy League had devastating effects on the morale of the Ottoman army resulting in the assassination of Sultan Mehmed IV in 1687. But after his brother Suleyman II (1687-1692) was proclaimed the new Sultan the Ottoman army once again began new preparations for war.

After a few months of planning Suleyman II declared a state of emergency and ordered general mobilization. On June 6, 1689 he left Odrin for Sofia and appointed Arap Rejep Pasha commander of the front against the Austrian army. Arap Rejep Pasha was then ordered to reclaim Belgrade while the Sultan observed the campaign from the Sofia Field in Bulgaria. Rejep Pasha was given command of 50,000 soldiers, 20,000 of whom were cavalrymen which was more than a match for the Austrians. Unfortunately Rejep Pasha lacked the confidence to engage the Austrians and instead of fighting them he took a detour through Serbia robbing and pillaging villages; upsetting the Serbian population. But if the Ottomans were not going to come to the Austrians then the Austrians would come to the Ottomans in Belgrade on August 13, 1689. Here Ludwig of Baden joined Piccolomini's and Veterani's corps and on August 29, 1689 attacked the Ottomans near Grabovets and Batochima delivering a devastating blow. With 3,000 dead, the demoralized Ottoman army robbed its own camp and fled for the Sofia Field. Managing to save his own skin, the incompetent Rejep Pasha together with some of his elite forces fled the battlefield and hid in Nish where he organized a new defense. A month later the Austrians began their attack on Nish delivering another devastating blow. Soon after the Austrian Army began its attack on September 24, 1689 the Ottoman forces in Nish panicked and fled. Five thousand Ottomans drowned in the Nishava River in an attempt to cross it.

After that defeat Rejep Pasha sent some of his forces to Dragoman to defend the access to Sofia and the remainder to Vranje and Kriva Palanka. By now the Sultan had lost all confidence in Rejep Pasha and appointed the Grand Vizier Bekir Mustafa as his replacement. The new commander immediately took control of his forces and after arriving in Dragoman had Rejep Pasha executed and his subordinates punished. Here Bekir Mustafa strengthened his defenses and carried out a general mobilization.

Having experienced several successes the Austrians became bold and divided their army into two columns. Piccolomini commanding the first headed south to the Adriatic Sea while Ludwig of Baden personally led the second column towards the Danube and Vidin. In spite of their divided strength both columns had success liberating cities and towns and stirring the population into action.

On October 20, 1689 Piccolomini informed Emperor Leopold I that he had arrived in Prishtina and had made a request for reinforcements in order to attack Skopje, Solun, Albania and Herzegovina.

The deep Austrian penetration inside Ottoman territory alarmed the Ottomans especially since it was nearing Macedonia, their main economic bread basket. Being cut off from the north part of the empire and having their army reserves depleted, the Ottomans had no choice but to turn to Macedonia not only for their economic but also for their military needs. To support the war effort taxes were immediately raised and new ones imposed. Young men were mobilized and forced Islamization was accelerated. Christians were not allowed to bear arms so Christian men were converted into Muslims by force in order to be inducted into the Ottoman army. Even haiduks were granted amnesty and turned into martolozes (defenders) and dervenjis then employed by the Ottomans to recruit soldiers for them.

While the Ottoman central government was busy preparing for its defense against the Austrians, local despots, outlaws and corrupt state officials took it upon themselves to make some profit of their own by robbing the population. Among the most famous of these outlaws was Yegen Pasha, a former Rumelian beglerbey, who along with 10,000 outlaws was engaged in robbing the people of the Central Balkans.

As events were unfolding between the Ottomans and Austrians, the Macedonian population was once again exploited by all sides. While both the Ottoman and Austrian central governments were vying for the Macedonian people's favour, local authorities were robbing them blind and turning them into slaves. In addition to raising taxes which were to be paid in kind, new taxes were introduced which were to be paid with money. Local authorities also imposed additional taxes to be served as free labour in aid of the war effort but which in many cases ended up serving the local authorities by working on their estates for free.

After the fall of Belgrade on September 6, 1688 the Ottoman Empire became unstable and many innocent people became victims of anarchy. Vizier Kara Mustafa too was accused of being responsible for the defeat in Vienna and was executed. Dissatisfaction with Ottoman rule was not limited to the Christian population but grew among members of the Ottoman administration and restlessness spread everywhere manifesting itself in desertions and outlawry.

At the beginning of the Austrian-Ottoman War in 1683, the Christian populations in the Balkans, particularly the Macedonians, Serbians and Bulgarians, were deprived of their rights and saw the Ottoman defeat and the Austrian penetration as an opportunity for liberation particularly after Austria called on all Christians in the Balkans to join the Austrian army's actions. Those who were far from the front were called upon to engage the Ottoman army through organized rebellions and haiduk actions.

If it was not the Austrian call to arms then it must have been the taxation, economic oppression and forced Islamization that spurred the Balkan Christian population, particularly the Macedonians, to rebel against the oppressors in what later came to be known as "The Karposh Uprising" named after its leader Arambasha Karposh.

The Karposh Uprising began sometime in 1689 as social, economic and religious pressures were placed on the Macedonian population causing numerous rebellions to flare-up and haiduk actions to become more frequent. Although unrelated to other rebellions such as the one in Moriovo, the Karposh Uprising signified the first attempt, since the Ottoman penetration, by the Macedonian people to liberate themselves in their struggle to establish a Macedonian state. The Karposh Uprising is extremely important to Macedonia since it was organized by Macedonians and took place inside Macedonia.

Unplanned in the beginning, the Karposh Uprising began with riots and continued with haiduk actions especially after the violent suppression of the Mariovo rebellion in 1688-1689. The population's dissatisfaction with its condition continued to increase and spread over wider regions engulfing Petralitsa and Kriva Palanka. At the same time another rebellion was sparked in Shtip. This one was lead by Ivo of Shtip a mortoloz leader responsible for guarding the dervens in Shtip. Even though Ivo was working for the Ottoman state he had connections, cooperated and from time to time conducted missions with the haiduks. But when his secret was revealed, the Ottoman authorities came after him. But knowing that his services were in demand, due to the war with Austria and the shortage of fighting men, Ivo appealed to his Ottoman overlords promising that he would repent and accept Islam if his deeds were to be forgiven.

Ivo was pardoned and assigned to recruitment duties in Shtip where he was expected to recruit more than 1,000 paid volunteers to fight at the front. After recruiting about 300 a battle took place near Nish where on September 24, 1689 the Ottomans were badly defeated. At this point Ivo resigned his post as a recruiter, renounced Islam and fled to join Karposh.

Karposh too had a similar beginning. Karposhe's career began in the second half of the 17th century right after the brutal suppression of the latest rebellions when the haiduk movement exploded. By this time Karposh was a well known haiduk but his involvement in the rebellion

earned him the respect of his peers who raised him to the level of arambasha.

Then when the Ottoman administration needed fighting men to fight against Austria the haiduks were officially pardoned and recruited as martolozes. As a martoloz, Karposh, which by the way is a nickname meaning “rock”, had free access to the Macedonian people. Here he played the double role of Ottoman recruiter and rebellion organizer.

In official historical documents the name “Karposh” appeared for the first time in 1689 where he is described as a haiduk leader of a large group of haiduks who fought the Ottomans during the Austrian-Ottoman war. Karposh became famous in the spring of 1689 when the Ottoman central government sent Sarach Ali-Unsta of Odrin to pursue and destroy Karposh and his haiduks at his base in Dospat Mountain in the Western Rodopi mountain range. Uskadari, who at the time was sent along with Ali-Usta, was a witness to those events and on May 26, 1689 wrote about Karposh in his journal.

Upon Ali-Usta’s arrival a battle took place. Ten haiduks were killed but Karposh escaped and continued to operate on Dospat Mountain until the rebellion began to spread to wider regions. By August the rebellion had spread to Sofia and as the Austrian army penetrated further south the rebellion spread south between Nish, Leskovac, Vranje, Breznik and Pirot.

On September 15, 1689 the Ottoman central Government issued orders to Mehmed the martolozbasha of Znepole to take charge of all forces from Breznik, Pirot, Vranje, Nish and Leskovac and go after Karposh and his haiduks. It is unknown what happened during this pursuit but the next we hear of Karposh is that late in September he had become a martoloz officer in the Ottoman service.

Between September 26 and October 5, 1689 the central Ottoman government had issued orders to the kadis of Kyustendil, Sirishnik and Radomir to appoint Karposh leader of their martolozbashia. The kadis of Shtip, Radovish, Veles, Dojran, Seres, Demir Hisar, Nevrokop and Razlog were also ordered to appoint Ivo of Shtip as their martolozbasha. Sugare was appointed martoloz of Petrich and Melnik.

It was stated in the Divan (edict) of the Sultan that Karposh was appointed highest commander of all martolozbashas (leader of all martoloz leaders) and Ivo and Sugare were appointed chief leaders. By enlisting the services of the most eminent haiduks in the region the Ottoman authorities assumed that they would a) gain experienced fighters in their fight against the Austrians and b) eliminate chances of the haiduk leaders leading a rebellion. Unfortunately the Ottomans were wrong on both counts. With the Austrian presence in the Balkans the haiduk movements quickly developed into guerilla warfare and in time, as small units combined, companies were formed resembling an army.

Outside of the haiduk movements, Austrian emissaries who agitated the Christian population also greatly contributed to the Karposh Uprising. Piccolomini's men made contact with Christian leaders and urged them to start uprisings. Petar Bogdani, the Catholic Bishop of Skopje, and Toma Raspasanovich, an interpreter in the Austrian army, also became involved in the agitation in Skopje. Military successes on the part of the Austrian army, agitation of Austrians emissaries and numerous haiduk attacks on the Ottoman defense spurred the Macedonian people into action.

The first armed conflicts on Macedonian territories between the Austrian and Ottoman armies took place on October 20th, 1689 in Kriva Palanka where the Austrians encountered stiff resistance from the Ottomans and were forced to retreat to Vranje. Although this was a small victory for the Ottomans, they truly believed that Holy League reinforcements would soon be arriving and there would be another and more severe attack, so the Ottomans retreated to Shtip. Just as the Ottomans left, Kriva Palanka was taken over by the haiduks who were preparing to use it as their base for future operations. At this time Karposh and Ivo were in Skopje engaged in the defense of the Ottoman Empire against the Austrian invasion and by the Sultan's orders were obliged to defend the city and surrounding region. But as the Ottomans retreated from Kriva Palanka and as the Austrian army began its approach towards Prishtina and Kachanic, Karposh sought his opportunity and lead a rebellion in Skopje and Kachanik. When Piccolomini's advanced guard reached Kachanik on October 23, 1689 it found the fortress abandoned. When the news of the rebel attack on Kachanic reached the Ottoman authorities, Mahmud Pasha dispatched 300 soldiers from Skopje to provide reinforcements but on their way they ran into Piccolomini's forces near the Gorge of Kachanik and were decimated.

On October 25, 1689 the Austrian army, led by General Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini, arrived at the Kachanik Gorge and was joined by Karposh and his Christian rebels, which marked the beginning of the Karposh Uprising.

The sudden appearance of the Austrian army accompanied by the thunder of its numerous cannons caused panic among the Ottomans in the city of Skopje, forcing many to flee leaving Mahmud Pasha with little to defend the city. A battle ensued near the Lepenets River leaving about 100 Ottoman soldiers dead and 200 more captured. Mahmud Pasha along with 200 soldiers managed to escape into the nearby woods.

Unbeknownst to Piccolomini, Mahmud Pasha had regrouped overnight, was supplied with reinforcements and had reentered Skopje with 8,000 soldiers laying a trap for Piccolomini. When Piccolomini found this out from the villagers leaving Skopje, he set a trap of his own and ordered his artillery to open fire on the city. After a barrage of salvos from his ten cannons Piccolomini sent Colonel Chaki to check on the city.

On his return Chaki reported that the city was abandoned and that the stores were full of food and other merchandise. But what Chaki failed to notice is that the city was infested with the plague. Piccolomini nonetheless entered the city and ordered his troops to gather supplies.

After entering the city of Skopje on October 31, 1689 Piccolomini sent a second letter to Emperor Leopold, in which he wrote: "The city of Skopje is almost as big as Prague. It has no walls and no ditches. I found it deserted, without any valuables, but richly supplied with goods. The few people we met in the streets were pale and scared. The fortress was built in an old-fashioned way, it is without defense now and without water and there is no room for the cavalry, which is very needed for the collection of contribution. We remained armed during the night. I recommended Colonel Strasser to take over command. This experienced soldier requested 15 days to prepare the city for defense and to supply it with food. I have realized that his condition is justified and I could not decide to stay here with the entire corps, because enemy forces could appear in Skopje in four or five days. Behind our back we had the Gorge which could become almost impassable because of frequent rainfalls usual for this time of the year. Kosovo Field was not possessed, Nish was too far, and Bosnia stayed behind. This situation made me think sensibly and while I was so indecisive, I received a report about the retreat of Markcount Ludwig of Baden. Reluctantly, I decided to turn the city into dust". (Vanche Stojchev, “Military History of Macedonia”, page 150) Unfortunately Piccolomini’s decision to destroy the city left a population of about 60,000 people in dire straits and 4,000 homeless refugees.

As mentioned earlier, Karposh’s rebels participated in the Kachanik fortress attacks delivering a blow to the Ottoman forces killing 19 and capturing 11 soldiers. News of this traveled fast and wide and when Karposh arrived in Skopje he was greeted as a hero by the people. Here is what Ottoman chronicler Silahdar had to say: "Among the most famous criminals was the damned atheist Karposh, one of the martolozes of Skopje, who had been promoted by the Padishah (Sultan) but then forgot everything. He escaped, and became the head of the company of more than 3,000 non-Muslim bandits of the rebelled raya and the foreign enemy". (Vanche Stojchev, “Military History of Macedonia”, page 150)

During his assault on Skopje, Piccolomini called on the Christian population to abandon the city and leave but of all the people invited only 20 Catholic families and two priests accepted his offer and left.

On his way to Kachanic, Piccolomini destroyed the passage through the Kachanic Gorge and upon his arrival in Kachanic he appointed General Holstein Commander of the fortress and sent Colonel Strasser to liberate Bosnia.

On November 1, 1689 Piccolomini left for Prizren where he was expected to spread the uprising. But unfortunately during his stay in

Skopje he was infected with plague and by now had become very ill. Sick and exhausted Piccolomini arrived in Prizren on November 6, 1689 where he was greeted by 5,000 armed Serbian, Albanian and Montenegrin insurgents including Arsenije III Chamojevich who wished to join his forces. After two days of negotiations it was decided that those who wanted to fight the Ottomans should join the Austrian army and the rest should turn in their weapons.

On November 8 Piccolomini turned over command to Herzog Holstein, took communion from Petar Bogdani, the Archbishop of Skopje, and the next day he died and was buried in Prizren.

Joined by Ivo of Shtip, with about 1,000 rebels at their disposal, Karposh continued the uprising liberating most of Macedonia and parts of Serbia and Bulgaria.

After Skopje was burned down, the Ottoman army retreated to Veles and Shtip, the Austrian army left for Kachanik and Karposh went to Kumanovo and Kriva Palanka.

The first territory to be liberated by the rebels was Kriva Palanka where a vicious fire fight took place and in spite of losing six cannons and other weapons, the rebels managed to capture and hold on to the fortress. From there, on October 27, 1689, the rebels launched an attack and captured Kumanovo and a few days later, with the help of the local population especially the miners, the rebels took Kratovo. The Kratovo fight was particularly vicious. It began in the streets as the Ottoman forces were pushed to take refuge in a bath house but the rebels destroyed the roof and set the place on fire killing everyone inside. After that the insurrection spread to Zletovo, Kochani, Kachanik and finally to Tetovo and Gostivar engulfing a large area spanning from the Gorge in Gradelitsa and Shtip, to the Gorge of Kachanik, Veles and Tikvesh to Kyustendil in the east. This much of Macedonia's territory was never before liberated since the arrival of the Ottomans, which the rebels managed to hold onto for six weeks.

With this much success in such a short time, it was no wonder Emperor Leopold proclaimed Karposh "Prince of Kumanovo" and his own people, especially his rebels, considered him their supreme commander and treated him like a king.

The Austrian command in Nish proclaimed Karposh "King of Kumanovo" and as a sign of recognition they awarded him the "hat of a prince" significant of a crown. In other words given the status of the symbols bestowed on the Macedonian leadership the Austrians indirectly recognized the Macedonian liberated territory as a "princedom".

Immediately after liberating the territory and establishing rebel control Karposh, as "king of Kumanovo", began to organize the various freed cities for defense against the return of the Ottomans. He especially

strengthened the gorge at Kriva Reka near Kriva Palanka, which the rebels blockaded by digging ditches and laying logs.

While the Macedonians were preparing to defend their liberated territory, the Austrian army began its intrusion deeper into Macedonia.

By November 1689 the Austrian army was making its presence in Shtip, Veles and Kavadartsi and later through Tetovo to Mavrovo. In Shtip, Colonel Holstein encountered a force of 6,000 Ottoman soldiers lead by Mahmud Pasha who earlier had retreated from Skopje. Holstein, who had earlier retreated to Vranje, made his way to Shtip via the village Orizari arriving just outside of the city in the dawn of November 10, 1689. A vicious battle ensued as the Austrians pushed into the city leaving 2,000 Ottoman soldiers dead. In revenge the Austrians also burned the city down but not before emptying it of its possessions.

As the Austrians left Shtip for Vranje they ran into another column of 300 Ottoman soldiers and managed to subdue them, killing more than half of them in the process. Holstein's campaign strengthened the defenses of the territory between Vranje and Kachanik, creating a consolidated defense line.

After receiving news that a large Ottoman force was concentrating in Vlainitsa near Leunovo, the Austrians carried out a second campaign in Mavrovo in the middle of November 1689. During this campaign the Austrian command sent a small force of Austrian soldiers reinforced with some Albanian Catholics to attack the Ottoman force. The armies clashed near Tetovo and drove the battle towards Vrainitsa where more than 600 Ottoman soldiers were killed and the rest escaped. Here too the Austrians robbed the region of its wealth stealing more than 1,000 cattle before returning to Prizren.

It is interesting to note at this point that the Macedonians here again were divided fighting on both sides of the war. While the Miaks fought on the Ottoman side the men from Mavrovo fought on the Austrian side. After the battle was over, the men from Mavrovo accompanied the Austrians and joined the ranks of the Austrian army, some even became officers. The Miaks on the other hand were well looked after by the Ottomans who allowed them to preserve their customs and to wear "the cross bayrak" in weddings.

The third Austrian campaign, led by Captain Sanoski, took place on November 20 and 21, 1689. Here 100 Austrian soldiers and 400 Serbian and Albanian volunteers joined ranks and after two days march, arrived in Veles, immediately surrounded the marketplace and slaughtered the entire population. While the Austrians remained outside the city, the Serbians and Albanians robbed and burnt it down. After they were done they left while the Austrians continued their march to Tikvesh and robbed that city. On their way back the Austrians clashed with a unit of janissaries leaving

Captain Sanoski badly wounded. His soldiers carried him to Kachanik where he died.

After General Piccolomini died the Austrians held their positions at Gradelitsa, Kachanik, Znepole and Dragoman Gorges. In the meantime the Ottoman Sultan issued a general mobilization order to enlist the entire male population capable of fighting. Janissaries, spahis, yuruks and all semi-military units in Rumelia were mobilized and spurred into action to stop the Austrian penetration and extinguish all rebellions. Extinguishing the rebellions was considered a priority and to be carried out before engaging the Austrians. In other words, the final result of the Austrian-Ottoman war depended on the success of the Ottoman army's ability to suppress the rebellions inside Macedonia.

While mobilization was taking place preparation for a serious counteroffensive was planned. The Grand Vizier Bekri Mustafa Pasha was replaced by Fazli Mustafa Kuprulu, a 52 year old man known as a man of respect with regards to Islamic law and tolerant of Christians. Also Koja Mahmud Pasha from Shtip was appointed commander of the entire Muslim force.

To increase his chances of success the Ottoman Sultan on July 21, 1689 made contact with Khan Selim Giray, one of his Allies from Crimea, requesting his help. To entice him to join the Sultan sent him a gift of 75,000 gold coins. The Khan obviously accepted and on July 26, 1689 left for the Balkans arriving in Sofia four months later, on November 14, 1689. By then reconnaissance had already been conducted and all the necessary information on enemy activities and positions was collected and plans for the counteroffensive were being drafted.

To reverse some of the damage done to the Christians and to patch-up relations, the Grand Vizier Kuprulu carried out reforms to rescind some of the taxes imposed on the Christians in hopes of preventing them from joining the Austrian army.

On November 15, 1689 edicts were sent to the kadis of Skopje and other cities in Macedonia, amnestying all those who owed back taxes.

Before finalizing his counteroffensive plans, the Grand Vizier had consultations with Selim Giray to get his agreement. Giray agreed that the rebellions should be put down first and the counteroffensive should begin in Sofia, not Nish. With regards to putting down the Karposh Uprising it was decided to deploy a combination of forces consisting of Crimean Tatars, Albanian mercenaries and all available Ottoman soldiers. The forces were to depart from Sofia to Kyustendil and via Kriva Palanka and Kumanovo to Skopje and from there to Kachanic and to Kosovo.

In addition to the local forces the Ottoman Sultan also ordered Koja Halil Pasha, the commander of the Peloponnesus, to gather all available forces from the Trikala and Euboea Regions and head to Skopje to join Selim Giray.

After resting for a few days in Sofia, the main body of the Ottoman army was ready to go. Led by Mahmud Pasha, the counteroffensive began on November 20, 1689 starting with the attack on Kyustendil. On their way the Ottomans encountered a company of about 100 haiduks and destroyed it. Prior to the attack on Kyustandil, Mahmud Pasha consulted with his Muslim leaders and was informed that about 6,000 more soldiers led by the nazir of Skopje had arrived in Kochani and were ready to depart for Kratovo and Kriva Palanka to join the fight.

A large force of Christians, numbering from 10 to 20 thousand with six cannons, gathered at Kriva Palanka prepared to meet the counteroffensive.

Led by Selim Giray the first wave of clashes between Giray's advanced guard and Karposh's rebels began on November 21, 1689 at the Kriva Reka Gorge entrance. Unable to stop the advance Karposh ordered the fortress to be burned down while he and his rebels retreated to Kumanovo.

By November 26th Giray had subdued the rebels and taken over Kriva Palanka and the next day he made his presence in Kumanovo where he was confronted by Karposh and his rebels. Karposh fought back gallantly but was unable to stop the assault and the Kumanovo fortress fell to the enemy. Karposh and most of his fighters who fought in the meadows outside the fortress were all captured. All those inside the fortress were killed and the fortress was burned down.

Giray afterwards divided some of his forces into three columns of about 10,000 fighters each and sent them in three different directions. One was sent to Tsrna Reka – Raets region to dislodge the rebels there, the second was sent to Tikvesh region and the third was sent to Shtip, Veles and Prilep regions where about 4,000 rebels lay in wait.

Giray and the main Ottoman army of about 10,000 soldiers, together with the captured rebels including Karpsh, departed for Skopje on November 29, 1689.

On December 6, 1689 the Austrian command in Prishtina received information that the Tatars had burnt down all the villages they passed through and had taken 6,000 prisoners, mostly women and children. They had also massacred the entire Christian population in the villages Rashtak and Ljuboten, today known as "butcher's meadows".
The Tatars entered Skopje unabated and settled there.

Upon finding out that a large Ottoman force was approaching, the Austrian army and the Macedonian rebel forces retreated, especially after learning that Karposh had been captured.

Given the new situation with the Ottomans, the Austrians decided to no longer assist the rebels, leaving them vulnerable to Ottoman attacks. The Tatars now stationed in Skopje Field continued their assaults on Tetovo, Veles and Mariovo, suppressing the rebellions and robbing the population. In the meantime Koja Halil Pasha from the Peloponnesus had arrived in

Skopje and had met up with Giray. Although Halil Pasha did not participate in the suppression of the Karposh Uprising, because he arrived late, his Albanian mercenaries were allowed to acquire land in Skopje and Tetovo Regions in gratitude for the terror they had spread on their way to Skopje.

Most of the rebel prisoners, including Karposh, who were brought to Skopje were tortured and then executed. There are also two versions as to how Karposh died. One version says Karposh was impaled by Tatar lances near the Vardar River Bridge in Skopje. The other version says that he was hung on an oak tree near the Vardar River Bridge. He was most probably executed near the end of November or probably in the beginning of December. News of his execution arrived in Odrin on December 13, 1689.

After putting down the Karposh Uprising, the Ottomans prepared to attack Kachanik and engage the Austrian army. 11,500 Ottoman soldiers were dispatched from Skopje to Kachanic on December 30th, 1689. Upon finding this out Holstein ordered Colonel Strasser and his forces in Pristina to go to help the soldiers located in Kachanik. Strasser arrived in Kachanik fortress with 9,000 cavalrymen, 400 Hungarians and 1,500 Serbian and Albanian volunteers and was joined by the 600 Austrian soldiers already stationed there. A battle broke out on January 1st, 1690 and the Austrians suffered a devastating defeat with 2,000 soldiers killed including Colonel Strasser. When Holstein received news of the defeat and that now an Ottoman force was approaching Prishtina, he quickly gathered his forces and fled to Nish.

After occupying Kosovo, the Ottomans stopped the counteroffensive to let their forces rest for the winter. Giray was no longer needed and was ordered to return to Odrin while his Tatar army was ordered to leave for Crimea.

In the meantime, the Austrians realized that without the help of the oppressed Christian population they could not survive another battle. They also wanted to correct some of the mistakes they had made during their campaign. A decision was made to send an appeal to all Balkan nations on behalf of the Austrian Emperor Leopold I. The appeal was a call to continue the fight against the Ottomans and by doing so to help the Austrians win. The appeal was made on April 6, 1690 and sent to the Balkan nations on April 26, 1690. A special Letter of Protection was also issued but only to the Macedonian people (Gens Macedonica) as a result of a letter sent to the Emperor by Marko Kraida of Kozhani and Dimitri Popovich of Solun, two Macedonians who had left their homes and moved to Austria. The letter written by the Macedonians was a request to the Emperor Leopold I to take the Macedonian people under his protection.

On May 31, 1690 Emperor Leopold I issued another appeal extending his protection to the Bulgarian, Serbian, Macedonian and Albanian

populations. He called on all these people to fight against the Ottomans, their mutual enemy, under Austrian colors.

Unfortunately in spite of all that was said and done the Austrian intervention turned out to be a big disappointment for the Macedonians and the promises and appeals were too little, too late. The people decided to side with the Ottomans and put pressure on them to deliver on tax cuts and amnesties which the Ottomans did.

After gaining the people's support the Ottomans carried out new offensives against the Austrians winning back Nish and Smederevo and eventually Belgrade driving the Austrians back across the Sava and Danube Rivers.

Part 11 – Macedonians in the Diaspora

The Austrian-Ottoman war achieved its aims in stopping Ottoman expansion into Western Europe but did nothing to alleviate the problem in the Balkans. The Balkan insurgents never received any real help in the form of weapons, forces or food from the Austrians or from the Holy League and were left to fend for themselves. Being concentrated in a small region, mainly inside Macedonia, the war caused much grief for the Macedonian people. The Macedonian people suffered the most not only during their involvement with the Austrians and the uprising but also later. After the conflict was over the Ottoman army and local Muslim authorities took it upon themselves to punish the rebels through revenge killings and abuse. This torment forced many Macedonians to leave their homes and abandon their properties. To make sure they did not come back local authorities made sure their lands were confiscated and awarded to their worst enemies who caused them the greatest suffering.

With the retreat of the Austrian army and the suppression of the Karposh uprising life in Macedonia became even harder for the average Macedonian who saw no end to his or her misery. Although some promised reforms to improve the lives of the Christians were initiated at the central level of the Ottoman state they were never implemented at the local level as local authorities continued to abuse the Christian people. Seeing no end to their misery, refugees from Skopje, Tetovo and Tikvesh in 1689 began to assemble and head north. A Great Migration of Christians organized by the Patriarch of Pech, Arsenije III Charnojevich, began in 1690 and was joined by Macedonians from Pech, Pristina, Vranje, Prizren, Skopje Region, Kumanovo Region, Kratovo Region, Kriva Palanka, Polog, Veles, Shtip, Kochani, Bitola and even Solun, all moving north to Vojvodina. Although we have no exact figures as to how many people fled at the time, we estimated them to be 30 to 40,000. More recent sources however indicate that the numbers were much larger more like 70-80,000 and perhaps even 100,000. (Vanche Stojchev, "Military History of Macedonia", page 157)

Subsequent to the Great Macedonian Migration, Ottoman authorities brought in Islamized Yuruk Turks, Albanians and other settlers to populate the vacant regions.

This unfortunately was not the first time that Macedonians had to flee north to Austro-Hungary in large numbers to save themselves. The first wave took place in 1391 after the Maritsa defeat when the Ottomans first invaded Macedonia. The devastation, plundering and forced Islamization frightened people into leaving their homes and seeking safety in Serbia and Bosnia. Then as the Ottomans reached Serbia many refugees fled to Austria and Hungary by crossing the Sava and Danube Rivers.

According to Dr. Vanche Stojchev the first people to leave Macedonia were the lower class nobles who, during the southward Serbian expansion, Emperor Dushan had moved from Bosnia, Herzegovina, Lika and Serbia to Macedonia. The next mass migration took place after the Vama battle in 1444 when Polish King Wladyslaw's and Walachian ruler Dracul's forces were decimated by the Ottomans. The devastating defeat of the Christian army frightened many Macedonians, mostly Vlachs, to take their large herds and belongings and migrate to Austria. Another mass migration took place after the failed Skanderbeg Uprising, which lasted from 1443 until 1479. Afraid for their lives, a large number of Skanderbeg Uprising participants from Ohrid, Struga and Debar fled their homes and headed north.

By now many of these Christian Orthodox immigrants had established colonies in Austria and Hungary and began to feel the pressure to accept Catholicism which they naturally resisted. To avoid becoming Catholics many, especially the wealthy, after the uprisings in Macedonia had been suppressed returned to their native lands. The rest asked to be transferred to the Ukraine or to some other Christian Orthodox country that was willing to take them.

The greatest migration of Macedonians to Austria and Hungary by far however was after the suppression of the Karposh Uprising in 1689. The Karposh Uprising was encouraged by the Holy League alliance and prompted by the Austrian army's invasion of Macedonia. Unfortunately when the Holy League's aims were fulfilled the people in the Balkans were abandoned and left on their own to fight a fight they could not possibly win. The Karposh Uprising was not taken well by the Ottomans and was brutally suppressed. Massacres, devastation and terrible repression followed forcing people to re-think whether it was still worth living on their homeland under Ottoman rule or just simply abandoning it. The Macedonians were by far the largest group of people to leave their homes but they were not alone. Serbians, Albanians, Montenegrins and others also joined the exodus. Led by Arsenije III Chamojevich, the patriarch of Pech, many Macedonians and others left their homeland and settled in Vojvodina, Budim and other Regions north of the Ottoman boundaries.

After settling in Vojvodina most of the immigrant population, especially the civilians, became occupied in agriculture, handcrafts and trade. Most of the experienced fighters joined the Austrian army and fought against the Ottomans in the Austrian-Ottoman wars. The more experienced Karposh Uprising veterans even became high-ranking officers. Jovan Monastirli from Bitola, who achieved the rank of colonel, was awarded the title Austrian noblemen with the right to his own family coat of arms. While serving in the Austrian military, Jovan Monastirli was given command of what became known as the "Serbian forces" which

consisted mostly of Balkan refugees. Monastirli was later promoted to general and fought alongside the Austrians in the battle of Slankamen in Srem, on August 10, 1691. Commanding a corps of 10,000 soldiers, mostly Macedonians and Serbians, Monastirli under the command of Ludwig of Baden, helped deliver a devastating blow to the Ottoman army commanded by the Grand Vizier Mustafa Pasha Kuprulu. The Ottomans lost 18,000 soldiers and 18 pashas during that battle including Kuprulu Pasha.

Jovan Monastirli was the first Macedonian to become a general in the Austrian army as well as earn the title Serbian sub-duke.

When the many years of hostilities between France and Austria ended and a Peace Treaty between Louis XIV and Leopold I was signed on October 30th, 1697, hope was raised that the Macedonians would be assisted to return to Macedonia. Now that Austria was free from its obligations in the west, it was expected that it would turn its attention to the south and vigorously engage the Ottomans. Unfortunately on January 26th, 1699 the Macedonian people's hopes were dashed when Austria signed the Karlowitz Peace Treaty with the Ottomans officially ending the Austrian-Ottoman wars and establishing the Rivers Sava, Danube, Tisa and Morish as permanent borders between the two empires.

With the signing of this treaty so ended the last opportunity for the Macedonian population living in Austria and Hungary to return to Macedonia.

No sooner was it was decided that the Balkan people would remain in Austria and Hungary than an "Illyrian Office" was established to aid the immigrants. At that time (18th century) all Slavic speaking nations were referred to as "Illyrians" by the Austrians.

After the Orthodox Christians established themselves in Austria, the Catholic clergy initiated actions to have them converted to Catholics. This however was adamantly opposed by Arsenije III Chamojevich and Jovan Monastirli of Bitola. On October 23rd, 1705 Charnojevich sent a desperate letter to the Russian court, in which he described the difficult situation. Unfortunately both Charnojevich and Monastirli died before any action could be taken. Charnojevich died in 1706 followed by Monastirli in 1707. This was a tragic loss for the Orthodox Christians in Austria not only because they lost their leaders and protectors but also because their religious rights, property, and right to self management were about to be denied.

On February 25th, 1711 Russia declared war on the Ottoman Empire. On March 3rd, 1711 Peter the Great issued a Manifesto appealing to all Balkan Christians in Serbia, Bosnia, Macedonia, Bulgaria, etc. to organize uprisings and join the Russian forces which by now were on their way to the Balkans. Unfortunately with the exception of the Montenegrins no other nation had the energy to yet again raise more rebellions.

Upon finding this out, the immigrant Orthodox Christians now living in Austria and Hungary managed to raise about 20,000 troops and were ready to march on the Balkans alongside the Russians. Unfortunately the Austrian army discovered their plans and stopped them before they left.

Discontent with their lives in Austria and Hungary, the Orthodox Christians looked for ways to escape their Catholic tormentors. Their prayers were answered after the Russian Empress Elisaveta Petrovna (1741-1761), daughter of Peter the Great, ascended the Russian throne. Elisaveta Petrovna made an appeal to the Austrian authorities to let the Orthodox immigrants go to Russia where she was prepared to allow them to practice their Orthodox religion.

Elisaveta Petrovna was motivated to give the Orthodox Christians a safe haven when she discovered that the Orthodox Christians lost their right to self management and were being forced to convert to Catholicism. This was particularly brutal for the Macedonian officers in the Austrian army who were expected to become Catholics if they wanted to keep their ranks and jobs. Those who had purchased properties were also expected to convert to Catholicism or their properties would be confiscated. Rather than becoming Catholics many decided to leave Austria and Hungary and make Russia their new home.

Another mass migration of Macedonians took place between the years 1751 and 1753 this time from Austria and Hungary to Russia. Here is a typical story of one man's journey that could apply to every Macedonian immigrant who ventured into Austria and Hungary. His name is Ivan Horvat, a Vlach from Macedonia. His father's name was Samoil. Samoil came to Austria from the village Horvat, located in Dolna Prespa Region, later renamed Horvati then Rvati. Today the Village is called Arvati. Samoil fought in the Karposh Uprising and after its suppression fled to Austria where he became Lieutenant Colonel in the Austrian army. Ivan was born in Petrovaradin and as he advanced through the army ranks he achieved the rank Major in an infantry regiment.

In 1750 Ivan Horvat contacted Mihail Petrovich Bestuzhev, the Russian Ambassador to Austria, and requested his permission to migrate to Russia. Bestuzhev accepted his request but asked him to wait a while until his request was approved by the Russian Government. To Horvat's surprise the Russian Government not only approved his immigration but offered him and his family citizenship and a job in the Russian army. In fact all the families of the officers who served in the Austrian military were granted citizenship and all officers were given jobs in the Russian army. (Vanche Stojchev, "Military History of Macedonia", page 160)

While waiting for a response from St. Petersburg, Ivan Horvat, along with 29 other military officers submitted their resignation to the Court Council of Austria so that they could be released from the Austrian military. Their resignations were immediately forwarded to Maria Theresa,

the Austrian Empress who at the time was on friendly terms with the Russian Empress. Maria Theresa discharged them and freed them from their obligations.

On July 13th, 1751 Ambasador Bestuzhev received confirmation from Empress Elisaveta Petrovna that Horvat and the other officers were given permission to leave for Russia and that jobs would be made available for them in the Russian military. Horvat would be promoted to General and the other officers would be promoted to higher ranks than those they had had in the Austrian army. Bestuzhev, his secretary Chemyev, Horvat and brothers Nikola, Todor and Jovan Chorbe from Ohrid organized the migration. (Vanche Stojchev, "Military History of Macedonia", page 161)

Led by Ivan Horvat, a convoy of officer,s their families and others left Austria and arrived in Kiev on October 11th, 1751. On December 24th, 1751 Horvat was invited to St. Petersburg to see Empress Petrovna, attend a Senate session and meet with the Military Board to discuss a project to bring all the Orthodox people from Austria to Russia.

An agreement was made and on December 25th a resolution was signed by the Empress to follow-up on the plans. Among other things, the resolution contained 29 items concerning the immigrants' arrival and settlement on Russian territory. Among the items included were directives to settle the immigrants on fertile land near the Dnieper River close to the Ottoman border. The territory which they would occupy would be called Novaja Serbia (New Serbia). All expenses incurred during the settlement were to be reimbursed from the army budget. No other ethnic group would be settled in the same region other than the immigrants from Serbia, Macedonia and Bulgaria.

On top of that the resolution also called for four regular regiments to be formed from the immigrants; two cavalry and two infantry. The cavalry regiment was to be composed of 4,000 members and the infantry regiment was to be composed of 1,000 grenadiers. All officers of all ranks who would be in command were to be paid the same salaries as the Russian army officers of the same rank. If at all possible regiments would be organized by ethnicity each consisting of twenty companies. Infantry and cavalry regiments were to be issued free armaments and discipline was to be regulated in accordance with Russian army regulation. All regiments were to be placed under the Russian Supreme Command.

On January 29th, 1752 the Russian Senate issued an order for Major General Galebov to assist Horvat in the settlement of the immigrants and in the creation of the said regiments.

Another immigrant who followed in Ivan Horvat's footsteps was Major Jovan Shevich who, along with 300 border-men and their families, left Hungary and arrived in the Ukraine in 1752. Shevich too was promoted to the rank of general in command of a regiment which included

74 Macedonians. According to the regiment list the 74 declared themselves members of the "Macedonian nation".

In addition to the Macedonians that arrived with Ivan Horvat's and Jovan Shevich's groups, there were also Macedonians in Ivan "the Albanian's" and Rajko Preradovich's groups who also landed in Novaja Serbia around the same time.

As the immigrant population kept growing and concentrating in that region, it sought to create an autonomous Novaja Serbia. Ivan Horvat took the initiative to the Holy Synod in 1753 but the idea was rejected. Subsequently, with Horvat's help, 17 churches were built in the region and priests were brought from Macedonia, mainly from Sveta Gora, to serve in those churches.

Horvat's initiatives so impressed the Empress that she allowed him, by decree, to personally promote officers up to the rank of Colonel.

The migration of Macedonians to the Ukraine from the Balkans, Austria, Hungary, Moldavia and other places continued for generations.

In 1751, at the beginning of the Balkan peoples' migration, four regiments were created strictly made up of immigrants; two were cavalry and the other two infantry. The regiments were divided into two groups, the maneuver or mobile regiments and the garrison or stationary regiments. While the garrison regiments consisted mainly of married men with families, the maneuver regiments consisted mostly of single men and were used for special military actions and wars outside of Russian territories.

On May 10th, 1759 Empress Elisaveta Petrovna issued orders to create two new maneuver cavalry regiments; one Macedonian and one Bulgarian. Major General Ivan Horvat was given the task of creating the Macedonian Regiment which consisted mostly of Macedonians with a small number of other people from the Balkans. Major Simeon Pishchevich was appointed in charge of the regiment while Aleksandar Dimitriev was given command of it. The regiment was given an official name "Macedonian Hussar Polevii Polk", that is "Macedonian Cavalry Maneuver Regiment". This regiment was created for the purpose of fighting wars outside of Russian territories. By Senate decision, the Macedonian Regiment was ordered to fight in Prussia, Poland and in the Ottoman Empire against Tatars, Cherkezes, Cossacks and others.

The organization and formation of the Macedonian Regiment was similar to the other cavalry regiments, consisting of 4,000 soldiers divided into 20 companies each with about 200 soldiers. It is interesting to note that on the personnel list under the column "nationality" the words "Macedonian" appeared with each individual's name, rank and date of arrival.

There was however one difference between the Macedonian and other regiments. The Macedonian regiment had its own seal, coat of arms and

flag. Also, considering most members of that regiment were once Austrian officers and soldiers, they were allowed to use their original weapons and uniforms which they brought with them after leaving Austria. This however gradually changed and the regiment acquired new weapons, uniforms and coats of arms. In the beginning the Macedonian Regiment's coat of arms was a little lion without a crown, borrowed from the Stematography of Hristifor Zhefarovich. Then in 1776 the Macedonian coat of arms was changed and had a shield in French form. The base was red with various oriental ornaments, and the emblem was a Tatar shield with two crossed spears with golden picks. (Vanche Stojchev, "Military History of Macedonia", page 162)

Soldiers and officers were allowed to wear whatever they wanted but on May 10th, 1763 the Russian Supreme Command issued a General Order to all cavalry regiments to upgrade their weapons and dress. Every soldier and officer was obliged to possess a mantle, a dolman, boots, a belt, a bag, a saddle, a saber, a carbine, a pistol etc. On October 3rd, 1775 another order was issued requiring all cavalry regiments to wear uniforms. The Macedonian Regiment was issued yellow jackets and trousers, ornamented with black braid and a red cap. On December 24th, 1776 a new order was issued with a more precise description of the uniform. According to that order the Macedonian Regiment was issued yellow jackets and trousers with red edges, ornamented with black braids. The Macedonian Regiment wore this uniform until it was disbanded. Each regiment also had its own bugle and a drummer.

Like all good things that come to an end, so did the immigrant colonies in Russia when Russian authorities decided to disband them and integrate them into Russian society. By Decree from the Empress Catherine II, on June 28th, 1783, the immigrant regiments were disbanded and new ones created. The regiment to which the Macedonians belonged was combined with the Dalmatian regiment and named the Alexandrian Regiment. In spite of the name change, the Macedonian people, unofficially of course, continued to call their regiment by its old name until it became fully integrated and began to lose its Macedonian identity.

Prior to being integrated the Macedonian regiment proved itself by demonstrating courage and success in battle for which it received various commendations from Empress Elisaveta Petrovna, Empress Catherine II and from the Russian Supreme Command.

During their participation in the Russian military a large number of Macedonian officers were promoted to the ranks of general. The highest known rank awarded to Macedonians was that of Major General proudly earned by Ivan Horvat and Todor Chorbe. Despite of all his merits however, Ivan Horvat was charged with severe obstinacy and sentenced to 20 years imprisonment in Siberia where he died in 1780.

Part 12 – Turn of the 19th Century and the Negush Uprising

After many Macedonian revolutionaries left for the Ukraine and Russia, permanently abandoning their homes and lands, the Ottomans brought Islamized Yuruk Turk workers, Albanians and other settlers to populate the vacant regions. Unfortunately as Ottoman Central power began to erode some Ottoman feudal lords began to openly work against it. Amongst them were the Albanians who were settled in Macedonia. Some Albanians took advantage of the weak Ottoman authorities and imposed themselves as feudal lords in certain regions. Among the most notorious Albanians were Ali Pasha of Ioannina, the Bushatli of Shkoder, Havli Paha of Skopje, Abdurazman Pasha of Tetovo, Ismail Beg of Seres, etc., all of whom imposed their influence on Macedonia after the suppression of the Karposh Uprising.

While in service of the Ottoman Empire these people took advantage of their positions and of Ottoman negligence to strengthen their own economic, military and political influence and all that at the expense of the populations they ruled.

With time, however, the Ottoman central government did have some success in eliminating some of these power usurpers but not before they did a lot of damage. By oppressing the populations to a point of economic collapse, they managed to instigate a number of rebellions not just in Macedonia but throughout the entire Balkans.

To cope economically some people in Macedonia were forced to leave their homes to find employment elsewhere while others were forced to seek political solutions by joining the haiduks or the armies of countries which fought against the Ottoman Empire.

Early in the 19th century travel was restricted to within the Ottoman Empire so migrant workers worked mainly in Asia Minor, Epirus and Serbia to name a few places. But later as travel restrictions were lifted, Macedonians traveled to as far as the United States, Canada and Australia. In their travels people learned about the various revolutionary movements such as the French and American Revolutions and brought such knowledge back home with them. This new knowledge had a profound effect on the Macedonian and other Balkan people and got them thinking about an all out liberation.

I just want to mention at this point that the vast majority of those who were contemplating the idea of liberation had no notion of dividing the Ottoman Empire and forming separate states. The idea then was to focus their entire effort to liberate the Christians from their oppressors, the servants of the Ottoman Empire.

Another factor that influenced the Balkan people under Ottoman dominion was the industrial revolution and western penetration into the Balkans. Westerners not only brought material goods and technological

innovations with them but they also brought nationalism, a concept unheard off in the Balkans.

As mentioned earlier, due to the political and economic situation in Macedonia many Macedonians had moved to Serbia to find work. At the time Belgrade was the best place for migrant workers to seek employment but it was also where the first uprising began in 1804. Being caught up in the fervour many Macedonians joined the liberation movement and fought on the Serbian side. Some even distinguished themselves as good officers and diplomats. Learning about their compatriots joining the revolt more Macedonian volunteers departed Macedonia in groups to join the rebellion. One such group was that of Velcho Zhika from Mavrovo. Velcho and his brother Kuzman were veterans of the Austrian-Ottoman War where Velcho had achieved the rank of Captain. When they found out a rebellion had broken out in Belgrade, they organized volunteers from Skopje, Ohrid, Kichevo, Prilep and Veles Regions and along with Petar Chardaklija lead these men into battle. Velcho unfortunately was killed in an ambush in Deligrad in 1807 in the same fortress his men had built upon their arrival from Macedonia. His brother Kuzman took command and led his men in many battles.

Another Macedonian who distinguished himself in battle was Janko Popovich from Ohrid who led the battle of Mishar in 1806. Among other Macedonians who participated in the Belgrade Uprising and distinguished themselves in battle were Kosta Kolarets, Military Chief of Smederevo, Georgi Zagla from Blatse along with his three brothers, Konda Bimbashi from Vevchani, Deli Gjorgij-Chiplak, Hekjim Tome, Mikjo Brko and Marko Krstikj from Belitsa. Among the Macedonians who participated in the Belgrade Uprising and distinguished themselves in the field of diplomacy were Petar Ichko from Katranitsa near Kajlari and Petar Chardaklija Shukjurovski from Leunovo. I just want to add here that Petar Ichko was an educated Macedonian who served as translator for the Ottomans in the foreign missions in Vienna and Berlin. In addition to speaking Macedonian he also spoke Turkish, Koine and a number of contemporary European languages which of course included German. Ichko was also instrumental in negotiating a peace treaty between the Belgrade insurgents and Ottoman representatives, something that neither Austria nor Russia could achieve even through armed interventions. Petar Chardaklija also did not fall short in his achievements. He led a Serbian delegation to St. Petersburg in 1804 where he requested Russian help to protect the insurgents.

Macedonian intervention was not limited to the Serbian Uprising. Macedonians also participated in the Phanariot Uprising and later in the Bulgarian Uprising.

Contrary to modern historical claims that the 1821 Phanariot Uprising was a Greek Uprising, it was not. The Phanariots were educated Christians

belonging to all ethnic groups that lived in the Ottoman Empire. The only thing they had in common was they were educated and spoke the Koine language, the language of the Byzantine Church. Because of certain Muslim religious restrictions (not being allowed to handle public money, travel outside Muslim lands or speak foreign languages), Muslims could not serve all the functions of the Empire so Christians were employed to do the banking, translating and traveling outside of Ottoman lands. In other words the Christian Phanariots belonged to the Ottoman middle class and had access to the outside world. They were the Ottoman merchants, ship captains, sailors, bankers and translators which meant that they had access to the outside world and were allowed to freely travel in and out of Ottoman domain. They were called Phanariots because they were based in the Phanar Region of Istanbul.

After the abolition of other Christian Churches which included the Macedonian Orthodox Church, the ecumenical Patriarchate was established in Istanbul by the Sultan and tendered by bids to the Phanariots to administer. Phanariots in some regions, as was the case in Romania, were also delegated the responsibility of collecting taxes for the Central government. In short the Phanariots were in charge of most of the Ottoman administration and were in a good position to organize a general Balkan wide uprising.

Spurred by the European Great Powers a general uprising was planned but not very well executed. Plans were developed to start uprisings in Serbia, Bulgaria, Thrace, Macedonia and the Morea (modern day Peloponnesus) and in 1818 persons, known as apostles, were appointed to organize various local uprisings. The first Macedonian apostle appointed to organize the uprising in Macedonia was Jovan Farmakis. Just before the uprising began, brothers Dimitar and Pavle were dispatched to Solun to start the uprising there. Among the various other Macedonians who took part in the uprising was Konstantin Chaush from Prilep.

In October 1820 the leaders of the uprisings met in Izmail and developed a plan to start the uprising in Morea followed by a Phanariot demonstration in Istanbul. At the same time the Serbs were to simultaneously invade Macedonia and Bulgaria and start uprisings in Bulgaria, Thrace and Macedonia while 6,000 cavalrymen from Russia were to attack the Ottomans in Romania.

As one can see from the strategies deployed the organizers of this rebellion had a single motive, to liberate all the Christians from the oppressive servants of the Ottoman Empire, once again proving that they had no intention of partitioning the Ottoman State and creating smaller countries as was the case later. Further proof of this is revealed in Article 5 of a treaty signed by the various factions during a meeting held between Vladimirescu, Olimpios and Farmakis which among other things committed all participants to working together for a common goal.

Among the many Macedonians that participated in this revolt were Marko Chepenkov's father and uncle, Nikola.

The general uprising which was to take place on March 1821 was short lived and unsuccessful. The Romanian peasants who were expected to attack the Ottomans attacked the Phanariots instead, unleashing their anger on those they saw as their true oppressors. The Phanariots in Istanbul failed to uphold their end because they too did not see any purpose in rebelling. Most already had lucrative positions in the Ottoman administration and saw no advantage in getting involved. Unfortunately because it was discovered that the Patriarch Gregory V blessed the uprising, the Ottomans had him hung on the door of the Patriarchate where he remained for three full days.

The uprising in Morea was no different except it was used as an opportunity by the poor to rob the rich. Morea was so poor that the Ottomans had virtually abandoned it. Security forces were sparse and easy to overpower. Unfortunately in the frenzy of the robberies the rebels (Klefts) massacred all the Ottoman security forces and when the uprising failed elsewhere they became fearful for their lives. Expecting retribution from the Ottoman army they kept on fighting and would not surrender peacefully.

When the Great Powers and the rest of the Balkans saw that the Moreans refused to give up the fight they too became involved.

Several new uprisings began but were brutally suppressed. One began in Solun and soon spread to the Kasandra and Chalcidice Peninsulas but was quickly put down by Lobud Pasha and his Arnauts who on December 1821 took their revenge on the priests of Sveta Gora.

The Negush Uprising flared up on March 3rd, 1822 and engulfed the city and surrounding Negus Region. Led by Zafiraki, Anastas Karatasho, Angel Gacho and Dijamandi the uprising began with the attack and destruction of the Ottoman garrison in Negush. About 1,800 insurgents then went on the offensive to take Ber but being unsuccessful they retreated to the Sveta Bogoroditsa Monastery in Dobra where they were joined by Zafiraki and Gacho with 500 more rebels.

The Ottoman army was quick to respond with three counter attacks, each repulsed successfully. When the villagers in the surrounding area were certain that the rebels could hold their own they began to join the rebellion. Macedonian villagers from Dobra, Katranitsa, Gramatikovo, Lozitsa and Drzhilovo joined in and fought alongside the insurgents. The uprising quickly spread to Kostur and Voden Regions.

As the revolt spread wide along the Bistritsa River, other local ethnic groups joined in and were of significant help to the insurgency. As more help was needed the leaders made an appeal to the Morean revolutionaries to send insurgents but none were received.

According to information obtained from the British Consulate more that 2,000 insurgents had joined the fight with plans to take Solun. However since no help was offered from the Moreans the rebels took action against the surrounding Ottoman chifliks burning down 134.

The Negush Uprising worried Ottoman authorities because it had the potential to flare up all throughout Macedonia so the Ottoman Central Government ordered Lobut Pasha, the vali of Solun, to take immediate measures to suppress it.

On March 24, 1822 Lobud Pasha sent Hadzhi Mehmed Aga ahead to Negush and on March 27 he followed with 12,000 more Ottoman soldiers and bashi-bazouks.

Overwhelmed by the sizable Ottoman force the surrounded insurgents fought gallantly and would not surrender for an entire month.

Unable to breach the fortress the Ottomans employed 14 heavy cannons and by the end of April 1822 they had reduced the barriers to rubble and the number of insurgents from five thousand to a few hundred.

After re-occupying Negush, the Ottomans took their revenge and killed two thousand women, children and elderly. They looted the city and burned it down along with some surrounding villages. Those who were captured alive were sold into slavery. The rich Macedonians who had friends and relatives willing to pay for them were able to buy back their freedom. Women suffered the most, most of them being raped before being sold into slavery.

After the Uprising was put down, all remaining villagers were moved to Seres Region. Those who escaped fled to Austria, Romania and Serbia.

This uprising was a wakeup call for the Ottomans who immediately began a sweeping program collecting all weapons from the Christian population throughout all of Macedonia. Travel without permission became illegal and those wishing to travel had to obtain travel documents.

The insurgents who escaped regrouped in smaller groups and continued their struggle. Some joined the Moreans. Among the leaders who escaped were Karatasho, Angel Gacho, Zafiraki and others. Unfortunately Zafiraki and Karatasho's oldest son were killed while on their way to join the Moreans. Gacho and his unit, consisting only of Macedonians, made it to Morea and proved themselves by fighting over fifteen battles against superior Ottoman forces.

More Macedonians who participated in the Negush Uprising later joined the Moreans and continued their fight for freedom there. Other Macedonians who had joined the general uprising in Romania also left and joined the Moreans. Many Macedonians who had served as blacksmiths and stable workers in the Ottoman army also took part in the Morean Uprising.

Fearing the creation of a large Christian State replacing the Ottoman Empire, the Russian Tsar was first to react to an all out general rebellion in

the Balkans. This obviously was not in Russia's interests so the Tsar ordered the cavalrymen to stand down before leaving Russia for Romania or Russia would stand on the side of the Ottomans. Soon afterwards it became apparent that Austria also did not want a single large state replacing the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans.

Refusing to die down, the Morean rebellion in time degenerated into a decade of Civil War.

It was during this time that the Western Great Powers concocted the idea of forming a Greek State and modeling it after the Ancient City States that once lived on those lands. Various Phanariots were invited to London England and convincingly taught the idea that they were descendents of a culture that existed two thousand five hundred years before on the very spot that the Morean Rebellion was taking place. They were convinced to stop thinking about liberating the Christians in the entire Balkan and concentrate on creating a new state modeled after the City States of two and a half millenniums ago.

As the Morean rebellion continued more and more outsiders joined in polarizing the struggle into civil war with one side wanting to liberate all the Christians and the other side wanting to form a Greek state. The side that was lead by the likes of Kleft Kolokotronis fought for a liberated Christian world but unfortunately in the end his side lost and he and others like him ended up rotting in Greek jails. Kolokotronis himself, the greatest Greek hero of the Morean Uprising, died in a Greek jail as a traitor.

Obviously the Phanariots who supported the idea of creating a Greek State, with the help of the Great Powers, won the war after the naval battle in Navarino Bay where the Russian, French and British navies sunk the Ottoman navy, reinforcements and all, thus ending a four century stranglehold of the region by the Ottomans.

Of the many Macedonians who fought in the Morean struggle some distinguished themselves and were promoted to high ranking positions. One such person was the Macedonian Marko Bochvaro from Voden Region. The reason I decided to mention Marko Bochvaro, or as the Greeks like to call him Markos Botsaris, is because when I was a student attending public school back in my village in Greek occupied Macedonia, a large portrait of him and other revolutionaries from the Morean struggle hung inside my classroom. As young children we were asked to call out the names of these revolutionaries and sing Greek heroic songs. At the time I did not know that Marko Bochfaro and I were Macedonians.

Marko Bochvaro fought against Ali Pasha of Ioannina and was already an experienced fighter when he joined the Morean Uprising. Bochvaro was one of the first Macedonians to join the Morean rebellion and proved himself a good leader, earning the appointment of commander of the entire rebel force. Unfortunately even then Macedonians were despised, especially those in high positions, and those under his command openly

showed their dissatisfaction. In spite of all that Bochvaro fought against the Ottomans and defended Mosolongion, the then capital of the insurgents. Later on August 8th, 1923 he along with 350 Macedonian fighters attacked an Ottoman stronghold where he was shot and killed. His friends buried him in the Mosolongion Church on August 10th.

Bochvaro, from what historians tell us, was a great thinker who spoke little and commanded great authority with the greatest of modesty. He was firm, but fair and mild mannered, serious but moderate. In battle he was as powerful and untamable as a lion. Even though he exposed himself to danger and was hated by his opponents he never took part in revenge nor did he allow his fighters to commit violence. He was respected by his soldiers, which prompted writers and poets to write about him and immortalize his name. Even Jules Verne and Lord Byron wrote about him. Lord Byron even mourned him after his death and when he himself was mortally wounded, Lord Byron asked to be buried in the same Church in Mosolongion.

As mentioned earlier, after the suppression of the Negush Uprising many of the survivors regrouped and created new haiduk companies which fiercely fought many battles against Ottoman forces and Bashi-Buzuk (Muslim civilian armed units) units.

It is estimated that 2,000 Macedonian fighters had joined the fight in Morea that included the companies of Dzhimi Karatasho, Angel Gacho, Hadzhi Hristo, Anastas from Maleshevo, Kocho Jovan from Tikvesh and others. Angel Gacho of Voden was one of the more distinguished fighters from the Negush Uprising who in 1823 was promoted to General by the then provisional government in Morea.

On September 16, 1824 Gacho wrote a letter to the Provisional Government in Navplion, in which he said: “After the suppression of the Negush Uprising, my family was captured. I left with 320 soldiers to the south. I participated actively in many battles. In the battle of Plaka, I lost my brother and other cousins, but later, with 120 soldiers I participated in the defeat of the Ottomans near Dervenaki at Peloponnesus. Then, I continued combat actions in Southern Greece, and along with my soldiers, I participated in the battles of Dadi, Trikeri and Skiatos.” (Vanche Stojchev. “Military History of Macedonia”. Military academy. Skopje, 2004. Page 171)

According to historian Vanche Stojchev, Gacho's wife and five daughters were captured in Negush and slaughtered. His sons, Nikola and Micho, also participated in the Morean Uprising. Micho was promoted to General for his contribution to the liberation of Morea.

Hadzhi Hristo came from a rebellious Macedonian family where both his father and brother participated in the Serbian Uprising and were both killed. Hristo fled to Bosnia, then to Egypt where he joined Mehmed Ali Pasha and later to Syria where he served under Hurshid Pasha. When

Hristo was sent to Morea to fight against the rebels he switched sides and together with 200 Macedonians fought on the side of the Moreans. He took part in many battles as a cavalryman against a stronger foe and on May 23rd, 1824 he was promoted to the rank of General. Then in 1834 he was awarded a medal for his contribution to the liberation of Morea.

Anastas from Maleshevo joined the fighting at the beginning of the uprising under Hadzhi Hristo's command and led 1,000 soldiers.

Kocho Jovan from Tikvesh also participated in the Morean Uprising and with Hadzhi Hristo was responsible for the creation of the rebel cavalry. He personally bought 16 horses for the insurgents with his own money and donated them to the cause.

After almost a decade since it had ignited, the Morean rebellion refused to die down which prompted Great Power diplomats to intervene but without success, that is until the Ottoman fleet was sunk in Navarino on October 8th, 1827. After that on September 14th, 1829 the Ottomans were forced to accept the June 24th, 1827 Treaty of London proposed earlier and to recognize the newly created Greek State.

Part 13 – The Razlovtsi Uprising

After forcing the Ottomans to accept the June 24th, 1827 Treaty of London, on September 14th, 1829 the newly created Greek State was recognized by the Ottomans which gave birth to the Kingdom of Greece. When the war in Morea ended there was relative peace in the lower Balkans for several decades but that did not mean that the people were content with their situation. With the creation of the Greek State seeds of discontentment were planted everywhere which would sprout in the future causing more revolts and calls for freedom.

The first seed of discontentment was about to sprout when Stojan Velenkov began to organize an uprising in Macedonia in 1867 in response to the uprising in Crete in 1866. The uprising was instigated by the expulsion of the Ottoman official in Debar. Once expelled the people of Debar refused to let the official back or to accept a new one. To calm the situation down the Ottomans moved the Debar office to Ohrid.

The Debar disturbance gave Velenkov the opportunity that he needed to begin organizing a massive revolt. Velenkov had been in touch with the Serbian and Russian Consuls in Bitola and they both gave him the green light to start preparing a wide uprising in Macedonia and Albania. Velenkov, a Krushevo born Macedonian, at the time was living in Bitola and worked for the Ottoman administration as an architect; he was perfect for the job in organizing and leading a massive uprising.

In April 1867 Stojan Velenkov, along with his brother and a friend, began a trek from Constantinople to Debar via Solun, Meglen, Bitola, Krushevo and Kichevo agitating the locals and prompting them to join the uprising. Among the rebels Velenkov recruited were the Albanian Sali Marko, Hasan Koka and Sul Kulesha.

When Velenkov returned from his tour he again met with the Russian and Serbian consuls and reported that the people in Moriovo, Poreche, Kopachka, Reka, Kichevo, Bitola, Prilep, Ohrid and most of Albania were ready to join a massive rebellion but lacked the necessary arms and ammunition. There were also Macedonian immigrants in Serbia such as Sardzho Dukov from Lazaropole, Petar Tule from Ohrid, Dimitrija from Gorna Belitsa, Dime Kusev from Prilep and other leaders who were also prepared to participate in the massive uprising but they too lacked weapons.

Upon receiving the news from Velenkov the Serbian consul promised that Serbia was prepared to arm the rebels. The only remaining task for Velenkov now was to receive and distribute the arms and prepare for the uprising.

Unfortunately when the uprising in Crete failed and the Ottomans appeased the Serbians by giving in to their demands to evacuate Ottoman garrisons from Serbian cities, the Serbian government backed out of the

plan to supply arms to the Macedonian rebels. This resulted in the uprising being delayed and as the rebellion in Debar fizzled out, the massive uprising never materialized.

As the Ottoman Empire continued to weaken during the fourth quarter of the 19th century, armed conflicts continued to escalate especially after 1875 to 1880, a period known as the Eastern Crisis.

Although revolutionary activities never ceased in Macedonia, the next Macedonian organized and lead insurrection was the Razlovtsi Uprising. The Razlovtsi Uprising took about a year to organize and began in Solun and continued in Razlovtsi following the Herzegovina Uprising. The main political, economic and logistics organizer of this uprising was Dimitar Pop Georgiev Berovski. Berovski (1840-1907), a Macedonian with military education and experience was a veteran of the Belgrade rebellion and was first to consider linking the Macedonian rebellion with an all out Balkan rebellion. Berovski patiently waited in Solun while observing activities in Herzegovina. Then when the Herzegovina Uprising commenced, Berovski began military preparations in Macedonia. His aim was to start a rebellion in two places. The first was to start in Solun in order to engage and divide the Ottoman army so that the Herzegovina Uprising would have a better chance of succeeding. The second uprising was to start in the village Razlovtsi bordering the villages Maleshevo, Pijanets and Kochani at the foothills of Mount Golak. Priest Stojan Razlovski, the local priest, was put in charge of organizing the second uprising.

The organizing of the Razlovtsi Uprising began with the formation of a secret circle of people known as the Secret Revolutionary Circle of Razlovtsi. Members of this circle included Priest Stojan Razlovski, Nako Pop Atanasov, Stoil Pop Anastasov, Tsone Spasov and Kostadin Spasov all from the village Razlovtsi as well as Hadzhi Atanas from the village Laki, Stefan Stojanov from Vinitsa and others.

The Secret Revolutionary Circle of Razlovtsi held three conferences to plan its objectives. The first was held early in 1876 in Kaladzherdzhevo where Priest Stojan outlined his plan for procuring and distributing weapons. The second conference chaired by Berovski himself was held in May 1876 again in Kaladzherdzhevo where the committee outlined its plan of engagement. Among other things it was decided that the uprising, once prepared, would begin in the village Razlovtsi. Berovski was elected leader of the uprising and given his first mission to attack the Ottoman garrison in Tserevo Selo, or Delchevo as it is known today, and acquire its weapons. From there the uprising was to spread to Pijanets, Maleshevo, Pehchevo, Berovo and Vladimirovo. It was also decided that before the uprising began, Berovski was to take a tour and organize simultaneous uprisings in Radovich, Strumitsa, Petrich, Melnik, Kochani, Vinitsa and Shtip Regions.

The idea here was to begin an all Macedonian massive uprising and while Ottoman forces were divided, use the opportunity to liberate all of Macedonia.

The biggest obstacle, even in this uprising, unfortunately was the procurement of enough weapons, ammunition, clothing, medical equipment and food to sustain a prolonged uprising. Outside help was scarce so it was decided that some of the money should come from local sources. The first to volunteer aid was Dimitar Berovski himself who authorized his father-in-law, Priest Stojan Razlovski, to sell his estate in Berovo which included his house, land, cattle, etc., convert it to cash and send it to him in Solun where he could use it to procure weapons and ammunition. Others too donated money for the cause in a similar manner and after the supplies were purchased they were stored in secret warehouses in the suburbs of Solun. From there the supplies were taken by horses and mules in small amounts and transported to secret stashes in the Krusha, Belesitsa, Plachkovitsa and Maleshevo Mountains.

Besides the procurement of weapons, ammunition and other supplies, it was also important for the revolutionary movement to have its own symbols and flag. The task for making the flag was given to teachers Nedela Petkova and Stanislava Karaivanova. The women used a fiery-red cloth background on which they embroidered a yellow-golden uncrowned lion, the words “Macedonia” and “Rebel to Liberate”. A while later the words “On May 8, 1876” were added to symbolize the start date of the Uprising.

As indicated on the flag, the uprising was planned for May 8th, 1876, right after Gjurgievden, so on May 7th, the day before the uprising, the Secret Revolutionary Circle of Razlovtsi held its third congress, again in Kaladzherdzhevo, to discuss the final plan before putting it into action. Unfortunately the congress was disrupted by the arrival of the Ottoman tax collector. Even though the taxes had already been voluntarily paid early that year, so as to avoid the tax collector’s visit, the tax collector showed up anyway un-announced and called on all the villagers to assemble under the threat that if they didn’t he would burn their village down. It was obvious to everyone that something was not right. The Ottomans must have found out about their plans but it was too late to do anything. The guns and ammunition were stored and hidden far from village so the Razlovtsi residents decided to assemble as ordered. People who did not belong in Razlovtsi were immediately arrested and taken to prison. Among those arrested were brothers Nako and Stoilo from Istevnik, relatives of priest Sojan Razlovki. But when the Ottomans, not satisfied with just apprehending the visitors, came back to apprehend the most beautiful girls in the village with intent to make them Turkish brides, the villagers became very angry and began the uprising right there and then. Unable to control the angry crowd the Ottomans hid indoors. As news of the

disturbance spread to the neighbouring villages more people armed with axes and pitchforks joined the mob. Exploiting the explosive situation, Berovski called for the uprising to begin immediately starting with the eviction of the Ottomans from Razlovtsi. Thirty new insurgents joined Berovski's rebels. A Cheta of 20 insurgents were dispatched to Razlovtsi. Six insurgents surrounded the inn where the Ottomans were hiding. Another small group went to intercept the Ottomans who had just left the village with the prisoners. The rebels caught up to the Ottomans and managed to free ten people. Unfortunately Nako Pop Atanasov, was accidentally killed by a stray bullet. He was the first casualty of the Razlovtsi Uprising.

Having no time to arm themselves, most villages stormed the inn where the Ottomans were hiding and with sticks, hatchets, pitchforks and knives and demanded that the Ottomans surrender. Unaccustomed to this kind of behaviour from the Macedonians the Ottomans refused to come out thus prompting the villagers to set fire to the inn. As the fire grew, heavy rain began to fall giving the Ottomans cover and a chance to move to other buildings. To be sure there would be no place for them to hide more and more people started burning their own houses. Many Ottomans were burned alive as the buildings were torched, those who attempted to escape, including the tax collector the infamous Sapil Aliman, were run down by the mob and killed. Only two Ottomans escaped.

By ousting the Ottomans from Razlovtsi, the village was liberated and the start of the uprising was deemed a success. The fervour and enthusiasm created by this incident prompted more people to join the insurgency and gave it the impetus it needed to spread outwards. While Berovski took his Cheta and departed for Maleshevo, a group of insurgents remained in Razlovtsi to defend the village from retaliations, especially from the Bashibuzuks (armed Muslim civilian population).

On their way to Maleshevo, Berovski and Smilevski were greeted with cheers by the villagers especially when the new flag was unveiled. The men threw their hats up in the air and the crowds roared in patriotic songs. It was a glorious moment, a moment to remember, a moment of liberty and freedom. News about the uprising spread far and wide and encouragements to fight on came from everywhere.

Filled with enthusiasm the insurgents went in pursuit of the occupiers calling them to surrender but as usual they refused and fire fights broke out. When the insurgents arrived in Pehchevo they called on Osman Kodon and Dervish Alija to surrender but their refusal forced the insurgents to burn down the house in which they were hiding. The noise from the rifle shots and the flames of the burning house unfortunately attracted the attention of passing Ottoman unit nearby which came to investigate. Lead by Ismail, the Ottomans opened fire on the insurgents and a battle ensued lasting five hours. Several Ottoman soldiers were

killed and four Macedonians were injured, one of them Dimitar Berovski. At the sight of their leader falling down the insurgents were demoralized losing their enthusiasm to fight on. Luckily Berovski was lightly wounded on the head and did not need hospitalization but the time lost in the confusion gave the enemy the upper hand. The time lost in the fight and because of his wounds caused Berovski's to miss his deadline of meeting with 300 insurgents who were waiting for him to arrive in Maleshevo. So given the new situation Berovski decided to return to Razlovtsi. But on the same evening as the Cheta arrived in Kaladzherdzhevo, Berovski found out that the Razlovtsi folk had evacuated their village the day before. The village Mitrashintsi was also evacuated. From what Berovski could gather, when his Cheta left Razlovtsi and had gone to Mitrashintsi in the afternoon of May 9th, 1876, the Bashibuzuks from the Pijanets Region villages assembled and attacked the village with everything they had. The villagers and insurgents left behind fought back but could offer little resistance against the well armed superior Bashibuzuk force. Three Bashibuzuks and twelve Macedonians from Razlotsi were killed in that battle. The village was robbed of its material goods and livestock and the church and several houses were burned to the ground, one of the houses burned belonged to Priest Stojan Razlovski. After the Bashibuzuks left the residents of Razlovtsi returned and barricaded themselves inside the village.

Given the new situation, Berovski abandoned the original plan of going to Maleshevo to meet with the 300 insurgents, and instead left for Kochani. After waiting for four days for Berovski to arrive, the 300 insurgents in Maleshevo disbanded and went home.

In the absence of Macedonian insurgents in Razlovtsi, the Ottomans took advantage of the situation and brought two new priests, Gjorgij Milenkov and Atanas Stoilov, to try and convince the villagers to surrender their weapons and repent for their actions so that they could be forgiven by the Ottomans. Upon finding this out, Priest Stojan convinced the people that the priests were nothing but traitors so he had them thrown out from the village.

Berovski and his insurgents meanwhile continued on their trek to Kochani and arrived in Plachkovitsa Mountain on May 23rd, 1876. There they were joined by 40 other insurgents from the village Laki lead by Tsone Donchev. Unbeknownst to Berovski and Donchev, however, an enemy group of 60 or so Bashibuzuks were headed for the village Laki and Razlovtsi to rob them. The Bashibuzuks entered the villages before Berovski and Donchev could head them off but by the strength of the combined Chetas they were able to extract and drive them out. Given the current situation the leaders decided to split up. Donchev was to stay and guard the villages while Berovski and his Cheta were to go to the village Radovish to continue his recruitment of insurgents and to pick up arms and ammunition from the nearby hidden depot in Smiljantsi. Unfortunately

before Berovski arrived at the village Smiljantsi he received news that it was occupied by Ottoman forces. It seems the Ottomans were aware of the existence of the arms and ammunition depot but were unable to find it. A field worker had witnessed suspicious activities and had reported them to the Ottoman authorities in Radovish. A large Ottoman force was then dispatched and had entered the village threatening to severely punish the villagers if they didn't reveal the hidden weapons. But before the Ottomans were able to extract any information, Berovski and his Cheta arrived and forced the Ottomans to take defensive positions. Berovski called on the people inside the village to stand and fight with him but fearing Ottoman reprisals they refused. Unable to extract the Ottomans the insurgents had no choice but to withdraw.

Perhaps the residents of Smiljantsi were wise in their choice not to join the fight because as events in their village were played out the Ottomans were assembling a massive force to suppress the rebellion. With all the disturbances at the fringes of their Empire, the Ottomans could not afford to have an uprising so close to their capital especially during the Eastern crises.

One way to extinguish the rebellion was to starve it out of food and new recruits. On May 28th, 1876 Ottoman authorities decided to reinforce their military installations in the rebellious villages by adding more soldiers. Five hundred Ottoman soldiers were added to Strumitsa and Radovish Regions, 1,000 to Melnik and Petrich and 1,000 to Gorna Dzhumaja. Many Bashibuzuks also joined the Ottoman soldiers and were let loose to plunder the villages and terrorize the civilian population. While the villages were surrounded to keep rebels out, the main objective of this Ottoman offensive was to destroy Berovski and his Cheta. One way to do that was to attack the very same village where the families of the rebels resided. Razlovtsi was again attacked, for the second time in less that a month, and experienced further plundering, torture and death. Other villages we also attacked and everyone associated with the uprising was arrested and put in chains. Fifty-seven people from Maleshevo Region, seven from Strumitsa, eighteen from Kochani and eleven from Radovish were captured and tortured. Some were released and the rest were sent to various prisons in Pehchevo, Strumitsa, Kjustendil, Seres, Solun, Skopje and Sofia to serve their fifteen year sentences. Tsone Donchev, leader of the Laki Cheta was poisoned.

While the civilian population paid for the sins of the insurgents, Dimitar Berovski with thirty of his most staunch fighters managed to escape capture by fighting his way out of the encirclement and fleeing through the mountains to the village Sazhdenik where he and the rebels spent the winter. Priest Sojan Razlovski, old and too tired to run was left at the Rila Monastery but unfortunately he was spotted by enemy spies who had him killed.

Berovski and his Cheta remained active and continued to be active after joining Ilo Maleshevski's Cheta in 1877.

Although organized to be part of a general uprising against Ottoman repression, the Razlovtsi Uprising was strictly a Macedonian affair with aims of liberating Macedonia and the Macedonian people. The flag was a nice touch that not only emphasized uniqueness in the Macedonian struggle but connected modern Macedonia to ancient Macedonia by its name and by its symbolic ancient Macedonian lion.

Part 14 - The Kumanovo-Kriva Palanka, Pijanets and Kreshna Uprisings

Even though unsuccessful in meeting its immediate objectives, the Razlovtsi Uprising in May 1876 served as a stimulus in promoting the idea of a wider uprising against the Ottomans. Such a notion was not only supported by the oppressed people inside the Ottoman Empire but also by outsiders all throughout Europe.

With time Macedonian revolutionaries began to participate more and more in other peoples' uprisings and in conflicts against the Ottoman Empire including the Serbian-Ottoman War of 1876 and Russian-Ottoman War of 1877-1878. All this in hopes that someday those who received help would in turn return it when the time came.

The first Macedonians to join the Serbian-Ottoman War were Macedonian immigrants who because of Ottoman oppression at home had moved to Serbia. After the war started (June 30th, 1876) more Macedonians joined in including Iljo Maleshevski, Risto Makedonski, Petar Nikolov Mishajkov, Kosta Shumenkov, S. Badzhov and others along with their Chetas (revolutionary bands). It is estimated that about 600 Macedonian volunteers had joined the Serbian War against the Ottomans in 1876 among whom many were distinguished in battle. The most famous among those distinguished were Iljo Maleshevski, Gjorgji Pulevski, Grigor Ognenov, Gjorgji Andonov and Dimitar Trifunov.
This round of the Serbian-Ottoman War ended in a truce in December 1876 but it did not end well.

In spite of their great losses the Macedonians fought bravely and fiercely following in the long Macedonian fighting tradition.
When the war was over most war survivors were transported to Russia where they were drafted into the Russian army.

As relations between Russia and the Ottomans began to deteriorate, more Macedonians began to join the Russian army including Macedonians who had emigrated to Russia from other wars. A Russian-Macedonian battalion was formed under the command of Russian Major Shinkovski with Macedonian officers appointed to carry out leading duties. The battalion, in addition to flying a Russian flag, also flew a Macedonian flag and all of its volunteers were recognized as Macedonians. This and other battalions which many Macedonians had joined participated in the 1877 to 1878 Russian-Ottoman War.

Unfortunately in the beginning of 1877 another war between Serbia and the Ottomans broke out and lasted until the winter of 1878. Those Macedonians who did not go to Russia after the Russian-Ottoman War ended up being drafted into the Serbian army. No sooner had this war started when new Macedonian volunteers arrived from Macedonia. Among them were Jakim Chelopechki, Nikola Algunjski, and Bogdan Ristich.

Unfortunately because of intrigues between Russia and Austro-Hungary this war ended in Serbia's defeat.

Despite their defeat the Macedonians in the Serbian army fought bravely and won many battles. Among the most distinguished of the Macedonian leaders who fought in this war were Kosta Shumenkov, Jakim Chelopechki, Nikola Dimitriev, and Bogdan Ristich. By January 19th, 1878 units of the Serbian army had penetrated Macedonia as far south as the north borders of Kumanovo and Kriva Palanka. At the sight of the arriving Serbian army the Ottomans withdrew their forces to Komanovo. They also evacuated the Muslim civilian population and its armed wing the Bashibazuks. During their withdrawal the Bashibazuks wreaked havoc on the Macedonian villages; robbing and killing people. Having being assaulted yet again and in view of the impending arrival of the Serbian army, the villagers began to fight back. They soon were met by the Macedonian volunteer fighters in the Serbian army. Combined the locals and the new arrivals joined forces, elected new leaders and began a new uprising termed "the Kumanovo-kriva Palanka Uprising". The leaders selected to lead this uprising were Jakim Chelopechki, Nikola Algunjski, and Bogdan Ristich who along with 500 well-armed fighters organized themselves for an uprising on German and Kozhjak Mountains. When the insurgents were ready to fight they came down to the valley along the Pchinja River approaching Kumanovo. As the insurgents approached the villages in the region they were greeted with great enthusiasm by the local population. Here too more Macedonians joined the insurgency including Dimitrija Pop Paunov and Veljan Tsvetkov. In no time at all the insurgent force had swollen to more than a thousand. Unfortunately as usual most of the men joining the insurgency were without arms or ammunition and the entire world's training could not help them if they had no weapons to fight with. For that reason a delegation was sent to the Serbian command in Vranje to discuss the issue of arms and from what we know from alternate sources the Serbians did give the Macedonians 3,000 rifles with 2,000 more to be delivered later to Prohor Pchinski Monastery. The well-armed Macedonian force soon swelled to 4,000 insurgents who fought gallantly and liberated a large Macedonian territory south of the Serbian border. Unfortunately with the signing of the San Stefano agreement by Russia and the Ottomans all insurgencies ceased. Then after the Berlin Congress all Macedonian territories were given back to the Ottomans.

Not wanting to use violence, considering that the Western Powers were about to honour the Ottomans by giving them Macedonia back, the insurgents were offered complete amnesty in return for their weapons. An Ottoman delegation arrived in Zabel on April 12, 1878 to negotiate the disarming but the insurgents refused to disarm. Furious, the Ottomans dispatched a large Bashibazuk force to attack them but failed to destroy them. Realizing that the Western Powers were now on their side, the

Ottomans mustered a larger force and in May 1878 attacked the insurgents. Great battles ensued and much of the rebel force was destroyed. Some of the more stubborn villages however refused to surrender and remained active and fought fiercely but by September of the same year that uprising too ended in failure.

As for the Macedonians who joined the Russian army they too became involved in the conflict as Russia declared war on the Ottomans on April 24, 1877. At the start of the mobilization all Balkan armies, including the Macedonian volunteers, were organized and trained as part of the permanent state armies. But later the Macedonian units were given special duties which included intelligence, reconnaissance, combat and surveillance in the front lines. The initial numbers that joined were in the 800's but soon increased to over a 1,000 as the war intensified. When the Russian army penetrated into Macedonia, the Macedonian volunteers became its guide helping the Russians infiltrate remote enemy positions, navigate through unknown territories and act as interpreters. All Macedonian Chetas showed great courage but that of Iljo Maleshevski, Gjorgi Pulevski and Gjorgi Antonov showed exceptional courage. In addition to the Macedonian volunteers fighting in the front lines, Dimitar Berovski and his Cheta fought behind enemy lines carrying out hit and run and terrorist actions. Consisting mainly of veterans from the Razlovtsi Uprising, Berovki's Cheta operated in the Osogovski Mountain region and during the summer of 1877 expanded its control to the Pijanets, Maleshevo, Kjustendil and surrounding regions. By December 1877 the number of insurgents had tripled and the area of operation was expanded to include the entire Tsarevo Selo territory and the Bregalnitsa and Strumitsa valleys encompassing 47 villages.

As the Russian army penetrated further south into the Balkans, Iljo Maleshevski and his Cheta broke off from the Russian army and in December 1877 descended to Kjustendil and Tsarevo Selo with aims of liberating his native Maleshevo and Pijanets.

By January 17, 1878 Kjustendil was liberated with help from the Macedonians and occupied by the Russian army. Unfortunately the Russian-Ottoman War ended abruptly with a signing of a truce on January 31st, 1878 leaving Maleshevo and Pijanets outside the demarcation line and still in the hands of the Ottomans. Being so close to liberating his native territory Maleshevski, without Russian approval, broke the truce and on January 20th, 1878 launched an attack on Pijanets. Upon receiving news of the attack more Macedonians joined in and began what became known as the Pijanets Uprising.

Unfortunately all that effort went for nothing because after the Ottoman-Serbian-Russian protocol of February 13th, 1878 was signed, the currently liberated territories including Pijanets were given back to the Ottomans.

I just want to mention here that besides participating in the Serbian and Russian war against the Ottomans there were also preparations for liberating Macedonia made by the Macedonian émigrés in Athens, Greece. It is estimated that about 10,000 Macedonian immigrants lived in Athens at the time; many eager to get back to Macedonia and fight for its liberation. For that purpose a revolutionary committee was created in Athens and lead by Leonidas Vulgaris originally from Pijanets.

The Russian-Ottoman War was an absolute disaster for the Macedonian people especially for those who sacrificed their lives and died helping Russia. Instead of being grateful for the help they received and allowing the Macedonians to create a Macedonian state, the Russians sold them out to the Bulgarians. By signing the San Stefano treaty Russia agreed to the creation of a large Bulgarian State which was to include Macedonian lands and people. Then as the Western Power intervened in the Berlin Congress instead of sorting things out and giving Macedonia autonomy as they did to Bulgaria, they gave Macedonia back to the Ottomans.

Instead of granting Macedonia real autonomy like they did for Bulgaria, the Great Powers offered empty words that lead nowhere. According to articles 23 and 62 of the Berlin Congress the Macedonian people were to receive political and religious autonomy within the Ottoman Empire. They were also promised political, religious and educational reforms which never materialized. Given that Macedonia was handed back to the Ottomans to do as they pleased, the situation was further aggravated by the Ottoman decision to bring Muslim settlers into Macedonia. Macedonia in fact became the dumping ground for renegades from the Ottoman army and for Muslims who escaped from Bulgaria, Bosnia, Serbia, Herzegovina and other regions of lost Ottoman territories. More than 60,000 Muslim families were dumped and disbursed in Macedonia to be accommodated in Christian homes. Many were armed and drafted into Bashibazuk units.

After the Berlin Congress those Macedonians who stubbornly fought against the Ottomans fearing for their lives fled to Serbia and Bulgaria. More than 200 Macedonian villages were emptied of their inhabitants. The ones who remained unfortunately faired the worst as the Ottomans hit them with new taxes to pay for the war damages and to supply the fast growing Ottoman military machine which by now numbered 80 battalions. The devastation in Macedonia was further exacerbated by the arming of Albanian Militias and allowing them to settle in Skopje and establish their own rule in Macedonia.

There was also a matter of the huge debt for money borrowed that the Ottomans now had to pay back to the Great Powers which again became a burden on the Macedonian people. By now Macedonian villages were paying over thirty different taxes which became a struggle for survival. It

was during these times that Macedonians found themselves wishing to be liberated or dead because life the way it was, was not worth living.
Even before the Berlin Congress and before their fate was sealed by the Western Great Powers, leading Macedonians could not accept the idea of a Macedonia unified with Bulgaria so the decisions of the San Stefano Treaty were opposed. But after the Berlin Congress Macedonians were in disbelief and horrified by the actions of the Western Great Powers especially when they gave Macedonia back to the Ottomans without any guarantees that the population would be protected from retaliation and harm.

In the eyes of the Macedonian people the Great Powers committed a cardinal sin. They sold out Macedonia and their Christian brothers for profit. No wonder some European Union states today are intolerant of the Macedonians. How could they recognize Macedonia and Macedonian people today when they were guilty of selling them out in 1878? To recognize the Macedonians today would mean that they would have to admit that they made a grave error in 1878. An error on the side of the Western Great Powers however was no small disaster for the Macedonian people who a century and a quarter later are still fighting for their rights and freedoms.

Betrayed by both Russia and the Western Great Powers and unable to see any other way out of these circumstances Macedonians had but one choice; liberate themselves! Unfortunately at this time there was no central revolutionary organization and the Great Powers refused to restore the Ohrid Archbishopric so there was also no Macedonian central governing body and with Ottoman vigilance on the rise it became increasingly more difficult to organize a general uprising.

Dissatisfied with the Berlin Congress decision Russia too was unhappy with the turn of events but refused to give up on the idea of gaining access to Mediterranean waters. So given that it had contacts with Macedonians inside and outside of Macedonia, Russia began to agitate for a renewed struggle. The revolutionaries inside Macedonia wanted an independent Macedonia while those organizing outside were mostly leaning to a unified Macedonia with Bulgaria. But to clarify the situation and what this struggle would be about, the Macedonians inside drafted a strategy which spelled out their aims. According to the constitution drafted this uprising was to "liberate Macedonia with full autonomy for all the Macedonian people" as opposed to other people like the Bulgarians.

The entire internal force which was to fight for the renewed uprising would consist of Macedonian veterans from the wars and previous uprisings, new recruits arriving from eastern Macedonia and numerous detachments and individual fighters from all over Macedonia. The idea of this uprising was simple; start a conflict somewhere in the north eastern part of Macedonia and spread it south westwards until it enveloped all of

Macedonia. The external force consisted mainly of Bulgarians and other foreigners to whom Russia promised that if Macedonia was liberated Russia would ensure that a greater Bulgarian state would be created.

While the internal force was engaged in combat, the external forces were expected to amass in Kjustandil and wait outside the Macedonian border. They would be there not to engage the enemy but to provide the insurgents with material support and enable them to fight without fear of being attacked from the rear.

Based on a decision made during a conference held in the Rila Monastery in the fall of 1878, the internal force was to amass in Gorna Dzhumaja in the territory liberated by Russia and wait for further orders. Among the individuals and their Chetas who responded to this call were Dimitar Berovski, Ijo Maleshevski, Stojan Karastailov, Todor Palaskar, Kosta Kukoto, Kocho Ljutata, and Stojo Tsapari. Stojan Karastailov was appointed to lead the insurrection.

A headquarters for the Macedonian Uprising was established on October 7th, 1878 with a mission to form, arm and equip Chetas for combat, procure food and medical supplies, maintain discipline, deal with prisoners, negotiate with the enemy and provide the Uprising with a central leadership and command base. Like the Razlovtsi Uprising this Uprising too had its own unique Macedonian flag.

The uprising, later termed the "Kreshna Uprising", began almost be accident when an Ottoman force was intercepted by the insurgents in Kreshna. Shots were fired on both sides and the skirmish turned into a full blown battle lasting about 18 hours. Hearing the gunfire hundreds of villagers from Kreshna, Vlah, Oshtava and other surrounding villages arrived at the scene and surrounded the Ottomans demanding their surrender. When it was over one Macedonian and nine Ottomans were killed, eleven Ottomans were wounded and one hundred Ottoman soldiers and two Ottoman officers were captured.

The sight of the captured Ottomans was enough to spark enthusiasm in the Macedonian people lifting their spirits and beckoning them to join the rebellion. A few days later one by one the surrounding villages began to rebel and fall as the Macedonian Chetas fought fierce battles putting down Ottoman garrison after garrison. As the rebellion escalated it began to move southwest and not towards Kjustandil as the Bulgarians and Russians of external command had expected.

Even though the Uprising was centered in Kreshna near the Bulgarian-Ottoman border and was expected to expand north, it quickly spread into four different directions. The first direction was to the east covering most of Maleshevo and Melnik Regions. The second direction was to the northwest covering Skopje, Kozjak Mountain, Varnje and Kjustandil. The third direction was to the west covering the Karadag and Verechka Mountains spanning over Bitola, Korcha, Kostur and Lerin Regions. The

fourth direction was to the southwest spanning over Mount Olympus, Kozheni, Ber, Katerini and Voden.

Fearing that they might lose control, especially since the rebellion was headed towards the Aegean Sea, the Bulgarian-Russian led external command put together a detachment of 300 soldiers led by Major Louis Voitkevich, a Polish officer, and sent it to Kresna to liberate the village Breznitsa. Voitkevich was sent to Macedonia not to become involved in the struggle but to take over command of the uprising and if that was not possible to cause discord between the Macedonian leaders. Voitkevich however was unable to take full command and failed in his mission to cause discord so when he returned he blamed his failure on Dimitar Berovski who at the time was Chief of Staff. Berovski was immediately summoned to external command headquarters to explain himself but his officers advised him not to go.

Unable to assert its influence, external command threatened to cut off support and supplies but Berovski still refused to comply. External command then dispatched Major Kalmikov to arrest him.

As soon as Berovski was captured and put in jail, Kalmikov took over command of the forces and began to lead the Kreshna Uprising. This did not go well with the Macedonian leaders who immediately pulled their support. That unfortunately worked out to Kalmikov's advantage as he appointed his own people to replace them and later to assassinate them.

With Berovski in jail and with the Macedonian leaders dead, the Kreshna Uprising was in trouble and began to stagnate.

When the Macedonian people found out that the Macedonian leaders were murdered they too pulled their support and so did the remaining Macedonian active Chetas.

The external forces soon found themselves isolated and abandoned without food and supplies. Those involved in the murder of Macedonian leaders unfortunately escaped before they could be pursued and the external attempt to gain a foothold in Macedonia failed.

Natanail, a Macedonian with pro-Bulgarian leanings however refused to give up on the uprising and after it was over tried to restart it again but without success. Failing that Natanail used his influence to get Berovski out of jail in hopes that he may restart it again. Berovski was let out of jail December 1st, 1878 and upon his arrival at Sushitsa in Karshiak Region he began to organize again. Upon his return he quickly established a provisional military office and a military council with its headquarters located in the village Tsapareno. This time the uprising was to take place in the Lebnitsa River Region, east to the Struma River and west to the Maleshevo Mountains.

Preparations and training for this uprising were made during the winter of 1878-79 and the offensive began in the spring and spread as far south as the village Gjurgjovo in Petrich Region and Gradeshnitsa in Melnik

Region. Unfortunately outsiders again began to interfere, bringing discord among the Macedonian leadership. And as Berovski was again forcibly removed and imprisoned on January 14th, 1878 the uprising began to lose ground.

The local Ottomans too became involved in a plot to suppress it by offering the villagers lower taxes and other incentives if they did not support the uprising. The greatest devastation however came from the Ottoman Central Government which ordered a massive offensive. By the end of November 1878, the Ottomans reinforced their military units in Macedonia to a total of 73 battalions and 15 batteries. Knowing too well how this uprising was going to end, to prevent further bloodshed, on May 25th, 1879 most active Macedonian Chetas disbanded. Those which wished to remain active retreated to the mountains and continued their fight from there.

The damaged cause by this rebellion was devastating. More than 73 villages were burned down, 4,000 died in combat and another 4,000 mostly women, children and old people died from starvation and from abuse. It is estimated that 30,000 Macedonians fled Macedonia as refugees and went to the liberated zones in Kjustandil and Dzumaja.

If there is anything to be learned from the Kreshna Uprising it is that the Macedonians were starting to cooperate more and were slowly centralizing their struggle and effort to liberate themselves. This is the first time in recent history that Macedonians not only from inside but also from outside of Macedonia came together to fight for a common cause.

Another thing Macedonians learned from this experience was that in addition to the Ottomans, they now had new enemies; Russia, Bulgaria and the Western Great Powers. This was the first time that the Macedonian people began to realize that they were on their own and their struggle for freedom would be long and hard.

Part 15 - Formation of the Macedonian Provisional Government and the Macedonian League

Instead of relaxing its grip on the Christian population and carrying out reforms as agreed upon by Article 23 of the Treaty of Berlin, the Ottoman government, after the Kreshna Uprising, enacted stricter laws and began to increase its combat readiness.

When the Macedonian people along with their lands were handed back to the Ottomans in 1878, to be further abused and exploited, the Macedonian leadership came to the realization that no one was going to help the Macedonians so they had to organize and carry out a national struggle to free themselves on their own.

The 1878 Congress of Berlin also awakened the Muslim Rulers in the Balkans to the reality that their Empire came very close to being destroyed.

So now we have the dynamics of the Macedonian people gearing up for a fight to free themselves and the Ottomans trying harder to stop them.

To maintain their state's integrity the Ottomans had to raise taxes in order to pay the interest on the money they borrowed from the westerners and to keep a close eye on potential insurrections and further losses of lands.

By the time taxes were paid a Macedonian family would be left with 25 to 40 percent of their meager annual earnings to live on.

To prevent further uprisings and rebellions, the Ottomans stepped up espionage activities and searches for weapons in the villages. If by any chance weapons were found, the entire village was burned to the ground, even if the weapons belonged to thugs.

The western powers, including Russia, convened in Berlin on June 13th, 1878 and by July 13th they had concluded, among other things, to allow Bulgaria to become an autonomous state and to give Macedonia back to the Turks. So Macedonia was free from the Ottomans for 132 days from March 3rd, 1878, when the San Stefano Treaty was signed, to July 13th, 1878 when Congress of Berlin decided to give it back to the Ottomans.

The Macedonian people's high hopes were dashed not only because they were excluded from the Berlin talks but also because they were handed back to the Ottomans without any guarantees that they would not be abused and exploited. This not only fostered hatred and mistrust for the Great Powers but also made the Macedonian people realize that they would have to solely depend on themselves to gain their freedom.

Outside of dashing the Macedonian peoples' hopes, the actions of the Berlin Congress placed doubts on Macedonia's future which opened the question "what will happen to Macedonia when the Ottoman Empire collapses completely?" A question that did not go unnoticed by the

neighbouring imperialistic states, Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria who were looking for ways to expand their own territories at the expense of the collapsing Ottoman Empire.

Most disappointed among the three by the Berlin Congress decision was Bulgaria, which just lost Macedonian territories. But happiest was Greece which now had a chance at expanding its own territory, an ambitious dream which called for resurrecting the Byzantine Empire.

Even though it was well known, at least to the Macedonians, that the Ottoman government would not budge on the promised reforms, some Macedonians continued to push for them so that they would include provisions regulating the national interests of the Macedonian people.

On April 17th, 1880 the Ottoman government informed the Great Powers that the anticipated reforms had been drafted and prepared for their approval. Many Macedonian intellectuals however were not happy because the reforms neglected their demands, including the recognition of the Macedonian language. In May 1880 about two-hundred prominent Macedonians signed and submitted a request to the European Commission protesting against the Ottoman Constitutional amendments because, among other things, the Ottomans neglected to recognize the Macedonian language. Unfortunately their written pleas were yet again ignored so a Macedonian delegation lead by Karandzhulov was dispatched to meet with Lord Fitzmorris, the British representative of the European Commission. Even though Lord Fitzmorris met with the Macedonians in person and heard their pleas, the Commission still ignored their demands. Dissatisfied with the way the reforms were carried out, particularly by the attitude of the Great Powers, Macedonian leaders began to look inwards to find a solution to their problems.

A number of prominent leaders, including Leonidas Vulgaris from Berovo Region, Pop Kostandin Bufski and 30 others, got together and held a National Assembly from May 21st to June 2nd, 1880 in Gremen, Ostrovo Region (Aegean Macedonia). Among other things, one of the items on the agenda was the Macedonian situation after the Berlin Congress. On this item the Congress concluded that the reason Macedonia was given back to the Ottomans was because of the neighbouring propaganda, mainly that of Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria, which falsely represented the ethnic composition of the Macedonian population. The Congress came to the conclusion that once the foreign propaganda was exposed and neutralized, the Macedonian people would have a better chance of uniting behind a Macedonian cause and creating an Autonomous Macedonian state within the Ottoman Empire or creating a Macedonian independent state. The Assembly also decided to challenge Ottoman authorities on articles 23 and 62 of the Treaty of Berlin which called for political and religious rights for the Macedonian people. If those rights were ignored then the Macedonians would have no other choice but to arm

themselves and fight under the slogan "Macedonia to the Macedonians, for reestablishing Ancient Macedonia". (Vanche Stojchev. "Military History of Macedonia". Military academy. Skopje, 2004. Page 252)

The National Assembly was concluded with the formation of an executive authority responsible for carrying out political decisions under a Macedonian Provisional Government called "Unity" which was to represent all ethnic groups living in the territory of Macedonia. Vasil Simov was appointed President of the Provisional Government and Stefo Nikolov was elected President of the National Assembly. Pop Kostandin Bufski and Leonidas Vulgaris were given the task of organizing the Macedonian military.

Decisions made at this Assembly were communicated to the Great Power diplomatic missions in Solun which initially ignored them but later accepted them as the "Macedonian way" of dealing with problems.

On March 23rd, 1881 the Provisional Government of Macedonia approved a Manifesto and submitted it to the various diplomatic missions in the Ottoman territories.

The opening statements of the Manifesto began as follows:

"Macedonians, our precious fatherland Macedonia was once the most glorious country in the world. The Macedonian people have civilized Asia and mankind by the victorious Phalanx having laid the foundation of military arts, and Aristotle of education and enlightenment. Unfortunately the once so glorious Macedonia today is on the brink of disaster because we have made mistakes and forgotten our past. Aliens are now trying to take our country away from us and to destroy our nationality, the brightness of which can never be darkened.

Macedonia has become a poor widow abandoned by her sons and no longer flies the glorious flag it once flew in triumph by its victorious Macedonian armies. Today Macedonia has been reduced to a geographical term as if someone is attempting to extinguish its glory and send it to oblivion.

Intriguers are digging Macedonia's grave and trying to destroy it by bringing in Austrian- Hungarian troops, but replacing the shackles of one with another will only destroy Macedonia. Macedonia will not be regenerated, and our nation will perish.

This moment is critical for Macedonia- it is a matter of life or death." (Vanche Stojchev. "Military History of Macedonia". Military academy. Skopje, 2004. Page 253)

Realizing that Macedonia had become a pawn of the Great Powers, the Provisional Government of Macedonia called upon all the Macedonian people, regardless of religion and ethnicity, to unite and fight for liberation and the creation of an independent Macedonian state.

"True Macedonians, faithful sons of Macedonia! How much longer are you going to put up with the decay of our fatherland?

Macedonia is calling you, crying out the words 'You, my faithful children, successors of Aristotle and Alexander III of Macedonia, you who bleed with Macedonian blood, do not let me die, help me!' What a sad sight it will be for you, genuine Macedonians, if you become witnesses to my death. Do everything in your power, carry my flag of unity and call out the words 'United Macedonia!' Be brave, throw out those murderers who hold in their hands the flag of disunity and divide you, my children of various ethnicities.

Gather under the flag of Macedonia, raise it high and write on it unanimously: Long live the Macedonian people! Long live Macedonia! Let them hear the voice of our fatherland; let us gain liberty, the most precious heritage of nations. Say these words, for the liberal people who will applaud you. Call their noble hearts to hurry and give their help, to join your Holy fight for liberty, which has been away from our precious country for so many centuries. Macedonians, think about our origin, and do not give it up." (Vanche Stojchev. "Military History of Macedonia". Military academy. Skopje, 2004. Page 253)

The Manifesto was signed by President Vasil Simon, secretary Nikola Trajkov and three other members of the Provisional Government of Macedonia, Petro Jovanov, Kosta Bufski and Hriste Gorgov. The signatures were confirmed by two government seals and on April 11th, 1881 the Manifesto was taken to Kjustandil where the transcript was translated to Russian and French and distributed to various foreign and domestic diplomatic representatives in Constantinople.

While the Provisional Government of Macedonia operated in Gremen another Macedonian organization was formed in north-eastern Macedonia called the Macedonian League. The League's purpose was to unite Macedonian immigrants in neighbouring countries, particularly the large Macedonian Diaspora in Bulgaria. After the creation of the Macedonian League and the establishment of a General Headquarters in Pirin Mountain, the League initiated the drafting of a constitution in order to define the aims and structure of a future government in Macedonia. All in all the constitution was divided into fifteen chapters constituting 103 articles. The first article dealt with Macedonia's territory within Ottoman borders which consisted of the Solun, Bitola and Skopje sanjak vilayets comprising historic and geographic Macedonia.

Among other things the constitution defined the various ethnic and religious populations living in Macedonia, the ministries and departments necessary to run the administration, the division of power in the legislative body of the government and the regulation of security including the army and police.

The government structure proposed was based on gaining broad autonomy within the Ottoman Empire. Through the drafting of the

constitution Macedonians made it clear that they wanted an autonomous Macedonia, based on Article 23 of the Treaty of Berlin, emphasizing the Macedonian distinct national identity that was to be separate from the other Balkan countries.

Article 99 of the constitution called for use of military force to be exercised by the Macedonian Liberation Army should Ottoman authorities or the European Powers disagree with the request to form an autonomous Macedonian state within the Ottoman framework.

On matters of the Macedonian army, the Chief of the General Headquarters responsible for drafting the security part of the constitution added a separate chapter to the constitution for regulating the military. This Chapter known as the Military Instruction constituted 246 Articles divided into two parts. The first part defined the structure and organization of the Macedonian army and the second part defined the tactics required if the liberation of Macedonia became necessary. The second part was put in place in case the Ottoman government or the Great powers refused to grant Macedonia autonomy and the Macedonian people would then have to fight for it.

The constitution drafted by the Macedonian league in aid of establishing a Macedonian government and a military organization was quite detailed and comprehensive, especially the Articles regarding the formation of a Macedonian army. For more information see chapter 14 of Vanche Stojchev's book "Military History of Macedonia".

After the Macedonian League established its General Headquarters it began sending out communiqués. On June 23rd, 1880 it sent a letter with a copy of the Macedonian Constitution to the six Great Power ministries of the European Commission requesting their approval. Expecting no reply, the General Headquarters then went ahead and created a Manifesto calling on all the Macedonian people to organize a united national uprising. Among the signatories of the Manifesto were Iljo Maleshevski, Vasil Dijamandiev and eight other leaders.

Among other things the Manifesto said: Article 23 of the Treaty of Berlin was our last hope for our freedom and that hope is now lost. It is time for us to rise and settle the century old account with our oppressor. We call on you to unite under the Macedonian flag and fight for liberty and independence. Only united we will be able to reclaim our precious fatherland for ourselves and gain absolute autonomy.

The Manifesto also warned the Macedonian people to watch out for opportunists who claimed to be fighting for the Macedonian cause while they were supporting alien interests.

The Manifesto ended with the slogans "Liberty or Death!" and "Long Live Liberated Macedonia!"

Even though the Manifesto was distributed far and wide, and the call for an uprising was loud and clear, the people could not muster the will

because the Ottoman government had learned its lesson in the past and was prepared for such an event.

Unable to spark an immediate uprising the Macedonian League continued its work through urging Macedonians to unite and organize all throughout Macedonia. Even though the strength of the League was concentrated in Pirin, its affect was felt all throughout Macedonia. Military actions carried out by the Pirin Chetas were disturbing not only to Ottoman authorities but also to the European consuls prompting the Russian Consul in Bitola to inform Moscow that: The Macedonians have declared themselves a separate nation and are connecting themselves to their past in Ancient Macedonia but they are not immune to the national propaganda of their neighbours. Even as early as 1881 the Great Powers were well aware of the existence of a unique Macedonian national consciousness that was tied to the Ancient Macedonians.

While well aware of each other's existence "Unity" the Provisional Government of Macedonia, stationed in Gremen, and the Macedonian League, stationed in Pirin Mountain, existed as separate organizations each with its own authorities. But in view of the Ottoman government's clamp down on covert activities each organization was unable to act alone so a meeting was held in Plodvid to determine how to join forces. The Provisional Government "Unity" sent Leonidas Vulgaris, Vasil Simon and Taki the Vlah while the League sent Vasil Dijamandiev. After becoming familiar with each others activities, the group concluded that their aims were identical and agreed to join forces. As a joint force, for functional reasons, they decided to separate their political leadership from their military assigning the political leadership to "Unity" in Gremen and the military leadership to the General Headquarters of the Macedonian army in Pirin Mountain.

After their meeting in Plodvid the group went to Pirin for a tour of the GHQ facilities and to meet the rest of the Macedonian League leadership. Here Leonidas Vulgaris met with Iljo Maleshevski and had discussions about placing the various headquarters under the patronage of Greece and Bulgaria but after hearing Maleshevski's concerns he decided it was not a good idea. Maleshevski was well aware of what Macedonia's neighbours, Greece and Bulgaria were up to when he said "Do not listen to those who are trying to spoil our water. Who will believe us that we are fighting for the liberation of Macedonia if we align ourselves with those 'patrons', when people know that all they want is divide us?" Vulgaris later wrote "I agree completely with Maleshevski, and we decided to work secretly from the Bulgarians and Greeks". (Vanche Stojchev. "Military History of Macedonia". Military academy. Skopje, 2004. Page 260) Unfortunately Vasil Dijamandiev however, had different ideas when he sent the Bulgarian Minister of Internal Affairs a letter informing him of what had just transpired. From what happened next it would appear that neither the

Bulgarians nor the Greeks were too happy about the Macedonians working in secret. After Vulgaris returned from Pirin Mountain he was followed by the Ottoman police and detained in Solun. Dijamandiev too was detained by the Bulgarians and further interrogated. The Greek and Bulgarian borders were then closed to haiduk activities, which seriously threatened the revolutionary movement.

Despite the setbacks however, the movement continued to grow and new groups began to spring up all over Macedonia. During the summer of 1881 a Macedonian Revolutionary Committee was created in Ohrid, followed by one in Demir Hisar.

Overall the situation in Macedonia was getting worse towards the end of the 19th century. While Ottoman authorities were tightening their grip on Macedonia, Macedonia's neighbours were stepping-up their propaganda activities attempting to sway Macedonians to see things their way. The loss of Ottoman territories after the Berlin Congress and the Ottoman government's non-compliance with Articles 23 and 62, created a climate for further oppression of the Macedonian people.

The Ottoman government settled Muslim refugees from the lost territories in Macedonia, giving them the most fertile lands and allowing them to take revenge on the Christians for their own personal losses which further exacerbated the situation. With the arrival of the newcomers there was a dramatic increase in the number of gangs and criminal activities. By ignoring Macedonian demands and not enforcing Articles 23 and 62 of the Berlin Congress, the Great Powers stifled the Macedonian peoples' ability to free themselves.

They did this by creating a climate for foreign churches and schools to proliferate and flourish in a land where they did not belong. This created a perfect opportunity for Macedonia's neighbours to carry out their anti-Macedonian nationalistic propaganda. But when their propaganda alone was not strong enough to achieve their aims, they resorted to using violence through armed brigands transforming Macedonia into a lawless wasteland. There was but one thought in the minds of the Macedonian people. What is happening to us and how do we get out of this predicament?

Part 16 – Birth of the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization

By the early 1890's there was but one thing on the mind of every Macedonian and that was what to do about the situation in which they found themselves. Feeling abandoned and betrayed by the Great Powers, stifled by their neighbours, subdued by their occupiers, the Macedonian people were left with a single choice, fight for their own survival.

Macedonians by now were well experienced in the art of organizing insurrections as demonstrated by the various rebellions they undertook in the past including the latest Kreshna Uprising. It was now a matter of organizing and executing a national uprising that would free all of Macedonia once and for all.

One of the first methods of spreading the idea of organizing an all Macedonian national uprising was through the "Loza" magazine published by a teacher and student group in Bulgaria. Even though this publication earned the group their banishment and prosecution, they were at least successful in starting the idea which then spread inside Macedonia. The next group to devote time to the idea was another teacher and student group in Prilep inside Macedonia. Here Macedonian teachers Dame Gruev and Pere Toshev devoted much of their time during the 1892-1893 school year in creating a revolutionary organization inside Macedonia. About the same time another group of like minded individuals, Petar Pop Arsov, Ivan Hadzhi Nikolov, and Dr. Hristo Tatarchev, got together in Solun and developed the idea that "only a secret revolutionary organization can protect Macedonia from foreign propaganda". Goce Delchev too, even before he was recruited in the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (MRO), had developed the idea that a revolutionary organization of secret nature needed to be established that would operate inside Macedonia. This type of organization would therefore be immune to foreign influence and propaganda. Its founders would be local Macedonians who would fight for a free and independent Macedonia with no connections to foreign governments; particularly to Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria. In fact Delchev was so convinced to stay as far away as possible from foreign governments that he made it his mission not to accept aid from the neighbouring Balkan states. Delchev who spent time in Sofia serving as a chairperson in various organizations was well aware of the possible consequences if Macedonians were to accept aid from Bulgaria. At one point he publicly declared that the Macedonians would pay dearly for such aid, the price would be the loss of freedom and independence for Macedonia.

The kind of Macedonian Revolutionary Organization every Macedonian sought after came into existence on October 23rd, 1893 in Solun, in Hristo Batandzhev's house when a group of Macedonian revolutionaries got together for a historic meeting. Among those present included Dame Gruev a school teacher from the village Smilevo near

Bitola, Hristo Batandzhiev a school teacher from the village Gumentdzhe near Voden, Hristo Tatarchev a doctor from Resen, Petar Pop Arsov a school teacher from the village Bogomila near Veles, Anton Dimitrov from the village Ajvatovtsi near Solun, and Ivan Hadzhi Nikolov a book shop owner from Solun. Among other things, they decided that the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization would operate in accordance with the following principles:

1. the Organization will be revolutionary in nature;
2. revolutionary activities will be conducted under ultimate secrecy;
3. the Organization will operate only within Macedonia's geographic and historic borders;
4. the Organization will be open to all those born in Macedonia regardless of ethnicity or religion;
5. the Organization will strive for the political autonomy of Macedonia.

As soon as the Organization was created, a constitution was drafted consisting of four parts and fourteen articles which among other things spelled out the Organization's mission, emphasizing the need for the Macedonian people to spread the spirit of liberation among the Macedonian population and to fight for their own liberty. Chapter two was dedicated to the Organization's structure and recruitment policies highlighting the fact that the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization was open to all people regardless of ethnicity, culture, religion or sex, as long as they respected the Organization's goals and objectives. Chapter three of the constitution covered items such as sources of financing and the Organization's assets while chapter four outlined the rules of conduct and punishments for individuals violating the Organization's principles.

By the summer of 1894, the MRO had created branches in Bitola, Kavadartsi, Negotino, Struga, Resen, Ohrid and Prilep and as the number of people joining increased, a conference was held in Resen in Dr. Hristo Tatarchev'e house, which lasted from August 27 to 29, 1894. The purpose of the conference was to discuss the activities of MRO and to obtain consensus on the Organization's future direction. It was also during this conference that the proposals of the Berlin Congress (articles 23 and 62) were rejected and it was decided to pursue autonomy for Macedonia only, leaving Odrin out.

I just want to mention at this point that when the Macedonians requested autonomy from the Berlin Congress they had also included the Odrin (Dardanelles) Region as part of that package. Now, however, it was decided to leave Odrin out but the Organization still retained its old name "TMORO" (Tina Makedonska, Odrin Revolutsionerna Oranizatsija, Secret Macedonian, Odrin Revolutionary Organization). In order to avoid

confusion I will be using the term "MRO" (Macedonian Revolutionary Organization) as an inclusive term that encompasses the TMORO and the IMRO (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization) since all these references refer to a single Macedonian Revolutionary Organization.

Even though no serious discussions on how to arm and train the people for combat had ever taken place in the Solun meeting of October 23rd, 1893 or in the Resen meeting of August 29, 1894 the various revolutionary branches continued to recruit revolutionaries with much enthusiasm. Then as the situation became a pressing issue, a second conference was held in Solun in 1896 where it was decided to start arming the fighters. Initially these fighters were called to temporary duty and were disbanded after each mission, but after 1899 permanent Chetas (units) began to appear. These Cheti were small in numbers and used mainly for defensive purposes. But as the number of recruits began to increase during the year 1900, military training centers were opened where untrained civilians could be armed and trained in preparation for combat.

By the year 1900 all fighting personnel fell under the command of Commander in Chief Gotse Delchev, responsible for all assignments and military preparation in all of Macedonia. In the early days most of the military training was done by ex-Bulgarian officers like Marko Lerinski, Mihail Apostolov and Hristo Chernopeev who had been dismissed from the Bulgarian military not because they were Macedonians but because they harboured Macedonian revolutionary ideas. Their job was to train the future Macedonian officers who would lead the Macedonian Chetas.

Soon after the military training camps were opened the Commander in Chief ordered the drafting of a Rulebook for the Chetas to follow. Unfortunately after the Rulebook was approved and sent for duplication the printing house was destroyed and the distribution to the various districts was delayed. A new Rulebook was again drafted containing five chapters and forty-seven articles. This book was a bit more comprehensive and included more details which Gotse Delchev the Commander in Chief had gained from his field experience.

According to the Rulebook, the Chetas directly associated with the MRO were to be given two basic tasks, one, to agitate the Macedonian population regardless of ethnicity or religion and, two, to arm the population for the national uprising. Outside the MRO Chetas, the Rulebook called for the formation of permanent village Chetas whose primary objective was to defend the villages from the Bashibazuks (armed Muslim civilians) and other irregular military forces. The village Chetas were also expected to carry out rear attacks and breach sieges when the main MRO Chetas were surrounded by enemy forces and needed help. Even though the village Chetas were permanent, their fighters were to participate in everyday civilian life and assemble only when required. Since they were required to operate clandestinely in order to protect the

villages from punishment from the authorities in case they were discovered, the fighters kept their arms and ammunition hidden away somewhere outside the village.

Besides the Chetas, the Rulebook specified the creation of secret police forces, courier services and terrorist groups. The job of the courier could only be entrusted to loyal, brave and capable people who were familiar with the terrain, especially with back roads and secret paths and were capable of delivering secret mail, providing arms and ammunition and smuggling people.

When the terrorist groups were first created their task was to seek out and punish enemy informants. The first terrorist group created in 1895 consisted of four people and began its operation by monitoring Ottoman activities in Prilep. In 1896 another terrorist group was created in Krushevo whose task was to follow certain suspects and to collect money and other needed items for the Organization. In time every revolutionary district created its own terrorist group who were assigned various tasks to suit its needs. All in all, these terrorist groups were very effective in demonstrating the Organization's strength and authority. By October 1898 twelve terrorist groups were operating in Macedonia including Prilep, Bitola, Solun and Kukush. One of the more significant deeds performed by a terrorist group was the execution of Dimitar Grdanov, a key Ottoman spy. Gedanov was executed by Metodi Pachev on August 5th, 1898 in Ohrid. The terrorist groups were also known to have participated in battles alongside the Macedonian Chetas as well as provide secret security services for MRO revolutionaries.

As the number and needs of terrorist groups increased, it was decided to reorganize them into a Secret Police. The decision to form secret police units was made during the 1896 Solun Congress and was enshrined in the MRO Constitution and spelled out in the Rulebook. According to article ten of the MRO Constitution, each committee of the Organization had the right to form its own Secret Police unit for the purpose of taking actions against internal and external enemies. After the formation of the Secret Police units however, most regional Organizations used their services to investigate various matters, perform intelligence functions, follow the movements of official Ottoman authorities, identify and investigate newly arrived personnel and track the movements of the Ottoman secret militia. Each committee was responsible for appointing a chief who in turn appointed three personally selected assistants who did not know each other.

Lacking skill and experience, most of these "secret agents" made mistakes and did not measure up to Gotse Delchev's, the Commander in Chief's, expectations so the Organization made sure to recruit from the more experienced haiduk (outlaw) groups. In fact the Organization took a step further and made contact with the various haiduk leaders throughout

Macedonia asking them to join the MRO and fight for a free and independent Macedonia. In time the majority did and those who did not and continued their illegal activities were eventually destroyed by the MRO.

At Delchev's call to meet with them many experienced haiduks responded including the battle seasoned Kocho Mustrukov, Ivancho Karasulijata, Apostol Petkov and Ilija Krchovalijata. After his initial success, Delchev called for more such meetings in the Drama, Seres, Demir Hisar and Solun Districts.

The experienced haiduks soon became the teachers and leaders of the uprising who not only taught the new recruits how to fight but also taught them how to survive under bad conditions.

The Macedonian Chetas unfortunately were not the only units operating in Macedonia. At about the same time organized armed groups from Greece and Bulgaria were also operating, agitating the Macedonian people and spreading foreign propaganda. One such group from Bulgaria operating in the Vinitsa vicinity on November 14th, 1897 robbed and killed Kazim Aga, a prominent Ottoman beg. This sparked an immediate investigation during which a weapons search was conducted. In spite of the care taken not to keep weapons in the village, some weapons were found in the various houses in Vinitsa. Upon finding these weapons, the Ottomans concluded that a revolutionary network was operating in Vinitsa and there may also be others. Being very suspicious of yet another uprising occurring in Macedonia, the Ottomans quickly expanded their search into neighbouring districts. Afraid of being found, many revolutionaries fled their homes and turned to underground activities. As a result and being pressured by the people to maintain higher security, the MRO changed some of its tactics and in 1898 began creating permanent Chetas which worked strictly underground.

Although their main activities were to agitate for the Macedonian cause, protect the villages and recruit and train new recruits, sometimes the Chetas had to face off with the Ottoman army. The first recorded armed conflict between the MRO and the Ottoman army took place in April 1899 in the village Gavaljantsi in Kukush Region. Another battle took place on September 16th, 1899 when Mirche Atsev's Cheta clashed with the Ottoman army in Papazchair and again on October 18th at the village Tsrven Grad in Prilep Region. By 1899 more than twenty Chetas were operating in Macedonia each consisting of about half to a dozen fighters.

Even though these Chetas with their abilities to agitate and provide security for MRO were exceeding the Commander in Chief's expectation, Gotse Delchev was well aware that a well trained army would be needed to free Macedonia. To achieve that the MRO needed Cheta institutes with special assignments to train and prepare the necessary leadership for the long fight ahead. To do this Gotse Delchev selected a number of people

who strongly believed in the MRO principles and appointed them to the duty of teachers to train future Cheta leaders. Among those appointed included Marko Lerinski, Mihail Apostolov and Hristo Chernopeev, mentioned earlier. The Rulebook was updated to reflect the new changes.

In 1902 the Chetas were restructured and new Chetas were created consisting of an average of twenty to thirty fighters each, some numbered as high as seventy. Being successful in training the leadership for the central Chetas, the schools were then decentralized and assigned to the various regional districts to perform similar functions.

In addition to employing fighters into the all volunteer service, the MRO also recruited priests, tradesmen and other workers to carry out various covert activities. The Organization also recruited the services of brave women who were prepared to carry out various activities which included smuggling weapons and ammunition, nursing the wounded, burying the dead, cooking food and mending clothing. Some women even served as agitators and as Cheta leaders.

Arming the Chetas with weapons and ammunition however was a more difficult task than initially anticipated. In the past small numbers of weapons were easy to come by through purchase, capture during battle, manufacturing personal weapons and confiscation from armed individuals. As the demand to arm the growing Chetas increased so did the difficulty of obtaining weapons. Macedonians did not have the necessary funds nor did they trust their neighbours to supply them with large numbers of weapons from the outside. They were constantly watched by the Ottoman authorities inside so large numbers of weapons were difficult to come by. To solve the problem, the MRO created difficult to find secret workshops at various secluded villages and began manufacturing its own weapons. Weapons manufactured included knives, rifles, bombs and wooden cannons. The knife making factories were most common and prevalent and produced a variety of daggers, yataghans and swords. The rifle workshops usually included repair of rifles and manufacturing of bullets and gunpowder. The manufacture of wooden cannons or improvised artillery was based on a long Macedonian tradition where the barrel was made of hard wood usually of cherry, elm, walnut, or wild almond, and chained with iron rings to give it strength. The wooden cannons were usually made by wagon makers, coopers or blacksmiths and outside of boosting the moral of the insurgents, were basically ineffective as weapons against the enemy. In fact because their barrels exploded more often than they fired, they were more dangerous to those firing them than the enemy.

By far most of the weapons needed were rifles, much of which were initially supplied by the haiduks who were issued weapons in the past by the various armies like the Austrians and Russians. Unfortunately these were not enough to fulfill the new demands and by 1898 new sources were sought out. Revolvers were purchased from Montenegro to arm the

revolutionaries in the cities who needed to have their weapons concealed. Revolutionaries in the villages and village militias used mostly rifles which were purchased from private sources in Serbia and Bulgaria. Some weapons were also purchased from Greece. The large immigrant population living in Bulgaria, especially along the long border, was instrumental in supplying a large number of weapons. Despite Delchev's objections, requests for purchasing arms were even made to the Bulgarian government but without much success. The Bulgarian army at the time had modernized its weapons and decided to sell over four-thousand of its old rifles to the MRO but then refused to supply it with ammunition.

Unable to meet its demands from external sources, the MRO then established its own secret manufacturing workshops. Although these sources were widespread, safe and expedient the quality of the weapons was not very good. Before the Ilinden Uprising the gunsmith profession in Western Macedonia, with secret workshops in Tetovo, Gostivar, Debar, Bitola and Skopje, employed more than one-hundred gunsmiths in Tetovo alone producing about fifty copies a week of the famous "Martini" rifle. Unfortunately this still was not enough to supply the growing demand for weapons so the MRO in the beginning of 1902 adopted a new policy to only arm those who could not afford to purchase their own weapons. Those revolutionaries who were financially more secure were expected to purchase and take care of their own weapons.

After the Ottoman-Greek war of 1897 the Ottoman army retreated and abandoned large caches of weapons and ammunition in warehouses in Thessaly which fell into the hands of the locals who later sold some to the MRO. Vasil Chakalarov, the Cheta chief of the Kostur district, was responsible for organizing these and other weapons purchases from Greece. Albania too was a source of military weapons.

After the Solun Congress of January 1903 and the Smilevo Congress of May 1903 the need for armaments increased dramatically; this preoccupied the MRO leadership considerably and they took it upon themselves to furnish as many weapons as possible.

Immediately after the Smilevo Congress, after a definite date was decided for the Uprising, the MRO leadership ordered the make-shift factories to increase production. In Krushevo, Stavre Borjar and his sons Todor and Sotir produced a large number of various rifle spare parts. The Krushevo foundry was also responsible for casting bullets and procuring fine gunpowder. Unfortunately fine gunpowder was illegal to sell and had to be acquired by illegal means. But thanks to the Ottoman gunpowder manufacturing workers in Bitola who made fine gunpowder available on the black market, the MRO was able to fulfill those needs. Readily and legally available coarse gunpowder was also purchased but because of its impurities was unreliable for bullets and was strictly used for emergencies and for stoking the cannons.

All in all the MRO did its best to obtain as much armament as possible under the given conditions but when the crunch came, it was not enough to arm and properly equip all available volunteers.

In solving its strategic problems the Organization made every effort possible to ensure it had the material and financial aid it needed to support the Uprising. Initially it tried to win support from the wealthy but without much success. Failing that, the Organization then turned to blackmail by kidnapping wealthy people and foreigners but that too not only failed to produce the necessary funds but caused negative publicity for the Organization.

Delchev was well aware that outside of the Bitola District no other district was equipped to start a general uprising and as such was opposed to the idea and was more in favour of partisan type actions, raids, acts of sabotage, gradually increasing in numbers and intensity until the process eventually would lead to a general uprising. Unfortunately the MRO did not follow that course of action, especially after Delchev's untimely death.

Part 17 - Preparations for a National Uprising

Even though a date had been set for the Macedonian National Uprising, many members of the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (MRO), including Gotse Delchev the Commander in Chief of the Macedonian forces, felt the timing was not right. Besides financial and armament shortfalls there was another growing menace that hampered MRO's progress, foreign interference.

The ideological and political preparation for the "final conflict" was hampered by centuries of oppression which had left the Macedonian people naïve and ignorant of their own historical tradition thus making them easy prey to flashy foreign propaganda. The situation was not helped by the number of ethnic and religious groups that lived in Macedonia each vying for someone else's favour. Even though many Muslims were ethnic Macedonians, because of their religion they were loyal to the Ottomans. Similarly Albanians of the Muslim religion living in Macedonia were also loyal to the Ottomans. Having to work with many diverse ethnic and religious groups inside Macedonia was enough of a challenge for the MRO but the real difficulty lay with outsiders.

The MRO had no choice but to fight a determined battle against political and military interference by the neighbouring Balkan countries and also against direct and indirect intervention of the European Powers through their proxies, the Balkan countries. For those who say the MRO did not want outside help, the stark fact is that it was not that the MRO did not want to ally itself with anyone; it is that the MRO had no trustworthy supporters with whom to ally itself.

In addition to external problems, awareness of yet another looming uprising intensified Ottoman activities prompting them to make more frequent weapons searches in the villages in hopes of discovering how these weapons were being distributed.

Another late 19th, early 20th century problem for the MRO was the increased activity of the Vrhovists (supremacists), a pro-Bulgarian organization calling itself the Supreme Macedonian Committee operating from Sofia. The aim of the Vrhovists was to usurp control of the MRO through propaganda and infiltration and direct its activities in Bulgaria's favour.

In the beginning it did not appear that the Vrhovists were of great concern to the MRO but when the time came to choose a direction for the Uprising, the Vrhovists became a real problem. There were always two trains of thought; one supported by Gotse Delchev, Gjorche Petrov, Pere Toshev, Yane Sandanski and others was for an independent Macedonia to be liberated from the inside by the Macedonian people through slow but systematic attacks against the Ottoman authorities until the system crumbled. The other, supported by Hristo Matov, was to strike at the

enemy from the inside in an all out war and let the outside powers come to the rescue. This plan was unfortunately also supported by the Vrhovists which made the MRO leadership feel uneasy. If this path was to be chosen it would invite Bulgaria to intervene and annex Macedonia for itself. That is precisely why most of the MRO leadership opposed this idea that is until Ivan Garvanov became involved.

To strengthen their position inside Macedonia the Vrhovists took aim at eliminating the MRO's Central Committee. They did this by releasing the names of the top Macedonian revolutionaries to the Ottoman authorities in order to have them arrested and removed from the people. This was done in early spring 1901 and subsequent to that the Vrhovists infiltrated the Organization with their own people, one of them being Ivan Garvanov.

Ivan Garvanov's entry into the MRO and his takeover of the top leadership position in the Organization's executive had a fatal effect not only on the development of the Organization but also in the Macedonian National Freedom Movement. Supporting the Vrhovist attitude that liberation could not be achieved by one's own forces alone and that a certain amount of interference from the outside was necessary not only suited the pro-Bulgarian circles perfectly, but made sense to the unwary. This naturally created a division between those who wanted to liberate Macedonia from the inside in a slow but systematic fashion and between those who wanted to liberate Macedonia with help from the outside. What most Macedonians unfortunately did not know or refused to believe is that the Vrhovists did not want to liberate Macedonia for the Macedonians but rather liberate it so that it could be annexed by Bulgaria. The Vrhovist idea was to start a massive rebellion inside Macedonia in order to exhaust both the Ottomans and the Macedonians, leaving the region weak so that Bulgaria could invade with little opposition.

Garvanov joined the Organization in the fall of 1902 with aims of starting an uprising in Macedonia in the spring or summer of 1903. Garvanov knew he would be opposed by the top MRO leadership so he broke protocol and only met and had discussions with those who would most likely agree with him. In effect Garvanov was planning the Uprising without the knowledge or consent of the MRO founding leadership. His effort was further supported by staged clashes between Vrhovist and Ottoman forces creating terror and insecurity in the population as well as weariness in the MRO leadership. All this was done to create an urgency to justify the start of the Uprising.

Although the constitutional principles of the Organization were already being openly or secretly violated, and although no regard was given to the ideas of the founders of the Organization, it was still necessary for purely formal reasons for the Organization to call a general congress. By a vote taken on December 24th, 1902 it was decided that a Congress would be

held in Solun on January 1st, 1903. This not only did not provide enough notice for the elected delegates to make it to the congress on time but also breached the Organization's constitution by allowing non-elected delegates to attend and participate in the vote. In other words, Garvanov took it upon himself to rush the congress to avoid being opposed by the MRO founding leaders and only invited those who he was certain would support his initiative to start a massive Uprising as soon as possible before the MRO was ready. This would have guaranteed its failure and in the process would have exhausted both the Macedonians and the Ottomans, leaving Macedonia open for a Bulgarian invasion.

The Congress began on January 2nd, 1903 and ended on the 4th without a single delegate from the founding MRO leaders attending. In fact none of the MRO delegates who would have opposed the early Uprising were they invited or attended. In other words the holding of this Congress was not only illegal, according to the MRO's constitution, but also was not representative of the entire revolutionary territory because many district delegates were either not invited or did not attend. Even Lazar Dimitrov, who took part in the Congress, voiced his concern in his memoirs calling the Congress "unlawfully constituted".

The Congress was opened by Garvanov, Chairman of the Central Committee of the Organization, who requested from each delegate to individually report on the situation in their districts. Most delegates however, including Anastas Lozanchev, district representative of Bitola, admitted that they were unable to provide reliable information on the status and readiness of the districts they represented. Almost all delegates admitted that their revolutionary districts were materially and morally not prepared for an uprising. The situation however changed when Lozanchev and Garvanov assured the Congress that a large delivery of arms would soon be arriving from Bulgaria and each detachment would be receiving its fair share of guns, supplies and other materials necessary to carry out the Uprising.

Garvanov made a strong impression on the delegates by his speech in which he assured them that leaflets calling on the Macedonian population to prepare for an uprising in 1903 were being spread throughout Macedonia. He said the fact that the Ottoman authorities had managed to capture some of these leaflets, proves that the job is being done as we speak. He went on to say that the 1903 Uprising would be even more glorious than the 1902 Gornodzhumajski Uprising. Garvanov told the Congress that he did not believe a mass uprising would be successful without external intervention.

In spite of Garvanov's reassurances there was still some opposition to his plan. Most of that opposition came from Lazar Dimitrov who declared to the Congress that far too many districts were unprepared for such an uprising and it would be a mistake. He also added that Lamzdorf, Russia's

Minister of Foreign Affairs, was against such an uprising and the Macedonians could not count on Russian support. He went further to say that he had spoken to other revolutionaries including Yane Sandanski and Gotse Delchev just before the Solun Congress and they were all against a premature uprising.

Unfortunately, despite his opposition, Dimitrov too signed Garvanov's declaration endorsing an early uprising. Even Dimitar Ganchev, the delegate from Skopje who was sent there by the District Committee with explicit instructions to press for a postponement of the Uprising for at least a year, seeing that the other delegates agreed, also added his consent.

On January 3rd, 1902 at 11:20 AM, after all the delegates had had their say it was decided that an Uprising would begin in the spring of 1903. It was decided that this would not be a mass uprising but rather a strategic one to start things moving. All District Committees were ordered to assemble and discuss the Congress's decisions and start preparations to ensure the Uprising was carried out.

Overall Garvanov and Lozanchev portrayed the Uprising as a vital act which would attract world attention and an eventual foreign intervention which would liberate Macedonia. This decision for the uprising to not be widespread and massive but rather of a partisan nature completely contradicted the basic norms and principles of the Organization and those of its founders who had always strongly felt that the uprising should be a mass uprising with a direct and single-minded aim: to overthrow the tyrannical Ottoman regime and to liberate Macedonia from the inside without outside interference.

Once the decision to start the Uprising was made it was irreversible but not without objections from the MRO founders, particularly from Gotse Delchev and Gjorche Petrov, the pillars of the Organization who were not against an uprising in principle, but were against a premature uprising which they believed would achieve nothing positive except open the door for Macedonia's occupation by its neighbours.

It is most unfortunate that those delegates who attended the Solun Congress without a hidden agenda did not question Garvanov's motives as to why he went against the wishes of the MRO founders or why he ignored the fact that the Great European powers were not open to making changes in the Balkans at that time and were not prepared to go to war against the Ottomans. Someone among those delegates must have known that Tsarist Russia's interests in 1903 were facing east towards Japan and that Russia was in support of peace in the Balkan Peninsula, which surely was in direct opposition to an uprising in Macedonia. Owing to the dictates of her own economic interests, Germany too was in favour of keeping the Ottoman Empire intact. So were France and England who had their own particular reasons for wanting to keep the Ottoman Empire together. So

when Garvanov preached “Great Power Intervention” in Macedonia of which Great Power was he thinking?

The only powers, if we can call them that, which were directly concerned with events in Macedonia, were the three neighbouring Balkan states Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria. Since they all were aspiring to gain control over Macedonia they all opposed a properly planned uprising which would have lead to an autonomous and independent Macedonia.

Bulgaria in particular had special interest in the Macedonian revolution’s failure as mentioned earlier. Bulgaria was counting on weakening both the Ottomans and the Macedonians before it could intervene in Macedonia and “liberate it”, if I can use those words. But what Bulgaria did not count on was Russian interference. When Russia found out Bulgaria was involved in Macedonia it put pressure on it to stop what it was doing. Without Bulgarian intervention the Uprising was condemned to fail, thus teaching the Macedonian people yet another hard lesson; a lesson well learned which must never be forgotten. Too bad all of this could not have been foreseen at the Solun Congress.

After a decision was made to start the uprising in the spring of 1903, Ivan Garvanov and Velko Dumev, both members of the Central Committee, took a trip to Sofia to meet with the top revolutionaries there. Among those present at the Sofia meeting were Gotse Delchev, Gjorche Petrov, Pere Toshev, Hristo Matov, Dr. Hristo Tatarchev, Ivan Hadzhi Nikolov, Sava Mihailov, Dimitar Stefanov and Mihail Gerdzhikov.

Besides being furious with the decisions made at the Solun Congress, most of the attendees adamantly opposed the plan for an early Uprising. Gjorche Petrov, knowing full well that no district was prepared to go to war, proposed that all detachments and terrorist groups switch from defensive to offensive tactics and begin their campaigns immediately. Petrov emphasized that an immediate, gradual and sporadic campaign in the long term would wear down the Ottomans without the need for starting a permanent uprising. Gotse Delchev too was categorically against starting the Uprising in 1903 because, of all the people present at the meeting, he alone knew how inadequately the various districts were prepared. Delchev again emphasized the importance of the Macedonians liberating themselves by their own actions by fire and by sword, He insisted that the campaign begin with attacks on Ottoman military installations, railroads and government buildings; pushing the Ottomans into a state of anarchy until the Sultan’s Empire broke up completely.

Yane Sandanski too was disappointed with the decision of the Solun Congress and added his voice to the chorus of opposition. News of the decision shattered the morale in Seres District. “Our idea of what should have taken place was totally different of what was being proposed. We campaigned for different things and everything turned quite

differently…we were very disappointed to a point of tears" wrote Sandanski in his memoirs.

When Hristo Chernopeev, leader of the Strumica revolutionary district, heard of the Solun decision he was quite beside himself. Nikola Pushkarov, leader of the Skopje revolutionary district, immediately informed Garvanov that his district was shocked by his decision both because it was a surprise and because it was unthinkable to start an uprising under these conditions.

The fact that the Macedonian people were not prepared for an early uprising was confirmed by all subsequent conferences held following the Solun Congress. Unfortunately, as mentioned earlier, despite all the protests that decision could not be overturned so the Organization had no choice but to start immediate preparations. The Organization's representative body stationed in Sofia, headed by Hristo Matov and Hristo Tatarchev, accepted the idea and gradually took over the role of making preparations. This included equipping and dispatching Macedonian detachments from Bulgaria made up from the migrant Macedonian workers, collecting donations, purchasing equipment and persuading workers to return to Macedonia and fight. Similar measures were also undertaken in Constantinople, Smyrna, Alexandria and other cities where Macedonians worked.

The message was passed on by word of mouth which simply said, "The day of the uprising is upon us return to your homeland immediately." Despite the circumstances the news of the imminent uprising was received with delight by all Macedonians, even by those working in Athens who quickly packed up and left for Macedonia.

The first signs of the Uprising, later dubbed as the "Solun Assassinations", began at the end of April 1903 when a group of Macedonian intellectuals, mostly from Veles, called the Gemidzhii (boatsmen), strongly influenced by anarchist ideas attacked Ottoman and foreign institutions in order to gain world attention. The Gemidzhii concentrated their action on destroying Western state institutions and companies which held European investments in Macedonia.

On April 29th, 1903 the Gemidzhii blew up the French boat Guadalquivir, an Ottoman Bank, a brewery, the German Club and other buildings. Panic seized the population, particularly the Ottoman population, and many lives were lost including those of the Gemidzhii several of whom were killed in action while others committed suicide. Those captured were handed down long prison sentences. The disturbance caused uproar inside and outside of Solun resulting in thousands of people being arrested, tortured and jailed.

The Gemidzhii actions however did achieve their aim in creating a powerful impact not only inside Macedonia but all over Europe. As a result, the situation inside Macedonia became even tenser, especially after

the Ottomans began to crack down. This created a new urgency to accelerate preparations and helped to spread more awareness on all sides that an Uprising was imminent.

The downside to the Gemidzhii action was the negative European reaction which called on Ottoman authorities to hunt down and deal with these criminals. This prompted the Ottoman authorities to apprehend and jail even more people including many of the revolutionaries and Ivan Garvanov. This naturally put a damper on the Organization's ability to be fully engaged in the preparations of the Uprising.

Another unfortunate and devastating event for the Macedonian people that also put a damper on the Macedonian Liberation Movement was Gotse Delchev's untimely death. Gotse was murdered when he was needed the most when the Organization was gearing up for the most important confrontation in Macedonia's recent history.

Angry and disappointed with the way things turned out at the Sofia meeting, Gotse decided to return to Macedonia through Nevrokop and Razlog, accompanied by one of his detachments. Gotse felt that quick and effective measures needed to be immediately implemented so he called a meeting with Yane Sandanski and the leaders of the Seres revolutionary district. The meeting was scheduled for early February 1903 to be held at the village Karacha near the border between Nevrokop, Seres and Demirhisar. Expecting his arrival several detachments from the Seres Revolutionary district, including those from Seres, Demirhisar, Melnik and Nevrokop, were dispatched to Karacha where Gotse Delchev and Yane Sandanski met. After they met and discussed the situation both Gotse and Yane agreed that the date for the Uprising had been prematurely set and that decision needed to be overturned. One of the ways to change this situation was for the Organization to isolate itself from the Vrhovists and avoid being entangled in their affairs, including the various campaigns they had initiated.

Towards the end of March Gotse Delchev stepped up his own campaign against the Ottomans and his detachments destroyed the railway bridge over the Angista River and the railway tunnel near Drama. Following that he set out for Solun to meet with Dame Gruev.

Delchev arrived in Solun in late April and for three days met and discussed the situation with Gruev who for the last two years had been imprisoned in the dungeons of Kale Prison together with Hristo Matov and Dr. Hristo Tatarchev, two well known Vrhovists. It seems Matov and Tatarchev had some influence over Gruev because Gruev was not himself and had lost faith in men and leaders. Although he had been keeping in contact secretly with the MRO, Gruev still did not have a clear picture of the situation in Macedonia. It was under these circumstances that, after his return to Solun, Gruev agreed to Garvanov's plan for an early uprising.

Gruev worked hard on Delchev to persuade him to go along with the Solun Congress decision but Delchev refused.

After his meeting with Gruev, Delchev left Solun and headed for Mount Ali Botush where he was expected to meet with representatives from the Seres District Detachments. Unfortunately he never made it. On his way on March 4th, 1903 he was killed in battle by the Ottoman army in the village Banitsa. There are reports that he was betrayed by having his whereabouts revealed to the Ottomans, but the question is by whom? Given the situation he did have lot of enemies but this is a subject for future investigative historians.

Delchev's death was an irreplaceable loss to both the Organization and the Macedonian people as a whole. His death, coupled with the Solun assassinations and the Bitola massacre of May 6th and 7th, 1903 had serious repercussions not only for the Organization but also for the Bitola Revolutionary district where the Uprising was expected to begin.

One of the agreements made during the Solun Congress was that each revolutionary district would have the authority to decide on its own how and when to enter the Uprising. The Bitola Revolutionary District, however, having carried out all necessary preparations felt it was ready for the Uprising and during a secret meeting in January 1903 it was decided that Anastas Lozanchev would commence the Uprising in Bitola. Anastas Lozanchev, as mentioned earlier, was an ardent supporter of an early uprising at the Solun Congress and felt that his district was best prepared in comparison to other districts in Macedonia. Besides, Bitola District, both from a geographical position and from a strategic point of view, was best suited for an uprising. Moreover Bitola at that time was also the seat of numerous European diplomatic missions and this undoubtedly was of no small importance.

In order to finalize all activities, the leadership of the Bitola District requested that a Congress take place on May 1st, 1903 in the village Smilevo. Dame Gruev, representing the Central Committee of MRO, was elected chairman of the Congress. Among other things the meeting agenda included discussions on (1) the distribution of military forces, (2) preparations for the Uprising, (3) duties and responsibilities of leaders both before and during the uprising, (4) what to do with unarmed people, disabled people, old people, and women and children during the uprising, (5) distribution of arms, (6) determining the exact time of the uprising, (7) establishment of regional administrative bodies before and during the uprising, and (8) method by which the uprising would be conducted.

From the discussions that took place it was determined that the best-prepared regions to enter the Uprising were Resen, Kostur, Demirhisar and several surrounding villages in the Bitola Region. Among the less prepared regions was Ohrid with only one thousand four hundred guns.

The speakers and debaters at the Smilevo Congress were very critical of Anastas Lozanchev, chairman of the District Committee, for his arbitrary representation of his District at the Solun Congress and for undertaking obligations in the name of his district without first consulting the various regions. Among the delegates who opposed Garvanov's plan for an early Uprising were Gjorgji Sugare, Petre Atsev, Tale Hristov, Nikola Karev and Nikola Petrov. They were all bitter about how the Solun Congress was conducted and their anger was reflected during the debates in the Smilevo Congress. Overall a tense situation was created prompting Dame Gruev's intervention. Gruev used his authority as chairman to break off the discussions, insisting that the uprising would still have to take place regardless of the protests because that question had already been settled.

A General Staff made up of Dame Gruev, Boris Sarafov and Anastas Lozanchev was elected and delegated with the responsibility of selecting the exact date the Uprising was to commence. Military measures passed by the Smilevo Congress included drafting of a disciplinary constitution for the uprising, which would establish the rights and duties of those actively involved in the uprising, and of the regional mountain based headquarters and General Staff. It was decided that the Bitola Revolutionary District was to be divided into twelve regions with a mountain based headquarters assigned to each entrusting each region with planning and coordinating its own activities. Each region was responsible for training its fighters in the use of weapons and battle tactics.

The question of who should be involved in the Uprising kept coming up so it was decided that all actions would be conducted by the detachments only, the civilian population would not be mobilized.

Each detachment was to consist of thirty to forty fighters who would attack traffic routes, telegraph and postal lines, disarm armed Ottoman civilians and attack Ottoman military instillations and institutions. Under no circumstances were the Detachments allowed to attack or detain ordinary Ottoman civilians, women, or children.

The Smilevo Congress ended on May 7th, 1903 and all delegates returned to their respective districts feverishly working to prepare for the Uprising. The General Staff and commanding forces of the Bitola Revolutionary District set about to increase their arms supply, training and acquiring food, first-aid and other materials. The regional mountain headquarters gradually took over the Organization's administrative duties and sent members of its detachments to acquire arms, train local fighters to handle weapons and acquire food supplies. The distribution of food was worked out so that each person carrying a gun would take thirty-five pounds of grain with them into the mountains. The grain had to be ground, put into sacks and hidden in caves. Each household was advised to prepare food reserves for a month and a half. In Bitola special persons were directed to keep the consulates informed about the uprising. The railway

authorities too were made aware that the railroads would be attacked at various points along the line between Bitola and Solun. All armed men were told to prepare for long stays in the field. Armed men in the villages were divided into groups of seven or eight, each led by a corporal. One commander was appointed for every twenty-five or fifty armed men. Village squads were combined into central detachments each led by a central commander. Army drills were carried out under the central commander's directives and dispatched on hit and run attacks against the Ottomans to gain combat experience.

General Staff were also making their final preparations by visiting the various regions in their Districts and working out their plans of action and strategies.

After all these preparations were made the entire Bitola Revolutionary District was inspired with a fierce revolutionary spirit which the Organization had been kindling for the last ten years. All that was needed now was a sign from the General Staff and the glorious Ilinden Uprising would begin.

Part 18 – The Ilinden 1903 Uprising

As was decided at the Solun Congress of January 1903, bells would toll to welcome the Uprising and the people in all villages and cities in all of Macedonia would rise up and with all their might demonstrate to the world their displeasure to Ottoman rule.

Even though many knew they were not properly prepared for a fight, they saw the Uprising as a welcome alternative to the status quo of being tormented and oppressed.

After the Solun assassinations in April 1903 Ottoman authorities took extraordinary measures to prevent the occurrence of an uprising which is why they reinforced their military capabilities with 80,000 soldiers. Besides mobilizing the Muslim population and creating a number of Bashibazuk units, Ottoman authorities also reinforced their forces with 87 infantry battalions numbering approximately 800 soldiers each, 20 cavalry squadrons, 19 artillery batteries, 36 mountain type weapons, 3 pioneer chetas and a number of technical stations.

Once the decision to begin the Uprising was made, the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (MRO) set plans in motion and converted the six Revolutionary Districts into six Uprising Districts and moved their headquarters to safe places deep in the mountains. Each Uprising District was numbered and was given a pseudonym: 1 -Pelister, 2 - Kozhuf, 3 - Belasitsa, 4 - Pirin, 5 - Ograzhden and 6 - Ovche Pole, to keep the locations a secret.

Although differing in opinions on how to conduct the Uprising, its goal none the less was to liberate Macedonia from Ottoman rule.

The districts that were prepared to participate in the Uprising were the Revolutionary District of Bitola, the Revolutionary District of Skopje, the Revolutionary District of Strumitsa, the Revolutionary District of Solun and the Revolutionary District of Seres.

The Revolutionary District of Bitola, being geographically located near roads and communication lines of significance, was chosen to lead the Rebellion which is why the general Headquarters for the Uprising, both political and military, was located in the village Smilevo, near the vicinity of the city of Bitola. Among the personnel who administered the mountain headquarters in Bitola District were Parashkev Tsvetkov, Ivan Delev, Gjorgji Pavlov and Gjorgji Sugarev.

The Bitola District itself was sub-divided into three Regions, the Mariovo, Smilevo and Pelister Region. According to military historian Dr. Vanche Stojchev, the population of the Bitola area, just before the 1903 Ilinden Uprising, consisted of 35,983 people of whom 20,713 were Macedonians, 11,150 were Vlachs, 2,740 were Albanians (of whom 250 persons were Christians) and 1,380 were Ottomans. Among the participants in the Uprising were almost the entire Macedonian and Vlach

populations and some Albanian Christians. (Vanche Stojchev. "Military History of Macedonia". Military academy. Skopje, 2004. Page 310)

The Skopje District, also known as number 6 – Ovche Pole District, was subdivided into seven Regions with a total population of 308,719 people of whom 196,417 or 64% were Macedonians. The rest were 82,084 or 26% Ottomans, 15,543 or 5% Albanians and others. (Vanche Stojchev. "Military History of Macedonia". Military academy. Skopje, 2004. Page 353)

Unfortunately as it turned out, the Skopje District was one of the least prepared Districts to enter the Uprising and was hampered by many factors including the heavily traveled and guarded main roads that lead from Skopje to Kjustandil, Kumanovo, Prishtina, Nish and Solun. The constant movements of Ottoman troops, the numerous Bashibazuks, the involvement of Vrhovist forces attacking the Macedonians and the spreading of Serbian propaganda in the region were all obstacles working against the Macedonian Uprising in that District.

Of the total number of Ottoman forces stationed in Macedonia, given the massive Macedonian population living in the Skopje sanjak, 23 battalions, 5 squadrons, 10 batteries and 2 pioneer chetas were positioned on the territory of the Skopje sanjak. This naturally convinced the MRO leadership to re-think their approach on how to deploy their forces and a decision was made to only carry out terrorist type attacks and avoid direct confrontation with the Ottoman army.

The Skopje District held a Congress in Kratovo on July 17, 1903 which was attended by the Skopje Cheta lead by vojvoda Nikola Pushkarov and by the Kratovo Cheta lead by vojvoda Dime Stojanov Barbercheto. But because of the limited attendance little was accomplished except for Pushkarov and Stojanov's decisions to engage the enemy by planning to capture Husein Hilmi Pasha, chief inspector of the Rumelia vilayets, at the time visiting the eastern kazas of the Skopje sanjak.

The Strumitsa District covered the Region stretching along the Strumitsa River in the East, to the Vardar River in the West bordering the Skopje District to the North and the Solun District to the South. Included in the Strumitsa District were Strumitsa, Radovish, Maleshevo and parts of Gorna Dzhumaja Regions.

Strumitsa was a key strategic point because of its proximity to the road following the Struma River which connected Solun with Sofia and the road and railway line following the flow of the Vardar River connecting Solun and Skopje. These two valleys were connected via the Kluch Gorge and the Strumitsa to Petrich roadway.

Prior to the Ilinden Uprising the population of Strumitsa District numbered about 104,000 of which 74,000 was Macedonian. Even though Ivan Ingilizov from Strumitsa and Giorgi Vamaliev from Radovish, representing the Strumitsa District at the Solun Congress, both voted for an

early uprising they did not have enough weapons to engage the enemy and were heavily relying on Bulgaria to supply them. Unfortunately the promised weapons from Bulgaria never materialized and as Ottoman authorities began to crack down, Strumitsa District did not have a Congress and no preparations for the Uprising were ever made.

The Solun District was divided into two Regions pseudo-named number 2 – Kozhuv and number 3 – Balisitsa. Again according to military historian Dr. Vanche Stojchev the population living in the Solun District prior to the Uprising numbered 418,270 people of which 195,637 were Macedonians, 103,957 were Ottomans and 30,786 were Jews, Vlachs and others. (Vanche Stojchev. "Military History of Macedonia". Military academy. Skopje, 2004. Page 258)

The Solun District was one of the most important Districts in Macedonia because it was an important economic, political and military center. And because Solun was the center of the vilayet, it was home to much of the Ottoman administration and military. Solun was home to the 3rd Army Corps, the 17th Infantry Division, the 3rd Cavalry Division, the 3rd Artillery Division and to various other regiments and staff. But because of Solun's proximity to Asia Minor and because of its transportation potential, it could easily import more military forces on short notice if necessary.

The tense situation created by the April 1903 Solun assassinations and the subsequent arrest of thousands significantly reduced the number of revolutionaries and their potential to carry out a massive Uprising in the Solun District. Being left with little to work with the Solun District, particularly the Kozhuf Region, was reduced to campaign by terrorist tactics. Among the leaders from this district who participated in the Uprising were vojvoda Sava Mihaijlov, vojvoda Argir Manasiev and vojvoda Apostol Petkov. But in spite of the shortcomings the Solun District did well during the Uprising keeping the Ottoman forces constantly engaged, forcing them to divide up their powerful army thus giving the other districts a break.

The Seres District covered the territory to the River Mesta in the East, the Bulgarian border in the North, the River Struma in the West and the Aegean Sea in the South. The city of Seres was its center. Prior to the Uprising the population living in this district consisted of 429,382 people of whom 245,582 were Macedonians and the rest were Muslims, Ottomans, Vlachs and others. (Vanche Stojchev. "Military History of Macedonia". Military academy. Skopje, 2004. Page 362)

Seres Region is another part of Macedonia that is of geographical and strategic significance particularly because of its numerous mountains, rivers and gorges. The Ottomans thought so too which is why they stationed parts of their 9th Infantry Division and their 18th Brigade in the city of Seres, their 33rd Infantry Brigade in Gorna Dzhumaja, and a number

of battalions in the cities Melnik, Drama, Demir Hisar, Nevrokop and others. They also had smaller units, ranging from 30 to 40 soldiers and from 100 to 150 soldiers, stationed outside of the major cities deployed in villages and strategic locations. Then just before the Uprising Seres was reinforced bringing the number of Ottoman soldiers to 5,000.

The Seres District, also known by its pseudonym number 4 – Pirin, represented by Lazar Dimitrov at the Solun Congress voted against an early Uprising but accepted the decision of the majority and began its preparations for a fight. Unfortunately after Gotse Delchev's death the District of Seres postponed its Congress because of the infighting between Vrhovists and Delchev's supporters and the Congress never materialized until August 22nd, 1903. Having discussed the Uprising situation and the Solun Congress decision at length with Gotse Delchev, Yane Sandanski, chairman of the Seres Congress, decided to continue the Uprising terrorist style just like Delchev had recommended. Also during the Seres Congress which lasted three days it was decided to begin the Uprising on September 14th, 1903 on Krstovden.

After all the preparations and after all that was said and done it was up to each individual to do his or her part in aid of the Uprising. But as was well known to most, the Macedonian people were not adequately prepared for such an Uprising. Even those who were willing to fight and give their lives for the liberation of their country unnecessarily sacrificed themselves. Fighting unequal battles against the Ottomans and consistently risking their lives for country and liberty were heroic acts indeed but this is not what the MRO had envisioned for the Macedonian people. The MRO, particularly Gotse Delchev, wanted a slow and widespread campaign of hit and run tactics to divide and wear down the enemy with minimum loss to the rebels. By continuously disrupting communications, travel and business in general, it was believed would wear down the Ottoman administration forcing it to make concessions. But lack of training and pent-up frustration drove the rebels to throw themselves at their tormentors with all their might resulting in many unnecessary deaths. The Macedonian Chetas were numerically small in comparison to the Ottoman army, sometimes outnumbered by more than ten to one but the ferocity of the Macedonian fighters more than matched the numbers.

In terms of how to conduct campaigns, the Macedonian rebels had strict rules to adhere to. These were designed for their safety and for the preservation of their lives. When marching to a campaign, fighters were organized in columns, one by one or two by two marching at a distance of three to four steps apart. Each column was accompanied by intelligence and combat security units. Two or three fighters were assigned reconnaissance duty, usually frontal, flank and rear. Columns moved four to six kilometers per hour and hid from sight during rest periods. Unsecured zones were usually checked by couriers or reconnaissance

patrols and information on enemy movements was relayed to the column. During movements strict discipline was exercised making sure no one was talking or smoking and orders were given by whispering. Fighters also used camouflage especially when approaching guarded places or places where they could be seen by the public. In villages and towns insurgents were strategically positioned in houses from where they could make observations and relay information back to those outdoors.

When the Uprising first began the insurgents applied mostly offensive tactics by sudden and massive attacks, which in the short term proved to be very effective. But as the enemy forces built up the insurgents switched to more hit and run and eventually to defensive tactics. Offensive actions in populated areas had to be organized very carefully and with utmost secrecy, being very cautious not to harm the civilian population.

Uprising forces were divided into detachments, Chetas and cores. Reserve forces were organized whenever possible but often village Chetas were used for that purpose. Immediately before a campaign the insurgents made sure the place of attack was isolated, particularly of civilians, and the attack began when the insurgents came 100 to 200 steps away from the position being attacked. The signal for commencing the attack was usually a bomb explosion. The weakest point of defense was usually the first point of attack.

The Ilinden Uprising began with military campaigns and offensive actions and after the desired effect was achieved the insurgents switched to defensive actions mainly to protect the liberated areas and the population in them until such time when the Great Powers or the Bulgarian army intervened, which as we know never happened.

Defensive actions were organized at various strategic points in populated areas such as villages and towns. The Macedonians did not have the necessary numbers to defend entire regions so they concentrated their defenses around hills, passages, roads and other convenient places from where the enemy could be observed and its advance obstructed.

Defensive positions were also organized in camps and populated areas with a main defensive position in the nearby hills and a backup position in the first buildings on approach to the settlement. Guards were posted to watch enemy activities and report to their leaders. If the enemy was to approach the defended settlement, the backup guards would initiate a battle in order to delay enemy penetration until the leadership could organize a proper defense depending on the size and strength of the enemy. Unfortunately insurgents, whose families lay behind the flimsy first line of defense, could not stand to wait for reinforcements and would throw themselves at the enemy and fight to the death. The best example of such self-sacrifice was that of vojvodas Pitu Guli and Gjorgij Stojanov who not only turned down the Ottoman offer for surrender but disobeyed General Headquarters orders to retreat. On many occasions defensive

strategies were turned into suicidal attacks when reinforcements could not arrive on time or when there was potential for the enemy to penetrate the defenses and attack the civilian population.

The Ilinden Uprising received a massive response from the Macedonian people and from other ethnicities living in Macedonia and in the neighbouring countries. But the real driving force behind the Uprising was the rural and village population which not only sacrificed many lives but suffered the most. The Ilinden Uprising was yet another step in the eternal struggle for freedom for the Macedonian people.

According to information published in 1904, 26,500 insurgents from all over Macedonia participated in the Ilinden Uprising and fought 239 battles against an Ottoman army of 350,000. Losses to the Ottomans totaled 6,000 dead and 5,000 wounded. On the Macedonian side 1,000 insurgents were killed in direct confrontations with the Ottoman army, more than 200 villages were burned down, 4,700 women, children and old people killed, 3,000 women and young girls raped, 70,000 people left homeless and 30,000 people fled the country as war refugees. (Vanche Stojchev. "Military History of Macedonia". Military academy. Skopje, 2004. Page 368)

In terms of achieving its aims, the MRO fell short of delivering a military victory but its aims were not to defeat the Ottoman army but to last out and fight a long term terrorist-type war until the Great Powers or the Bulgarian army intervened as had been promised. But as we know the 1903 Uprising was very much more than an active military movement. It was also a passive demonstration in which the whole Macedonian population participated. As mentioned earlier the casualties from the battles were relatively small but it was the non-combatants who bore the full weight of the Ottoman wrath. The misery, loss and hardship endured with courage and unfaltering resolution were a sacrifice to the ideal of liberty rarely paralleled by any of Macedonia's neighbours.

Every town and village that joined the Uprising did so with the knowledge that it might be burned to the ground, pillaged and its population decimated to the last person. That every Macedonian voluntarily faced these dangers is proof of each Macedonian's desperation in which life had lost its value and peace its meaning. In many of the districts which joined the Uprising the people had little doubt about what was in store for them and many abandoned their villages the first day of the insurrection. Men joined their bands accompanied by a few women, who went to bake and as nurses to care for the wounded. The older men, women and children sought refuge in the mountains and took with them as much food as they could carry. In most of the insurgent defended zones the non-combatant population came together under the direction of the MRO and formed great camps in inaccessible places. Temporary shelters were constructed from the branches of trees, ovens dug in the earth and all the

normal functions of village life were reproduced as much as circumstances would permit.

Life of the refugee population, which soon numbered close to 60,000, grouped in some dozen camps among the mountains passed through three distinct phases. During the hot weather of the first two or three weeks of August they lived in relative comfort rejoicing in their brief freedom, welcoming as heroes the bands which came and went, hailing their successes. Then came the second phase of perhaps two weeks during which people in the camps still enjoyed relative security, had food to eat and did not suffer grievously from cold even on the mountainsides. But down below them their villages were burning. They no longer heard tales of glorious victories, but rumours of massacre and torture and the sounds of gunfire haunted them. Then came the third phase when the Ottomans tightened their grip around the mountains and hunted the refugees from forest to mountain and from peak to peak.

"Their only safety was to follow the now concentrated bands, and sometimes the battle raged about the lair where the women and children lay, the men fighting with all their manhood to defend some shallow trench, knowing that behind them cowered wife and child expecting massacre if their courage failed or their bullets missed the mark. Fleeing incessantly, they soon left behind them their stores of food and their herds of beasts. They were now shelterless under colder skies. There were villages which lived for days together on roots and salad grasses. The younger children died in great numbers, and men and women graduated for the epidemics which were to decimate those whom the Turks had spared. Often the big camps broke up into scattered groups of starving and terrified fugitives, who returned at last to make their submission among the ashes of their homes. It sometimes happened that these fell in with prowling soldiers or marauding Bashi Bazuks. Fifteen villagers, for example, from Bouno (near Resna), trudging, with their priest at their head, towards the town, were massacred without distinction of age or sex. The younger women fared the worst, for, when the troops could catch them, they were often carried off to the Turkish camps and there kept for some days until the last brute who desired them had had his will. Many were shot while they sheltered behind the insurgents during the latter skirmishes of September and October, and sometimes the same bullet wounded a mother and her baby. It was the impossibility of feeding and protecting the refugees which compelled the leaders to proclaim the insurrection at an end with the close of October; for the weather was still relatively mild (indeed, to us who came direct from England it seemed warm), though to be sure the mountains were already snow-clad, even on their lower-heights. The Turks had made war upon the women and children, and the men dared not prolong the unequal conflict with starvation.

By the first week of November the population of the revolted districts had once more settled down, part of it on the sites of the ruined villages, part of it among friendly neighbours who had saved their roofs. Long before November the towns were crowded with helpless masses of starving women, who begged their bread from door to door, clamoured about the portals of the Bishops' palaces, and slept in the abandoned and ruined houses which abound in every Macedonian town.

It was at this stage that we first saw the condition of the returning villagers with our own eyes. Those who had found a roof beneath which to shelter in some friendly village were in an enviable case. They had lost everything indeed — crops, home, cattle, and household gear. They lived on the charity of neighbours, who as often as not had themselves been robbed. They owned nothing but the tattered summer garments in which they had fled three months before. They had neither blankets nor winter cloaks. At least there was still a thatch between them and the rain. But the majority were camped among their ruins, busied during the last warm days of the autumn in clearing away the rubble from some corner of their homes and erecting some sort of 'lean-to' of wood and straw against a crumbling wall. Nothing but a photograph could convey an idea of the devastation. The villages were mere heaps of charred wood and blackened stone, buried beneath a red dust, which the rain converted into mud. A few walls still stood upright, the only hope for the winter. Where the churches had not been burned they were riddled with bullets, blackened with bivouac fires, pillaged, dishonoured, and defiled with the ordure of a camp. The wells were sometimes buried under the debris of fallen houses, and in one case at least poisoned with the carcass of beasts. The mills, like the houses, had been burned, their dams broken down, the machinery destroyed, and even their stones in some cases shivered into fragments. Of the horses and oxen which the peasants owned, even after the authorities had professed to recover the loot, not one in four remained. Of the sheep and other small beasts and the poultry I doubt if one in ten was left. Even the ploughs were burned or stolen. It was rarely, too, that a family recovered the clothing and utensils which it buried before its flight — the Bashi Bazuks had the knack of finding spoil. Of the harvest most villages saved sufficient for four or six weeks, while a few in the upland places where the ripe crops had been left ungarnered had enough for three months at most. But more harrowing than the material ruin was the moral desolation. Women would stand on a frosty day, their breasts bare, their feet naked upon the icy ground, oblivious of cold and hunger, sobbing out some tale of how they had seen the dear head of son or husband beaten in before their eyes by soldier or Bashi Bazuk. Not less to be pitied were the young men who had laid down their arms and returned to find neither wife nor home. I think of one whose case seemed to me a full world of commonplace miseries. He was a mason who worked in Constantinople to keep a family in a village

near Resna. He was driven out of the capital, with all his countrymen, early in the spring, and returned home with an empty money-belt. Three months of idleness followed, and, when the lot fell upon him, he went out with the village band. His wife was struck by a soldier, and died in premature child-birth. The father cared for the baby as best he could, but he could find no work, and he came to us begging that we would provide milk to save the life of the ailing child. The quick horror of painful deaths seemed less moving than this succession of everyday troubles, each due to some political catastrophe or some national hate. Nor was the misery at an end when the insurrection ceased. Hundreds of men were in gaol or in exile in some distant Armenian town, and, as the months went by, the ill-spelt missives, without date or signature, began to arrive, which told how one village leader after another had died of typhus on the way to Diarbekir. There were other troubles too, more secret and more horrible, which would come to our ears through some kindly doctor who used his skill, where the Turks would allow it, among the village folk. Two young girls, for example, in a single village, who had passed some days and nights of shame in a Turkish camp, at last gave way to madness as they realized that they must become mothers. And all the while amid the degradation and the suffering, the sickness, and the fear of famine, there weighed upon this defeated people the sense that all its sacrifice had been in vain. The Turks had triumphed; Europe was still heedless and unconcerned; Macedonia was still enslaved; and we, who were doling out our blankets and our flour among them, were only keeping them alive to endure fresh oppressions and further shame.

The first surprise was that this population rose at all, and rose en masse. The second surprise, to my thinking more startling than the first, was that all the sufferings of the autumn produced no reaction whatever against the Committee or its leaders. The peasantry remained loyal to the organization which plunged it in all this misery. Among the ashes of comfortable villages, or in the wards of the hospitals where the Relief Society had gathered the wounded women and children, there were moments when one felt tempted to curse the whole idea of insurrection, to think that no provocation could justify a population in facing such risks, to doubt whether any gain in freedom could warrant the mere physical pain involved in winning it. But these were an outsider's reflections. They seldom entered the heads of the Macedonians themselves. One heard no recriminations, no blame of the Committee, no regrets for an apparently wasted effort." ("Macedonia: its Races and their Future", H. N. Brailsford, London, 1906, pages 163 to 167)

Part 19 – The Smilevo Uprising

Just prior to the August 2nd, 1903 Ilinden Uprising the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (MRO) moved its headquarters to the village Smilevo near the city Bitola in the Bitola Revolutionary District. The move made Smilevo the Political and Military Center of Macedonia. Being the center of Macedonia however had its drawbacks. The constant movement of people, particularly during the Smilevo Congress, which was held in Smilevo between May 3rd and 7th, 1903 attracted the attention of the Ottoman authorities. Thankfully the Congress was over when an Ottoman battalion dispatched from Bitola arrived just outside of Smilevo on May 11th, 1903 and surrounded the vicinity. Unfortunately, as luck would have it, vojvoda Pareshkev Tsvetkov with 18 of his insurgents just happened to be there near the village Mogila at the time and fell into the Ottoman trap. A battle ensued and after 12 hours of fighting and numerous attempts to break the siege, the battle ended with most of the insurgents dead. Tsetkov was badly wounded and took his own life.

To avoid being discovered, the MRO leadership decided to move its headquarters to the Golem Gar locality. The Ottomans meanwhile, to prevent further developments, decided to garrison Smilevo and turn it into a military and political center leaving part of a battalion there to guard it. After assessing the situation however, the Bitola Revolutionary District leadership concluded that Smilevo, despite the new Ottoman developments, was still the best place from which to continue preparations for the Uprising such as organizing defenses and shelters, storing food and clothing, hiding ammunition and running a secret hospital. Smilevo was also an ideal place from where the insurgents could keep an eye on the surrounding region in case of an enemy encirclement. In view of all these factors, the District leaders decided to destroy the Ottoman garrison in Smilevo and proclaim Smilevo and the surrounding territory “a liberated zone”, but this would have to wait until the beginning of the Uprising.

Having no assistance from the outside world the MRO always relied on the local population to provide it with financial aid. In the Bitola District the MRO turned to the local population, particularly to the rich Vlach villages Trnovo, Magarevo and Gopesh for money and goods which it then used to purchase weapons from the Ottomans and Albanians who collaborated with the MRO.

Just prior to the Uprising, in its preparations for combat, Smilevo assembled and trained 158 insurgents and subdivided them into six Chetas. Then four days before the Ilinden Uprising a messenger arrived with instructions and details on how to commence the attacks. All people working outside their villages, particularly those working in Bitola, were instructed to return to their homes immediately. After the District flag had been sanctified on August 1st in the fields above the village everyone was

told to go home and act in their normal way in order to avoid suspicion. The next afternoon all the Chetas assembled in an area near Golem Gar and at dusk, together with the District Headquarters, came down to the villages and attacked the Ottoman garrisons. Being caught by surprise there was much panic and confusion on the part of the Ottomans as they ran for cover in nearby houses. Unfortunately the Ottomans recovered quickly and were out fighting in the streets again as the insurgents tried to contain them. In the fury of the battle the Ottoman soldiers were pushed back in the houses, concentrating in Gjorgija Churanov's house in the center of the village, the same house in which the Smilevo Congress was held.

When Damjan Gruev arrived at the scene he was disappointed not because the Ottomans had occupied the house in which the Smilevo Congress was held but because this particular house was a stronghold that could not easily be broken into. It was decided that the only way to dislodge the Ottomans from it was to burn it down. Fearing more Ottoman soldiers would soon arrive to join the battle the rebels, with permission from Churanov the owner of the house, torched the house in a hailstorm of bullets. And thus began the Uprising in violence and flames.

During the night the insurgents cut telephone lines and destroyed bridges on the Bitola to Resen road. One Cheta attacked the Bashibazuks in the village Dolnentsi while another kept the Ottoman soldiers pinned down leaving the rest to assist with the evacuation of the villagers.

On the afternoon of August 3rd, 1903 more than 2,000 people from the villages were evacuated and moved to a secluded place near Golem Gar where a shelter was previously prepared for them.

During the first day of skirmishes it was estimated that about 25 Ottoman soldiers were killed and two Macedonian rebels were badly wounded.

Just as the people were leaving the villages, a detachment of 400 Ottoman soldiers was spotted approaching the village Obednik, about four kilometers east of Smilevo. One of the Chetas, lead by Stojan Donski, was quickly dispatched and attacked the Ottomans just as they were about to enter the village. Unfortunately, probably to spare the Cheta from being destroyed, Headquarters ordered its withdrawal allowing the Ottomans to enter the village, release the blockaded soldiers and burn down 34 houses. Fearing the insurgents would return with a larger force, the Ottoman detachment left Smilevo and went on to attack and burned down the village Gopesh.

Encouraged by the August 3rd success, the next day the Ottomans dispatched another unit of soldiers and a group of Bashibazuks but this time they were not so lucky. As the Ottomans approached the village Obednik they were met by a more determined Cheta which inflicted a

catastrophic blow. It was estimated 45 soldiers died, one rebel was killed and one wounded.

Following this defeat the local Ottomans abstained from attacking Smilevo again until the arrival of new troops, leaving the people in the region to enjoy their short lived freedom which lasted from August 4th to August 27th.

Left free, the Macedonians in and around Smilevo continued to bolster their defenses building shelters, fortifications and digging trenches. Those from the burned villages came to stay in Smilevo and helped with the Uprising.

By the time the Ottomans had consolidated their forces, the number of insurgents in Smilevo was numbering over 600. After his retreat from Gjavato, Gjorgij Sugare and his insurgents also joined the Smilevo bands.

On August 14th, 1903 the Ottoman General Bahtiar Pasha with 1,200 soldiers was spotted on the move headed for Smilevo and was planning to invade the region from four sides; from the village Gjavato, Sninishta, Mramoritsa and from Slepche in Demir Hisar Region.

Bahtiar Pasha initiated the invasion with an artillery barrage but given where the artillery was launched from and the position of the insurgents in the mountains it was as good as useless. Failing that Bahtiar Pasha ordered his troops to attack in waves and by the afternoon the rebels began to crack. When the situation became critical the insurgents under the leadership of Sugarev, defending the north side of Smilevo, broke through the encirclement and escaped leaving the four village Chetas to defend the village Smilevo. In Beli Bregovi, meanwhile, 70 insurgents lead by Mishe Dimov-Kjoseto armed with improvised cold weapons (pitchforks, swords and knives) attacked the enemy with extraordinary vigor. Sixty-eight of the seventy rebels were killed in that battle. But as more enemy soldiers joined the push, the insurgents began to run out of ammunition and the Chetas began to pull back leaving Golem Gar unguarded.

The moment the Ottoman soldiers entered the Golem Gar camps they began to indiscriminately attack the civilian population. Seventy-three men were killed and many women and children were massacred and tortured.

After the Ottomans broke through the Golem Gar defenses they attacked the village Smilevo but encountered stiff resistance from the village Chetas. The approach to Obednik also held out but only at the expense of many of the insurgents who fought to the death. But as the Ottomans continued to press even harder the insurgents retreated into the villages and barricaded themselves in the stronger houses. The battles turned into street fights as the Ottoman soldiers pursued the insurgents inside the villages. Damjan Gruev gave orders to fight to the death, to the last rebel if necessary but vojvoda Pavle Krstev objected suggesting that the insurgents would be needed to fight other battles another day. Gruev accepted the suggestion and ordered the men to pull back into the

Kokjinovtsi-Gorna Maala forest. Thirty five insurgents were killed during that battle.

After pulling back the insurgents decided to breach the Ottoman encirclement but were not successful on the first try. While attempting to puncture a hole at Grobot several insurgents were killed but on the second attempt at Jovarets they made it through. Sugarev's Cheta distinguished itself during this fire fight by concentrating its attack and breaking through the blockade.

No longer having a need to blockade the Smilevo Region, the Ottomans withdrew their encirclement on August 30th but maintained some presence in the area until September 3rd at which time they moved most of their troops to Demir Hisar, leaving only 200 soldiers in the village Gopesh to guard the vicinity.

After breaking through the encirclement the Macedonian insurgents retreated to Bigla Mountain where they regrouped and lead an attack on the Ottomans at Sloeshtitsa on September 30th. After that 200 insurgents and their leaders returned to Smilevo but they were attacked by the Ottoman force stationed in Gopesh driving them back into seclusion at the Boishka Mountain retreat. Another vicious battle broke out on October 3rd, 1903 near the village Tsapari where 45 more insurgents were killed. After that the MRO leadership decided it was time to disband and ordered the insurgents to hide their arms and ammunition, thus marking the end of the Smilevo Uprising.

Part 20 – The Krushevo Uprising

The Krushovo Revolutionary District covered an area stretching from the Blato River in the east, the Tsrna River and Prilep in the south, the Velika River in the north and Demir Hisar Region in the west. With the town of Krushevo as its center, the Krushevo Region supported about 10,000 inhabitants of whom 5,000 were Macedonians, 4,000 Vlachs, 400 Christian Albanians and others. In comparison to other towns, Krushevo was more developed and its people more educated and highly motivated working in the fields of trade, handicrafts and cattle breeding.

Like other revolutionary Districts, Krushevo, right after the Smilevo Congress, began preparations for the Uprising by electing leaders and enlisting, training and arming insurgents. Among the six elected representatives, Nikola Karev was elected commander of the insurgency force which at the time numbered about 1,200.

Weapons for the forces were supplied by various channels from Greece, Albania, Tetovo, Kichevo and other places. Six cherry-wood cannons were especially built for the defense of Krushevo and their operators received special instructions on how to deploy them. A ten day training course was provided to all insurgents, which included various tactical exercises and instructions on how to use weapons. Special ovens and storage facilities were also constructed in several secluded places to accommodate cooking for a large number of people and for storing food, clothing, ammunition and other materials.

Upon Krushevo Region's decision to participate in the Uprising a survey of enemy forces was undertaken and it was discovered that the town of Krushevo was garrisoned by only 60 soldiers and no more than 100 Ottoman civilians were armed. It was also discovered that it would take the Ottomans from 8 to 10 hours to bring reinforcements.

In view of the above facts it was decided to begin the Uprising with an attack and speedy destruction of the Krushevo garrison before the Ottoman reinforcements had enough time to arrive.

It was also decided that after its liberation the Krushevo Region would be defended by positioning the Cheti at various strategic locations. The insurgent force would be divided into eight units; six main and two support. Andrej Dimov's unit would be assigned to take over the prison, telegraph, post office and the home of the state treasurer and the gendarmerie. Ivan Alabakov's unit would be assigned to take over the barracks where the Ottoman soldiers were stationed. Pitu Guli's unit, which would be accompanied by members of the Macedonian village police, would be assigned to protect Krushevo on the south from the direction of the villages Ostriltsi, Birino and Trsenik and provide support to other units when needed. Being the largest, consisting of 300 insurgents, this unit would also have a flag bearer. Gjorgij Dimov was tasked with that

duty. Marko Hristov-Mirche's unit would be assigned to protect Krushevo from the north-east side. Tashko Karev's unit would be assigned to protect the Pavlena Cheshma Pass and Kosta Hristov's unit would be assigned to take position at the Muratova Cheshma Pass. Gjurchin Naumov and Gjorgij Stojanov's units would be assigned to occupy positions at Deni Kamen between Sliva and Bushova Cheshma to the north-west and Pusta Reka.

The Krushevo Uprising Headquarters held a meeting in Birinska Mountain on July 30th, 1903 and finalized its plan for the attack on Krushevo. It also briefed the unit leaders on their assignments. Details of the attacks were withheld until the signal to commence the Uprising was received.

While the military leaders were preparing their strategies, the government in Krushevo, headed by Nikola Karev, was busy preparing the Krushevo Manifesto which was to be distributed to all Ottoman villages just after the Uprising began. The idea of the Manifesto was to provide the people with a real picture of what the Uprising was all about and to assure the Muslims that the Uprising was not against them but against the oppressive Ottoman government. In part the Manifesto said that the Uprising was not aimed against the Muslims but rather against the tyranny and slavery of the oppressive Ottoman government which violated the honour of all people including that of the poor Muslims. The Manifesto also called on all people to rise up against the Ottoman government, join the rebellion and fight for liberty and justice for all. Surprisingly the Manifesto did exactly what it was designed to do and caught the attention of many Ottomans including the attention of Lieutenant Suleyman Ali, the commander of the Krushevo garrison who escaped the rebel attack. In a letter addressed to the Krushevo Republic, Sulayman Ali congratulated the rebels for their accomplishments and on behalf of his people apologized for treating the revolutionaries like bandits. He also wished the rebels success and gave them his blessings. At the end he asked them to destroy the communiqué.

It was believed, because of the Manifesto, less Bashibazuks joined the Ottomans in attacking and ravaging the villages which was of great help to the insurgents.

Attacks against Ottoman defenses took place as planned and the insurgent forces were deployed as expected and in a timely fashion. The attack on Krushevo itself began at midnight with Vangel Topuzov firing the first shot. The gendarmerie was stormed and everyone in it surrendered. The post office also fell without any resistance. The tax inspectors refused to surrender and were killed in a firefight. By the morning of August 3rd, 1903 all of Krushevo business district was in rebel hands.

The Ottoman soldiers however were not as easy to put down as first anticipated and had reached a stalemate with Alabakov's insurgents. It took the additional forces of Pitu Guli's reserve detachment to finish the job. Incendiary bombs were eventually used to dislodge the Ottomans. Fourteen hours later 9 soldiers were captured and 17 along with their commander Sulayman Ali broke through the rebel breach and escaped. Eight insurgents were killed and 16 were wounded in this battle. The attack was unexpected and a complete surprise to the Ottomans giving them no advanced warning.

Upon discovering the rebel attack on Krushevo, the Ottomans quickly assembled and dispatched 300 soldiers consisting in part of the 3rd regiment from Prilep and some Albanian Bashibazuks. Upon their arrival in the Spili and Kale vicinity the Ottomans were intercepted by Marko Hristov-Mirche's Cheta and a firefight broke out forcing the Ottomans to quickly retreat. The Ottomans tried again the next day and the day after to breach Mirche's defenses but without success. After that the situation in Krushevo remained calm until August 11th, 1903 when a large Ottoman force arrived.

On August 4th, 1903 a Bashibazuk detachment was spotted near Deni Kamen advancing towards Drenovo. Gjurchin Naumov's Cheta was quickly dispatched and managed to push the Bashibazuks back into a hasty retreat. Twenty Bashibazuks were killed in that battle.

Just as the Ottoman forces were being put down on August 4th, 1903 Nikola Karev, along with other MRO political leaders, arrived in Krushevo. Immediately upon his arrival he proposed the establishment of a six member provisional government. After being welcomed as a hero and liberator, Nikola Karev requested the presence of 60 of the most prominent residents of Krushevo. He specifically asked for prominent people from all three ethnicities, Macedonian, Vlach and Albanian which lived there. From these people six were selected to run the provisional government. They were Dinu Vangel appointed as President and head of the court, Gijorgij Chache appointed Secretary and requisitions manager, Teohar Neshok appointed Treasurer, Hristo Kjurchiev appointed Mayor and Chief of Police, Dimitar Sekulov appointed Manager of food supplies and Dr. Nikola Baljo appointed Manager of Health Care. A Governing Council was then elected and Nikola Karev was appointed President. As President, Nikola Karev declared the Krushevo Region a Republic, the first republic in the Balkans run by Macedonians, Vlachs and Albanians.

First order of business for the newly elected government was to make sure all people, including the Muslims, were protected and treated as equals.

Several houses and stores were turned into workshops and storage depots to store, manufacture and repair weapons, shoes and clothing in aid of the Uprising. Extraordinary measures were also taken to requisition

food supplies, weapons and ammunition. Most of the population voluntarily donated such items as pots, pans, dishes and other utensils to be melted down to make bullets.

Headquarters in the meantime worked hard to devise defense plans in order to defend the newly established Macedonian Republic from an Ottoman invasion and looked for the most efficient ways it could deploy its limited defenses. One of the actions taken to bolster the defenses was the construction of a well stocked trench system which would protect the insurgents from enemy fire as well as provision them with supplies for prolonged battles.

It did not take long however for the Ottomans to regroup and start an all out offensive. Between August 5th and 12th, 1903 a sizable force of 18,000 Ottoman soldiers and Bashibazuks was quickly assembled. The force consisted of 40 infantry battalions, several cavalry units, 4 artillery batteries and 24 cannons all concentrated in the Bitola, Prilep and Kichevo Regions.

While the insurgents were busy bolstering their defenses three Ottoman columns were dispatched to attack the regions. The main column commanded by Bahtiar Pasha consisting of 10,000 soldiers, fully equipped with artillery, advanced towards Krushevo from the east, from the Prilep and Krivogashtani direction. The second column consisting of 3,000 Ottoman soldiers also supported by artillery advanced from the south. The third column consisting of about 5,000 soldiers equipped with cavalry and mountain artillery advanced from the north-west.

The Ottomans had good reason to act fast and suppress this Uprising as soon as possible because the Ottoman government was seen as somewhat of a villain by the European public. The establishment of the Krushevo Republic could have had unforeseeable political consequences for the Ottoman Empire if not quickly checked. Besides, Krushevo was a rich region with a healthy economy that would support a high concentration of insurgents and a sustainable and prolonged uprising if allowed to deeply trench itself.

On August 12, 1903 Bahtiar Pasha ordered his troops to encircle Krushevo. Following that he dispatched an ultimatum to the Uprising Headquarters demanding its surrender. The answer from Headquarters however was a flat “no”. “We did not rise up so that we can surrender but rather we took up arms to fight for our liberty and for Macedonia” was the Headquarters’ response. Upon receiving his reply, Bahtiar Pasha ordered his troops to start firing.

Children and the elderly were quickly evacuated in the nearby forests and the rest took up their positions to defend Krushevo. Gjurchin Naumov’s Cheta took up position to defend the heights above the Bitola-Prilep road. Ivan Alabakov’s Cheta took up the defense of Bushova Cheshma, Deni Kamen and the road to Kichevo. Gjiorgij Stojanov’s Cheta

was assigned to protect the Sliva Pass and Tashko Karev's Cheta was sent to defend the road to the village Kochishte at Kojov Trn. Todor Hristov and his group took up defense in the rocky peak at Mechkin Kamen. By orders of Pitu Guli, inspector of the insurgent units, all insurgents without weapons were sent home. The Uprising Headquarters was moved to Gumenje which gave the leadership a good view of the entire Prilep Field.

Upon discovering the size of the Ottoman force surrounding Krushevo, the Council of vojvodas met and recommended to the Provisional Government to surrender the town of Krushevo to spare it from destruction. The plan was to surrender Krushevo and retreat, hoping the Ottomans would pursue. Then while retreating, the insurgents would lead the Ottomans into a trap at the River Zhaba's narrow pass west of Krushevo. Unfortunately that plan was quickly abandoned when it was discovered that the Ottomans had already taken the pass. Failing that, the Council decided to save its forces by leaving the region altogether. Unfortunately too many insurgents, not wanting to leave their families behind unprotected, disobeyed the orders and decided to fight to the death. Among those who fought suicidal battles was Pitu Guli and his Cheta who declared "if there is no liberty then there is death".

At 10:00 AM on August 13th, 1903 Bahtiar Pasha ordered his artillery to begin firing. He then ordered his troops to tighten the encirclement around Krushevo. While Krushevo was burning, Headquarters again ordered all insurgents to retreat and Pitu Guli along with 34 of his men again disobeyed and fought until their ammunition ran out saving the last bullets for themselves. Pitu Guli and his men displayed great courage that must never be forgotten.

While most defenses fell apart, Gjiorgij Stojanov's Cheta managed to safeguard the Sliva Pass allowing many civilians and insurgents to be evacuated. Ivan Alabakov's Cheta took with it is as many people as possible and also retreated to the hills via the Sliva Pass. Stojanov, with 40 of his fighters however, remained active at the pass and fought to the death. His and his men's sacrifice saved thousands of people from being trapped by the Ottomans.

By the end of the day on August 13th, 1903 Krushevo was on fire and pillaged by the Bashibazuks who took no pity and slaughtered, murdered, tortured and raped the civilian population. Krushevo and the villages Seltse, Rastoitsa and Zhurche suffered the most with 139 men killed, 165 women raped, 217 houses burned, 210 stores burned to the ground and 1,170 people left homeless. (Vanche Stojchev. "Military History of Macedonia". Military academy. Skopje, 2004. Page 322)

Part 21 - The Kichevo, Karbunitsa, Dushegubitsa and Gjavato Uprisings

The Kichevo Uprising encompassed the Kichevo and Poreche Regions and was lead by vojvodas Luka Dzherov, Janaki Janev and Arso Mitskov representing Kichevo Region and Gjorgij Peshkov, Vancho Srbakov, Janaki Petrov and Tsvetan from Svetoratse representing Poreche Region. The Kichevo Region was subdivided into sub-regions Gorna Kopachka, Dolna Kopachka and Dolna Reka. The Poreche Region was sub-divided into Rabetin Kol and Poreche.

Unlike most Regions, the Kichevo-Poreche Regions, populated almost entirely by Christians, the vast majority being Macedonian, took part in the Uprising in vast numbers making them proportionally one of the strongest supporters of the Uprisings in Macedonia. Unfortunately the people in these Regions were faced with obstacles; they were poorly armed and were bordering a Region predominantly populated by Albanians and other Muslims.

Being faced with a difficult situation the Kichevo-Poreche Region leadership was hesitant to start the Uprising under these conditions prompting Damjan Grev and the General Headquarters to intervene.

On May 28th, 1903 Gruev dispatched a Cheta of 40 insurgents lead by vojvoda Maksim Nenov to Dolna Reka to raise the peoples' moral and make sure the Uprising began on time. Unfortunately the Cheta was spotted by the Ottomans and attacked by the Bashi Bazuks. Unprepared, the Cheta was defeated and suffered severe losses. With Gruev's plan foiled, General Headquarters decided to take a different approach. Instead of maintaining the Kichevo Revolutionary Center as a military base it decided to move its mountain headquarters to Dolna Reka and turn it into a logistics and strategic base for reserves which could be employed at other sub-regions. The Kichevo leadership was then asked to lobby the prominent Debar citizens to influence the Albanian and other Muslim populations to be more sympathetic to the rebel cause.

Their actions seemed to work and as more money was raised more rifles and ammunition were purchased. Just before the Uprising started 450 rifles were purchased and 23 villages participated each with their own Cheta.

In spite of the problems experienced in Dolna Reka, the four Chetas formed there were dispatched to other regions. Two were dispatched to participate in the Galichnik Uprising, one in the Lazaropole and the fourth in Tresonche. During the Uprising most Chetas were dispatched to assist with the fighting in Gorna Kopachka since there was little activity in the Kichevo and Poreche Regions.

The number of fighters mobilized in these two regions just before the Uprising numbered over 1,000 but they were still outnumbered by the

Ottoman army by three to one not to mention the additional numerous Bashi Bazuk units that roamed these regions.

The orders to commence the Uprising, dispatched from the General Headquarters, arrived in the Kichevo Uprising District on July 26th, 1903 prompting the district leadership to convene on July 31st in the Prechista Monastery and prepare its plan of action.

Upon completion of the plan of action, on August 1st, 1903, the village vojvodas were briefed and given orders to mobilize the forces on August 2nd. Six hundred insurgents arrived the night of August 2nd and were divided into three detachments. About an hour after midnight the attacks commenced. One detachment attacked a camp near Jurija while another attacked the Kale barracks. The attacks were designed to shock the enemy and cause it as many casualties as possible in the shortest possible time.

While these attacks were taking place, six smaller village Chetas in the Gorna Kopachka Sub-region combined forces to form a large, 120 insurgent Cheta which in turn encircled and attacked the 150 soldier strong Ottoman garrison at Izvor. This particular garrison, being of some importance, was cause for both sides to escalate the fighting. As a result, the Ottomans dispatched another 150 soldiers to the scene prompting the Macedonians to match it with 200 of their own. A vicious fight ensued resulting in the breach of the Macedonian blockade. As soon as the garrison was freed the Ottomans retreated to Kichevo. Fifty Ottoman soldiers and eight Macedonian insurgents were left dead.

The next day (August 3rd, 1903) the Ottomans came back with 200 soldiers and 150 Bashi Bazuks intending to attack and blockaded the village Vraneshtitsa. The Macedonians sent 200 insurgents lead by Arso Mitskov to the rescue. The Macedonians divided their forces into two groups intending to attack the enemy from two sides. The first group managed to intercept the Ottomans at the village Staroets before they had a chance to do any damage. The second group attacked the Ottomans near Vraneshtitsa resulting in an Ottoman defeat. After a short engagement the Ottomans near Staroets were also defeated. The Ottomans retreated to Kichevo while the Bashi Bazuks were pursed by the insurgents with several engagements taking place. The Bashi Bazuks disbanded after their leader Alija was killed and the pursuit ended.

On the morning of August 4th, 1903 a regular Ottoman battalion numbering 800 soldiers, along with a number of local Bashi Bazuk units, viciously and repeatedly attacked the village Karbunitsa. Three of the attacks were repelled by the 200 insurgents lead by Arso Mitskov defending the village but the defense line was breached during the fourth attack and by noon the village had fallen into enemy hands.

In their attempt to withdraw from the battle Arso and his insurgents lead the enemy in pursuit to a place near Gjugjevitsa where an ambush was prepared by 350 insurgents from Gorna and Dolna Kopachka. Then just as

the Ottomans received more reinforcements from the Kichevo garrison and from the Bashi Bazuks, 150 more insurgents, lead by Jordan Piperkata and Dimitar Dechev, arrived and joined the battle.

Unprepared for a long battle the insurgents soon ran out of ammunition and the firefight turned into a vicious hand to hand massacre as the Macedonian insurgents threw themselves at the enemy, armed with only daggers and knives. But as luck would have it, one of the Macedonian insurgents killed the enemy commander responsible for directing the battle and during the confusion many of the insurgents broke through the enemy lines and managed to escape. About 700 Macedonian insurgents participated in this 12 hour battle leaving behind 30 dead and many wounded. On the Ottoman side more than 1,500 soldiers and Bashi Bazuks participated in the battle with 120 dead and many wounded. When the battle was over the Ottomans declared it a defeat and the army retreated to Kichevo while the Bashi Bazuks fled to the forest in hiding.

After failing to win in Kichevo, the Ottomans turned their attention to Poreche Region. On August 8th, 1903 2,500 Ottoman soldiers and about 1,000 Bashi Bazuks made their way into Rabetin Kol where they were met by 100 Macedonian insurgents lead by Vancho Serbakov. Just as the insurgents approached the enemy near Poduvach in Cholaitsa Mountain, the Ottomans opened fire with their artillery forcing the insurgents to retreat back into the hills. A vicious battle ensued but without the use of its artillery the enemy was unable to break the barrier and its advance was halted. When the battle was over the Ottomans retreated leaving behind 80 dead. The Insurgents lost 12 fighters.

Frustrated, during its retreat the Ottoman army burned down the villages Orlantsi and Rabetino leaving behind 20 women, children and old men dead. After their retreat, the Ottomans stayed away from this region for at least a month. During this time the Macedonian civilian population prepared special camps in secluded areas where they remained for the duration of the Uprising. While living in the safety of the camps, the civilians served as the main providers of food, clothing, weapons and medical supplies for the local insurgents who were fighting in the Uprising.

The village Dushegubitsa was attacked by Ottoman soldiers on August 29th, 2003 as part of an Ottoman offensive against the Kichevo Uprising. A detachment of 600 Ottoman soldiers was dispatched from Debar to Dolna Reka to clean up the insurgency there when it was met by the Dushegubitsa village Cheta. A battle ensued and lasted about four hours before insurgent reinforcements arrived and pushed the Ottomans back. This was indeed a great battle where a tiny village Cheta consisting of inexperienced men and women pitted against an entire Ottoman detachment of battle hardened soldiers. But thanks to the timely arrival of

Luka Dzherov's district Cheta and the Laftentsi village Cheta, a disaster was avoided.

After their defeat the Ottomans quickly retreated leaving behind 30 dead. The insurgents experienced no deaths and only a few wounded. The next day the Ottomans came back and tried to invade the region again but this time the insurgents were prepared with an ambush at Bistra Mountain. Unfortunately due to an accidental rifle shot their plans were revealed and the Ottomans turned back before falling into the trap.

A few days later, on September 2nd, 1903, the Ottoman army returned. This time it brought 2 battalions from Debar numbering 2,000 soldiers. In its third attempt to enter the region the Ottomans divided their forces into two groups. One group was to attack and capture Dushegubitsa while the second was to simultaneously attack and capture Lafchani. Outnumbered and suffering from exhaustion, the Dushegubitsa village Chetas decided to retreat and head for the village Klenoets. The Lafchani village Cheta, consisting of 75 insurgents, decided to stay on and fight. Unable to resist the numerically superior Ottoman army the Lafchani insurgents also decided to abandon their positions and retreated to Podvis. The second Ottoman group then burned down the village Lafchani and retreated to Kichevo and Debar. The first Ottoman group meanwhile, invaded Dushegubitsa and burned the village down and then headed towards Kleonets in pursuit of the insurgents. Several battles ensued before the Ottomans retreated.

A stronger Ottoman counter-offensive in the Kichevo and Poreche Regions did not begin until September 8th, 1903 when 10 Ottoman battalions arrived with 7,000 soldiers and 4 mountain cannons. The army positioned itself to attack the region from four different sides. On the opposing side, leading the defense were vojvodas Mihail Josifov, Pesho Radev and Kocho Kurshumot with 200 insurgents. The fight lasted two days before the Ottomans broke through the Kichevo defenses and burned down the refugee camps along with the villages Pateets, Svetorache, Kozichino and Rabetin. After that the Ottomans took measures to suppress the Uprising in Poreche by sending an attack force of 1,500 soldiers accompanied by a large number of Bashi Bazuks which attacked and robbed the villages Tsreshovo, Belitsa and Vir.

By September 17th, 1903 most Uprisings in the neighbouring districts had been squelched and more Ottoman forces were becoming available to carry out new offensives in the still liberated regions. By then Ottoman forces were arriving from Kichevo, Debar, Ohrid and Demir Hisar and they were all headed for Gorna and Dolna Kopachka.

Sensing the enormity of the force arriving in the region, General Headquarters ordered the insurgents to back off and evacuate themselves prompting the Ottomans to go on a three day wild goose chase.

Unable to finish the job, the Ottomans left disappointed but came back to Dolna and Gorna Kopachka on October 1st, 1903 and robbed and burned down several villages.

By October 13th the Uprising in these regions had been squelched and with the exception of some garrisons, most of the Ottoman army returned to its bases in Kichevo and Debar.

All in all when it was all over, it was estimated that the Ottomans lost 600 soldiers. On the Macedonian side, 100 insurgents were killed, 12 villages were burned down, 550 houses were destroyed and 204 civilians killed. (Vanche Stojchev. "Military History of Macedonia". Military academy. Skopje, 2004. Page 327)

The Village Gjavato was of no extraordinary importance except that it was situated in the Bitola-Smilevo vicinity near the crossroads leading to Bitola, Prespa, Resen and Ohrid. Being in the way of the Ottoman communication and transportation corridor, Gjavato was attacked many times during the Ilinden Uprising. The first attack took place on August 3rd, 1903. Ottoman forces heading for the Smilevo Region attacked the village in an attempt to dislodge the insurgents so that they would not interfere with their Smilevo campaign. The village was defended by 150 insurgents lead by Gjorgij Sugarev and assisted by vojvodas Stefanov and Tale. Realizing that they were no match for Bahtier Pasha's several thousand finest Ottoman soldiers, the insurgents, after some short resistance, yielded and allowed the enemy to pass.

The second wave of attacks manifested themselves on August 12th, 1903 when the Ottomans began their counter-offensive in the region. This time the village was first attacked by a large group of Bashi Bazuks from the villages Kazhani and Dolentsi. Fortunately the Chetas lead by Boris Sarafov and Gijorgij Monchev happened to be in the vicinity and together with Sugarev's Cheta the insurgents were able to repel the attack. Unable to break the impasse the Ottomans sent in the artillery which forced the insurgents and much of the civilian population to fly to the forest.

Two days later, just as the people had returned to their homes, the attack, as part of the counter-offensive to suppress the Uprising in the Smilevo Region, was renewed in Gjavato resulting in a massive fight. In an attempt to slow down the enemy advance Sugarev ordered his most experienced fighters to take a frontal position near Prevarets as a first line of defense for Gjavato. A battle ensued and the front line insurgents resisted as long as possible before retreating into the village and taking positions in the sturdiest houses. As the Ottomans advanced on the village the insurgents managed to repel the first wave of attacks. Being unable to encircle the entire village, due to lack of sufficient forces, the Ottomans concentrated their second wave of attacks on two fronts, east and west. Still unable to break the impasse, the Ottomans ordered re-enforcements from Bitola. During the lull, Sugarev evacuated the civilians and ordered

his insurgents to continue to fight. Unfortunately the re-enforcements arrived equipped with cannons and by dusk the enemy had turned the village into dust. Being familiar with the terrain however, Sugarev and his insurgents had no problem slipping through the Ottoman encirclement in the dark of night and escaping to Bigla Mountain.

Part 22 - The Demit Hisar, Prilep and Margara Uprisings

The Demir Hisar Revolutionary District encompassed the region covered by Ilinka Mountain, Velmeshka Mountain, Sprostranska Mountain, Baba Mountain, Ljuben Mountain and part of the Krushevo valley. The population in this district consisted of about 12,800 people, predominantly Macedonian with only a few Albanian villages. It was estimated that about 10% of the population actively participated in the Uprising.

Taking part in the Uprising in top leadership roles as vojvodas in this District included were Jodan Silijanov – Piperkata from the village Koritsa, Dimitar Dechev, Priest Kuzman from Babino and Hristo Pashov.

Preparations for the Uprising in this District began immediately after the Smilevo Congress and by the time the Uprising began the people were ready to fight. While the larger Chetas, including that of Jordan Piperkata, were tasked with attacking the Ottoman garrisons during the Uprising, the smaller Chetas were dispatched to incapacitate roads, cut telegraph wires and destroy bridges and other facilities between Kichevo and Bitola. Jordan Piperkata and his 150 insurgents took on and destroyed the Ottoman strongholds in Ukjumat, Murdirluk and Pribiltsi. After burning down the Ottoman strongholds and liberating the local villages, Jordan Piperkata and his fighters left for Kichevo Region.

After the liberation of Krushevo and the establishment of the Krushevo Republic, Macedonian authority was extended to Kichevo and parts of Demir Hisar Region. Jordan Piperkata was tasked with providing security for the region but as soon as Bahtiar Pasha advanced towards Kichevo Jordan Piperkata's insurgents were instructed to open fire. However, being vastly outnumbered, Piperkata wisely withdrew to save his forces and retreated to the hills. Being unopposed the Ottomans entered Tser, killed all its inhabitants, including women and children and burned down 200 houses. The next day Piperkata and his insurgents returned to investigate and help those in need but the Ottomans were waiting for them and they fell into an ambush. The Ottomans quickly encircled the area and began to tighten the ring. Fortunately reinforcements from Svinishta arrived just in time and succeeded in breaching the encirclement allowing Piperkata's Cheta to escape to Sprostani. When the Cheta arrived at its destination the villagers poured in to jubilantly greet it but when they found out Jordan Piperkata was not among his insurgents the crowds went silent. Jordan Piperkata was killed in battle during the escape.

Upon finding this out, some of the villagers traveled to the scene of the battle, retrieved the bodies of their fallen heroes and returned them to the village Velmentsi where they gave them a proper burial. Many attended the funerals and the entire district was in mourning for days, mourning their favourite vojvoda who for years had defended them from the

Ottomans. But even the dead were not allowed to rest as the funeral was interrupted by the arrival of a large Ottoman force. They disrupted the insurgents from saying their final words to their leader and forced them to take refuge in Sprstranska Mountain where they remained for a while.

On August 15th, 1903, as part of the Ottoman general offensive, a column of 2,000 Ottoman soldiers were spotted approaching Strugovska Mountain on its way to Slepche. The local Cheta did its best to intercept the Ottomans but was quickly put down by the numerically superior Ottoman force which then burned down the village Slepche, including its old monastery.

Following the first column of Ottoman soldiers, another column of 1,000 was spotted coming from Gjatovo. So as not to provoke a firefight, the local Chetas, including that of Boris Sarafov, withdrew their force and allowed the Ottomans to enter the village Babino unobstructed, in hopes that it would not be harmed. Unfortunately the Ottomans did not feel sympathetic that day and robbed the village and burned it down anyway.

While the people tried to recuperate from the shock a third column of 1,000 Ottoman soldiers was spotted marching on the Bitola-Kichevo road. Unprovoked they attacked and burned down several villages including Sopotnitsa and Rakinitsa.

A fourth column of another 1,000 Ottoman soldiers was spotted marching on the Kichevo to Belitsa road and as the days passed they pillaged and burned villages indiscriminately. The columns eventually came together on August 21, 1903 at the village Slp. Convinced that they had destroyed the Uprising the soldiers retreated to Kichevo and Bitola from whence they came.

Unbeknownst to the Ottomans most Chetas were not completely destroyed and as the insurgents fled to the Demir Hisar mountainside to hide they formed a sizable force, numbering over one thousand. Unfortunately as the number of insurgents increased so did the chances of them being discovered and as they waited for further orders from the General Headquarters an Ottoman force numbering over 10,000 infantry soldiers and Bashi Bazuks, lead by Bahtiar Pasha, was dispatched in pursuit. Equipped with 14 mountain cannons and 4 cavalry squadrons the Ottoman force was divided into 4 columns and on September 17th, 1903 began its second offensive against the Macedonian insurgents.

As all columns headed for the Demir Hisar mountainside, the first column started out from Smilevo and moved towards Slepche, the second column left from Strugovska Mountain and headed towards Laskovo, Tserovo, and Virono, the third column started out from Resen and headed towards Tsrn Vrv and the fourth column began its campaign in Ohrid Region and moved towards Gol Vrv and Plake.

As this massive Ottoman force began to tighten its noose on the Bitola Revolutionary District, General Headquarters quickly scrambled to

assemble its forces and take the defensive. A force was 300 insurgents was ordered to defend the General Headquarters, which at that time was located on Mount Bigla, right in the middle of the Ottoman encirclement. Sugarev's Cheta, consisting of about 250 insurgents, was dispatched to the southern side of Bigla Mountain to head off the Ottoman advance. A third Cheta consisting of local Demir Hisar insurgents was positioned to defend Vorovsko and Sloeshtitsa. The Chetas stayed in constant contact with each other and with General Headquarters through couriers who reported the enemy's activities and movements. Just as the 19 kilometer Ottoman encirclement, stretching from the village Boishta to the village Sloeshtitsa began to close in, command of all the 970 or so insurgent forces was taken over by the District leadership and orders were given to open fire on the enemy.

Outnumbered 12 to 1, the insurgents initiated the attack and a severe battle broke out all throughout Bigla Mountain, lasting several hours. Unable to stand the pounding of the enemy artillery the insurgents in the lower half of the mountain left their positions and retreated into the forest, regrouping at the rear of the General headquarters.

Resistance free, one of the columns from the Ottoman force continued to advance up the mountain until it was again attacked by insurgents at the Sloeshtitsa Slope. The loud roar and sudden appearance of the insurgents stopped the Ottoman advance forcing the soldiers to take defensive positions. A firefight broke out and a stalemate was quickly reached. To break the stalemate the Ottomans brought their artillery and again began to pound the insurgents. Unable to withstand the pressure the insurgents abandoned their positions and retreated back into the woods splitting their forces into several columns. One column of about 200 insurgents went directly to Tserovo Mountain and took a defensive position in the rocky terrain. The other columns that had retreated to Virovo and Boishka Mountains later joined the Tserovo force just as the Ottomans began to concentrate their attacks. A stalemate was reached before the day was over, which would have prompted the Ottomans to order artillery attacks the next day. Instead of waiting it out, the insurgents took the offensive and attacked the Ottomans in the dark of night punching a hole in their defenses.

After breaching the Ottoman encirclement the insurgents organized themselves into three groups and escaped. One group consisting of the General Headquarters escaped to Boishta and Smilevo, another group escaped to Tserovo Mountain and the third escaped to Virovo.

During the battle, which lasted all day and through the evening, 78 Ottomans soldiers and 17 Macedonian insurgents were killed and 11 Macedonian insurgents were wounded. When it was over the Ottomans returned to their garrisons and the insurgents returned to Demir Hisar to regroup. Unfortunately with the Uprising in decline the insurgent force in

Demic Hisar was disbanded and by the end of 1903 everyone was sent home.

The Prilep Region, at the start of the 1903 Uprising, supported 38,000 residents of whom 35,000 were Macedonians and the rest were Ottomans, Albanians, Vlachs and Roma. Of the 38,000, 17,000 lived in the city of Prilep.

During the preparations for the Uprising the Prilep District was divided into three Regions and further subdivided into thirteen centers each equipped with a small Cheta of 10 to 15 insurgents. Since the region was not prepared for the Uprising, the first priority of the Chetas was to help mobilize the villagers, recruit new insurgents, acquire medical supplies, form intelligence networks, carry out training and procure weapons, food, clothing and other supplies.

As a result of their activities, the Chetas managed to recruit 600 more insurgents but unfortunately there were only 500 rifles in reserve and not sufficient ammunition to properly arm all the men. The Bitola Revolutionary District did help out but not sufficiently to develop a force strong enough to tackle the Headquarters of the Ottoman 7th Cavalry brigade located in Prilep, consisting of four squadrons, a battalion of reservists and four other battalions numbering 4,500 Ottoman soldiers and officers in total.

Since a direct attack on the Prilep Ottoman strongholds was out of the question, the regional and village Chetas were ordered to initiate the Uprising using diversionary actions which included destroying bridges, cutting telegraph wires, attacking the Bey's estates, etc.

During their operations the Chetas not only avoided direct confrontation with the Ottoman army but between August 2nd and 8th carried out missions in Skochivir, Grbalovo, Brod, Ribartsi, Novatsi and other villages. They managed to damage the roads to Bitola, Krushevo and Veles and to destroy the railway station in Gradsko. After all these successes the leadership decided to take its chances and attack the 300 soldier strong Ottoman garrisons in Vitolishte. For that purpose smaller but well armed and trained Chetas were ordered to gather together in the neighbouring village Zhiovo and combine forces. The combined Chetas lead by Tole Pasha and Dimitar Andonov were split into several columns. The first column was to attack from the east and the second from the south while the others acted as reserves. The date of the attack was chosen to be August 12th, 1903 and was kept a secret until the final minutes when a rebel accidentally fired a shot as the Chetas were approaching the Ottoman barracks.

A firefight broke out and the insurgents continued their pressure, with Andonov's Cheta taking positions on the hill above the village forcing the Ottomans to retreat into the barracks while Tole Pasha's insurgents kept up the pressure on the buildings where the gendarmerie was housed. Unable

to take the garrison the insurgents retreated to the Kuchkin Kamen Peak on Nidzhe Mountain leaving 16 Ottoman soldiers dead without any losses to themselves.

Discouraged by their failed attempt the Prilep Leadership decided to disband the new Chetas and sent the insurgents back to their old Chetas and continued their partisan style operations mainly in the mountains.

Prilep Region is the crossroad connecting Western Macedonia with Skopje and Solun. The railway connecting Gradsko and Veles to Krushevo, Brod and Kichevo also passed through Prilep which for the most part carried thousands of Ottoman soldiers from Uroshevats to Vels, Gradsko and Prilep. Unfortunately, perhaps as an oversight by the Macedonian leadership at General Headquarters, this strategically important part of the country was never secured and was allowed to operate uninterrupted.

The small Chetas continued to concentrate their operations in the mountains until August 19th, 1903 when an Ottoman force attacked and encircled the village Paralovo on Mount Selechka trapping Petso Zhelezarov's Cheta inside. The attack however was slowed long enough by the local Cheta for Todor Zlatkov and Kole Mariovets's Cheti to arrive with reinforcements and punch a hole in the encirclement. This too was an unequal battle bidding 250 insurgents against 400 Ottoman soldiers but the insurgents fought hard and saved the day. Two insurgents and twenty-six Ottomans were killed in this battle.

Aching from the sting, a few days later the Ottomans sent a larger force numbering 7,000 soldiers and again clashed with the insurgents, this time in the village Dunje. Vojvodi Peshkov, Zlatkov and Zhelezarov with a combined force of 350 insurgents were surrounded but still managed to punch a hole through the Ottoman encirclement and escaped with only 20 dead. The Ottomans lost 160 during this battle. Unfortunately as the number of Macedonian fighters dwindled the Ottoman forces continued to grow making battles more and more difficult to win.

One of the last major battles to be fought in Prilep Region was on September 16th, 1903 when Nikola Peshkov fought an unequal battle with the Ottomans on the slopes of Dren Mountain near the village Belovoditsa and lost 35 insurgents and his own life.

One of the most brutal and significant battles ever fought by the Prilep Revolutionary District during the Ilinden Uprising was the battle of Margara, fought near the village Chanishte, Moriovo Region. As the Uprising was winding down in the southern parts of Macedonia the insurgents were being pushed northward and were concentrated in certain regions creating serious opposition to the Ottoman offensive. As it happened, in the beginning of October, there was a concentration of insurgents on the move in the Moriovo Region. Among the Cheta leaders present there were Lazar Pop Trajkov and Ivan Popov with 116 insurgents,

Gjorche Petrov with 14 insurgents and 10 insurgents from the remnants of Tole Pasha's Cheta lead by Milan Zvezdov. The insurgents numbered 140 in total and were pitted against a force of 5,500 well armed Ottoman soldiers.

The battle began at seven in the morning just after sunrise on October 2nd, 1903 when an Ottoman force was spotted just above Margara attempting to surprise the rebel camp near the village Chanishte. The moment the Ottomans were spotted a security unit of 20 insurgents, lead by Iovan Ivanovich (a Montenegrin) was dispatched and set up positions to intercept. Vasil Kotev's Cheta meanwhile took up position at a nearby hill. Luka Ivanov took charge of the operation and ordered the insurgents not to fire until the enemy was within 200 paces. Surprised by the sudden burst of fire the Ottoman force quickly retreated and took up a defensive position. A stalemate was reached as the two sides continued to fire at each other. Many Ottomans were killed during the initial attack. About an hour later the Ottomans received reinforcements and again began the offensive, this time in a much denser line. When the insurgents stopped firing it was a sure sign that they had fled. Confident that the insurgents were gone the dense Ottoman line continued its advance only to find out it was a trick. This time the Ottomans received even heavier losses.

About six hours later the Ottoman force was again reinforced and ordered to encircle the entire battle ground. Through the call of trumpets all Ottoman units were ordered to attack simultaneously from all sides but to their surprise the insurgents kept fighting with renewed vigor. In their arsenal the insurgents also employed grenades, dynamite, boulders and even javelins, swords and knives. It was going to be a fight to the end.

By the evening the Ottomans realized that it was not going to be an easy victory so they retreated for the night.

The next day a bigger Ottoman force arrived fully equipped with artillery only to find the insurgents had left.

The battle of Margara, the greatest and last of the Ilinden Uprising great battles, pitted an insurgent force of 140 Macedonians for 12 hours against a superior force of 5,500 Ottoman soldiers and proved that under the right conditions, with good discipline and a willingness to fight, the scales against the Ottomans could have been tipped.

Part 23 - The Ohrid and Resen Uprisings

The Ohrid Uprising Revolutionary District, which included the Ohrid and Struga Regions, consisted of 111 villages housing a total population of 64,000 residents. Of those, 46,000 were Macedonians, 7,000 Albanians, 6,000 Ottomans 3,000 Muslim Macedonians and 2,000 Vlachs. (Vanche Stojchev. "Military History of Macedonia". Military academy. Skopje, 2004. Page 336)

Even though the Ohrid Revolutionary District leadership had concluded that Ohrid was not ready to participate in the Uprising militarily, it did not want to go against the National leadership's decision to start an early Uprising, so after the Smilevo congress it began intensive preparations. Tome Davidov, a trained military officer, and his Cheta were dispatched to the region in March 1903 and were given responsibility for organizing training camps and acquiring food supplies, weapons and ammunition. Unfortunately, as luck would have it, soon after their arrival, his Cheta were surprised by a strong Ottoman force near the village Rbeni and in a pitch battle, Tome was killed and 150 of his insurgents were captured. The incident severely hampered preparations but soon afterwards Hristo Uzunov, just released from prison, took over the operation and brought it back on track.

Initially, the Ohrid Uprising Revolutionary District was divided into four Regions consisting of Debar with 18 villages, Lake with 37 villages, Malesija with 10 villages and Drimkol with 18 villages. By mid-May 1903 it was re-organized into six Regions consisting of Debar with 12 villages led by Smile Vojdanov, Malesija with 10 villages led by Tase Hristov, Dolna Debartsa with 23 villages led by Dejan Dimitrov, Lake with 19 villages led by Nikola Mitrov, Debar Drimkol with 7 villages led by Marko Pavlev, and Struga Drimkol with 11 villages led by Jakim Alulov. Recruitment and training began immediately after the re-organization and was conducted underground and with utmost secrecy.

On July 23rd, 1903 the General Headquarters announced the actual date of the Uprising, prompting the Ohrid District to set up its regional headquarters in the mountains and to prepare plans for combat. The Uprising was to begin in three regions in Ohrid; Gorna Debartsa, Dolna Debartsa and Lake. Uzunov made it clear to all the District Vojvoda's that the aim of the Uprising was to follow Gotse Delchev's prescribed methods of fighting which included first and foremost saving the population and second prolonging the struggle by carrying out Partisan style campaigns.

Their first task was to evacuate the population from the areas where battles were expected to take place. Then the Chetas were to attack and subdue the various Ottoman garrisons and strongholds in the Ohrid vicinity and finally the insurgents were to pursue and eliminate representatives of the Ottoman authorities and their collaborators;

including tax collectors. It was prohibited to attack the Ottoman civilian population. Various posters were put up explaining the Organization's aims and that this was an attack on the Ottoman system; not on the people.

On July 28th, 1903 the district vojvodas held a meeting with the village leaders and local vojvodas in order to inform them of the Uprising date and of their plans for the Uprising. Unfortunately, as it turned out, one of the leaders from the village Velmej was also an Ottoman spy and the plans were revealed to the Ottoman authorities. Being discovered before the Uprising began ruined the surprise attack on the enemy and placed the insurgents at a disadvantage. As a result, events in Debartsa Drimkol and Struga Drimkol did not develop as planned and the village Chetas were not mobilized. Of all the Chetas from Struga Drimkol that were prepared to join the Uprising, only the Regional Cheta became active and participated in various battles outside of its territory. Because its support was needed at various other places, the Regional Cheta was split into two units, one commanded by Lazar Dimitrov and Marko Pavlev and the other by Milosh Krstev. While the first Cheta was tasked with cutting the telegraph lines connecting Debar to Struga, the second Cheta was sent to recruit insurgents for the village Chetas.

While this was going on, Malesija Region came under attack and Pavlev and his Cheta were dispatched to provide assistance, thus abandoning the mission to cut telegraph lines.
Because of the sudden and unexpected attack, the Malesija Region too deviated from its original plans and instead of providing support to neighbouring regions it ended up fighting for its own survival. Unprepared for a fight, the civilian population suffered the most.

On August 3rd, 1903 a Bashi-Bazouk group of 300 from the village Zhupa appeared in the region near Kale in Seltse and was confronted by Pavlev's Regional Cheta. A vicious battle broke out and unable to withstand the pressure the insurgents retreated. Then another battle broke out between Tase Hristov's Regional Cheta and a regular Ottoman army unit of 200. Hristov's insurgents fought hard but after the Bashi-Bazouks attacked them from the rear, the Cheta retreated to Debar.

In other parts of Malesija Region, the plan was for the village Chetas from Lazheni, Draslaitsa and Tashmaruninishta to go to the foot of Karaorman Mountain and, on August 1st, 1903, meet up with the Chetas from Struga Drimkol and leave together for Gorna and Dolna Debartsa. While the 210 insurgents from the three villages arrived on time, 80 being unarmed, the ones from Struga did not show at all. Then, after a three day wait, the village Chetas attacked the Ottoman garrison of 100 stationed in the village Velishta. Unfortunately the attack was unsuccessful and was quickly repelled by the Ottomans with assistance from the local Bashi-Bazouks. The insurgents then withdrew to Tashmaruninishta where they were followed and attacked by Ottomans and Bashi-Bazouks. A vicious

battle ensued and lasted until the evening of August 3rd, 1903. By then the Ottomans had dispatched reinforcements from Ohrid numbering 800 soldiers but before they could engage in battle the insurgents withdrew and retreated to Karaorman. When it was over, 25 insurgents and 80 Ottoman soldiers lay dead and wounded. After this battle the insurgents went to Gorna Debartsa, signifying the end of the Uprising in Malesija Region.

In the Gorna Debartsa Region, in the meantime, 330 insurgents from Dolna Debartsa and Malesija arrived to join forces with Gorna Dabartsa and the surrounding villages and to attack Izdeglavje. Smile Vojdanov, the Regional leader, was given responsibility for mobilizing the 232 insurgent village Chetas in the six surrounding villages and to ultimately lead them in the attack. The aim was to approach Izdeglavje from two fronts, surround it and destroy its garrison. While the Chetas were attacking from the outside two village Chetas, one from Mramor and the other from Slatina, were tasked with simultaneously attacking the towers in Osashani, Ozdoleni and Slatinski Chiflik. The insurgents were successful in burning down the Osashani and Ozdoleni towers but failed to destroy the Slatinski Chiflik because the attack was expected and as the garrison moved its defenses forward the rear was reinforced with about 2,000 fresh Ottoman troops from Ohrid and Debar including Bashi-Bazouks from Pesochani. Unable to withstand the pressure the insurgents withdrew their forces to Rbeni and Laktinje. The Ottomans did not pursue and instead burned Ozdoleni to the ground.

In other places in Dolna Debartsa, on August 2nd, 1903, Vojvoda Gurko Sadulov mobilized the village Chetas from a number of surrounding villages in Struga Field and conducted demolition operations including the cutting of the Struga to Ohrid telegraph lines and demolishing the Ohrid to Struga road. Unfortunately their operations too were cut short as the enemy set an ambush and attacked and killed most of the insurgents including their leader Gurko Sadulov. During the same day a unit of 200 Ottoman soldiers attacked the three village Chetas from Brezhani, Belchishte and Velmej. The Chetas were forced to retreat but came back the next day and pushed the Ottomans back to Vemej where they remained under siege for the next three days. During the siege two insurgents were killed and six wounded. The Ottomans had five dead and three wounded.

While this was going on the Cheta from Belchishte, consisting of 140 insurgents, attacked the Ottoman garrison in Sirula from three sides but unfortunately the attack was anticipated and the insurgents were forced to retreat.

In the Lake Region in the meantime, the plan called for defensive and diversionary attacks. On August 2nd, 1903 the regional Cheta led by Argir Marinov was sent on a mission to cut telegraph wires and destroy the Ohrid to Resen road. The rest of the village Chetas led by regional vojvoda Nikola Mitrev were dispatched to carry out diversionary missions on the

Ohrid to Pogradets road. Unfortunately unbeknownst to the insurgents, the Ottomans were aware of their plans and anticipated their moves thus ambushing Mitrev's Cheta in a surprise attack between the villages Elshani and Konsko. Five insurgents were lost during the ambush but they managed to successfully cut the Ohrid to Resen telegraph lines. After fleeing the scene the insurgents regrouped and took defensive positions outside the village Trpejtsa.

Marinov's Cheta was successful in blocking the Ohrid to Resen road and as a bonus managed to capture a convoy carrying food supplies.

Between August 2nd and August 6th, 1903 the Macedonian insurgents managed to liberate Gorna and Dolna Debartsa as well as part of Lake Region thus ending the first phase of the Uprising in the Ohrid Revolutionary District.

In the lull that followed the Regional Headquarters began to prepare for the next phase of fighting by tasking its forces with gathering provisions and war material. A number of checkpoints, shelters and warehouses were established in various mountainous regions in preparation for prolonged partisan-like warfare. A hospital with the capacity to handle 30 people was also established along with a kitchen and bakery well stocked with medical supplies and food. Hristo Angelov, a graduate of medicine, was appointed as the doctor who not only treated wounded insurgents but also sick villagers.

Given the proximities of the sub-regions liberated, Regional Headquarters on August 9th, 1903 decided to split itself into two headquarters. One, led by Uzunov, Tsvetinov and Zlatarev was established to lead the forces in Dolna Debartsa and Lake sub-Regions. The second, led by Ketskarov, Chakrov and Dimitrov was established near Gorna Debartsa.

Unfortunately, as it happened in other regions, the Ottomans, before commencing their offensive, bolstered their forces with significant reinforcements both with trained soldiers and with Bashi-Bazouks and began their attacks. As in other regions they were not simply attacks to recover lost territories, but assaults on the entire population with aims to eradicate it. The Ottomans burned houses, killed civilians and robbed and destroyed their properties. The insurgents fought back with all their might using every technique known to them but it was futile. As the number of insurgents declined the number of Ottomans kept increasing and the battles were moved out of the villages and into the mountains and campsites. Then on August 30th, 1903 a regular Ottoman army numbering about 3,000 soldiers accompanied by Bashi-Bazouks began to besiege the refugee camps. At the time these camps were sheltering over 2,000 refugees from 18 different villages from the Dolna Debartsa and Lake sub-Regions and were protected by 117 insurgents. A fierce battle ensued and lasted the entire day. Unfortunately vastly outnumbered and outgunned, the

insurgents could not hold out and the battle turned into a massacre of women and children. About 190 were killed, mostly women and children and every female of young age was raped and dishonoured. Forty one insurgents were killed and 200 Ottoman soldiers were lost to the enemy. All the buildings that stored food and other supplies were looted and destroyed.

After this the civilians in Dolna Debartsa and Lake began to slowly return to their homes only to find them in ruins. After the disastrous battle insurgent activities continued to decline and completely ceased by the beginning of October. Those insurgents who remained active, including Hristo Uzunov, left for Demir Hisar.

The less devastated insurgents in Gorna Debartsa continued the struggle for a little longer but they too eventually were forced to flee for their lives and escaped to Albania and from there to Montenegro. Hristo Uzunov returned to Ohrid and shared his people's fate.

During the Uprising period from August 2nd to October 1903, 42 villages were burned down, 2,064 houses, 24 churches and 18 schools were completely destroyed in the Ohrid Revolutionary District. According to Hristo Uzunov, 483 people were killed of whom 116 were insurgents and the rest were civilians mostly women and children. (Vanche Stojchev. "Military History of Macedonia". Military academy. Skopje, 2004. Page 342)

After the Smilevo Congress, the Resen Uprising Revolutionary District with a population of 28,000 was sub-divided into two independent regions, Gorna and Dolna Prespa. Gorna Prespa was led by Slavejko Arsov, Dragan Petkov and Aleksandar Panajotov, while Dolna Prespa was led by Nikola Kokarev, Veljan Iliev, Naum Fotev and Angel Andreev.

Gorna Prespa Region consisted of the city Resen as the center and 32 surrounding villages. Dolna Prespa Region was made up of 43 villages with the village German as its center. Seventy-five percent (75%) of the population in the Resen Uprising Revolutionary District was Macedonian and the rest were Vlachs, Albanians, Ottomans and others.

Due to some prior successes in the struggle against the Ottomans, the people of Resen were ready to follow their leaders. In January 1903 Arsov and his Cheta engaged the Ottoman army and the Bashi-Bazouks in the village Izbishte in a great battle and won a victory. Following that more battles were fought and won thus giving the insurgents some reputation as good fighters and gaining the trust of the people. When the call to arms came, many volunteered for all sorts of duties including stocking food, clothing and other assets necessary for a prolonged struggle. Even many of those who had gone to work abroad as pechalbari answered the call and over 1,000 returned to prepare for the ultimate fight.

Purely for the purpose of better organization, the Dolna Prespa Region was further divided into two sub-regions, one covering the villages south

of Podmochani to Dolno Dupeni, led by Valjan Iliev, and the second covering the villages near Mala Prespa Lake, led by Angel Andreev. Nikola Kokarev was appointed leader of both.

Just before the Uprising began, the Resen Revolutionary District was visited by Damjan Gruev and Boris Sarafov who offered some advice for the division of the forces and on how to commence the uprising. Having only 900 insurgents at their disposal, the local leaders were encouraged to recruit more and subdivide their forces so that they could simultaneously strike several targets. Village Chetas were also formed and charged with defending their villages.

On July 18, 1903 regional head Slavejko Arsov held a meeting in the village Bolno with the Resen city elders to convince them to prepare for an uprising inside the city but the idea was opposed. Failing that, the regional leader convinced them to at least help the rebellion by donating medicines, food, etc. and establish an intelligence service inside the city.

About a week prior to the Uprising, the District received its final orders and a decision was taken to strike at the mudirluk in Nakolets first where 200 Ottoman soldiers were stationed. The plan was for several Chetas to simultaneously attack on August 2nd, 1903 from various directions. Unfortunately not all the Chetas made it to their destination on time and left a gap for the Ottomans to escape. Having unexpectedly escaped, the additional Ottoman force was able to aid the Ottoman Beys in the village Slivitsa and to contribute to the defeat of the insurgents in other areas. Having freed Slivitsa the Beys then participated in the defense of Nakolets which lasted two days. A band of Bashi-Bazouks from the village Krani joined the Nakolets battle and drove the insurgents to retreat.

The Mala Prespa Lake sub-Region leadership in the meantime held a meeting on August 2nd, 1903 in the village Rudari and developed a plan of attack which called for attacking the village Ppli where 150 Ottoman soldiers were stationed. Village Chetas from Esvika, Oromnik, Bukovik and Drenovo on one side, and Chetas from the villages Rmbi, German, Medovo, Shtrkovo and Rudari on the other, with a total force of 200 insurgents, were to approach secretly and at their leader's signal attack simultaneously from all directions. Because of the close proximity of the Albanian armed population living in those villages extreme caution needed to be exercised. Unfortunately before the plan could be put into action, the Ottomans became aware of it and took precautions. Having lost the advantage of a surprise attack, the insurgent leaders decided to withdraw their forces and retreated to the village German where they held another meeting to decide what to do.

Despite their position of disadvantage, the leaders decided to carry out some attacks anyway. The first attack was staged against the village Shaovtsi during the night of August 8th, 1903, but without success. The next attack was carried out against the village Bostandzhiovtsi on August

8th, 1903 which was also unsuccessful. Both villages were well armed and well defended not only by the Ottomans but also by the Albanians who lived there.

The plan to commence the Uprising in Gorna Prespa was with an attack on the city Resen. To finalize preparations, the insurgent leaders got together in the village Bolno on August 1st, 1903. It was decided to split up the Chetas into 5 groups of 30 and commence the attack the same day. All Chetas except the one from Drmeni made it to its destination and waited for the signal to commence firing. The Drmeni Cheta was unfortunately intercepted by an Ottoman night patrol and had no choice but to open fire. The premature gunfire alerted the city authorities of the imminent attack and to prevent a counter attack the rest of the Chetas opened fire starting multiple battles. The firefight lasted 45 minutes before the Ottomans regrouped and had the Chetas driven out of the city.

While the main Cheta was battling the Ottomans in the city, several village Chetas from Izbishta, Kriveni, Krushe and Zlatari attacked Ottoman patrols but with little success. The Ottomans, with help from the Bashi-Bazouks, quickly took the upper hand and not only drove the insurgents out but in revenge also burned down the villages Krushe and Leva Reka. The village Chetas from Evla and Gorno Dupeni with about 50 insurgents attacked the Ottoman stronghold in Petrino which was guarding the Ohrid to Resen road. Skirmishes were also sparked in the villages Tsarev Dvor, Drmeni and Podmochani. Battles continued for the next couple of days and most of Prespa Revolutionary District, except for the City Resen, Nakolets and Ppli, were liberated. The failure to liberate these places was mainly due to treachery where the plans of the insurgents were secretly revealed to the enemy.

No sooner had the insurgents liberated the region than the Ottomans sent reinforcements. Late in the day on August 3rd, 1903 a column of 600 enemy soldiers and Bashi-Bazouks arrived in Resen and began surrounding villages and indiscriminately firing at the civilians. As each village fell, it was looted and houses were robbed and then burned. The general population was tortured and many women were raped and dishonoured. Each attack was concluded with the burning of the village. The worst suffering happened at the hands of the Albanians who formed a unit of 700 Bashi-Bazouks and went on a rampage robbing, beating and torturing the Macedonian population. After crossing the Devol River, these Bashi-Bazouks continued their rampage all through Nivitsi, Grazhdino, Orovo, Drenovo and other villages in the Dolna Prespa Region.

These severe attacks on the civilian population prompted many insurgents to leave their posts and join the village Chetas in an effort to save the Christian population. Unfortunately, the more the insurgents resisted the worse was the punishment on the villagers.

By August 11, 1903 almost the entire insurgence in the Resen Uprising Revolutionary District was engaged in the defense of the civilian population but without success. The Ottoman army received further reinforcements from Lerin and the massive revenge continued. Ljuboino and Brajchino were burned to the ground and as the battle moved from Brajchino to Dupeni both insurgent leaders Nikola Kokarev and Veljan Iliev were killed. The leaderless insurgents were then thrown into disarray, literally ending the Uprising in the northern part of Dolna Prespa.

In the southern part, meanwhile, the insurgents decided to stiffen the resistance and called for all available fighters to join the battles. When the Ottoman offensive began between August 23rd and 25th, 1903, near the village German, the first to arrive was the Bitola Cheta, numbering 86 insurgents, led by Aleksandar Eftimov and Ivan Kafedzhija. Joining in from Vmbelska Mountain were the Kostur Chetas, numbering 825 insurgents in total, led by Vasil Chakalarov and Pando Kljashev. Also joining the fight were about 200 local insurgents led by Andrev and Olchev. In total there were 1,100 Macedonian fighters pitted against an army of 6,000 Ottoman soldiers.

After surprising and demolishing the Bitola and German Chetas near the village Shtrkovo, the Ottoman army on August 28th, 1903 engaged the remaining Chetas near the village Rudari where several battles broke out. The results were catastrophic for the insurgency, leaving 85 insurgents dead and virtually ending the Uprising in that Region. Demoralized, both insurgents and civilians began to hastily retreat to the safety of Pelister Mountain.

After the mass exodus, the insurgents shifted their priorities from offensive to defensive tactics and concentrated their efforts on protecting the civilians and providing food and shelter for them.

Some Prespa residents made the Island of Ail into a stronghold and held out for the better part of September. But when word came that the Ottomans were about to acquire long range artillery, the Island defense leadership evacuated the island on September 20th, 1903. As the villagers began to return to their homes the insurgency quickly died down, thus concluding the August 2nd, 1903 Uprising in that district.

Part 24 - The Kostur Uprising

The Kostur Uprising Revolutionary District (now occupied by Greece) covered the south-western part of Macedonia which roughly corresponded to the administrative Kostur Caza with borders following the flow of the Bistritsa and Devol Rivers to the edges of the Gramos, Smolikina and Sarakina Mountains. The Kostur Caza was supported by a population of about 75,000 people of whom 51,000 were Macedonians and the rest were Albanians, Vlachs and Ottomans.

Revolutionary activities in the Kostur Uprising Revolutionary district increased significantly with Gotse Delchev's visit in late 1901. His extended visit and tour of the region, which lasted well into 1902, helped the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (MRO) establish revolutionary committees in almost all of the Christian populated villages.

The top leadership positions in the Kostur Uprising Revolutionary District were filled entirely with Kostur Region locals, which included the famous vojvodi Vasil Chakalarov, Pando Kljashev and Lazar Pop Trajkov, all well known to Delchev from his school days in Solun. Because of urgent circumstances, the Kostur Uprising Revolutionary District leadership wanted to begin the Uprising early and made such requests to other Regional Revolutionary Organizations.

The failed Uprising attempt in Zagoricheni by Anastas Jankov alerted the Ottoman authorities that something was happening in that region so the immediate reaction was to clamp down on the population and destroy the MRO. So rather than waiting for the Ottomans to pick them off one by one, the Kostur Revolutionary leaders requested that the Uprising begin as soon as possible. At the time there were only 1,800 Ottoman soldiers stationed in and around Kostur so it would have been a great opportunity to liberate Kostur before more troops were brought in.

In the meantime, because of the Uprising attempt at Zagoricheni, the Ottomans became aware that something was developing so they increased their searches, arrests and murders of people. Violence became an everyday occurrence with grave consequences not only for the ordinary Macedonian people but also for the future of the Uprising. All this weighed heavily in the hearts and minds of the revolutionaries, particularly on Chakalarov and Kljashev, so at the Smilevo Congress, which took place in May 1903, they not only supported an early Uprising, they demanded it.

At the Smilevo Congress it was decided that the leaders to organize and lead the Uprising in the Kostur Revolutionary District, among others, would be Vasil Chakalarov, Pando Kljashev, Lazar Pop Trajkov, Manol Rosov, Ivan Popov and Mihail Nikolov.

Immediately after the Smilevo Congress, Kostur Revolutionary District representatives organized a number of meetings that took place in the villages Dmbeni, Blatse and Ppli where the general situation was discussed

and decisions were made on how to proceed with preparations for the Uprising. It was decided to divide the Kostur Uprising Revolutionary District into 5 sub-regions, each lead by a vojvoda who in turn would report to the Regional Headquarters. As soon as the vojvoda's were appointed, preparations for recruitment, training and arming of insurgents followed. People were also placed in charge of acquiring food, clothing, medical supplies and other provisions in support of the Uprising.

While the insurgents were secretly preparing for the Uprising, the Ottomans continued to reinforce their forces and stepped up their provocation, abuse and torture of the general population. In their search for weapons, the Ottomans burned down the village Smrdesh along with the bomb making factory and grenade manufacturing workshop. A little later the villages Statitsa, Kolomnati and other surrounding villages were raided and over 100 rifles were confiscated.

So instead of waiting for General Headquarters to give a date for the Uprising, while the Ottomans were destroying Kostur Region village by village, the local Kostur Region leadership decided to retaliate. After the burning of Smrdesh, on May 31st, 1903, Chakalarov took the offensive and attacked the Ottomans near Lokma, delivering a devastating blow. Being left alone for a while, the insurgents continued with their preparations and around mid-July 1903, Chakalarov, Kljashev and Popov felt confident to take their Chetas on a tour of the various Kostur Region villages.

When news of the Uprising start date reached the Kostur Regional Headquarters, all 80 Kostur Region villages were informed in a matter of 4 to 5 hours, indicating that the Kostur Uprising Revolutionary District was ready for action. Unfortunately so were the Ottomans who had found out about the impending attacks, particularly about the one on the city of Kostur.

When the insurgents discovered that the Ottomans knew of their plans to attack the city, they quickly changed their tactics and began attacking smaller Ottoman installations. The first attack, carried out by Popov's Cheta, began in Aposkep and Zhupanoshte during the night of August 2nd, 1903 and escalated during the liberation of Klisura.

The town of Klisura, with a population of 3,400 inhabitants, is located on the Klisura Mountain curve 1,170 meters above sea level. Geographically and from a military point of view, Klisura is located in an ideal place bridging Kostur with the surrounding villages. Another good reason for the insurgents wanting to liberate Klisura was to gain control of the road that links Kostur to the central part of Macedonia which also happened to pass through Klisura. The road from Kostur leads to the east via the village Mavrovo, to the north around Nered Mountain and to the south around Snezhnik Mountain. All these branches which interconnect Kostur to Vrbeni, Kajlari, Banitsa, Bitola and Solun must pass through Klisura, which makes this town of great strategic importance not just for

the insurgents but also for the Ottomans. That is precisely why both sides were prepared to fight over it at any cost.

Given the strategic importance of Klisura, the Kostur Uprising Revolutionary District leadership decided to concentrate its efforts on liberating this town as soon as possible, before the Ottomans had a chance to bolster their defenses. The first attack took place on August 4th, 1903 under Nikola Andreev's own initiative. At the time there were only 300 Ottoman soldiers stationed there and Andreev, with his Cheta of 150 insurgents, decided to surprise the Ottomans. Unfortunately it was he who was surprised as the attack was expected and quickly ended in disaster with 6 insurgents dead and the rest barely escaping with their lives.

Fearing more attacks to come the Ottomans made preparations to bolster their defenses, particularly near the roads, by bringing reinforcements from other garrisons.

Having learned their lesson, the insurgent leadership began preparations for a second attack on Klisura scheduled to commence before the Ottoman reinforcements arrived. After developing a plan, all available insurgents in the Kostur Uprising Revolutionary District, numbering about 600, were ordered to amass, concentrate and regroup. The insurgent force was then divided into two columns and each column was given its responsibility. The column responsible for the liberation of the northern region of Kostur District, lead by Chakalarov, Kljashev and Rozov, which included the Zagorichani and Bobishta Chetas, was tasked with attacking the Zagorichani-Bobishta-Klisura line, while part of the same force was separated and assigned to protect the Lehovo-Klisura line. The column responsible for the liberation of the southern region of Kostur, lead by Popov and comprised of eight smaller Chetas, was tasked with carrying out its attacks from Kumanichevo into Klisura. But as the plan was ready to be put into action, information gathered by the intelligence service indicated that a large Ottoman force of undetermined size was about to be dispatched from inside Kostur towards Klisura. Based on this information the insurgents had to change their plans and immediately intervene. To slow down the Ottoman advance, it was decided that the closest Cheta from Visheni lead by Joto Rashejkov and Naum Trpovski's Cheta be dispatched to set an ambush by the road near the village Visheni. But with help from the people of Visheni, the Macedonian Chetas not only stopped the Ottoman advance but in their surprise attack they sent the Ottomans fleeing in panic.

Then at dawn, August 4th, 1903, a massive battle began which pitted 2,000 Ottoman soldiers against 700 Macedonian insurgents. It was an extraordinary battle that lasted over twelve hours, employing the best military tactics and weaponry by both sides. While the Ottomans utilized their artillery and cavalry, the Macedonians more than matched them with their determination, decisiveness, sharp shooting and use of hand grenades.

With their determination, accurate aim and superior maneuverability, the Macedonians eventually took the upper hand and drove the massive Ottoman force to retreat to Lerin. On August 5th, 1903 the insurgents came out victorious thus liberating Klisura from the Ottomans. What was also amazing about this battle is that while the Ottomans sustained 26 casualties, the insurgents sustained no casualties. Klisura remained liberated and free until August 28th, 1903 when its liberators retreated without a fight and the Ottomans returned to reclaim it.

In other parts of Kostur Region, meanwhile, the Ottomans began their penetration on August 13th, 1903 with a massive force of 6,000 soldiers. To avoid detection the Ottoman force crossed Kostur Lake with ships, departing from Kostur and landing in Mavrovo at the rear of the insurgents. The first to spot the Ottoman invasion was Ivan Popov's Cheta which did its best to slow the penetration, but without much success. A battle broke out but being vastly outnumbered the insurgents had little choice but to flee to Vicho Mountain to save themselves. The Ottomans persistently pursued the fleeing Cheta but on their way ran into Chakalarov's Cheta. Another battle broke out and lasted several hours, but unfortunately still outnumbered the combined Macedonian Chetas decided they were no match for the Ottomans and withdrew. In their haste the insurgents left all their provisions behind but not without poisoning them first. Unaware of the poisoning, the Ottomans took advantage of the free food and 250 of them ended up sick.

On August 21st, 1903 the Ottomans launched a massive cleanup operation against the Kostur Uprising Revolutionary District with a force of 15,000 soldiers. The force consisted of three separate columns originating from Kostur, Sorovich and Lerin and initiated simultaneous attacks indiscriminately killing people and burning villages. By the time the Ottomans finished they had burned 23 Macedonian villages and killed 600 people.

To stop the indignant attacks on the villages and the civilian population, the insurgent leadership decided it was time to open new offensives. They regrouped their immediate forces and split them into two groups. Lead by Pop Trajkov, Popov, Nikolov and Razov, the first group of 620 was dispatched towards Lerin Region. The second group consisting of 450 insurgents lead by Chakalarov and Kljashev was dispatched to head south to attack the Ottoman detachment of 2,000 soldiers stationed in Aposkep. In the meantime a much smaller insurgence force, lead by Dimitar Pandzhurov, was left in Kostur Region to regroup the remaining insurgents and, to the best of its ability, protect the population.

When Chakalarov and Kljashev began their attacks on Aposkep it was a total surprise to the Ottoman commander Ethem Pasha in Kostur, who was under the impression that the insurgency in Kostur Region was defeated. Witnessing a large force of insurgents at its doorstep, which was

no more than six kilometers from the outskirts of the city of Kostur, panic began to grip the Ottomans turning what could have been a victory into defeat. More Ottomans were dispatched to the battle and they too were defeated. Victorious, the insurgents again divided their forces into two new groups. One group, consisting of 120 insurgents lead by Chakalarov, set its sights on liberating Smrdesh, Dmbeni, Kosinets and Nestram. The other group, consisting of 330 insurgents lead by Kljashev, returned to Kolomnati where it was split into several smaller Chetas and assigned to protect the various villages in the region.

Chakalarov's Cheta fought several battles with both the Ottoman army and the Bashi-Bazouks in the region but eventually returned to Kolomnati and with Kljashev continued to score victories against the Ottomans.

Part 25 - The Lerin Uprising

The Lerin Uprising Revolutionary District (now occupied by Greece) is situated south of the Bitola Uprising Revolutionary District. On its south and west it bordered the Kostur Uprising Revolutionary District. On its north it bordered Dolna Prespa and Pelister Regions and on its east it bordered Voden Region.

The most strategically significant part about Lerin Region was the road passing through its territory that interconnected the transportation and communications lines between Bitola and Solun.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Lerin Region was supported by a population of about 60,000 people of whom 63% were Macedonians, 19% Ottomans, 7% Albanians, Vlachs and others. (Vanche Stojchev. "Military History of Macedonia". Military academy. Skopje, 2004. Page 350)

Revolutionary activities in the Lerin Uprising Revolutionary district were unfortunately stifled due to an incident that took place in 1902. Because of an accidental discovery of weapons, the Ottomans suspected something was going on in that region and initiated massive and intense weapons searches. In the process they also initiated terror campaigns and committed atrocities against the Christian population. This improper conduct weighed heavily on the Lerin Region Revolutionaries and prompted them to take action against the Ottomans. Regrettably this brought them into a collision course with the Ottoman authorities who felt they needed to eliminate the insurgency. Unfortunately in their unprepared-ness the insurgents could not protect themselves or initiate a prolonged fight against this aggression. But once exposed, the insurgents were pursued, hunted down and killed one by one, including their illustrious leader Marko Lerinski. Unfortunately this incident caused much harm, not just to the insurgents, but also to the Uprising. The incident gave the Ottomans more reasons to further escalate the searches which eventually lead to the discovery and confiscation of over 600 rifles and large quantities of ammunition. Besides overpowering the insurgency and removing the arms from the region, Ottoman authorities also bolstered their defenses, especially around the railway, rail yards and rail stations.

Fortunately help came from General Headquarters with the appointment of Georgi Papanchev sent to Lerin Region to replace Marko Lerinski and to lead the Uprising. Then in March 1903 Boris Sarafov was sent to inspect the Revolutionary District's progress and encourage the local population to join the Uprising. With Sarafov's help, several meetings were held in various villages including Setina, Banitsa and Ekshi Su. Issues concerning preparations for the Uprising were discussed including plans to create and train new Chetas, procure and stockpile food, acquire medical supplies, etc.

Because of its weakened state, the Lerin Uprising Revolutionary District was also encouraged to look to the Kostur Uprising Revolutionary District for assistance, particularly in coordinating simultaneous and joint attacks on the enemy.

Primary targets selected for attacks were the railway tunnels near the village Tserevo, the railway station in Banitsa and the bridges near the villages Sakulevo and Ekshi Su.

Despite its inability to contribute much to the Uprising, the Lerin Uprising Revolutionary District did attend the Smilevo Congress in May 1903 and was represented by Georgi Papanchev and Mihail Chekov from Ekshi Su. It was there that it was decided that Lerin Region had the potential to fight and would definitely participate in the National Uprising. As a result, Georgi Papanchev, Lecho Tserovski and Kosta Gruev were appointed leaders of the Lerin Regional Head Office and were to lead the Uprising and revolutionary activities in that District.

After the top leadership was appointed Lerin Region was then sub-divided into six Uprising centers each with its own leader and each reporting to the Regional Head Office.

Soon after their return from the Smilevo Congress, Papanchev and Chekov decided to schedule a number of meetings with the local leaders to inform them of the situation. The first meeting was scheduled for the night of May 28th, 1903 in the village Banitsa where local leaders and more than 400 insurgents were in attendance. Unfortunately, and despite the precautionary measures the insurgents had taken to avoid incidents, the Ottoman authorities were aware of their activities and very early in the morning of May 29th, 1903 Ottoman troops surrounded the village. In their attempt to breach the siege, 17 insurgents lost their lives, including their leader Papanchev, again devastating the Organization and delivering another blow to the Lerin Uprising Revolutionary District's effort to join the National Uprising.

In spite of the great loss, however, General Headquarters still believed there was potential for the Lerin Uprising Revolutionary District to join the national fight so it dispatched Gjorgji Pop Hristov to pick up the pieces and continue the Uprising effort as head of the Lerin Uprising Revolutionary District. Hristov's first priority as top leader was to punish the traitors and informants who caused the disaster. His actions immensely contributed to the straightening and reputation of the Organization. After that Hristov devoted his energy to the preparations for the Uprising.

To help things along Damjan Gruev and Boris Sarafov, in the beginning of July, 1903, paid Lerin Region a visit and managed to attract over 800 potential insurgent recruits. Unfortunately there were no weapons available to arm these people so they were told to return to their homes. With the disasters that befell the Lerin Uprising Revolutionary District, weapons were rare and not easy to acquire, so most of the Lerin Region

insurgents remained unarmed. The number of those who were armed was small and therefore needed to be safeguarded to be effective. For this reason the Lerin Region insurgents had to resort to partisan style warfare. Small units were assembled and assigned to independent actions that mainly had to do with preventing the enemy from executing speedy transfers of troops and material from region to region and with the task of informing and educating the general public about the impending Uprising.

Then when the Lerin Uprising Revolutionary District received information on the Uprising start date, it exercised its duty to warn the management of the railway in Solun not to transport civilians in the trains. But as soon as the railway was disrupted, due to insurgent diversionary attacks, railway management requested of the Ottoman authorities 25,000 Ottoman soldiers to secure the entire railway line. Unfortunately due to lack of resources only one battalion could be spared, which arrived from Asia Minor, and was tasked with securing the rail line between Banitsa and Lerin.

Despite its ill preparedness, the Lerin Uprising Revolutionary District continued to contribute to the Uprising through hit and run operations and by attacking non-defended parts of the railway, cutting telegraph lines, bombing bridges and generally disrupting the transportation and communications corridor between Bitola and Solun. But after the National Uprising began and Krushevo was liberated, the Lerin Uprising Revolutionary District switched its operational tactics from hit and run to fully offensive. One of its biggest offensive operations was the attack on the village Ekshi Su where more that 200 insurgents, lead by Gjorgji Pop Hristov, assembled and destroyed the local railway station.

As the District's fighting skills improved, more and more successful offensive operations were carried out and more armed insurgents enlisted and joined the fighting. Their continuous successes allowed the leadership to shift from small operations to fighting the enemy in frontal attacks and larger battles.

On August 13th, 1903, when a large force of 3,000 Ottoman soldiers arrived in the region, the smaller Macedonian Chetas combined into a single large Cheta and held off the Ottoman advance until all the local villages including Bitosha, Bouf and Rakovo were safely evacuated and the civilians escorted into the local woodlands. Following that incident the Lerin and Kostur Uprising Revolutionary Districts began to coordinate attacks and to combine their forces. Combined actions between Kostur and Lerin were best demonstrated during the attack on Neveska which took place at the end of August during the Ottoman counter-offensive.

The battle for control of Neveska was one of the greatest successes demonstrated by the Macedonians during the Ilinden Uprising which took place during the height of the Ottoman counter-offensive when the Ottomans were attempting to demonstrate their strength.

Unfortunately this glorious military success was not meant to be because a large Ottoman force arrived just in time to rob the insurgents of their victory, marking this the last major offensive carried out by the Macedonians in that region.

Neveska at the time was a small Vlach town of about 5,500 people located in the southwestern part of Lerin Region. Before the Uprising, Neveska had its own telegraph office and a permanent Ottoman garrison of 70 soldiers residing inside Neveska. But as the insurgency intensified, Ottoman soldiers that were driven out of liberated villages began to concentrate and set camp outside of Neveska. By mid-August the Ottoman soldiers residing in and near Neveska numbered over 250 making this town a formidable Ottoman stronghold.

Plans to invade Neveska were prepared during the successful attack on Psodery, a nearby Vlach town. The actual plans of attack were prepared by the famous and experienced vojvoda Vasil Chakalarov and were carried out efficiently and effectively by a coordinated attack involving the forces of vojvodas Lazar Pop Trajkov, Ivan Popov, Nikola Andreev and Nikola Mokrenski. The insurgence force of 650 was divided into four groups. Each group was then dispatched to each of the surrounding villages that had a road leading into Neveska. In the north, a group was dispatched to Bel Kamen, in the east to Zelenich, in the west to Elovo and in the south the last group was dispatched to Prekopana. Chakalarov in the meantime took to the hills from where he had a view and could observe all the action as well as keep an eye out for possible outside intervention from the Ottomans. The groups remained in seclusion during the day and in the dead of night simultaneously advanced on Neveska. By 3 a.m. Ivan Popov's insurgents advanced to within 600 meters of the Ottoman camp without being spotted. The first to open fire on Neveska was the Lerin unit which commenced the attack from the north, from the road leading from Bel Kamen. The next to open fire was Ivan Popov's unit of sharp shooters who pinned down the Ottomans in the camp, preventing them from getting to their weapons. Unable to fight back, the Ottomans fled in panic leaving their weapons and equipment behind. No sooner had the Ottomans left than Popov and his insurgents collected their weapons and proceeded to enter the town. Andreev and his insurgents followed from the south and opened fire on the installation where the permanent garrison was stationed. A battle broke out but the Ottomans were quickly overpowered. Unable to maintain resistance, the Ottomans fled allowing the compound to fall into the hands of the insurgents who quickly claimed its contents and burned it to the ground. The loot left behind included 37 modern Mauzer rifles, 6,000 rifle shells, military overcoats and some military machinery.

After the town of Neveska was officially declared liberated, marked by the hoisting of the Uprising flag, the Kostur Region insurgents left for Kostur. The victorious Lerin insurgents, under Pop Hristov's command, were left in charge of defending the town and assisting its people to establish provisional authority.

Three days later, on August 27th, 1903, a 15,000 strong Ottoman force consisting of two columns was spotted heading for Neveska. One column consisting of about 10,000 Ottoman soldiers was observed marching briskly from the south through the village Zagorichani. The other column of 5,000 soldiers was advancing from the north from Lerin through the village Bel Kamen.

No sooner had the insurgent leadership become aware of the new situation than it was decided it would be futile to resist such a formidable force. At this point a decision was made to withdraw all the insurgent forces and in future resort back to hit and run partisan style operations. The retreat was well planned and skillfully executed with much care not to further anger the Ottomans. No incidents were reported and no civilians were harmed by either side.

In their withdrawal from Neveska most of the insurgents retreated to the south towards Emborska Mountain to Kajlari Region passing through Vrapchishte, Ostrovo Lake and Rudnik. The rest fled towards Koreshta ending up in Kostur Region. The retreat was hasty in order to avoid contact with the Ottomans and not to spark a conflict which would have been detrimental to both the insurgents and the civilian population.

Without any resistance from the insurgents the Ottomans quickly re-established themselves in the various villages and took extraordinary measures to also occupy the mountains and former insurgent strongholds in order to prevent the insurgents from returning. They also systematically cut and burned the forests to prevent the Uprising forces from re-establishing camps and shelters. In essence the Ottomans established permanent control over the entire territory.

Even though the vast majority of the Lerin Region insurgents remained active in other parts of Macedonia, the Uprising in the Lerin Uprising Revolutionary District, by the end of August 1903, was effectively over.

Part 26 - The Skopje and Strumitsa Uprisings

Just before the Skopje Uprising Revolutionary District began its preparation for the Ilinden Uprising, its leadership decided to rename the District to "Ovche Pole" in hopes of keeping it clandestine. Unfortunately those involved in continued to call it "the District of Skopje".

Ovche Pole, or the District of Skopje, was supported by a population of 308,719 people of whom 196,417 or 64% were Macedonians. Of the remaining, 82,084 or 26% were Ottomans, 15,543 or 5% were Albanians and 14,000 or so were Vlachs and others. (Vanche Stojchev. "Military History of Macedonia". Military academy. Skopje, 2004. Page 353)

The most significant strategic part of the Skopje Uprising Revolutionary District was the central location through which the transportation and communication corridors passed, connecting Skopje to Kjustandil, Kumanovo, Prishtina and Solun. This strategic location was very important to the Ottomans so it was well guarded. Because of the constant movement of Ottoman troops and supplies this region was always very busy and difficult for the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization to function in unnoticed.

Besides being well guarded and well traveled by the Ottomans, this region was also sandwiched between the largely Albanian populated villages to the north, swarming with Bashi-Bazouks, and the Ottoman civilian populations to the south. The constant pressure from all sides created many obstacles for the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization and made preparations for the National Uprising very difficult.

As if that was not enough, there was also pressure from Serbia. As Serbia was preparing to assert its influence in Macedonia, many of its agents were operating inside Macedonia, feverishly promoting Serbian propaganda. This interfered with the natural development of the Macedonian national consciousness, a vital component in creating awareness and recruiting insurgents. There were also constant clashes between the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization and the Bulgarian sponsored Supremacist forces competing for control of this District, which did not always go un-noticed by the Ottomans. In fact because of these clashes there was an incident in 1897, later termed "the Vinitsa affair", which caused much damage not only to the Skopje Uprising Revolutionary District but to the entire revolutionary movement as well.

After the Solun assassinations in April 1903, the Ottomans began to suspect that the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization was busy promoting revolutionary ideas and preparing the population for an Uprising. With that in mind, Ottoman authorities began to reinforce their military instillations, particularly those in vital areas such as Skopje and the surrounding region. Outside of reinforcing their regular military

instillations, the Ottomans in Skopje District also mobilized the Albanian and Muslim population forming numerous Bashi-Bazouk units.

By the end of June 1903, Ottoman military strength in the Skopje Vilayet was up to 87 infantry battalions, each consisting of 800 regular soldiers, 20 cavalry squadrons, 19 field artillery batteries, 36 mountain weapons, 3 pioneer Chetas and several technical stations. The Ottomans had over 80,000 soldiers stationed in the Skopje Vilayet alone. Of these, 23 infantry battalions, 5 cavalry squadrons, 10 field artillery batteries and 2 pioneer Chetas were stationed in Skopje Sanjak, on the territory of the Skopje Uprising Revolutionary District.

After the Solun assassinations, Ottoman army installations were reorganized and forces were relocated to the east of Skopje mainly to Kumanovo, Kratovo, Kriva Palanka and Kochani and were placed in a state of combat readiness. Many of these units were also charged with guarding various places of strategic importance such as villages, roads, bridges, etc.

Being under constant watch by the Ottomans and having to compete with Bulgarian sponsored Supremacist intrusions, the Skopje Uprising Revolutionary District leadership decided it would be best if its forces existed in small units. This way it could carry out partisan style diversionary missions without engaging the enemy and at the same time keep the civilian population safe from retribution and retaliatory attacks from the enemy.

On July 17, 1903 the Skopje Uprising Revolutionary District held a Congress in Kratovo. The Congress was unfortunately only attended by the Skopje Cheta, lead by vojvoda Nikola Pushkarov, and by the Kratovo Cheta, lead by vojvoda Dime Stojanov Berbercheto. In spite of the small turnout however, it was decided, among other things, to pursue and capture the Rumelia Vilyet main inspector, who at any time was expected to be there. They also planned to attack Kratovo and capture Husein Hilmi Pasha. Husein Hilmi Pasha, they were informed, would be residing in Kratovo while visiting the Eastern Cazas of the Skopje Sanjak.

As was the case with other Revolutionary Districts, on July 30th, 1903 General Headquarters informed the Skopje Uprising Revolutionary District of the date of the National Uprising and requested of its leadership to make plans and prepare for attacks. It also requested it to carry out diversionary attacks on the roads and bridges and keep the Ottoman forces engaged as much as possible. Diversionary attacks were ordered to begin immediately after the Bitola Uprising Revolutionary District began its Uprising on August 2nd, 1903. Unfortunately the Skopje Uprising Revolutionary District remained passive during this period because the District's plans to capture Husein Hilmi Pasha were discovered and Husein Hilmi Pasha reinforced his military and police units making it impossible for the insurgents to operate. All the Skopje Uprising Revolutionary

District could muster that day was to assemble the City of Skopje Cheta, lead by the teacher vojvoda Andrej Kozhuharov, which numbered no more than 170 insurgents. Unfortunately that Cheta too could not operate and had to quickly withdraw so as not to endanger the Macedonian civilian population because in addition to reinforcing his military and police units, Husein Hilmi Pasha also armed the Muslim population with 5,000 modern rifles and had the city surrounded preventing the Macedonian population from gathering during the day or from leaving or entering the city during the night.

Skopje was surrounded, barricaded and locked tight by regular and by irregular Ottoman military forces making all insurgent efforts to start the Uprising futile. But regardless of what was happening in the Skopje Uprising Revolutionary District the Ilinden Uprising in Bitola began as planned. At this point vojvoda Nikola Pushkarov moved his Cheta out of Kratovo to the St. Jovan Monastery near the mouth of the Pchinja River where 100 kilos of dynamite and 200 bombs were stored. After recovering the ammunition Pushkarov dispatched his deputy Milan Angelov with a number of insurgents and 30 kilos of dynamite to deliver it to the Cheta inside Skopje so that diversionary actions could be initiated inside the city. Unfortunately, when Angelov and his insurgents arrived in Skopje, the Skopje Cheta, lead by Kozhuharov, had already left and there was no one there to receive the dynamite. Unable to deliver the material, the planned diversionary actions never materialized.

Sometime after the General Uprising began, Macedonians working outside of Macedonia began to arrive and joined the fighting. One such group, consisting of seven insurgents lead by vojvoda Andelko Aleksich, arrived in Skopje from Serbia and at the beginning of August joined Pushkarov's Cheta. Reinforced by Aleksich and his insurgents, Puskarov decided it was time to carry out those overdue expected diversions. The first target of attack was the railway. At this time the railway was of crucial importance to the delivery of Ottoman troops to the various battle zones. Any attacks on the railway would hinder Ruzdi Pasha's ability to deliver Ottoman soldiers where they were needed. As it happened, Ottoman forces at the time were being moved from Uroshevats through Skopje and Veles destined for the Gradsko railway station. From there the troops were expected to go on foot via Prilep to Bitola in order to suppress the Bitola Uprising.

During the night of August 13th, 1903 Puskarov and his insurgents arrived at the St. Jovan Monastery near the village Vetersko. There Pushkarov divided his Cheta into three squads each consisting of 12 insurgents. With himself in command, he reinforced the first squad with the village Cheta from Kozhle and tasked it with taking control of a local bridge. The second squad, lead by Dimitar Bojanov was dispatched northward to take control of another bridge. The third squad, lead by

Todor Nikolov, was dispatched across the river to take control of a tunnel. Each squad was instructed to wait until 11pm before attacking its target.

At precisely 11 pm Pushkarov and his insurgents opened fire on the 50 soldier security force guarding the bridge. A fierce battle ensued. Surprised by the vicious attack 10 Ottoman soldiers were left dead and the rest fled. Fearing more Ottoman soldiers would soon return, the insurgents mined the bridge with explosives but in their haste managed to use the wrong fuses and their effort to blow it up was unsuccessful.

The second squad lead by Bojanov attacked the northern bridge at the scheduled time but without success. The security force on this bridge was better prepared and the insurgents were unable to dislodge it.

Given the number of soldiers guarding the tunnel, the third squad decided it was not safe to attack and withdrew.

Disappointed that he did not blow up the targeted bridges and tunnel, Pushkarov decided to take more drastic measures and blow up a military train. His insurgents waited near the village Novachani until a train arrived before setting off the charges. This time the explosives did go off but only caused minimal damage. With only two soldiers wounded, the military train continued along its journey unabated. This action however did have some subsequent effects because for the next two days the Ottomans stopped using this railway to transport soldiers. Also this part of the railway was only used during daylight hours.

The next day, August 14, 1903, after bombing the train Pushkarov's insurgents retreated to the St. Jovan Monastery only to be discovered by the Ottomans. No sooner had they arrived than they were surrounded and attacked. The insurgents fought back fiercely all day but could not break the siege. Finally they broke through the siege during the night and escaped to the village Divlje. There they met up with the Kumanovo Cheta lead by vojvoda Bobi Stojchev and together the Cheti fled for the seclusion of the Sveti Nikole Monastery in Gurishte.

This hideout too unfortunately was discovered by the Ottomans and on August 16, 1903 the Chetas were surrounded by a large Ottoman force aided by Bashi-Bazouks from the local villages. Numbering about 50, the insurgents resisted with all their might and around 9 pm the same night they broke through the siege and escaped to Kumanovo.

On August 30, 1903 another Ottoman force was dispatched to seek and destroy the Chetas but by then the Chetas were well on their way to Vranje in Serbia, out of Ottoman reach.

Other Chetas belonging to the Skopje Uprising Revolutionary District remained active and were joined by new Chetas, such as the one from Kochani, until the Ottoman counter offensive began.

On August 27, 1903 Georgi (Goshe) Tanev's Cheta from Dolno Trogertsi, Shtip Region, consisting of 12 insurgents, was surrounded by

200 soldiers from the regular Ottoman army and destroyed. After a long and vicious battle 10 of the 12 insurgents were killed.

On August 15, 1903 another Cheta attempted to blow up the iron bridge near the village Nerezi but without success. Its plans were discovered before they could be put into action.

Another Cheta attempted to cut the telegraph lines near the village Gorno Lisiche but it too was unsuccessful due to its premature discovery by the Ottomans.

On August 17, 1903 two of Ruzdi Pasha's Ottoman battalions from Uroshevats arrived in Skopje, increasing the Skopje battalions to seven. At this point the Ottomans were amassing a huge force, up to 15 battalions, in order to subdue the Uprising in the various regions in Eastern Macedonia. By mobilizing its forces the Ottoman plan was to create up to 55 battalions and let them loose on the Macedonians.

On August 26, 1903 the Skopje Vilyet alone had amassed 41 battalions and by mid September that number had increased to 63 battalions, five squadrons, two artillery regiments and two pioneer Chetas. Because of fears of a Bulgarian invasion, most of these forces were dispatched to guard the frontiers at the Macedonian-Bulgarian border.

This massive show of force literally ended the first or diversionary phase of the Uprising in the Skopje Uprising Revolutionary District but the National Uprising was not over.

The second phase began with the arrival of two new Chetas from Bulgaria. Both numbering about 100 each, were lead by vojvodas Vladislav Kovachev and Atanas Dimitrov-Babata. Unfortunately on their way to Skopje the Chetas were intercepted by Ottoman forces. Pinned down by 300 Ottoman soldiers at Plavitsa Mountain, just south of Kratovo, the insurgents fought a vicious battle killing 25 Ottoman soldiers and losing 2 of their own. Due to the severity of the battle, the Chetas returned to Bulgaria. The following day several new Chetas arrived in the Skopje Uprising Revolutionary District with over 270 insurgents lead by vojvodas Hristo Tsernopeev, Captain Georgi Trenev, Pesho Samardzhiev and others. Among the several Chetas were Dushko Zheve's technical specialist's Cheta and Milan Stoilov's field medics.

Again due to the large Ottoman presence in the region, Hristo Chernopeev's Cheta was spotted by spies in the village Vitosha in Kochani Region, and on September 16, 1903 came under Ottoman pursuit. After spotting the Ottomans, Tsernopeev and his insurgents fled for the security of the mountains and took up defensive positions. Unfortunately in their haste to flee the insurgents left a vast part of their arms and ammunition in the village which the Ottomans had unintentionally destroyed.

Unaware of the presence of the ammunition, which included bombs and dynamite, the Ottoman soldiers set fire to the houses in the village and as the bombs began to explode they became startled fearing an attack. The

Ottomans withdrew immediately and called for reinforcements. After about 6,000 new soldiers arrived the next day, the Ottomans went in pursuit of Tsernopeev's Cheta in the mountains. A fierce battle ensued and lasted the entire day. Unable to hold back the numerically superior Ottoman force, the insurgents in the dark of night decided to flee towards the Bulgarian border. Unfortunately due to the heavy build up of Ottoman forces at the frontier the Cheta was spotted and intercepted by Ottoman soldiers. To save itself, the Cheta split into several smaller units and each took separate paths to safety. This unfortunately still did not save them all as some of the units were ambushed and destroyed. The ones remaining, with the exception of one, fled to Bulgaria. One fled to Sultantepe and fell into an ambush. A vicious battle broke out lasting two days. The Macedonians fought fiercely and by September 18, 1903 when the battle was over 75 insurgents and 380 Ottoman soldiers lost their lives.

One of the most vicious battled fought in the Skopje Uprising Revolutionary District was that of September 24th, 1903 where Nikola Dechev's Cheta from Veles, Grigor Manasiev's Cheta from Kratovo and Toma Pazarliev's Cheta from Voden, totaling 113 insurgents, were pitted against a force of 7,000 Ottoman Soldiers. The Macedonian Chetas found themselves surrounded near Lukovo and Emiritsa in Kratovo Region when the battle broke out. Unable to puncture the siege, the Macedonians fought gallantly the entire day. Then during the dark of night they slipped through the encirclement and fled to Bulgaria. While most escaped with their lives intact, 31 insurgents, including vojvodas Dechev and Manasiev, lost theirs.

Outside of battling the Ottomans, the Macedonians in the Skopje Uprising Revolutionary District also fought against Bulgarian sponsored Supremacist bands operating in Skopje Region, especially near the Macedonian-Serbian border. This was particularly more pronounced after the fall of the Krushevo Republic.

Unfortunately the failed Uprising in this region, as carefully as it was planned not to provoke Ottoman retaliation against the civilian population, did exactly that and the Macedonian people suffered immensely from Ottoman retaliation and revenge killings.

As large as the Macedonian population in the Skopje Uprising Revolutionary District was the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization was unable to motivate it on mass to take up arms against the Ottomans. But as we have seen it was not because the population was unwilling to fight but rather because it was afraid of Ottoman retaliation; a fate it did not escape.

The Strumitsa Uprising Revolutionary District covered an area stretching from the Struma River in the east to the Vardar River in the west. It bordered the Skopje Uprising Revolutionary District in the north and the Solun Uprising Revolutionary District in the south. In other words,

it covered the Strumitsa, Radovish, Maleshevo and parts of Gorna Dzhumaja Regions.

The Strumitsa Uprising Revolutionary District had two important roads and a rail line passing through its territory which made it strategically very important to both the Ottomans and the Macedonians. One road, connecting Strumitsa with Solun and Sofia, followed the flow of the Struma River. The other road and railway, connecting Solun and Skopje, followed the flow of the Vardar River. The Vardar and Struma valleys in turn were interconnected via the Kluch Gorge and via the Strumitsa to Petrich roadway.

At that time the Strumitsa Uprising Revolutionary District was supported by a population of 104,000 people of whom 71% were Macedonians. (Vanche Stojchev. "Military History of Macedonia". Military academy. Skopje, 2004. Page 357)

At the Solun Congress when it was decided to begin the National Uprising early, the Strumitsa Uprising Revolutionary District, represented by Ivan Ingilizov from Strumitsa and Georgi Vamaliev from Radovish, despite its unprepared state, voted for an early uprising. The District did not have enough weapons to arm all its insurgents but that did not worry its leadership because it expected that Bulgaria would soon furnish it with what it needed.

Towards the end of January 1903 the Strumitsa Uprising Revolutionary District was visited by Boris Sarafov and his Cheta of 40 insurgents. At that time there were two local Chetas operating in the District with a combined strength of 25 insurgents, which joined Sarafov's Cheta in its mission to inspect the readiness of Strumitsa District. Sent by the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization, Sarafov's job here was to consolidate the various bands and their leaders who were at the time operating independently and to begin agitating the population and prepare it for the National Uprising.

Towards the end of March more help arrived when Hristo Tsernopeev and Hristo Maznejkov arrived with their Chetas to assist with the Uprising in Strumica and Radovis Regions. Nikola Detsev's Cheta from Veles and Timo Angelov's Cheta from Tikves also crossed the border into the Strumitsa Uprising Revolutionary District and together with the other Chetas participated in various missions.

On April 6, 1903 the combined Chetas descended from Mount Goten and openly attacked the Ottoman, making this an offensive operation. When the battle was over Tsernopeev and Maznejkov went to Strumitsa and Radovish Regions to continue their missions.

After the Solun assassinations 200 angry and frustrated residents from the village Voislavtsi, in Radovis Region, armed with a variety of firearms, swords, knives and pitchforks took to the streets and demanded that Tsernopeev immediately commence the Uprising. Fortunately Tsernopeev

was able to calm the angry villagers but not for long. All through May, 1903 frustration drove people to take to their protests to the streets; resulting in fights.

Unfortunately the usual cure for this type of violence was more violence and Ottoman retaliation. In mid July 1903 while traveling through Radovis, Hilmi Pasha himself ordered extreme measures be taken against these outbreaks. This, as usual, resulted in punishing the innocent civilian population more than it punished the troublemakers.

Without the delivery of the expected arms and ammunition from Bulgaria, the Strumitsa Uprising Revolutionary District leadership found itself inadequately prepared and unable to sustain any operations, not even partisan style diversionary ones.

Part 27 - The Solun Uprising

Prior to the preparations for the National Uprising, the Solun Uprising Revolutionary District (now occupied by Greece) consisted of two districts: the second or eastern district known as "Belasitsa" and the third or western district known as "Kozhuf". These were later consolidated to form the Solun Uprising Revolutionary District.

At the start of the 20th century, the Solun Uprising Revolutionary District supported a population of 418,270 people of whom 195,637 were Macedonians, 103,957 were Ottomans, 30,786 were Jews and the remaining were Vlachs and others. (Vanche Stojchev. "Military History of Macedonia". Military academy. Skopje, 2004. Page 359)

Solun, the capital of Solun Vilayet, was not only a cultural, administrative and military center; it was also a cosmopolitan city with enormous economic power. Much of the high ranking Ottoman authorities were located and lived there. The staff of the 3rd Army Corps, the 17th Infantry Division, the 3rd Cavalry Division and the 3rd artillery Division as well as the staff from several regiments, for example, were all located in Solun. In addition to supporting high ranking officials, Solun Region also supported a number of regular Ottoman army divisions.

As one of the most important cities in the Ottoman Empire, Solun, at the time, was literally the transportation junction between the Balkans and the outside world. It was the crossroad between Europe and Asia, capable of supporting not only a huge civilian population but also large armies on the move to and from Asia Minor and the Balkans.

Being a cosmopolitan city and supporting many foreigners on political, religious and business missions, Solun was a calm and relatively peaceful city. But that was not the case after the Solun assassinations in April 1903. To restore order and regain the confidence of these foreign investors and businessmen, Ottoman authorities had to crack down on the troublemakers with massive arrests. These actions unfortunately not only robbed the Uprising of its leadership but also created conditions of fear which significantly decreased the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization's ability to function in this District. Without grass roots participation, all the Solun Uprising Revolutionary District could muster was the formation of small bands.

Understanding that very little could be done with small bands, the Solun Uprising Revolutionary District leadership decided to organize its activities around partisan style hit and run activities. Plans were then put in place to conduct combat missions in and around Mount Kozhuf.

Appointed to lead the Kozhuf branch of the Solun Uprising Revolutionary District Headquarters were vojvodas Sava Mihajlov, Argir Manasiev and Apostol Petkov. Considering the lack of leaders available to

lead the insurgency in other branches of the Solun Uprising Revolutionary District, it was decided to combine some of the Chetas.

In Belitsa, the Eastern part of the Solun Uprising Revolutionary District, the most prepared region to do combat during the National Uprising was Kukush. Here it was decided to allow the larger Cheta, lead by Krsto Asenov, formed before the Solun assassinations to function as a whole.

Preparations for the National Uprising continued to be made even after the Solun assassinations regardless of the strict measures imposed by the Ottomans. While secrecy and vigilance restricted their movements, organizers did manage to build a large base of operations in the seclusion of the reeds near Lake Ahmatovo. Among other things they built a warehouse for storing food, weapons and ammunition, barracks for the insurgents, and other buildings to be used for cooking food and nursing the wounded. The insurgents from Kukush also owned a red flag made of silk which they carried during their missions.

Around mid-May 1903, for its own safety, the Kukus Cheta retreated into Krusha Mountain to wait until the National Uprising date was announced. Unfortunately no sooner had the Cheta arrived and settled than it was discovered and placed under siege by a column of Ottoman soldiers. While patrolling an area near the village Megurek, south-west of Lake Butkovo, the Cheta was attacked and a battle broke out. Throughout that day the battle spread outside the villages Gorni and Dolni Todorak, lasting the entire day. The insurgents fought gallantly but were unable to break the siege as the Ottomans continued to pursue them through the night. As the insurgents pushed the battle into the woodlands of the village Nemantsi, Kukus Region, they finally broke free and fled leaving behind many dead including Milan Delchev, Gotse Delchev's brother.

It took a while for the insurgents to regroup but by the start of June 1903 they all arrived in the secluded region of Lake Ahmatovo where they met up with Trajko Jotov and Gotse Nistorov's Chetas. Combined, the three Chetas numbered over 200 insurgents.

Even in the seclusion of the reeds the insurgents were not safe as the Ottomans continued to look for them and kept the lake surrounded with artillery fire. For almost a month the Ottomans pounded the area with artillery and when they couldn't uproot the insurgents they tried to burn the reeds but without success.

While the Ottomans were pounding the insurgents, the local Kukush Uprising leadership was making plans of its own to attack and gain control of the city of Kukush. The plan was to combine the three Chetas and assign Krsto Asenov as the top leader while separately each Cheta would have its own vojvoda, Trajko Jotov, Gotse Nistorov, or Gone Beginin.

Before the attack on Kukush, scheduled for July 28, 1903, the Chetas met at the village Postolar to discuss strategies. The attack commenced on

schedule and, surprised by the sudden assault, the Ottomans were easily defeated giving the insurgents a decisive victory. Unfortunately before he could be stopped, the Kukush Kaimakam requested support from the Ottoman garrisons stationed in Kukush, Gevgelija and Dojran. Running out of time the Macedonians strengthened their defenses as much as time would permit but not soon enough to be able to hold onto the city. By morning the Ottomans had surrounded the city and at dawn began their attack. A vicious battle ensued and lasted until late night when the insurgents, in small groups, broke through the siege and escaped to Ardzansko Blato. Given the circumstances, the insurgents managed to inflict great casualties on the enemy while themselves suffering minimal losses.

When the National Uprising began in the Bitola Uprising Revolutionary District on August 2nd, 1903 the Kukush Cheta lead by Krsto Asenov, the Enidzhe Vardar Cheta lead by Apostol Petkov and the Gevgelija Cheta lead by Ivan Karasulijata attacked and liberated the village Komisor. With the Kukush Cheta's flag flying high, vojvoda Krsto Asenov celebrated the liberation by marrying Ana Malesevska, a teacher and daughter of the famous revolutionary Nikola Malesevski. Unfortunately Krsto Asenov's happiness was cut short as he was killed in action soon after his marriage. After his death the Kukush Cheta remained intact and, together with the Gevgelija and Enidzhe Vardar Chetas, continued to contribute to the National Uprising and to the liberation of Macedonia.

Soon after preparations began for the National Uprising in the western half, or Kozhuf part of the Solun Uprising Revolutionary District, the District leadership, lead by Apostol Petkov, subdivided the District into four regions; Grubevtsi, Kriva, Tumba and the City of Gumendzhe. A base of operations, with a number of warehouses, was established on Mount Pajak near Lake Enidzhe Vardar for carrying out Uprising preparations and revolutionary activities. Unfortunately, even though Vojvoda Apostol Petkov was able to recruit a large number of insurgents he was unable to arm them because of lack of weapons and ammunition. With the exception of delivering 10 rifles of 'Gra-Gra' type and several revolvers even the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization's Central Committee could not help.

To make things worse the Bulgarian sponsored Supremacists became involved in the region and began to agitate the population in the villages around the Pajak and Kozhuf mountains to rise en masse during the Uprising. Vojvoda Apostol Petkov, however, opposed their plan arguing that under the circumstances it would be best not to involve the general population and instead allow the village and local Chetas to carry out partisan style combat activities. Accordingly, Apostol Petkov issued specific orders to the Tumba and neighbouring villages to coordinate their

activities with those of the Gevgelija Cheta lead by Sava Mihajlov and Argir Manasiev. Some of those activities included the demolition of the Vardar Bridge and the destruction of the railway north of Gumendzhe. The village Cheta from Grubevtsi meanwhile was ordered to cut the telegraph lines between Enidzevardarsko and the village Kufalovo. At the same time the Gumendzhe leadership was instructed to make preparations for an attack on the installation in Gumendzhe.

Because of a large Ottoman army presence in the area the Uprising in the Enidzhe Vardar Region did not begin until August 6th, 1903.

The Uprising began with a planned attack on the village Kriva where Apostol Petkov was hoping to destroy the garrison of 30 Ottoman soldiers and liberate the village. Unfortunately his plan was discovered and instead of the insurgents attacking the Ottomans, the Ottomans attacked the insurgents and drove them back. While this was going on Sava Mihajlov, with assistance from the Bojmitsa villagers, dynamited and destroyed the railway. A few days later Petkov's Cheta attacked and besieged the Gumendze garrison. Although the insurgents did not capture the city they did manage to block the Ottoman army and hold it besieged in its installation for some time. When Ottoman reinforcements arrived Petkov's Cheta, along with the other Chetas, retreated to Mount Pajak and by mid October 1903 fought several independent battles in various parts of this region.

One of the most severe battles fought in this part of the district was in Gandats, one of the highest peaks of Mount Pajak. There Apostol Petkov and Ivan Karasulija's insurgents took their frustration and anger out on the Ottoman army and Bashi-Bazouks for the crimes they had committed against the innocent and unarmed Macedonian civilian population.

On September 12th, 1903 via a letter to the Ottoman garrisons in Gevgelija and Gumendzhe, the insurgents challenged the Ottoman army to "Come up to Gandats and fight the insurgents instead of attacking the unprotected population in the villages..."

Frustrated by their peoples' plight, vojvodas Apostol Petkov and Ivan Karasulija looked for a way to teach the Ottomans a lesson for taking revenge on the innocent Macedonian population. They strongly believed that if they could draw the Ottomans into the mountains, away from the civilian population, they could strike a blow that the Ottomans would never forget.

The challenge was accepted and on September 14th, 1903 the Ottoman army climbed Mount Pajak from two sides and took position around Gandats peak. The Ottoman plan was to surround the Chetas and deliver a devastating blow. Petkov and Karasulija however were well aware of Ottoman army tactics and the Macedonians with great skill out-maneuvered the Ottomans and forced them into an ambush. The insurgents fought until they ran out of ammunition killing 183 Ottomans. Taking

advantage of the dark of night the insurgents then slipped away leaving the Ottomans in peace to bury their dead.

In Gevgelija Region in the meantime, Vojvodas Sava Mihajlov and Argir Manasiev were busy recruiting insurgents for their own Chetas and making preparations for the National Uprising. Just before the Uprising began they had managed to recruit about 50 insurgents. They chose the village Konsko as their base of operations and as their Uprising center for this region. When the time came the Gevgelija Region leadership decided to split up its Cheta into smaller groups and initiated the Uprising by taking diversionary actions against the railway north and south of Gevgelija.

On August 15th, 1903 Sava Mihajlov's Cheta, assisted by the villagers from Bojmitsa, attacked and destroyed the local railway and a local bridge. While explosives were placed on the railway by small groups, the larger Chetas secured their positions. In the meantime, Argir Manasiev's Cheta carried out a couple of diversionary actions, one near the village Balintsi and the second near the village Smokvitsa where a vicious battle broke out and the insurgents fought against an Ottoman army unit.

In Tikvesh Region meanwhile, vojvoda Petar Jurukov took charge of the Uprising preparations which began early in February 1903 immediately after the Solun Congress. Unfortunately due to the close proximity of Tikvesh Region to Solun and the strict measures imposed after the assassinations, acquiring weapons became very difficult. Even under these circumstances Petar Jurukov still managed to acquire about 300 rifles of the 'Gra-Gra' type and some Martini rifles.

By end of July, 1903 Jurukov's Cheta had grown to 80 insurgents, which was then subdivided into three groups each capable of carrying out individual diversionary actions. Jurukov's presence in the region unfortunately attracted the attention of Ottoman authorities who retaliated by imposing further repression on the Macedonian population. These strict measures forced Jurukov to re-think his strategy and as a result he demobilized the groups of insurgents, dismissing half of them. With the other half he formed two Chetas, one lead by himself and the other by vojvoda Lazar Misev.

As Ottoman weapon search activities increased in Tikvesh Region, to avoid conflict and further endangering the civilian population, the two Chetas left Tikvesh Region and transferred to Prilep Region, but only for a short time before returning to Tikvesh.

While patrolling the vicinity near the village Sheshkevo, on August 16, the Tikvesh insurgents came under Ottoman fire and a vicious battle broke out. When it was over 15 insurgents and 17 Ottoman soldiers lay dead. A few days later another battle broke out, this one near the village Kopristits, leaving 2 insurgents and 7 Ottoman soldiers dead.

Even though the Solun Uprising Revolutionary District had been restricted by the Ottomans in so many ways, its leadership still managed to accomplish a great deal. For starters it mobilized its forces and kept them active. It got the attention of the Ottomans by forcing Suleyman Pasha to send his powerful army after them and to commit large forces to guard the railways. By doing this the Solun Uprising Revolutionary District leadership proved that even a small number of insurgents involved in partisan style activities could literally pin down a large army, as Gotse Delchev had earlier predicted.

Part 28 - The Seres Uprising

The Seres Uprising Revolutionary District (now occupied by Greece), with the City of Seres as its center, covered the territory extending from Mesta River to the east, the Bulgarian border to the north, the Struma River to the west and the Aegean Sea to the south.

Immediately before the 1903 Ilinden National Uprising, the Seres Uprising Revolutionary District supported a population of 429,382 people of whom 245, 582 were Macedonians and the rest were Muslims, Ottomans, Vlachs and others. (Vanche Stojchev. "Military History of Macedonia". Military academy. Skopje, 2004. Page 362)

The Seres Uprising Revolutionary District, being geographically positioned between a number of mountains, rivers and gorges, was not only of strategic importance to both the Ottomans and the Macedonians but because of its poorly developed road networks it made it ideal for organizing a revolutionary movement. Unfortunately because of the 1878 Kreshna Uprising this District gained special significance in the Ottoman defense strategy and was well guarded. Besides being militarily well guarded, this District was also placed under constant Ottoman watch for revolutionary activities.

In terms of defense in the first half of 1903, just before the August 2nd, 1903 Macedonian National Ilinden Uprising, stationed in the Seres vicinity alone were parts of the 9th Infantry Division and the entire 18th Brigade. The 33rd Infantry Brigade was stationed in Goma Dzumaja and forward battalions were stationed in Melnik, Drama, Demir Hisar, Nevrokop and other cities. There were also smaller units ranging from 30 to 40 and from 100 to 150 Ottomans soldiers deployed in the various villages in Seres District. All in all there were over 5,000 Ottoman soldiers stationed in this District alone. How this massive Ottoman military presence was deployed largely depended on the geographic position of the cities and villages and on the perceived threat from the revolutionaries.

To keep itself clandestine as much as possible, Seres Uprising Revolutionary District took the name "the fourth Uprising District - Pirin". But in spite of its large Macedonian population and all efforts by the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization to bring this Revolutionary District in line with the others, there was not much success. This was also reflected by the fact that only one delegate attended the Solun Congress.

Lazar Dimitrov, representing the Seres Uprising Revolutionary District, was well aware of the situation in his District when he voted against an early uprising. But given that many of the delegates voted for an early Uprising, Dimitrov accepted the decision and complied with the wishes of the majority.

Towards the end of January 1903, Gotse Delchev paid the District a visit and met with Jane Sandanski, Pejo Javorov, Taskata Serski and others

in the village Kara Koj, Nevrokop Region, to assess the situation. Unfortunately before his work was done Delchev was killed and his death brought further deterioration to the District's ability to organize the people and to participate in the National Uprising.

Gotse Delchev's death was viewed as suspicious and there was contention between the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (MRO) and the Bulgarian sponsored Vrhovist leadership. The two factions were accusing one another of betrayal and of having Delchev murdered.

The presence of a large number of Bulgarian sponsored Vrhovists did not help the situation. Discord between the MRO and the Bulgarian sponsored Vrhovists always existed but nowhere more than in the Seres District where there was a gaping divide between the ideologies of the two groups. In fact at one point just before the Uprising, there was so much tension that there was serious danger of an armed conflict breaking out between the two groups.

Because this district was already suspected of being involved in revolutionary activities and due to earlier revolutionary incidents in Gorna Dzumaja and Solun (assassinations), the people in Seres were placed under extreme scrutiny. So to avoid placing the civilian population in peril, Yane Sandanski, the only revolutionary leader in the District with authority to make decisions and influence the population, decided to follow Gotse Delchev's idea and not participate in the National Uprising, at least not en masse. Unfortunately since that decision had already been made during the Solun Congress, to avoid making the situation even more difficult for the civilian population, Sandanski gave in to Vrhovist pressures and joined forces with the Bulgarian sponsored bands.

All in all there were 850 Vrhovists; 134 were under the command of Colonel Anastas Jankov, 300 were under the command of Jordan Stojanov and Petar Drvingov. All were under the command of General Ivan Tsonchev.

Because of the problems experienced, the District remained inactive, that is, until August 15th, 1903 when Vrhovist Lieutenant Jordan Stojanov's Cheta clashed with an Ottoman unit on the slopes of Belasitsa Mountain.

On August 19, 1903 another battle broke out on Etipitsa Hill in Bansko Region near Lake Eltepen. Here Lieutenant Jordan Stojanov's Cheta combined with Boris Strezov's Cheta to form the Belitsa detachment and fought the Ottomans under Lieutenant Petar Drvingov's command.

On August 22, 1903 Yane Sandanski held the long overdue Seres District Congress in Belemeto, Pirin Mountain. Here it was decided that the Seres Revolutionary District would continue to participate in the Uprising but in a limited way and through the use of diversionary partisan style actions. The first target chosen to be attacked was the Dedeagatch to Solun rail line.

During this Congress, which lasted three days, it was decided to start the Uprising in Seres District much later than in the other districts. The date chosen was the Krstovden Holy Day, September 14, 1903, 43 days after the Ilinden Uprising in Bitola District. The reason for the delay was because the Seres District was not ready to enter the Uprising with all that Ottoman military build up in its District. The thinking was that if Seres remained peaceful, the Ottomans would surely redeploy the Seres District massive force elsewhere where it was needed. Counting on the Ottomans to disperse their troops to other Districts that had already commenced the Uprising, the people of Seres would rise up and have a better chance of liberating themselves. At least that was the plan.

On August 28, 1903, in order to make use of all available forces, Yane Sandanski summoned Lieutenant Jordan Stojanov to bring the Vrhovist Chetas to the village Pirin, Melnik Region, where he intended to incorporate the Vrhovists with Mihail Tsakov's and his own Cheta. Many were not happy with Sandanski's decision but accepted the idea and cooperated as long as the aim was to liberate Seres and Macedonia.

On August 31, 1903 more Chetas arrived, both Vrhovist and MRO, and met in the region between Nevrokop and Melnik. Included among the Vrhovist leadership were General Ivan Tsonchev and Colonel Anastas Jankov as well as a couple of Russian journalists named Petar Orlovetz and Romoald Przhevalski.

The concentration of armed insurgents unfortunately attracted the attention of the Ottomans who dispatched two military battalions to engage them. A vicious battle broke out near the village Pirin as the combined Chetas took joint action for the first time and defeated the Ottoman attack.

Afterwards Sandanski met with Tsonchev and explained to the Vrhovist that he could not have frontal confrontations with the Ottomans at this time and ordered him to take his Chetas to a region near Lake Braznitsa and wait until the official announcement of the Uprising in Seres Region was made. General Tsonchev accepted Sandanski's recommendation and withdrew his Chetas.

After the Vrhovist withdrawal, Sandanski went to Breznitsa and met with Tsonchev and the other Vrhovist representatives in hopes of reaching a consensus on how to deploy the troops during the Uprising. While Tsonchev wanted an all out war simultaneously deploying every available resource, Sandanski wanted to divide up the Chetas by region and conduct long term partisan style diversionary actions. Unfortunately no consensus could be reached other than to begin the Uprising on Krstovden, September 14, 1903. A vote was taken and, by majority, Tsonchev's plan was accepted and a General Headquarters was established. Tsonchev and Dimitar Stefanov, as well as others from both sides, were appointed to lead the Uprising. Unhappy with the outcome, Sandanski and his insurgents

returned to Seres and Drama to begin preparations for the Uprising and to conduct partisan style diversionary actions.

Vrhovists General Tsonchev, Colonel Jankov, Lieutenant Colonel Stefan Nikolov, Lieutenants Drvingov and Sarakinov, along with their Vrhovist Chetas, waited until September 15th, 1903 before initiating frontal attacks against the Ottomans. They restricted their campaigns close to the Bulgarian border, mainly in the Gorna Dzumaja and Razlog Regions, and when confronted by sizable Ottoman forces the Vrhovists retreated inside the Bulgarian border leaving the villagers open to Ottoman reprisal.

As planned, Sandanski divided up his insurgents into smaller Chetas and placing one under Vojvoda Mircho Kiprev's command. Unfortunately on September 15, 1903, while patrolling the Drama region, this Cheta fell into an Ottoman ambush. While most insurgents escaped with their lives, Vojvoda Kiprev was killed. Command of the Cheta fell to Vojvoda Ivan Anastasov-Grcheto.

On September 16, 1903 the same Cheta ran into another column of Ottoman soldiers, this time near the village Kalapot. Another battle broke out but, unprepared to fight a frontal attack against a numerically superior enemy, the insurgents retreated into the woods leaving behind four of their own dead.

By mid September 1903 most Revolutionary Districts had fallen to the enemy and the Ottomans had no problem responding to the late Uprising in Seres with a formidable counter attack, thus putting an end to the short lived Uprising in that District.

Having failed to drive the Ottomans out of Seres, the Vrhovists continued their campaign in the District but focused their actions more on spreading Bulgarian propaganda and less on attacking the Ottoman army.

From a military perspective, the short lived Uprising in the Seres Revolutionary District was unsuccessful mainly due to the District's inability to become organized under the constant watchful eye of the Ottomans but also due to the conditions of the Uprising's late start. By mid September 1903, free from campaigning in other districts, the Ottomans had more than enough resources to respond to the Seres Uprising, something the insurgents did not count on.

From a moral and political perspective, the Uprising was a success because, in spite of all odds, the Seres Revolutionary District, mainly due to Sandanki's good leadership, was able to muster enough will to begin the Uprising thus entering the annals of history as a District that struggled to not only free itself but to free all of Macedonia.

Part 29 - The Ilinden Aftermath

Given the dire situation the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization's (MRO) leadership found itself in at the start of the 20th century it is understandable why it decided to instigate an Uprising but it is quite puzzling as to how it was aiming to achieve its objectives to liberate Macedonia and the Macedonian people from the Ottoman yoke. Although rushed by pressure from the Bulgarian sponsored Vrhovists, an eventual Uprising was imminent but it was difficult to identify factors for a successful outcome. To put it another way, besides not being ready for a long drawn out war against a vastly superior foe, the MRO had no external backing and it was surrounded by enemies. If its intent was to attract Europe's attention and draw the Great Powers into a conflict with the Ottoman Empire then it did not do a good job of communicating its wishes or if it was given signals from the outside it either misinterpreted them completely or it was mislead.

Whatever the case, the Great Powers not only did not come to Macedonia's aid but were quite surprised by the Uprising and upset about the whole situation. Outside of their own personal non-involvement in Macedonian-Ottoman affairs with regards to the Uprising, the Great Powers urged Macedonia's neighbours not to get involved. So the message from the outside, particularly from the Great Powers, was loud and clear "liberate yourselves or die trying".

The Ottoman response to the 1903 Ilinden Macedonian National Uprising was both overwhelming and brutal. Entire villages and communities were completely destroyed in order to permanently prevent an Uprising from ever happening again. What was not destroyed by the Ottoman army was pillaged by the Bashibazuks and Albanians. Due to the timing of the Uprising most of the crops could not be harvested and with the approach of winter numerous difficult problems had risen. Unable to cope, a large percentage of the peasant population began to leave the villages and seek refuge in the bigger urban centers, such as Bitola, Prilep and other cities. Many fled Macedonia all together and sought refuge in neighbouring countries such as Greece, Serbia, Romania and Bulgaria or went to more peaceful parts of the Ottoman Empire. Some fled to Austria-Hungary and to other western European countries and about seven to eight thousand fled to North America. (A History of the Macedonian People, Institute of National History, Macedonian Review, Skopje, 1979. page 181)

In response to this grave, post-Uprising situation the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (MRO) turned its attention to saving the people. Immediately after the suppression of the Uprising, the MRO leadership, that is those who survived the Ottoman retaliation, began to organize food and shelter for the destitute population. Unfortunately the

difficult situation in Macedonia was made even more difficult by Macedonia's neighbours Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria through their armed propaganda activities inside Macedonia. Foreign armed band infiltration and activities increased sharply right after the Uprising's suppression. Sponsored by the neighbouring state governments these bands were dispatched with aims of destroying the MRO along with the Macedonian national revolutionary movement. Through their armed and intense anti-Macedonian propaganda, their goal was to create an atmosphere of fear in the Macedonian population and prepare the groundwork for the conquest and partition of Macedonia. Eliminating the Macedonian peoples' desire to create a free and independent Macedonia would also make it easier to assimilate the Macedonian people once Macedonia was partitioned. While the Greeks, Serbians and to some extent the Romanians continued to bolster their private, illegal bands of terror in Macedonia, the Bulgarian sponsored Vrhovists continued their infiltration into the MRO with aims of deceiving the people and steering them towards Bulgaria. However in spite of all their efforts, the MRO may have been down but it was not out thanks to the efforts of Yane Sandanski and the Seres Revolutionary District.

Since none of the means employed this far secured the desired results, the Vrhovists organized an attack on Melnik, the Seres Revolutionary District center, in order to destroy Yane Sandanski and his Macedonian insurgents. Fortunately the attack was discovered early enough, which gave the Macedonians the needed time to organize a counter offensive. A fierce battle broke out on April 7th, 1904 near the village Kashna and the Vrhovists were driven back. Even though defeated, the Vrhovist bands continued their activities in Macedonia up until the Young Turk Uprising.

After the failed Ilinden Uprising the MRO, in addition to being hunted down by Ottoman authorities and by the Vrhovists, was also confronted by a new form of struggle; Serbian and Greek armed intervention. Benefiting from the Bulgarian sponsored Vrhovist experience, ruling circles in Serbia were hoping to achieve by force of arms what they had failed to achieve through their propaganda. Serbia began its preparations to enter the armed band struggle in Macedonia immediately after the Ilinden Uprising and used some of the declassed elements of the revolutionary movement to achieve penetration into Macedonian territory.

Under the direct supervision of high ranking Serbian military and government officials, Serbian band action in Macedonia intensified in 1904 and by 1905 there were eleven illegal Serbian sponsored armed bands operating in Macedonia; totaling more than one hundred fighters. Penetrating systematically from the north towards central Macedonia, their goal was to secure, by force of arms, Serbian dominance in that part of Macedonia in which Serbia had designs so that Serbia could gain an outlet to the Aegean Sea.

When the Ilinden Uprising was over Greek armed bands also started to penetrate Macedonian territories with aims of also securing Greek dominance in the southern region of Macedonia. Greek armed band involvement in Macedonia dates back to before the Ilinden Uprising, but after the Uprising activities became more prevalent.

Aiding and providing intelligence information to these foreign armed forces were officials from the foreign churches and schools who were directly sponsored by their respective governments. The Greek armed bands were generously financed by the Greek state budget and, like their rivals the Serbians, Bulgarians and to some extent the Romanians, incurred massive costs. In the course of 1905 more than one thousand armed Greek band members, the majority recruited from Crete, were active in the Bitola Vilayet alone. Greek armed action was particularly violent in the southern parts of Macedonia. These bands employed all available means, including organizing pogroms and burning entire villages to the ground, in order to break the Macedonian people's resistance.

While Greek, Serbian and Bulgarian armed bands operated in Macedonia terrorizing the Macedonian population, actions welcomed by the Ottoman authorities, the Great Powers, Austria-Hungary and Russia in particular had some ideas of their own. Although outwardly their position was to preserve the integrity of the Ottoman Empire, inwardly each hoped that Macedonia would come under their control. To avoid being upstaged and to insure that peace would prevail, the two powers agreed to meet and talk about reforms.

A meeting to work out the reforms was scheduled for early October 1903, between Czar Nicholas II of Russia and Emperor Franz Joseph of Austria-Hungary at Mürzsteg from which later became known as the Mürzsteg Reforms.

Based on the British government's proposals of September 27, 1903 the Reforms basically called for two civilian agents, one from Austria-Hungary and the other from Russia, to be appointed to serve with Chief Inspector Hilmi Pasha. Their responsibility was to ensure the Ottoman administration implemented specific reform programs in the Macedonian Vilayets. The Reforms also called for a foreign general with a number of European officers as his attachés to be appointed to reorganize the Ottoman gendarmerie in Macedonia. Reform of the administration and judiciary and the development of local self-government were also contemplated.

The Ottomans were not happy about these imposed reforms and did as much as possible to sabotage them but finally agreed to look into them. General de Giorgis, an Italian, was appointed Commandant of the Gendarmerie and Macedonia was divided into five sectors where foreign officers were established. The Austrians were put in charge of Skopje Sanjak, the Italians of the Bitola Vilayet, the Russians of the Solun

Vilayet, the French of Serres Sanjak and the British were put in charge of Drama Sanjak.

Unfortunately, as were with many things concerning the Macedonian people, the Mürzsteg Reforms were never implemented as intended and did not meet with Macedonian expectations. And precisely for this reason they were outright condemned by the MRO.

The only positive thing about the Reforms was that they affirmed to Europe and to the world the Macedonian people's struggle for freedom and desire for independence.

After the end of the Ilinden Uprising, as mentioned earlier, the MRO found itself in an extremely difficult situation especially when it came to providing for the people who had lost their villages and homes. But in spite of what the MRO did, which obviously was not enough, people experienced untold suffering. The strife took a toll not only on the physical being of the people but also on their faith in the MRO's ability to solve their problems. The MRO's leadership was also affected placing blame on itself for the catastrophic situation it had created. Communications between District and Central Committees slowly dwindled and eventually broke down leading to the dissolution of the Central Committee as the leading body of the Organization.

The failed uprising, loss of so many great MRO leaders, the Turkish backlash and now foreign influence was too much for the MRO to bear. The close links with the villages and the ideological differences between isolated MRO branches widened. Although the MRO continued to live, it lacked direction and was on the verge of an ideological collapse. In time however it managed to muster two more congresses. With the advent of Krste Misirkov's book, a new tide of opinion was spreading throughout Macedonia. Misirkov warned against falling under the influence of the chauvinistic elements and recommended taking a more nationalistic approach in order to weed out the Bulgarian sponsored Vrhovist and conservative elements in the Organization. At the Prilep Congress held in May 1904, the MRO was re-vitalized and its independence reasserted. The most significant developments to emerge from this Congress were MRO's ability to shed itself of its conservative elements and to adopt a resolution to decentralize the organization and give more power to the sub-districts. Unfortunately this Congress literally split MRO into two ideologically polarized halves. While the more progressive MRO faction adopted a defensive strategy, the Vrhovists pursued a policy of renewed confrontation. The two factions continued to masquerade under the same banner and were headed for a showdown. The showdown materialized in November of 1905 at the Rila Monastery near the Macedonian-Bulgarian border and took the form of a General Congress. There was a single item of paramount importance on the agenda, to determine the direction of the Organization. Twenty-two elected delegates in total attended the Rila

Congress and by secret vote the more progressive faction came out victorious.

As a result of the Rila Congress a rulebook was issued proclaiming the aims of the Central Committee, which basically called for:

1. Creating an autonomous and independent Macedonia.
2. Achieving this by means of a united national front, over a long period of revolutionary activity.
3. Resisting all foreign interference

There was one more safeguard added that is worth mentioning. The MRO now possessed the capacity to recall a rebellion by a 75% majority vote of its delegates. They could only be nominated from regional sub-committees within Macedonia; a safeguard that guaranteed there would be no more interference from Sofia and the Vrhovists.

Defeated at the Rila Congress, the Vrhovists took up permanent residence in Sofia and continued to wage a terrorist war on the MRO leadership. Both Nikola Karev in 1905 and Damjan Gruev in 1906 were indirectly eliminated by terrorist acts of the Vrhovists.

Bulgarian interference in Macedonia not only damaged the revolutionary movement but also put fear in the civilian population, ripening conditions for Balkan intervention. Greece and later Serbia were quick to take advantage of a weak MRO and a frightened population. With the assistance of the Turkish military they were able to step up armed propaganda campaigns inside Macedonia. The aim was to kill two birds with one stone. By being the eyes and ears of the Turks, the Greek clergy spied on the Macedonians and disclosed information to Turkish authorities. The Turkish military in turn, stepped up activities to eradicate the remnants of the insurgents and their leaders. At the same time, in the midst of terror, the same Greek spies were offering Macedonians Hellenism as a way to salvation. "No one can deny that the Greeks owed much to the Turks. Indeed the victory of the Turks in 1903 was the salvation of Hellenism in Macedonia. From the outset the Greek clergy and notables devised means of passing information to the Turks. The Turkish authorities on their side welcomed this support." (Pages 118-119, Dakin, The Greek Struggle in Macedonia 1897-1913)

The most notorious of the Greek clergy was the Metropolitan of Kostur, Archbishop Germanos Karavangelis. Karavangelis was sent to Macedonia by the Patriarch Constantine V who favoured the Athenian (the most nationalist) style of Hellenism and selected Karavangelis as the right man to do the job. Dakin portrays Karavangelis as a charismatic and capable figure of a man that is a credit to the human race. (Pages 119-127, The Greek Struggle in Macedonia 1897-1913) That, however, is far from the truth. Karavangelis was a ruthless killer and a disgrace to the Christian

religion. Karavangelis was personally responsible for the assassination of hundreds of Macedonian patriots including priests, notables, teachers and MRO leaders. He was also personally responsible for Hellenizing hundreds of Macedonian villages by force and by sheer terror.

Karavangelis' first priority after accepting the post as Metropolitan of Kostur was to raise an army. He couldn't import one, the Great Powers were watching, so he resorted to purchasing one. The most pliable and feeble-minded man who would sell his soul for gold was the self styled brigand Kote of Rula "the darling of Athens". Kote sold out his own people for Greek gold. From being the most revered Cheta leader, Kote became the most hated man in Macedonia. When Karavangelis decided who was to die, Kote became the executioner. In addition to regular pay for murder, Kote and his band of no-goods received additional rewards of gold coins for turning in desired body parts from their victims. While Kote was doing the murdering in the Macedonian villages, Karavangelis, in person with Turkish escorts, was Hellenizing them. Nothing and no one could stand in his way. Those who Karavangelis couldn't buy or bribe were killed. "By containing and fragmenting the Internal Organization in Western Macedonia, Kota (Kote) and Karavangelis not only caused the projected rising to be continually postponed but they also caused it to be undertaken prematurely; and eventually they both contributed towards its defeat and failure. True, most of the recorded action (the arrests, searches and attacks on villages and bands) were carried out by the Turks, but the Turks nearly always acted on information supplied by Karavangelis or his agents. It was Karavangelis again who prevailed upon the Turks to attack Smardeshi (Smurdersh) on 9/22 May 1903." (Page 132, Dakin, The Greek Struggle in Macedonia 1897-1913)

“After the Ilinden rising of August 1903, it was Karavangelis who, escorted by 600 Turkish soldiers, visited the villages, celebrating mass, speaking to the villagers and calling upon them to surrender arms. The result was that even such strongholds as Aposkepos (Aposkep), Zagoritsani (Zagoricheni) and Gabresi (Gabresh), which only a few months before had declared themselves Exarchist, now returned to the Patriarchist fold. Without the support of the Turks, it is doubtful whether Karavangelis's work would have been successful. It is equally doubtful, however, whether but for the activities of the Patriarchist counter-movement, the Turkish authorities could have dealt such a decisive blow to the Internal Organization (MRO)." (Page 135, Dakin, The Greek Struggle in Macedonia 1897-1913)

Even my own small village Oshchima didn't escape the hand of Karavangelis. It was a Sunday morning when Georgios Tsantos (Varda) and his gang came to Oshchima looking to murder Pop Giorgi Popov. On the way they ran into a young man named Yane Dzhigerov who was taking his mule to pasture. It is unknown what transpired but the young

man was found dead, with his throat cut. After killing Yane, Varda broke into Oshchima's Svety Nikola Church and killed Pop Giorgi by stabbing him multiple times. He then skinned the beard off his face and cut off his blessing finger. Varda was prepared to kill many more had it not been for the Oshchimian Cheta led by Bozhin Temov who drove Varda and his hoodlums out of Oshchima at gunpoint. Pop Giorgi Popov's beard and finger were delivered to Karavangelis in exchange for gold.

With regards to Kote from Rula, greed was stronger than loyalty. Lazo Pop Ttrajkov, an usher at Kote's wedding and a man who twice saved Kote's life, was on Karavangelis's hit list. After a skirmish with the Turks in Mariovo, word was out that MRO leader Lazo Pop Trajkov had received a wound on the head and was on the run. Kote caught up to him at Turtska Polena in Oshchima and after a long chat the two men said their goodbyes and Kote left. On his way to Zhelevo, Kote sent some Zhelevtsi to kill and decapitate Lazo. Lazo's head was taken to Karavangelis to collect the reward. Lazo's headless body was buried behind the altar in Sveti Nikola Church in Oshchima.

The ultimate disgrace for Karavangelis came after the massacre of the village Zagoricheni. Refusing to bend to Hellenism, Zagoricheni, on direct orders from Karavangelis, was massacred to the last person the Greeks could lay their hands on, including the unborn children inside the wombs of pregnant women. Witnesses reported finding bodies of pregnant women with their abdomens cut open. The survivors who escaped the atrocity refused to bury the dead bodies of their neighbours until they were seen by foreign dignitaries. For days the dead were guarded until the European consuls in Bitola came to witness the atrocities for themselves. Here is what Brailsford had to say; "The chef d'oevre of this Hellenic campaign was achieved at Zagoricheni, a large Bulgarian village (author's note: Macedonian village, there were no Bulgarian villages inside Macedonia) near Klissoura, which, like Mokreni, took a leading part in the uprising of 1903, and like Mokreni was burned by the Turks. A Greek band, which is said to have numbered over two hundred men under three Greek officers in uniform, surprised it by night (April 6-7, 1905) by using bugle calls which led the villagers to suppose that Turkish regulars were manoeuvering in the neighbourhood. They burned ten houses, and twenty-eight of the temporary homes erected amid the ruins of the last conflagration. They wounded seven persons and killed no less than sixty, among them seven women, twenty-two persons over sixty years of age, and five children under fifteen. There was a good deal of evidence to show that the local Turkish authorities were privy to this massacre, and some circumstances seemed to include the Archbishop of Castoria (Kostur). It is quite clear that no conflict or provocation preceded what was simply a deliberate massacre, and the only reason for choosing Zagoricheni was that it was an eager and patriotic Bulgarian center, and that it disobeyed the summons of

the Greek Archbishop to return to the Patriarch fold." (Pages 216-217, Macedonia its Races and their Future)

After the massacre when it was discovered that Karavangelis was implicated, to escape punishment the cowardly Archbishop of Kostur fled to Sveta Gora (Holy Mountain) where he spent two years in hiding before fleeing to Austria. Today there is a statue of Karavangelis in Kostur to commemorate his great contributions to Hellenism.

The Roumanie of Bucharest has published the text of a circular found by the Turks in some documents seized on the person of a Greek prisoner. It reads like a genuine Greek document, and its authenticity has not been questioned by the Greek organs. It is said to bear the seal of the Greek Committee. (Remember there were no Bulgarians or "Bulgars" in Macedonia). It read as follows:

"Brave defenders of Hellenism, I address you today in order to express the gratitude which the entire nation feels for all you have done and will yet do on behalf of the Fatherland. Continue the struggle against the Bulgarian assassins, and neglect no means of proving to the whole world that Macedonia is purely Greek. Exterminate the priests, the teachers, and the notables who compose the Bulgarian Committees. It is at length time to put in practice the saying: an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. When it is a question of taking vengeance we must not spare the Bulgarians, even when they hide under the robes of a priest. Burn, shoot, assassinate, and purify the soil of Macedonia from all that is Exarchist. The Supreme Panhellenic Committee has decided to intensify the struggle by making use of your arms, O valiant combatants, and if for some time past the Committee has hardly seemed equal to the occasion, the reason is that official Greece hesitates. But what is official Greece to us, when we have the approbation of the whole Hellenic world? Forward, then, until you have wiped out the last Bulgarian in our Macedonia. Your names will be inscribed in letters of fire in the annals of the race. May Heaven grant that the day be near when the sun of Hellenism will shine on Macedonia; then there will be peace for us and for the Turks, with whom we stand on the best of terms. Let our motto be: Purge Macedonia of the Bulgars." A quote from M. Gaulis' admirable paper, La Macedoine. (Page 217, Brailsford, Macedonia its Races and their Future)

Macedonians were well acquainted with the murderous activities of the Bulgarian sponsored Vrhovists whose new waves of terrorist bands began to penetrate the eastern borders of Macedonia in March of 1904. Fortunately Yane Sandanski's forces were still in control of the Pirin district and more often than not, successfully repealed Bulgarian advances. In the west bands of young Turks, who deserted the army during the Ilinden rebellion, joined Albanian gangs, looting and killing indiscriminately.

Part 30 – The Nozh Uprising

By the middle of 1907 the Macedonian people found themselves in a state of anarchy with war looming on the horizon. No one knew or could confirm with any certainty how many illegal armed bands were operating in Macedonia. Neither the Ottoman army nor the International Peacekeepers wanted anything to do with them. These Greek, Serbian, Bulgarian, Albanian and Romanian bands were paid to terrorize and victimize the Macedonian civilian population with a single aim, to eliminate the Macedonian peoples' desire to create a free and independent Macedonia and to make it easier for whoever possessed Macedonian lands to assimilate the Macedonian people once Macedonia was partitioned. These bands were dispatched and paid for by the Greek, Serbian, Bulgarian and Romanian governments to serve their interests.

By this time the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (MRO) had recovered somewhat from the failed Ilinden Uprising but did not possess the strength or resources to respond to all the troubles that the Macedonian people were facing. However the few Macedonian Chetas that remained active fought day and night to protect the people, sometimes two or three battles per day. If they fought the Greeks, Serbians and Bulgarians in the morning then they fought the Ottoman army in the evening.

The civilian population did not know what to make of all the chaos and violence and lived under constant fear and threat of war. The situation worsened when the Ottomans began to reinforce their military installations in the Bitola Vilayet with ten additional battalions. Not knowing what this military buildup was for the MRO decided to react, particularly after the Ottomans joined the Greeks, Serbians, Bulgarians and Bashibazuks in committing violent crimes against the Macedonian population.

Given the dire situation, particularly in the Bitola Vilayet in April 1907, many of the Macedonian insurgents and Vojvodas who survived the Ilinden onslaught were recalled and asked to reassemble at Babuna Mountain in Bitola.

The first to return were Vojvodas Petar Atsev and Tane Nikolov along with 50 experienced and well-armed insurgents. Vojvodas Mihail Chakov, Hristo Tsvetkov and Mircho Najdenov, along with their Chetas, arrived followed later by Ivan Naumov- Alabakov from Veles with his Cheta. In total there were 230 insurgents who had returned and 300 more from the local village militia. After arriving, the force of 530 insurgents relocated to the Nikodin vicinity where they were joined by more local Chetas and some from Kostur Region and southern Bulgaria.

On June 6, 1907 the Council of Vojvodas held a meeting in Popadiski Chukari where they discussed strategies on how to take adequate measures to protect the population. Anticipating dramatic events, the Council ordered the local organizations to immediately prepare food for 500

persons for three days. Fortunately the dramatic events anticipated did not materialize.

In the middle of June, 1907 two Serbian armed bands appeared in the village Nikodin and began to hassle the civilian population. On June 22, 1907 the Macedonian Chetas led by Mihail Chakov, Tane Nikolov, Petar Atsev, Mircho Najdenov and Hristo Tsvetkov surrounded Nikodin and began their assault on the Serbian bands. Unfortunately before the bandits could be captured most escaped the encirclement by disguising themselves as women wearing traditional clothes, or shepherds and herdsmen.

When the Ottoman authorities found out that Macedonian insurgents had returned and were in the vicinity of Nikodin, they quickly dispatched their army and garrisoned all the villages including the small ones.

On July 10, 1907 the Chetas, led by Nikolov, Atsev, Najdenov, Tsvetkov and Gorgi Mariovski from Mariovo numbering more than 150 insurgents reinforced with 300 insurgents from the village militia, regrouped in the vicinity between Popadija -Nikodin and Rakle and went on their way to intercept another Serbian armed band which had entered Nikodin.

On July 11, 1907 the Council of Vojvodas decided to encircle the Serbian band and this time destroy it for good. But yet again the Serbians breached the encirclement and escaped. Eager to save their own skins and get revenge on the Macedonian Chetas, Serbian agents reported the Macedonian buildup to the Ottoman authorities who in turn sent a large local army unit as well as other units from Bitola, Prilep, Voden, Lerin, Tikves and Veles to immediately depart for Babuna Mountain. Upon learning of this, the Prilep Revolutionary Committee advised the Vojvodas to quickly leave Nikodin and retreat to Mariovo.

Unfortunately all the Chetas could not retreat as they were expecting other Chetas to arrive and needed to warn them of the Ottoman advance. Ivan Alabakov's Cheta decided to stay behind while Tane Nikolov and Petar Atsev, who had major roles in the Council of Vojvodas, watched the Serbian movement and while waiting for the arrival of the Ottoman army divided their forces into two groups. The first group led by Nikolov, Atsev and Mariovski, together with the local militia, occupied the Popadiski Chukari hills. The second group led by Chakov, Tsvetkov and Najdenov occupied the Nozh hill near the village Rakle. The second group was then subdivided into two smaller groups of eight insurgents each, commanded by Sekula Oraovdolski and Velko Popadiski. One group was sent to secure Jasenova Glava peak between the villages Nikodin and Vladilovtsi.

On July 13, 1907 messengers from Prilep, Topolitsa, Trojatsi and Veles reported that a column of 3,000 Ottoman soldiers led by Enver Bey, future leader of the Young Turk revolution, was headed towards Nikodin. The same day, the Vojvodas Chakov, Tsetkov and Najdenov were urged to consult with Nikolov, Atsev and Mariovski, now located near Popadiski

Chukar, to decide what to do. Petko Kojchev, secretary of the Veles Cheta, in the meantime, was given the role of acting Vojvoda at Nozh to replace Ivan Alabakov who had left with his 50 insurgents the night before.

Soon after the Vojvodas met they were informed that the Ottoman column was now moving towards Nozh. Messengers were immediately dispatched with orders to inform the Chetas to retreat from Nozh and head towards Popadiska Vodenitsa.

After receiving the order all but 54 insurgents left Nozh. Among the remaining 54 was the entire Kostur Region Cheta numbering 30 insurgents and some volunteers who had recently joined. Command of the Kostur Region Cheta was entrusted to 19 year old assistant Vojvoda Atanas Popov from Sesteovo, Kostur Region and 19 year old Tredafil Dumbalokov from Suho, Solun Region. Dumbakov was a volunteer who had just left the Military Academy in Sofia to join the fight and be close to the Macedonian people.

When Popov and Dumbalokov received orders from the Council of Vojvodas to retreat they immediately rejected the orders and refused to leave claiming that they were sent there by the people of Kostur Region to fight. They were again informed that a column of 3,000 Ottoman soldiers was about to embark on their position, but the two young men and their insurgents again refused to leave insisting that this was their destiny. They came here to fight and not retreat. This was their final decision and they were here to fulfill their obligation to the people of Kostur even if they had to fight to the death.

Popov's and Dumbalokov's decision to fight, although astonishing, was welcome news to the village militia and to the Papradiste insurgents led by Najdo Arsov and Petko Kojchev but a disappointment to the Council because it would prove to be a senseless loss of such good fighters and patriots.

But as the first Ottoman soldiers began to arrive and encircle Nozh there was a change of heart in the Vojvodas, insurgents and village militia as they tried to unsuccessfully breach the Ottoman encirclement. It was impossible to help the brave souls since by then all roads to Nozh were occupied by the Ottoman army and another large army group was approaching.

Tane Nikolov and Mirche Najdenov with their Chetas took position on the highest hill, while Mihail Chakov and Tsvetko Popadiski with their Chetas climbed to another hill surprising and pushing back the Ottoman advance.

Tane Nikolov's insurgents fought the Ottomans approaching from Veles while Ivan Alabakov attacked the Ottomans headed to Nozh in order to open a gap for the Kostur Region Cheta to escape. Understanding the seriousness of the situation, the village militia too tried to punch a gap in the Ottoman encirclement but again without success. The Ottoman army

was much too numerous to overwhelm and well informed of the situation at their disposal.

Still refusing to budge, knowing that they would all die, the Kostur Region Cheta and its new volunteer recruits remained steadfast and determined to give their lives for the liberty of Macedonia. During the night of July 13 and 14, 1907 the brave insurgents took an oath that they would not surrender and took their position with only one thought in mind, "victory or death".

By dawn on July 14, 1907 the 3,000 strong Ottoman column had completely encircled Nozh and a vicious battle ensued. After firing the first volley the Ottomans sent a message asking the Macedonians to surrender. The Macedonians in turn rejected their offer with a counter offer saying that they preferred to fight.

The Ottoman commander was not amused so he began to tighten the noose escalating the battle from all directions.

The unequal battle continued, leaving many dead and wounded but without any surrenders and no attempts to escape, until noon when the last bullet was fired. Then as was previously agreed to, the 45 insurgents who were still alive huddled together, destroyed their guns, watches and other valuables so the enemy could not possess them, gathered all their ammunition and explosives, pointed their revolvers at each other and began to sing a Macedonian patriotic song. They then blew themselves up with their own ammunition.

As the ammunition exploded violently their bodies were scattered with arms, legs, bones and other body parts falling everywhere. The enemy was shocked as it had never seen such self-sacrifice for idealism and with such a tragic ending. When the Ottoman commander Enver Bey arrived at the scene he too was astonished by what he saw. He had nothing but admiration for those who sacrificed their lives and he used the moment to exemplify this tragedy as an act of heroism. He called upon his soldiers and showed them how real heroes fight and die.

To honour the fallen, by Enver Bey's order, the 3,000 Ottoman soldiers shot three volleys in the air while shouting 'Allah, Allah, Allah'.

Italian gendarmerie Captain Lucius in the meantime took photos of the fallen and afterwards Enver Bey allowed the villagers to bury the corpses.

Part 31 – The Young Turk Uprising

It appears that the Christians were not the only ones being targeted for exploitation and abuse by the high Ottoman authorities and the Ottoman system in the Balkans during the early 1900's.

After the Ilinden Macedonian National Uprising was suppressed, conditions in the Ottoman Empire continued to deteriorate distressing even elements of the Ottoman ruling class.

Pushed to the limit, the first to react were the foreign educated Ottoman military officers who later came to be known as the Young Turk Committee of the "Unity and Progress" party. Having run out of options as to what to do about the distressful situation in which they found themselves, the Young Turk Committee decided it was time to take matters into its own hands by organizing a rebellion, later termed the Young Turk Uprising.

The decision to start an uprising was made in Bitola at the "Unity and Progress" party headquarters on July 3rd, 1908. Here the Young Turk Committee ordered the commander of the Resen garrison, Ahmed Niazi Bey, an Albanian by origin, to leave the barracks and take his soldiers to the mountains. Soon afterwards the commander with 160 of his soldiers took whatever they could, including 74 rifles, 30,000 cartridges and all the money possessed by the garrison, and left for the mountains.

When word of the rebellion spread throughout the civilian population Niazi Bey was joined by many of the policemen in the region.

Soon after Niazi Bey declared his intentions to the Ottoman authorities in Istanbul, Solun and Bitola that he had raised a rebellion against the Sultan's regime, on July 5, 1908, he sent a proclamation to the Macedonian people also informing them of his intentions. In his proclamation, among other things he said: "Christian and Muslim brothers, this is to inform you that the time has come to put an end to the terror and abuse which we all have suffered for centuries. We are in this situation because up to now we have been listening to the Great European Powers and their proxies, Bulgaria, Serbia and Greece. Our authorities have contributed a great deal to this situation by exerting pressures on us, the Ottomans, Macedonians, Vlachs, Albanians and others... Today we have stood up to fight against this tyranny, to eliminate the pressure imposed on us, and to create a future where all of us will have independence and liberty, equality and justice… That is why I call on you to disband your Chetas and to join us in a common struggle against tyranny and injustice. Liberty, to borrow a word from the Macedonian language, for all will be guaranteed… Those who oppose us, be it Muslim or Christian, will be severely dealt with…" (Vanche Stojchev. "Military History of Macedonia". Military academy. Skopje, 2004. Page 387)

On July 7, 1908 Sultan Abdul Hamid II ordered Shemsi Pasha, commander of the 18th Division stationed in Mitrovitsa, to take two Ottoman battalions and crush the Young Turk rebellion. But as the situation developed, as soon as he arrived in Bitola, Shemsi Pasha was killed. Then on July 20, 1908 the entire 3rd Ottoman Army stationed in Solun deserted and joined the new insurgency. The 2nd Ottoman Army stationed in Odrin also joined the insurgency.

After the Young Turks appealed to the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization's (MRO) Chetas to join their fight, the Young Turks formed new armed forces consisting of the Ottoman soldiers who deserted and the Macedonian insurgents from the MRO village Chetas, forces which continued to grow with each passing day.

On July 20th, 1908, led by Niazi Beyand Sabri Bey, about 3,000 Young Turk insurgents entered Bitola and emptied its jails releasing about 1,200 political prisoners, mostly Macedonian revolutionaries.

On July 24th, 1908 Niazi Bey took control of Prespa, Struga, Resen and Debar Regions, punished those who had aided the Sultan and established revolutionary authority over those regions. Shortly afterwards Solun became the new centre of the Young Turk Uprising.

On July 24th, 1908 Sultan Abdul Hamid II issued a decree ordering the Ottoman Empire's State Constitution to be rolled back to the Constitution established in 1876.

The day after the Constitutional roll back order was given, Yane Sandanski from Nevrokop and Hristo Chernopeev from Strumitsa called a meeting to discuss the situation during which the Macedonians decided to give the Young Turks their support.

On July 27th, 1908 the Young Turk committee of the "Unity and Progress" party in Bitola, led by Niazi Bey, organized a welcoming reception for the MRO Chetas. The Macedonian leaders including Apostol Petkov, nicknamed "the Sun of Enidzhe Vardar", and Vasil Chakalarov from Kostur were welcomed with special honours. In Pehchevo, Vojvoda Gerasim Naumov gave a speech in which he also said: "Brothers and sisters, Turks, Macedonians, Gypsies, Vlachs, Jews, we are all in this together and together we will fight to destroy the Empire but preserve the Republic of Turkey as it is now, with no sultan". MRO insurgents were also welcomed as they arrived from the mountains.

On July 30, 1908 Yane Sandanski arrived in Solun where he was welcomed by thousands of Ottoman citizens, including Enver Bey and Mustafa Kemal Ataturk.

On July 31st, 1908 Sandanski issued his famous Manifesto, calling on all nations in the Ottoman Empire to unite as brothers and together fight against the Sultan's tyranny. After that all political prisoners in the regions under Young Turk control were amnestied. More Vojvodas and their

Chetas came down from the mountains and were welcomed and allowed to operate legally.

On August 8th, 1908, while in Solun, Sandanski participated in the reformation of the MRO to include Odrin, a region east of Macedonia. After that MRO became known as the MORO (Macedonian Odrin Revolutionary Organization). MORO was also reformed to include some of the Young Turk goals which were supported by the Macedonian leadership, including Sandanski but with some reservations. Before committing himself fully to the Young Turk cause, Sandanski warned the Young Turks that if they did not keep their promises he would not hesitate to take his insurgents back to the mountains. It was clear that Sandanski did not fully trust the Young Turks because, besides making threats, he also ordered some of his Chetas in Seres, Melnik and Shtip to hide weapons, just in case the Young Turks were not on the level.

During August 1908 the Young Turks elected a new National Parliament in which many of the Empire's nations participated, including the Macedonians. Elected in the first National Parliament were 275 delegates of whom 142 were Turks, 60 Arabs, 25 Albanians, 23 Greeks, 12 Armenians, 5 Jews, 4 Macedonians, 3 Serbs and 1 Vlach. The Macedonians elected were Todor Pavlov from Skopje District, Pancho Dorev from Bitola District, Dimitar Vlahov from Solun District and Hristo Dalchev from Seres District. The fact that Macedonians were invited to participate in the elections and the fact that Macedonians were actually elected in Parliament raised the Macedonian peoples' hopes and their trust in the Young Turks.

On December 17th, 1908 the new National Parliament held its first session with the passing of an anti-strike law directed at ending all strikes, most of which took place in Macedonia; the revolutionary core of the Ottoman Empire. Unfortunately, being prejudiced against the Macedonians and unable to let go of bad habits, the Young Turks exercised the usual violence and anarchy which their predecessors had employed when putting down strikes, thus creating confusion and distrust for the new regime.

At the start of January 1909 the MORO created the National Federal party (NFP) which supported democracy in Macedonia and was against Macedonia separating from the Ottoman Empire. The NFP was in support of an Ottoman Empire as a Federation of States with all of Macedonia existing as a Republic inside that federation. Unfortunately, the Young Turk Uprising in general and the NFP's goals and objectives in particular were not popular with the Great Powers who at the time had different ideas.

The Young Turk revolt, no matter how popular inside, was a threat to Great Power plans particularly to those to whom Macedonia had been promised. The neighbouring countries, with help from the Great Powers,

carried out numerous activities designed to disunite the Macedonian revolutionary movement. Some of these activities manifested themselves in a class struggle between left and right. The right it seems was promised an independent Macedonia while the left fought for a Macedonian republic under an Ottoman Federation.

After the MRO was disbanded in early 1908, left wing forces, including the insurgents from Seres, Strumitsa and Solun Districts, followed Sandanski's lead. Odrin District also joined Sandanski after it was incorporated into MORO by the Young Turks.

In September 1908, under the influence of the Bulgarian government, members of the right wing MRO created the Association of Bulgarian Constitutive Clubs (ABCC) whose main goal was to "group Bulgarian nationalities in new administrative units, homogenize the regions and give them power to self-manage". Clubs such as these were created all over Macedonia and worked hard to separate Sandanski and the NFP from the Young Turks.

In the fall of 1909 after the Law on Associations was passed, which prohibited the creation of organizations on a national basis, the ABCC was disbanded. So to avoid condemnation the Bulgarian government participated in the creation of various Macedonian and Odrin organizations, which again were used for the realization of Bulgarian national objectives. These organizations were created on Bulgarian territory then dispatched to operate in Macedonia and Odrin.

While world politics was polarizing the MORO leadership pulling it to the left or to the right, many Macedonian insurgents remained neutral and fought for the original MRO ideals. One such group was the Bitola District Cheta, which at the time operated legally in Bitola District. On October 13th, 1908 the Bitola District Committee submitted an official protest to the city's Vali, the Young Turk committees and to the Great Power diplomatic representatives in Bitola declaring that the Committee had noticed change for the worse in the Young Turk attitude towards the Macedonian people and unless the proper authorities took measures to alter this change, the MRO would be forced to act. But in spite of the strong words, the MRO continued to operate legally under the rules created by the Young Turks.

The Serbian government in the meantime, in view of the changes brought on by the Young Turks, instructed its diplomatic representatives to support Young Turk initiatives but to also emphasize and promote Serbian interests in Macedonia. During the elections Serbian diplomats demanded that the Young Turks recognize the so-called "Serbian nationality" in Macedonia and to allow the appointment of a Serbian metropolitan to the Veles-Debar eparchy. All this Serbian political maneuvering was carried out through the Serbian Democratic League established in August 1908. It was renamed "Educational-charity organization of the Ottoman Serbs" in 1910. Besides using this organization, Serbian propaganda was spread by

the Serbian church, schools and other Serbian cultural and educational institutions and clubs established in Macedonia.

Greek interests in Macedonia were also affected by the Young Turk Uprising but that did not stop the Patriarchate church, Greek consular representatives and the Greek sponsored armed bands from spreading Greek propaganda in Macedonia. Before the Young Turk Uprising, the Patriarchate, being a legal institution in Macedonia, was authorized by the Sublime Porte to oppose Bulgarian Exarchate influence in Macedonia. But with the Young Turk victory that privilege was threatened so on August 6th, 1908 the Greek silogos convened a meeting in Istanbul. A decision was made to create Greek political clubs in Macedonia and use them to spread Greek propaganda and promote the Greek national ideology.

The Young Turk regime did not meet Albanian expectations so in 1908 the Albanians fought against the Young Turks, struggling for their own independent national, political and economic freedom.

Albanian clubs were also created in several Macedonian cities including Skopje, Bitola, Solun and Debar. The club in Skopje at the beginning of September 1908 had 120 members many of whom were of the Christian Catholic religion, which attracted the attention of the Austrian-Hungarian consul. In June 1909 the Albanian Constitutive Club in Solun submitted a letter of protest to the Young Turk committee condemning the violence and terror perpetrated in Albania by General Javid Pasha.

In the spring of 1910, Midhat Frasheri, president of the Albanian Solun committee, was removed by the Young Turk government from his position as Political Department Director of the Solun Vilayet and was sent to work in Baghdad. This was yet another blow to Young Turk-Albanian relations.

Dissatisfied with the treatment they received from the Young Turk regime, the Albanian people in Albania, in the spring of 1911, began to riot spreading their havoc from northern to southern Albania. As the protests widened a large number of Ottoman officers deserted, joined the Albanian side and began to organize riots against the Young Turk regime in Macedonia.

In early 1912 several Ottoman officers and about sixty soldiers from the Bitola, Ohrid, Prilep and Debar garrisons deserted and some officers in command of the Ottoman battalions began to disobey orders demanding that the Young Turk committee schedule new elections.

In June 1912 a number of Ottoman officers created the “Peoples’ League of Saviours” (“Ishadia”). Then on July 5th Major Halil and Lieutenant Arif, representing the “Ishadia”, met with Chernopeev and Chavdarov in Dupnitsa to discuss what to do about the Young Turk situation. After much discussion the various representatives agreed that they would unite and counter-revolt against the Young Turk regime. The Ottoman officers also agreed to supply the Macedonian insurgents with

weapons, ammunition and the targets to attack. The Macedonians in turn agreed that they would not attack the "counter-revolutionaries" and would try to establish relations with the Albanian and Greek bands and gain their assistance in the fight against the Young Turks.

According to this agreement the Macedonian revolutionaries were to receive armaments, free movement and the cooperation of the counter-revolutionary Ottomans, Albanians and Greeks.

The extreme pressure placed on the Young Turks by the counter-revolutionary movement was too much to bear and in July 1912, the Young Turks finally cracked with the dismissal of parliament. Immediately afterwards more than 10,000 insurgents stormed Skopje and released about 440 political prisoners.

Because of all these countermeasures, the Ottoman government passed even more restrictive laws, took stricter measures and brought new police and military forces into the region. Life in Macedonia became harsher and the only way out of it was seen to be through a war against the Ottomans; a war which could be carried out by reestablishing MRO and its original military activities.

The Young Turks did not succeed in achieving their goals mainly because their "revolutionary ideals" were not supported by the rich Ottoman feudal lords. In fact on April 13th, 1909 in Istanbul, the feudal lords called for a coup against the Young Turks, instigating the April 15th, 1909 protests in Solun where Yane Sandanski and the NFP were called on to participate in putting it down.

Sandanski was again called on April 20th, 1909 to participate in another attack against the old Ottoman regime; this time to a place called Chataldzha near Istanbul where the 3rd Ottoman Army consisting of 40,000 soldiers and 15,000 volunteers was concentrated. Sandanski with 2,000 insurgents, Hristo Chernopeev with 150, Todor Panitsa with 120 and other Macedonian volunteers joined this huge force in a joint action to overthrow the Sultan. The battle lasted three days, resulting in a victory for the Young Turks whose forces occupied Istanbul on April 24th, 1909, overthrowing Sultan Abdul Hamid II and replacing him with Mehmed Pasha V, former inspector for the Murzsteg reforms. Unfortunately, due to Great Power intervention the Young Turk armed forces along with the Macedonian insurgents were forced to retreat and the new administrative organs that were put in charge followed the old Ottoman rules.

It would appear that the Young Turks tolerated the insurgency in Macedonia as long it was needed to fulfill their own objectives but as soon as they took control of the territory and overthrew the Sultan they no longer needed the insurgents and began passing restrictive laws to suppress them. One of the more significant laws was the law on military squad creation for the purpose of hunting down and eliminating insurgents.

In November 1909 Hilmi Pasha, the Minister of the Interior, signed a disarmament law aimed at disarming Rumelia Vilayet and punishing those who were suspected of harbouring weapons. The law consisted of 38 articles grouped in 4 chapters enforced by the Ministry of the Interior and by the War Ministry.

Ordered by Talat Bey, the new Minister of the Interior, another law was passed on December 24, 1909 to revoke all amnesties granted to former MRO activists on July 11, 1908. This law additionally would charge MRO members for old acts committed for which they were already pardoned.

After all these laws were passed, the Ottomans began to arrest, persecute and murder Macedonian revolutionaries, activists, military leaders and insurgents, generally disarming the population by force and by repressive measures.

During late 1909 more than 150 people were killed in Skopje, Bitola, Solun and Odrin Vilayets including Vojvodas Todor Dochev from Bitola and Gjurchin Naumov from Ohrid. Many were wounded, robbed and mistreated and even many more, particularly Christians, were expelled from Macedonia and their properties confiscated and given to Muslim refugees from Bosnia and other places. From March 1st, 1909 to the end of 1910 1,084 Muslims were settled in Odrin vilayet, 10,000 in Solun vilayet and 10,300 in Skopje vilayet, increasing not only the terror against the Macedonian Christian population but also changing the region's demography.

Failing to bring permanent change in the region, the Young Turk regime not only failed the hopes of the Macedonian people but brought unprecedented terror to the population forcing the Macedonian revolutionaries to go back to the mountains.

Among the first to take to the mountains were Vojvodas Blazhe Krstev-Birincheto, Trajko Mitrev from Prilep, Alekso Stefanov from the village Radevo, Bogoj Simeonov from the village Malo Tsrsko followed by Apostol Petkov, Todor Aleksandrov, Hristo Chernopeev, Konstantin Samardzhiev and Mihail Dumbalakov.

In mid-December 1909 Chernopeev, dissatisfied with the current situation in Macedonia, went to Solun and announced to his friends that he was fleeing to the mountains because he believed the situation in Macedonia would only change through violence and war; a notion that was fully supported by Dimitar Vlahov.

In the spring of 1910 new Chetas began to pop-up in Strumitsa, Pehchevo and Shtip Regions and as their numbers increased the Cheta Chiefs decided it was time to create a new General Headquarters and elect new leaders. This task was delegated to a group of former MRO activists from Strumitsa, Seres and Solun Revolutionary Districts who in April 1910 met in Varna and then in Sofia and decided to resume the insurgency

in Macedonia and to include Odrin District. An organizational committee was elected led by Hristo Chrnopeev and Andon Bozukov. But in spite of this group being Macedonian and in spite of the insurgents fighting for the liberation of Macedonia and Odrin, the organization which was going to lead it was called "Bulgarian National Macedonian Odrin Revolutionary Organization" (BN MORO). This was done in order to placate Bulgaria, which had pledged support for the Organization and would allow its Chetas to be formed on Bulgarian soil.

Led by Chernopeev and Petkov, the first Cheta organized by BN MORO was dispatched to Macedonia on June 29th, 1910. Not happy with the situation another group of former activists, consisting of Hristo Matov, Todor Aleksandov, Aleksandar Protogerov, Petar Chaulev, Stefan Nikolov, Milan Gjurlukov, Stojan Mishev and others, got together in Sofia in May 1910 and decided to reestablish MRO and its revolutionary activities in accordance with its old principles. A new MRO Central Committee was elected that included Todor Aleksandrov, Aleksandar Protogerov and Petar Chaulev with Hristo Matov and Todor Lazarov as representatives from abroad.

On May 10, 1910 a group of 13 people, led by Todor Aleksandrov, arrived in Macedonia and after crossing the border broke into five groups and went to various cities to re-establish MRO and carry out new military activities.

As a result of their work numerous new Chetas were created in a short time and established in almost every region of Macedonia. People were told that the new MRO was based on the old Ilinden ideals and would seek the same goals as its predecessor. MRO's comeback had great influence on the Macedonian people as many flocked to join its new Chetas. Skopje Revolutionary District, led by Todor Aleksandrov, was the most successful District to engage the people not only to join the Organization but also to carry out military campaigns against the Ottomans.

Unfortunately in spite of all efforts on the part of the MRO and its leadership, neither the new Chetas created internally nor the ones infiltrated from abroad would follow the MRO military procedures and principles. Each Cheta followed its own rules and acted more or less on its own initiative.

To resolve this and other outstanding issues, a meeting was held in Sofia on March 11, 1911 between the various representatives of MRO and BN MORO. After a long discussion it was decided that the name MORO would be used to represent all Organizations and as for the conduct of its members, they were to follow the old pre Ilinden Constitution and Rulebook. The new struggle would be mostly diversionary with attacks aimed at the railroads. A new Central Committee was elected consisting of Todor Aleksandov, Hristo Chernopeev, Petar Chaulev and Aleksandar Protogerov. Todor Lazarov and Pavel Hristov were appointed

representatives from abroad. Immediately after the meeting new Chetas were created, each consisting of 5 to 6 insurgents led by Vojvodas Aleksandrov, Chernopeev, Jurukov, Apostol Petkov, Ichko Dimitrov, Konstantin Samardzhiev and others.

Before returning to Macedonia, Todor Aleksandrov, in a speech, reassured the Macedonians in Sofia that the morale of the Macedonian people in Macedonia was high, that the new insurgency was welcomed everywhere and that the Macedonian people were again ready to make sacrifices.

The first MORO (United VMRO and BN MORO) Chetas, organized by activists from the former Supreme Committee (Vrhovists) and led by Lieutenant Colonel Stefan Nikolov, were dispatched to Macedonia in May 1911. Upon crossing into Macedonia the Chetas were broken up into smaller groups and each group was sent to a pre-selected region; namely Strumica, Petrich, Maleshevo, Melnik and others. Each smaller Cheta, led by Tane Nikolov, Doncho Zlatkov, Stefan Chavdarov, Georgi Zankov and others, in turn operated independently of the others.

On October 18th, 1911 MORO's Central Committee sent a memo to all Great Power Consuls in Macedonia informing them that the political and economic situation in Macedonia had not changed since July 11th, 1908, emphasizing that in such a situation it was only normal that revolutionary activities, such as those agreed upon on July 10th, 1908, be continued. All conflicts from here on forward between insurgents and the Ottoman army would be due to revolutionary activities of the MORO.

After the memo was sent, Ottoman authorities imposed even stricter measures against the Macedonian people. During 1911 and especially 1912 diversionary campaigns became a regular theme in Macedonia being carried out by MORO insurgents.

Explosive experts from the Bulgarian army were dispatched to train MORO insurgents on how to carry out effective attacks on rail lines, focusing mainly on the Solun-Skopje and Solun-Bitola rail lines.

Besides carrying out diversionary attacks on railway facilities, explosive devices were also placed in cities, often on market days and in crowded places. These kinds of diversions were carried out all throughout Macedonia. One of the most severe attacks was carried out in Dojran where 13 people were killed and 42 Ottomans and four Macedonians were wounded. Another attack was carried out in Shtip on November 21st, 1911 killing one and wounding three Ottomans. Although this attack did not cause much damage, this particular incident stirred up fanaticism in the Islamic population causing it to massacre many Christians and rob and burn their shops and houses. After the Muslims were done 20 Macedonians were killed and 262 were wounded.

On July 19th, 1912, just before the Balkan Wars erupted, a bomb exploded in the green market in Kochani. Five minutes later another bomb

exploded in the granular food market killing 10 people in total. Twenty minutes later the Ottoman army blocked all exits and, aided by the police, entered shops and houses killing everyone in sight. In the seven hours that Kochani was seized 40 people were killed and 200 were severely wounded. Houses were robbed and burnt and many women were raped. All consuls were informed about the incident, which was later used as pretext for the First Balkan War.

After Italy declared war on the Ottoman Empire, Ottoman authorities, in October 1911, declared a state of emergency and initiated mobilization of the Macedonian people. To avoid being mobilized many young Macedonian men left their homes and fled abroad. By the end of 1911 more that 900 young Macedonians had avoided the Ottoman recruitment only to return as MORO insurgents.

At the start of March 1912, Shukri Bey, secretary of the Ottoman Ministry of the Interior, and Abdul Kerim Bey, secretary of the Ministry of Education, arrived in Sofia and requested that Bulgarian government stop armed MORO insurgents from entering Ottoman territories from Bulgaria.

A meeting was convened between the Ottomans, the Bulgarian government and the MORO to negotiate a deal. But as a representative of the MORO from abroad, Hristo Matov categorically refused to allow the disarming of insurgents. Being unsuccessful in negotiating a deal, the Ottomans decided to increase their gendarmerie forces in Macedonia to five regiments, each consisting of 3,000 soldiers, and five mobile battalions, each consisting of 1,000 soldiers. The total number of policemen was also increased to 20,000.

In the summer of 1912 new organizations were created in Bulgaria in an attempt to quickly solve the Macedonian Question. On June 17th, 1912 a group of people, among who were Bulgarian officers of Macedonian descent, met at Dr. Dimitar Vjadov's house to plan what to do next. Among them were Lieutenant Colonel Aleksandar Protogerov, Lieutenant Colonel Stefan Nikolov, Major Petar Drvingov and Major Boris Drangov. After some discussion it was decided to convene a congress in Sofia and present the Bulgarian government with a scenario that favoured an uprising followed by war. A new administrative body, headed by Stefan Nikolov, was appointed to organize the Congress.

The Congress took place in Sofia on August 12th, 1912, which according to media reports was dubbed the "People's assembly for Macedonia and Odrin". During the Congress a resolution was adopted demanding that the Ottomans provide complete autonomy to Macedonia and Odrin with its own district national parliament, people's police and a Christian governor to be elected by the people and to be supported by the Great Powers. If this demand was not immediately met the resolution called for the Bulgarian government to declare war on the Ottoman Empire.

At the beginning of September 1912 the Macedonian-Odrin brotherhood executive committee began to organize volunteer Chetas for the liberation of Macedonia and Odrin. On the eve of the Balkan Wars, in addition to existing MORO Chetas, new Chetas were created and recruited in Bulgaria to be dispatched to Macedonia. Unfortunately the various leading bodies could not agree on who was going to lead the Chetas, which brought into question Bulgarian mistrust of the Macedonians regardless of their political affiliations.

Part 32 – Prelude to the Balkan Wars

The Ilinden Macedonian National Uprising was the Macedonian peoples' conclusion to a long struggle for freedom from the oppressive Ottoman Empire and for the creation of a free and independent Macedonian state. The Macedonian peoples' hopes and aspirations unfortunately were not only dashed, when the Ottomans violently crushed the Uprising, but their hopes for liberty in the future were also destroyed as a Macedonian defeat signaled to Macedonia's neighbours that Macedonia was now ripe for the picking.

Despair and helplessness overcame the Macedonian population as it lost its strength to struggle not only against the Ottomans but also against foreign influence and alien propaganda. Disappointed in their leadership's ability to lead them to liberty and under the influence of neighbouring propaganda, Macedonians began to believe that the only way they could liberate themselves was if Bulgaria, Serbia, or Greece helped them. The hopes of the majority were pinned mostly on Bulgaria because its propaganda, delivered by the Exarchate Church and the Vrhovists (Bulgarian supremacists), was very convincing. Bulgarian propaganda was so strong that Macedonians began to trust Sofia to become their liberator.

In terms of numbers, just before the First Balkan War broke out, there were 2,360,000 people living within Macedonia's ethnic and geographical borders in an area encompassing 67,741.2 square kilometers.

Of the total population living in Macedonia, 52.4 percent, or 1,182,000 people were Christian Macedonians, 22 percent, or 500,000 were Ottomans, 10 percent, or 230,000 were Greeks, 5.7 percent, or 123,000 were Albanians, 3.6 percent, or 80,000 were Vlachs, 3 percent, or 70,000 were Jews, and 2.4 percent, or 54,000 were Roma (Gypsies). Ottomans lived mainly in the Vardar River valley and on the Aegean Coast. Greeks lived on the southern fringe of Macedonia and Jews lived mostly in Solun. In 1912 Solun had a population of 125,000 people, 60,000 of whom were Jews, 25,000 were Ottomans, 14,000 were Macedonians and 14,000 were Greeks. (Vanche Stojchev. "Military History of Macedonia". Military academy. Skopje, 2004. Page 397)

Even though the Macedonian Odrin Revolutionary Organization (MORO) had much influence over the entire Macedonian territory, it was unable to entrench itself everywhere. There were peripheral areas still out of its control where Macedonians were only a minority. MORO attempted to pull these areas under Macedonian control and grant them political autonomy. But just before the Balkan Wars, Bulgaria and Serbia signed a secret treaty which put an end to Macedonian autonomy altogether. The name "Macedonian" was also deleted from various official documents including the "Greek-Bulgarian Defense Alliance" map created in early

October 1912 and the military convention of the Bulgarian and Greek army Major Headquarters.

Nineteenth and twentieth century Serbian aspirations towards Macedonia were based on a Serbian national program created by Ilija Garashanin in 1844. Serbian writers, poets and scientists contributed much to the creation and development of the Serbian national ideology, especially during the romantic period towards the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. Garashanin's idea called for the creation of a strong Serbian state capable of opposing Austria-Hungary and Russia who had intentions of partitioning the Balkans along the Vidin-Solun line. Garashanin wanted the Serbian state to be based on historical rights going back to the 13th and 14th century Serbian Empire. Serbia, Garashanin believed, would be a factor of stability in the region and would hold the balance of power after the Ottoman Empire was removed. He based this belief on the certainty that the Western Great Powers, led by France and Britain, were opposed to the Austrian and Russian expansion in the Balkans.

Garashanin's idea of a Greater Serbia was to include Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and northern Albania, territories under Ottoman rule, as well as Srem, Banat, Bachka, Slavonija and Croatia. Even though Garashanin never mentioned Macedonia by name he clearly meant it to be incorporated into Greater Serbia as per Dushan's empire of which Macedonia was part.

Later, after Austria-Hungary annexed Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia lost its chance to access the Adriatic Sea, it came to rely on Russian help to achieve its objectives. This prompted Serbia to look south to Albania and Macedonia to obtain access to a seaport, which clearly proved that Serbian aspirations were nothing more than imperial land grabs of other peoples' lands. This was also proven by the fact that Serbian authorities told their own people to prepare to fight at any cost in order to obtain access to the sea. While preparing to drive out the Ottomans, Serbia had to also confront its Balkan partners Bulgaria, Greece and Montenegro who had similar ambitions and were preparing to also occupy and annex Ottoman territories in the Balkans.

While Serbia directed its attention southward towards Macedonia and Albania, Bulgaria was hard at work looking for ways to annex all of Macedonia and Thrace (Odrin Region). Due to the outcome of the 1876 Istanbul Conference and the 1878 Treaty of San Stefano, Bulgaria believed it had legal rights to annex Macedonia. Bulgaria also believed that it was the only state entitled to annex Solun even though Solun was never included in any of the aforementioned agreements. Greater Bulgarian propaganda was constantly emphasizing that the Macedonian people were Bulgarians and had Bulgarian national consciousness and that Bulgaria had a moral right to look after them. These assumptions were taken as the

basis upon which Bulgaria carried out its international affairs regarding the Macedonian Question.

Greece also had similar expansionist ambitions to enlarge its own territory at the expense of the Ottomans. The most important of Greece's goals was to liberate the so-called "Greeks" who at the time were under Ottoman rule. But as this idea was popularized, a dispute arose between various factions of Greeks as to the definition of who exactly was Greek. Influenced by many factors such as the idea of creating a new Greek national state, various ideologies, economics, religion and other factors, which surfaced in the first half of the 19th century, resulted in two political and spiritual centres to emerge; Athens and Istanbul. Rivalry between the two became an obstacle for building a unique Greek national ideology but was later overcome in the second half of the 19th century by the adaptation of Hellenism. Modern Hellenism connected the ideas of an ancient Greek civilization and a Byzantine Greece, thus linking together all Greek factions.

The Istanbul Patriarchate also played an important role, not only with its spiritual and secular power over the Ottoman Orthodox Christians but also with its political, economic and cultural influence. The Byzantine Church language, later termed "Greek", being the language of business and commerce among the Christians in the Ottoman Empire was widespread among the educated non-Greek population, which supported the idea of creating a Christian ruled state similar to the Byzantine Empire.

But by mid-19th century, Hellenism became the adopted compromise for the Greek national formula which united the ancient and the Byzantine heritage thus ending the lengthy dispute between the Greek autocephalous church created in 1833 and the Istanbul Patriarchate. The Istanbul Patriarchate recognized the independence of the Greek Church in 1850 and the Greek Church in turn recognized the supreme power of the Patriarchate. The Russian Church was instrumental in playing the intermediary from its traditional attitude that Russia was responsible for the preservation of Orthodoxy in the Balkans.

The desire for a Greater Greece was first publicly expressed in 1844 in a statement to the Greek national assembly by Ioannis Kolettis, the president of the Greek government. Kolettis called for the liberation of all Christians in the spirit of the "Megali Idea" (Great Idea), which was to decide not only the destiny of Greece but also the destiny of Greeks in the European part of Ottoman Turkey and in Asia. He added that "all those who believe in Christ are Greek", an idea supported by Greek intellectuals.

Greeks initiated the "Megali Idea" in 1830 immediately after the creation of the Greek state, which at the time consisted of the Peloponnesus and surrounding territory. Then in 1881 Thessaly became a Greek territory and after the Balkan War in 1913, Greek territories expanded to include 51% of Macedonia, Epirus and almost all the islands

in the Aegean Sea, approaching the Turkish coast, including Crete. Then by the Treaty of Versailles in 1920, Greek territories expanded to include southern Thrace and parts of Asia Minor (Izmir and its surrounding Region extending 20 km from Kushadasi). But after Ataturk's victory over the Greeks in 1922, Greece retreated from the Turkish mainland but retained the islands. In 1932, by the Treaty of Sevres, Greece was again expanded to include the southwestern islands near the Turkish coast and in 1947 Greece was given the Dodecanese and surrounding islands.

By any measure the "Megali Idea", supported by the Great Powers, especially by Great Britain, was a great success for Greece which expanded its territory by several times.

The Ottomans on the other hand, as the Young Turk Uprising came to a close, found themselves in a deep political and economic crisis. Their neighbours were continuously exerting pressure and openly showing aspirations to annex more of their territories.

Foreseeing their own demise, the Ottomans decided to use foreign loans allocated for modernization to reinforce their armed forces. They hired German officers and military advisers to modernize their land forces and British seamen to restructure their navy. The Empire's General Staff evaluated and militarily reinforced the various strategic places in the Balkans. Then in the fall of 1910 the Ottoman army carried out military exercises near the Bulgarian border, which revealed to its Balkan neighbours that the Ottoman Empire could not be easily defeated. Given the situation, the Balkan neighbours realized that each state individually could not successfully defeat the Ottoman army. A defeat was only possible if all states put their efforts together. This could only be done if the once bitter enemies became friends; a friendship of convenience. So their way of becoming friends began in July 1910 with the reconciliation between the Bulgarian Exarchate and the Greek Patriarchate Churches.

Another set of players besides the Greeks, Serbians and Bulgarians vying for establishing a "Greater State" inside the Ottoman Empire were the Albanians. The idea of establishing a Greater Albania appeared during the Eastern Crisis, when an Albanian National Movement was formed and demanded autonomy and unification of all territories inhabited by Albanians. Some Albanian intellectuals were in support of cooperation between the Balkan nations in their struggle against the Ottoman Empire. Most, however, were of the opinion that once the Ottomans were thrown out of the Balkans other people would take over their territories. So they supported autonomy for the Albanians but within the Ottoman Empire.

Influenced by rich Albanians, Husein Pasha, from Shkoder together with some Albanians from Istanbul, on June 10th, 1878 formed the Prizren League, a political organization with objectives to struggle for the unification of all territories populated by Albanians and for Albanian autonomy within the Ottoman Empire. Its ideological leader was Abdul

Bey Frasheri who initiated the idea of a "Greater Albania" and from the beginning opposed all others who inspired similar ideas such as "Greater Serbia", "Greater Greece", "Greater Bulgaria" and so on. Greater Albania was to encompass Shkoder Region, Kosovo Region with Skopje as its centre, and the Ioannina vilayet as a single Ottoman province under the Sultan's sovereignty, with an Ottoman governor and a council of 10 Albanians.

With the Berlin Congress canceling the Treaty of San Stefano, the Ottomans were given back their lost territories at which point the Ottoman government disbanded the Prizren League and crushed the Albanian national movement. At the same time however, Austria-Hungary escalated its interests in Albania offering its protection for the Catholic population, living there and in the greater area, and financing Catholic priests and schools. Austria-Hungary also established permanent ports in Albanian harbours. This was done right after Austria-Hungary invaded and occupied Bosnia and Herzegovina, and after it began its penetration into Novi Pazar sanjak, Kosovo and Macedonia. Austrian-Hungarian presence in the region also reaffirmed the Prizren League Program.

The Ottomans on the other hand continued to reject Albanian requests for autonomy. Divided into Entente and the Central Powers, the Great Powers of Europe were against not only Albanian autonomy but any kind of alliances and conflict against the Ottomans.

Victory during the First Balkan War came quickly thus preventing the creation of a Macedonian or Albanian autonomous state within the Ottoman Empire, as promised by the Young Turks. Ottoman defeat and the occupation of Albanian territory by Serbia, Montenegro and Greece had significant consequences for the Albanian people who now had to give up the idea of autonomy within the Ottoman Empire and begin their fight for independence. Austria-Hungary and Italy, which in 1901 had agreed that if there was an Ottoman defeat would guarantee the status quo in Albania, now became very much involved in preventing neighbouring countries from dividing Albania. This in fact ruined Serbia's chances for accessing the sea through Albania and encouraged Serbian aspirations for Macedonia.

Led by Ishmail Kemal, the Albanian Peoples' National Congress in Valona, on November 28th, 1912 proclaimed Albanian independence. The Great Powers, in December 1912, however only recognized Albania's autonomy under Ottoman sovereignty. But with the Ottomans out of the way Albania became a Great Power protectorate. The Balkan countries who wanted to annex Albanian territories now had no choice but to accept the new situation.

Soon after achieving autonomy the Albanian government, through the Prizren League, requested of the Great Powers to allow Kosovo, Macedonia with Skopje, Bitola and Prespa and the territory as far south as

Ioannina and the Ionian Sea to become part of the Albanian territories. Serbia and Montenegro, however, also made similar requests including acquiring almost half of current Albania, and Greece wanted Epirus and Korcha. Despite these requests Albania's borders were determined by the London Conference Protocol of the ambassadors in April and August 1913. After that the Great Powers granted Albanian independence reserving their right to rule the country in the future. In September 1913 the Great Powers appointed German prince Wilhelm von Wied ruler of Albania. But after arriving in Durres on March 6th, 1914, the Albanian people demonstrated against him and soon afterwards he was expelled. On March 14th, 1914 the Albanian people established their own government and elected Turhan Pasha Permeti as their president.

The Prizren League reappeared again during World War II and was led by Xhafer Deva, Ibrahim Bey Bichaku, Mithat Frasheri and others. Supported by Hermann Neubacher, a German diplomat, the Prizren League created a new Albanian government, the "National Board", and in 1943 proclaimed Albanian independence.

To connect itself to the 1878 Prizren League and the idea of a "Greater Albania", Xhafer Deva and Albanian representatives from Kosovo, Montenegro, Macedonia and Novi Pazar sanjak established the "Second Prizren League" during an assembly in September 16-19, 1943. A Central Committee of the League was also elected with Rexhep Mitrovitsa as leader. As their first act, the League proclaimed unification of Albania with Kosovo, western Macedonia, parts of Serbia and Montenegro. To achieve this, the League created its own military forces including the "SS Skanderbeg Division". But due to Nazi Germany's capitulation the Prizren League's plans for a Greater Albania failed.

Those Balkan states which wanted to annex parts of the Ottoman Empire for themselves, having realized that individually they could not do the job on their own, decided to start forming alliances. The formation of the first Balkan alliance began in phases spanning from 1866 to 1868 involving Serbia, Greece and Montenegro in two bilateral treaties.

In 1866 a secret alliance between Serbia and Montenegro was created involving both nations in the preparation of an uprising to liberate and unify their respective people. Montenegro promised to participate in any Serbian led war provided Serbia did the same. Another alliance was formed between Serbia and Greece and a Treaty was signed in 1867 in Veslau near Vienna.

After the failed Macedonian Uprising in 1903, Macedonia became the apple of discord between the various immediate Balkan States who in 1912 formed another Balkan Alliance, this time involving Serbia, Montenegro, Bulgaria and Greece. This Alliance was based on previous bilateral treaties.

Negotiations between Serbia and Greece were held as early as 1892 and 1899, while negotiations between Serbia and Bulgaria were held in 1889, 1897, 1904 and 1909 .These negotiations did not result in any firm treaties but built a foundation for future negotiations, particularly during the Young Turk Uprising when the various Balkan countries were encouraged to cooperate.

A more serious phase of negotiation was entered after the Young Turks capitulated and terror and anarchy returned in the Balkans. Fearing the possibility of Great Power intervention and the Ottoman Empire being divided between the Great Powers, the small Balkan states realized that they could achieve their objectives only if they cooperated. Russia was in support of the creation of a Balkan Alliance as a bulwark against Austrian and German penetration into the Balkans.

Negotiations for the creation of a Balkan Alliance began in the fall of 1911with the first serious negotiations taking place between Serbia and Bulgaria, which involved the division of Macedonia. Refereed by Russia, Bulgaria was forced to give up on the San Stefano Treaty in order for Serbia to get parts of Macedonia.

The real motive for the creation of the Balkan Alliance, as it turned out, was the division of Macedonia which was accelerated by the 1911 Italian-Ottoman war. Bulgaria was unhappy about having to give up the San Stefano Treaty but would have found itself at a disadvantage if it did not participate in the Alliance. Fearing being attacked by the Ottomans, Bulgaria decided to join the Balkan Alliance.

The Serbian government had its own reasons for rushing the signing of the treaty with Bulgaria. After the Italian-Ottoman war started, Serbia sent classified information to St. Petersburg, London and Paris warning the Triple Entente of possible consequences if a war broke out in the Balkans. According to the Serbian view, the best way to protect Balkan interests was through the creation of a Balkan Alliance.

The Greek government had no expectations that the Great Powers would resolve the Macedonian Question. That is why it also put in a bid to annex Macedonian territories, a bid supported by Great Britain. For that reason Greece was in support of a Balkan Alliance. With its support behind Serbia, Montenegro too was in support of a Balkan Alliance, particularly since it had ambitions of annexing Shkoder and other parts of Albanian territories.

Supported by Russian delegates Hartvig and Nekludoff in Belgrade and Sofia, the treaty initiated by Serbia and Bulgaria provided the basis for a Balkan Alliance and negotiations began in September 1911.

On March 13, 1912 the Treaty of friendship and alliance between Serbia and Bulgaria was signed and on June 2, 1912 a secret appendix was added detailing military agreements. Among other things these agreements provided guarantees for each state's independence and territorial integrity

and support in case of attack by a third party. They also committed to mutual support if any of the Great Powers tried to occupy or take by force any part of the Balkan territory under Ottoman rule, which might threaten their interests.

The secret appendix spoke of a war against the Ottomans with prior permission from Russia where the "liberated" Ottoman territory would be treated as mutual to be divided among the participants three months after the war ended. The only debatable part of territory was the Shar Planina Mountain, Rodopi Mountains, the Archipelago and Lake Ohrid, which if not divided by the allies could be given autonomy.

So according to the March 13th, 1912 Serbian-Bulgarian Treaty of friendship, the debatable part of Macedonia's territory was to be given autonomy. This was added to the Treaty, at the request of Ivan Geshov, to deceive the Macedonian people; especially the Macedonian immigrants in Bulgaria.

Believing that Bulgaria had abandoned the Treaty of San Stefano and the decision to give Macedonia autonomy after ejecting the Ottoman army out of the Balkans were the sole reasons why the Macedonian people joined the allies during the Balkan Wars.

But as it turned out neither Serbia nor Bulgaria were prepared to give Macedonia autonomy. How could they? They did not even recognize the existence of the Macedonian nation. Their plans were to divide Macedonia among themselves without considering the consequences for the Macedonian people.

According to Article 2 of the Secret Appendix, Serbia and Bulgaria had drawn their mutual border right over the debatable territory, which extends from the Golem Vrv near Kriva Palanka to the Gubavets monastery at Lake Ohrid. Serbia was obliged not to request more territories and Bulgaria was obliged to recognize the border if the Russian Tsar supported the said division. This meant that Serbia and Bulgaria had already divided Macedonia even before the First Balkan War began and the Russian Tsar's role was only a formality.

According to Article 4 of the same Treaty, Russia was given unlimited power regarding the solution of the Macedonian Question.

After the Treaty was signed both Bulgaria and Serbia began missions to separate the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization from the people in order to manipulate them more easily.

The June 2nd, 1912 Military Convention, appended to the Treaty, included plans for a military offensive against the Ottoman Empire which required Bulgaria to commit no less than 200,000 troops and Serbia to commit to no less that 150,000 troops. In case of Austrian-Hungarian attack, Bulgaria was to assist Serbia with no less than 200,000 troops. If Romania or the Ottomans attacked Bulgaria, Serbia would assist with at least 100,000 troops. If the Ottomans attacked Serbia, Bulgaria would send

no less than 100,000 troops. If both Serbia and Bulgaria were attacked by the Ottomans, they would engage 100,000 troops each.

But then, due to some disagreements about their role in their engagements in the battlefields, another treaty was signed in September 1912, according to which the obligations of the Bulgarian army were reduced.

King Ferdinand opposed Article 2 of the Treaty and Article 3 of the Military Convention directed against Austria-Hungary but, under Russian pressure, he finally agreed to sign it.

Bulgarian-Greek negotiations also began in 1911 but were interrupted due to their dispute regarding how to divide Macedonia. Negotiations resumed again in March 1912 and the Treaty was finally signed in May 1912. As it turned out the treaty was actually a defense alliance for mutual support against the Ottomans and the Great Powers. They also signed a declaration of neutrality for Bulgaria if Greece fought the Ottomans to gain Crete.

In terms of troop commitments, Bulgaria was to commit no less than 300,000 troops and Greece was to commit no less than 120,000 troops. The Greek fleet was also to be engaged in order to block traffic in the Aegean Sea traveling between Asia Minor and the European part of the Ottoman Empire.

The last phase of the formation of the Alliance was for Montenegro to sign a treaty with Bulgaria which was done in July 1912. Montenegro was also committed to be the first to declare war on the Ottoman Empire in order to engage as much of its forces as possible.

There were no treaties signed between Serbia and Greece and between Montenegro and Greece.

Part 33 – The First Balkan War

After the various alliances between Serbia, Greece, Bulgaria and Montenegro were made the Balkan countries began preparations for war. Then on September 20th, 1912 the allies sent an ultimatum to the Ottoman authorities asking them to reform the administration and establish local assemblies, local police, free schools, etc. The Ottoman response came on September 23rd, 1912 with the mobilization of part of the Ottoman military forces in the European part of the Ottoman Empire. The allied response to that was a general mobilization which took place on September 30th, 1912. A day later the Ottomans also ordered a general mobilization prompting Serbia to do the same on October 17th and Greece on October 19th, 1912 and thus initiating the First Balkan War.

The Ottoman mobilization, which lasted almost a month, did not go as well as expected because the Macedonians and other Christians refused to join the Ottoman army thus allowing it to recruit only half of the planned forces.

The very low turnout on the Christian part was mainly due to the escalation of anti-Ottoman propaganda conducted by the Allies leading the populations to believe that liberation was imminent. Many Macedonian emigrants in Bulgaria anticipated this war with great hope. During its preparations for war, Bulgaria used propaganda to fool the Macedonians that because of the Bulgarian-Serbian Treaty, Bulgaria was committing to giving up the San Stefano Treaty and to recognizing Macedonian autonomy. Knowing nothing about the "secret agreements" to "partition" Macedonia, the people in Macedonia, Serbia and Bulgaria considered Macedonia to be just another ally. Only Yane Sandanski was suspicious of the Serbian-Bulgarian Treaty and believed it to be an agreement to divide Macedonia. As soon as Sandanski found out about the Serbian-Bulgarian Treaty he was sure and made his opinion clear to his followers, that no such agreement was possible if it would not result in the division of Macedonia. Sandanski was a believer of Gotse Delchev's philosophy that it was better for Macedonia to remain under Ottoman rule than to be partitioned and annexed by its neighbours. Sandanski was against the Balkan Wars unless of course they led to the creation of a Balkan Federation where Macedonia was to be an autonomous country. Sandanski always believed that "those who will come to liberate us will occupy us". Sandanski and others supported regional autonomy for Macedonia within a democratic Ottoman Federation, or, a liberated and independent Macedonia within a democratic community of Balkan nations.

On August 15th, 1912, just before the First Balkan War started, a number of Macedonians in Bitola sent a letter to Russia warning the Russian leadership that the Balkan Alliance was not created to liberate Macedonia but to divide it among Serbia, Bulgaria and Greece. "Those

nations do not recognize a Macedonian national identity and all this time have tried to turn Macedonians into Serbians, Bulgarians and Greeks, so why would they now want to liberate Macedonia if not to divide it among themselves. Only Russia could save Macedonia by giving it its support and forcing Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria to cease their propaganda activities in Macedonia. Russia can help Macedonia by supporting the Macedonian people to restore their church independence and self rule and allow the natural course of the Macedonian national consciousness to take its place in a single undivided Macedonia. Russia can help by assisting the Macedonian people to open Macedonian schools and teach in the Macedonian language."

The letter was concluded with the words "Macedonia reeks of death! We place our hopes on Russian interference to give us our independence not as a 'Slavic alliance' against the Ottoman Empire, but as moral support and some pressure on the Ottomans to grant us these rights. If Russia continues to support the Balkan alliance, there will be a Balkan War and Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria will divide Macedonia."

On March 23rd, 1913 the Bulgarians attacked Odrin. By the early morning hours of March 25th Odrin was occupied by the 4th Bulgarian Army and by Macedonian units which were inducted into the Bulgarian army. After that the Macedonians were sent to the Gallipoli front where a severe battle against newly arrived Ottoman force from Anatolia was taking place during which the Macedonians showed great courage and combat readiness. They pursued the Ottoman forces all the way to the Marmora Sea.

When the First Balkan War was finished the Macedonian units fighting in the Bulgarian army were sent to Kratovo, Macedonia to fight against Serbian forces. Serbia, having also recruited Macedonians in its army, such as the Osogovo Detachment, also had Macedonians fighting on the Serbian side. So here we have Macedonians fighting Macedonians for Serbian and Bulgarian interests.

Outside of the Macedonian Partisan Chetas that fought under Bulgarian command, there were also 34 other Macedonian Chetas and village militia units organized by the Macedonian population which also fought against the Ottomans and liberated their own cities and villages. But after the war was over these independent Macedonian Chetas were disarmed and disbanded by the Greek, Serbian and Bulgarian armies. Some surrendered but many fled to the mountains. According to estimates, more than 13,000 Macedonians in total were engaged in the Balkan Wars.

Besides the help the Macedonians offered the Allies towards the liberation of Macedonia there were also independent actions taking place. The Strumeshnitsa River valley population, for example, formed their own village Cheta numbering 700 fighters who on October 19th, 1912 fought the Ottomans and liberated the villages Ilovitsa and Sushitsa.

The following day Lefterov and Smolarski arrived with their Chetas and, together with the Strumeshnitsa River valley Cheta, subdued a local Ottoman detachment. In Prilep Region, meanwhile, Krsto Germov with his "Prilep Flying Detachment" joined forces with Vojvoda Milan Gjurlukov's Cheta giving incentive for others to join the fight. Vojvodas Mirche and Argir mobilized more than 1,000 fighters and fought and won a battle against an Ottoman cavalry detachment.

Macedonian independent Chetas from Prilep also coordinated their activities with the Serbian armed forces. They, for example, helped the Serbian army breach Ottoman positions near Prisad, gaining Prince Alexander's personal gratitude for their assistance. But despite the Princely gratitude received, it did not take the Serbian authorities too long before they labeled the very Macedonian Chetas who assisted them, Bulgarian, and arrested Vojvoda Gjurlukov for allegedly working against Serbian interests.

Even before the First Balkan War began, a number of "all Macedonian" volunteer village and Macedonian Revolutionary Organization Chetas had assembled at Plachkovitsa Mountain. Among the Vojvodas leading these Chetas were Gorgi Pop Hristov, Marko Ivanov, Pavel Hristov, Vasil Chakalarov, Ivan Popov and Hristo Siljanov. During the war they too took independent actions in Tikvesh, Gevgelija and Kostur Regions where they were joined by the local population and liberated many villages.

On October 20th, 1912 Macedonian Chetas liberated the City Voden and gave the local population their support in establishing local authority. Vojvodas Vasil Chakalarov, Ivan Popov and Hristo Siljanov, who were known from the Ilinden Uprising and carried some authority, attracted the population and encouraged many to join the fight. As a result they succeeded in liberating large territories in Kostur, Lerin and Voden Regions in a relatively short time.

In November 1912 the Ottoman army carried out a counter-offensive against the Macedonian liberated territory but the Macedonians, in a joint operation with the allied Serbian and Greek forces, repulsed the Ottomans. Unfortunately when the First Balkan War was over, on December 12, 1912, the local Macedonian Chetas were disbanded and their leaders arrested by the Greek and Serbian authorities who at the time were negotiating Macedonia's division.

Kumanovo was another Region of significance during the First Balkan War where almost every village had its own Cheta. Numbering several thousand fighters in total, the Kumanovo Region militias were on the move, constantly attacking Ottoman positions. On October 10th and 11th, 1912 they attacked an Ottoman military installation near the village Orashets and captured a number of heavy artillery pieces and other weapons.

In Skopje Region Chetas cooperated with the village militias and coordinated their activities with the Serbian army.

There were also independent Chetas operating in Shtip and Kochani Regions led by Vojvodas Efrem Chuchkov, Simeon Gjorgjiev, Orovchanov and others. The largest independent Cheta was that of Solun Region led by Vojvoda Ichko Dimitrov.

The best actions however, to illustrate events during the First Balkan War in Macedonia, were those that took place in Krushevo. Led by Vojvodas Vancho Delev-Dzhoneto, Vancho Beluvcheto and Metodi Stojchev, the Krushevo Chetas, along with the Serbian army, fought in the battles of Obednik, Oblakovo, Snegovo and Bitola. Then on October 24th, 1912, the village militia occupied Krushevo and immediately established authority by applying the principles of the Ilinden Krushevo Republic. Prominent citizens such as Todor Spasev, Velko Kjurchijata and others were appointed to administer the local government, which lasted twenty days before it was disbanded by the Serbians.

Upon establishing authority, the people of Krushevo were the first to provide the Serbian army with food and other supplies and to welcome the Serbians as liberators and heroes. But as more and more Serbian units arrived in the city, Serbian authority was established and the Macedonian Chetas were ordered to surrender their weapons. As for the fighters themselves, they were told that they could stay in Krushevo or leave for Bulgaria. Given the situation, Vancho Dzhoneto and his Cheta delivered their weapons while Stavre Dimitrovski, Vancho Beluvcheto and their Chetas refused and fled to the mountains. The Serbian army went after them and after several days of pursuit Beluvcheto was killed. The Serbians then cut off his head and paraded it in the city streets to frighten the people, which showed their real intent towards the Macedonian population. This act, in the eyes of the Macedonian people, certainly unmasked the role of the so-called Serbian liberators.

After this the Krushevo Revolutionary Organization met and decided that everything that could be done had been done and there was nothing more to do. “We established a Republic and have gone from one slavery to another. Now there is nothing to do except wait for the war to end and hope that peace will bring something better”. Borjar, the cherry tree gun craftsman, went on to say “So we now had the first and the last meeting under our new occupation and have walked away with our heads down, as if we were about to face death”. After this the Krushevo Revolutionary Organization, even though it had led the Macedonian people in the fight for their liberation for more than a decade, ceased to exist.

In Bitola Region meanwhile, local Chetas, believing the Serbians were there to liberate Macedonia, combined forces with the Serbian Chetas in the region and carried out joint missions to oust the Ottoman army. The Macedonians interacted superbly with the Serbians in the liberation battles

of Gopesh and Gjavato. Local Chetas also supported the battles in Pribiltsi, Smilevo and especially in Bitola. But after the Serbian army gained control of Bitola all local Chetas were disbanded and Serbian authority established.

In Ohrid Region, Petar Chaulev's Cheta joined forces with Dejan Dimitrov and Stefan Atanasov's Cheti and together fought the Ottomans in Debartsa, Kichevo, Malesija and Demir Hisar Regions. On October 14th, 1912 Macedonian local Chetas captured 300 Ottoman soldiers near the village Slivovo and on October 15th, 1912 Atanasov's Cheta ambushed and captured 250 Ottoman soldiers.

Then on October 23rd, 1912 Chaulev discovered from the Serbians that there was a "disputed zone in Macedonia" and a "secret treaty" between the Serbian and Bulgarian governments which was of enormous significance for the Macedonian people. But, despite his disappointment, Chaulev continued to fight the Ottomans.

On November 4th and 5th, 1912 Chaulev attacked Pribiltsi and Brezhani and captured 600 Ottoman soldiers. The following day his Chetas fought Xhavit Pasha near Bukovik and captured another 300 Ottomans.

On November 10th, 1912 Chaulev captured Ohrid and established a short lived local authority, which three days later was abolished by the Serbian army.

Of all the Ilinden Revolutionary Districts that fought in the 1903 Macedonian National Uprising however, the Seres group, with Yane Sandanski as the top leader, remained active.

Given the current situation, the Seres group held a meeting in Solun in June 1912 and decided to participate in the war. If having no other choice Sandanski believed that Macedonians should help Bulgaria annex all of Macedonia in order to prevent it from being dismembered.

By end of September 1912 all preparations and logistics were in place and a second consultation meeting took place in Melnik where rules of engagement and other military matters were discussed. It was decided that Melnik would be the Military District's new headquarters and Sandanski would lead the group with Gjorgi Kazepov as his assistant.

A number of people in the villages were mobilized and assigned to acquire weapons, equipment, food and other supplies. Armed units were trained to carry out intelligence and reconnaissance activities, conduct ambushes, cut telephone and telegraph poles, destroy bridges and railroads and attack the enemy, causing as much damage as possible.

Sandanski was well respected by the Macedonian people because he was a principled man and because he refused to cooperate with those who had interests outside of the Macedonian cause. He and his Chetas were considered to be the protectors of the Macedonian people. But as war was inevitable, Sandanski had no choice but to cooperate even with those he considered his enemies. Before the Balkan War began, Sandanski had

managed to mobilize about 2,000 Macedonian fighters and on October 5th, 1912, 13 days before the allies had declared war on Ottomans, he began a campaign to oust the occupier. Sandanski's forces fought in Pirin Region near Nevrokop (today's Gotse Delchev), in Drama Region, in Melnik Region and in St. Vrach (today's Sandanski).

Sandanski's forces, consisting of about 2,700 fighters in total, were organized in a number of Chetas that included his own detachment as well as a number of village militias and other independently created Chetas. Even though these forces were independently led by Macedonians, they were all subordinated to Bulgarian Command because the Bulgarians had agreed to support the Macedonians and contribute to the future of the Macedonian cause.

Sandanski's units initially were responsible for providing the Bulgarians with logistics support on Ottoman positions and strength. There were reports that Sandanski's people also provided the Bulgarian army with 5,000 loaves of bread, food and medical care for wounded Bulgarian soldiers. Later Sandanski's armed units carried out diversionary missions against the Ottoman army's rear and on October 14th, 1912 liberated the city Melnik and established local authority.

During its retreat the Ottoman army killed 26 Macedonians, prompting the Macedonian civilian population to rebel and forcing Sandanski to deploy his forces to protect the Ottoman civilian population.

With the situation in Melnik calmed down, Sandanski's forces went on to liberate surrounding villages including Tsrvishte, where the Ottoman garrison that guarded the Rupel Gorge was stationed. With the Ottoman garrison destroyed the entire Struma Valley from Melnik to the Rupel Gorge was also liberated.

After establishing local control in the region Sandanski took 300 of his best Macedonian fighters and began his trek towards Solun, acting as the advance guard for the Bulgarian army. On his way there other Macedonian units joined in, including those led by Vojvodas Stoju Hadzhiev, Dimitar Arnaudov, Gjorgi Kazepov, Krsto Chaprashikov, Ivan Chontev and A. Bujnov.

Sandanski's 300 Macedonians, along with a Bulgarian Cavalry group, were the first to enter Solun on October 28th, 1912. Following immediately after them was a Greek column led by Constantine, the Greek King.

Bulgarian princes Boris and Cyril arrived with the main Bulgarian force for whom the Macedonians provided security.

Sandanski, because of his reputation acquired during the Young Turk Uprising for his struggle for liberty and equality, was well known in Solun and was greeted with honours when he arrived. He was also respected by the Bulgarian army because of the assistance he provided to the Bulgarian troops.

All that being said, however, when General Georgi Todorov, Chief of Staff of the Bulgarian 7th Rila Division, proposed a toast on the occasion of "liberating" Macedonia and annexing it to Bulgaria, Sandanski stood up and said "I will drink to a free and autonomous Macedonia, for which the united Balkan nations fought and suffered so much". Sandanski's toast infuriated and shocked the Bulgarian officers who stormed him, cursing and threatening, ready to cut him into small pieces with their swords.

Sandanski remained calm during the brawl as he walked away fully convinced now that he had been right all along that ousting the Ottomans out of Macedonian did not mean the liberation of Macedonia but quite the contrary, it meant that the Macedonian people were deceived and an occupation and partition of Macedonia would follow. Therefore he concluded that the Macedonian peoples' struggle for liberation and independence had to continue.

At the conclusion of the First Balkan War a Russian journalist, V. Vodovozov, came to Macedonia to investigate the situation and learn more about the Macedonian Question. Late in July 1913 he attended a meeting in Sofia where Macedonia was the main subject of discussion. In attendance also were Macedonians including Nejchev, Ljapchev, Todorov, Kiril Popov and others who voiced their opinions. But only Petko Todorov spoke of autonomy for Macedonia and called the Treaty of March 13th, 1912, offensive. The others also spoke of autonomy but as a last resort and even asked the foreign journalist to prepare the ground work for it. Sandanski too was in attendance and when Vodovozov asked him why he did not speak in favour of an independent Macedonia, Sandanski said "You can see how these gentlemen treat the issue of autonomy; it would be distasteful to speak of independence for Macedonia in their presence in such circumstances. When the 'liberators' declared war on the Ottomans, not many Macedonians had realized that the destiny of their fatherland had already been decided without their knowledge or consent. Macedonians assumed the war would be fought to liberate and create an independent Macedonian state. It was forbidden to speak and write about Macedonia in Bulgaria, especially about its independence and today's situation is a result of such politics. When Albania became independent and began to establish its statehood, Macedonia was condemned to be divided and destroyed which of course is beginning to happen."

Sandanski's idea to continue the Macedonian peoples' struggle for liberation and independence was too late for at least a couple of reasons. For one, the neighbouring countries had already invaded and occupied Macedonia and had driven out the Ottomans so they were not about to leave Macedonia and give up what they had gained. Also the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (MRO), which managed the preparations and led the Macedonian National Uprising in 1903, was now in shambles and

there was not a single political body to lead a renewed Macedonian struggle.

Part 34 - Macedonians in the Greek, Serbian and Bulgarian Armies

When the Allies Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria, under the guise of "liberation", began to penetrate Macedonian territories at the beginning of the First Balkan War, many Macedonians became involved. Some were mobilized by the Allies through recruitment yet others volunteered to fight the Ottomans and free their country.

There was much hatred and distaste for Ottoman rule, especially after the failed Ilinden Macedonian National Uprising, so Macedonians were literally flocking to the allied camps to enlist with high hopes that their turn to be liberated had finally come.

As the first Balkan War progressed, Macedonians created their own Chetas and fought the Ottomans in independent battles. But many fought as participants in the Greek, Serbian and Bulgarian armies.

The precise number of Macedonians that fought against the Ottomans is not known but is estimated to be around 75,000. (Vanche Stojchev. "Military History of Macedonia". Military academy. Skopje, 2004. Page 441)

As part of their plan to expand Greece, by annexing Macedonian territories (Megali Idea), pre-First Balkan War Greek governments were busy organizing propaganda campaigns and recruiting and arming illegal bands in Macedonia. Greek organizations involved in Macedonian affairs included 'Makedhonikos silogos', 'Elinizmos', 'Ethniki Eteria' and 'Skopeftiki Eteria' as well as the Greek Patriarchic Church which legally operated inside Macedonia.

Outside of the Greek organizations and the Patriarchic Church there were also Patriarchic Macedonians who supported the Greek expansion into Macedonia and who donated funds and recruited insurgents to fuel the illegal Greek armed bands. As the armed propaganda campaigns escalated in Macedonia, particularly after the Ilinden Uprising, the Greeks accelerated their recruitment by hiring Macedonians and Vlachs. New illegal Greek sponsored bands were created in Konsko, Tsarushino and other villages in Voden, Kostur and Lerin Regions.

Even though these illegal bands were enemies of the Macedonian Chetas and often fought against the Macedonians, the Macedonian and other Christian Chetas did cooperate with them in their efforts to evict the Ottomans out of Macedonia. In fact many Macedonians fought under Greek command to liberate Lerin, Kostur, Voden and Solun. But as soon as the Ottomans were evicted the Greek army established Greek authority in Macedonia, disbanded the Macedonian and other Christian Chetas and allowed the Greek sponsored illegal bands to freely operate.

During the drive for Solun the Macedonians, fighting independently as well as part of the Allied armies, were instrumental in assisting the allies in

achieving their objectives. In addition to fighting at the front and rear of the enemy, Macedonian Chetas also acted as guides, provided reconnaissance information and cleared up paths for the allied armies to follow, by liberating villages and towns.

One such Cheta was that of Todor Aleksandrov which, on October 23rd, 1912, liberated Kukush, established local authority and appointed Gotse Mezhdurechki's Cheta as its protector. Macedonian Chetas also liberated the village Ajatovo, near Solun, making it possible for the allies to pass uninterrupted.

Among the Macedonian Cheta leaders who assisted the Allies in the drive for Solun were Yane Sandanski, Todor Aleksandrov, Dumbalakov, Andrej Ljapchev and Simeon Radev from Resen and Nikola Naumov from Shtip.

Prior to Solun falling to Allied hands, the Ottomans, influenced by the Great Power foreign consuls in Solun, were ordered to surrender the city to the Greek army, which had arrived there about 24 hours prior to the arrival of the Bulgarian army. But after the Bulgarians arrived they too began to establish Bulgarian authority. To avoid conflict, on November 5th, 1912, the Greek Government reaffirmed its good relations with the foreign consuls, including the Russian consul who paid a visit to the Greek King, leaving a subtle but distinct impression that Solun now belonged to Greece.

By the start of November, 1912 Greece had amassed a large armed force in Solun, which was used to enforce Greek administrative authority in the city. Among its armed supporters were Macedonians and Vlachs, one of whom was Tego Sapundzhiev, a well known Ottoman spy who was appointed as district chief. But as soon as Greece brought its own people from the south, even their most loyal Macedonian supporters were removed from their positions.

As part of its century old craving to expand its territory, Serbia too was looking to annex part of Macedonia and followed in the Greek and Bulgarian footsteps in organizing propaganda campaigns and recruiting and arming illegal bands in Macedonia. Among the members of the illegal Serbian bands were also Macedonians who at the time were living in Serbia.

By the end of July 1912, more than 30 illegal Serbian sponsored armed bands were operating in Macedonia, with more than 400 men from whom about 300 were immigrants; Macedonians looking for work in Serbia. These bands were led by the Board of the People's Defense which operated through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and through the Serbian consuls in the Ottoman Empire stationed in Macedonia. Operation of the bands was coordinated by a Serbian Executive Board located in Vranje, Serbia near the Serbian Ottoman border.

Led by the Serbian Vojin Popovich-Vuk, one Serbian sponsored detachment composed of several Chetas was tasked with mobilizing and recruiting Macedonians from inside Macedonia to act as an advance guard for the Serbian army. Its Detachment Headquarters was manned by Serbian officers, while its fighters and Vojvodas were mostly local Macedonians.

In the spring of 1913 the Serbian Army Supreme Command created an all Macedonian Volunteer Regiment composed of local Macedonians. Being unable to reach the Adriatic Sea, due to the creation of the Albanian state by the Great Powers, Serbia was now looking to gain access to a port in the Aegean Sea. And to fight its way there, Serbia needed help from the Macedonians. The massive mobilization of Macedonians in the Bulgarian army was also an incentive for Serbia to get into the act.

Serbia began a massive mobilization program in Macedonia by first recruiting the 4 Chetas patrolling the banks of the Vardar River between Kavadartsi and Gevgelija and with them creating the Vardar Detachment led by Serbian Vasilije Trbich. Later Jovan Babunoski's Patrolling Detachment was also created and dispatched in the Kratovo -Ovche Pole – Kochani Regions to fight in the front lines.

Considering that both the Bulgarian and Serbian armies mobilized Macedonians and concentrated them on the front lines, unbeknownst to them, Macedonians actually fought for the occupation and division of Macedonia. Keeping in mind, however, that according to the Hague rules of war it was not allowed to mobilize forces from the occupied population. That is precisely why the Serbians called the Macedonian "Volunteer Regiments", and the Bulgarians called them "Opolchenie Companies". These forced mobilizations were conducted on the pretext that these men were volunteers.

The creation of the so-called Macedonian "Volunteer Regiment" was initiated by Chief of Staff of the Supreme Serbian Command, Vojvoda Radomir Putnik, and approved by the Serbian government.

On May 16th, 1913 Putnik issued the following order:

Four battalions were to be created in Sveti Nikole, Prishtina, Gevgelija and Negotino Regions. They were to be manned from the local population and their cadres were to be provided by the border unit command. The mobilization was to include Christians, Ottomans and Arnauts (Albanians) as well as those who had served in the Ottoman army who would be allowed to retain their ranks. The volunteers were required to take an oath of loyalty to the Supreme Commander of the Serbian army and to His Majesty King Petar I. All mobilized soldiers were to be given uniforms, weapons, food and horses.

Macedonians in both the Bulgarian and Serbian created Chetas were assigned to fight in the Ottoman rear or as advance guards, which meant that they would always be the ones to engage the enemy first. In this way

Macedonians were responsible for the liberation of most villages and cities in Macedonia.

Operating within the 1st Serbian army as reconnaissance and advance guards, Macedonian volunteers, on October 20th, 1912, attacked the Ottoman camp in Starets near Kumanovo capturing a great number of weapons. Macedonians were also responsible for organizing and arming the population in Kumanovo Region. In Stratsin alone they recruited and armed 700 people.

The Macedonians fought heavy battles against the Ottomans prompting Ottoman Marshal Chakmak, Commander of the Ottoman 16th Division, on October 21st, 1912, to write a telegram to his superiors demanding more troops.

On October 23rd, 1912 more than 2,000 Macedonian volunteers fought all day unassisted against the Ottoman army in Strevitse near Kumanovo and in Mlado Nagorichane until reinforcements arrived; thus preventing the Ottomans from encircling the Serbian army. More than 200 Macedonians were killed and six Vojvodas wounded during that battle but the Macedonians fought gallantly without abandoning their posts.

After the battle for Kumanovo was won the Macedonian volunteer Chetas, village Chetas and other Macedonian armed bands marched in front of the 1st Serbian Army, liberating villages and cities including Veles, Sveti Nikole, Shtip, Kochani and its surrounding villages. Being defeated at Kalimantsi and Kochani, several thousand Ottoman soldiers regrouped and blocked the Macedonian volunteers from entering Krivolak and taking over the Skopje -Veles –Solun transportation corridor.

Led by Vojin Popovich- Vuk, Vasilije Trbich and Jovan Babunski, the Macedonian volunteer Chetas along with village Chetas and numerous other volunteers who wanted to join the fight, were directed to go to Mukos on Babuna Mountain where a new detachment was created. There this detachment fought an Ottoman cavalry brigade and a gendarmerie battalion; a battle which lasted four days.

Macedonians were also the eyes and ears of the Serbians, informing their armies of dispositions and movements of Ottoman forces which, in one case, greatly contributed to the eviction of the Ottomans from Bitola. Thirty Macedonians were killed and many wounded in the four day battle at Mukos and Prisad.

The Macedonians were proving themselves to be formidable fighters which, on November 5th, 1912, prompted the Ottoman Western Army Commander to send a telegram to the Commander of the Vardar Army saying that “the morale of the Ottoman soldiers seen here (in Bitola) was very high during the last few days but you ruined it by retreating when attacked by the Macedonian volunteer Chetas”.

Many local Macedonian Chetas joined the Serbian Morava Division as it was advancing from Skopje towards Tetovo and provided

reconnaissance and acted as an advanced guard for the Serbian army. Tsene Markovich's Cheta was especially successful and greatly contributed to the success of the Tetovo, Gostivar and Kichevo battles. Here 30 Macedonians were killed and 11 wounded compared to the large Serbian army from which only 28 Serbians were killed and 41 wounded.

While the Serbian army was busy establishing authority in the region, after the battle for Kichevo, the Macedonian Chetas continued to fight and liberated Debar. On November 29th, 1912 the Macedonians ambushed an Ottoman division at Slivovo and Turje Saddle and captured 550 Ottoman soldiers.

A single Macedonian Cheta consisting of 150 fighters threw out the entire Ottoman garrison from the village Lomani, crossed the Tsrna River, occupied the village Mogila and acted as a reconnaissance unit, providing the Serbian Army information on the disposition of a 40,000 strong Ottoman force advancing towards Bitola. Local Macedonian Chetas also dislodged the Ottoman gendarmeries out of the villages Gopesh, Logovardi and Novatsi.

During the battle for Bitola, Macedonian Chetas, subordinate to Serbian command, operated as independent strike units and on November 17th, 1912 fought against two Ottoman battalions of the 62nd Regiment in the village Kozjak near Resen.

The Plake village Cheta prevented an entire Ottoman battalion from joining its Regiment at Krusji Anovi. Then on November 19th and 20th, 1912, Macedonian Chetas intercepted Ottoman forces retreating from Bitola at the Bukovo, Svinjishte and Kuratitsa crossing and captured 280 Ottoman soldiers.

Even the Serbians were impressed with the Macedonian contribution, enough to prompt them to make the following statements: "The enslaved nations in the Balkans carried out military actions during the war against Ottoman Turkey, and contributed to the victory of the allies. A large number of Macedonians participated in the war on the side of the allies, deeply convinced that they were fighting not for the interest of the Balkan monarchies, but for their own national liberation. Serbian, Bulgarian and Greek historians had always intentionally hidden the fact that the Macedonian people participated in the Balkan Wars. The Macedonian Chetas were called Serbian, Bulgarian or Greek in order to negate the existence of the Macedonian people and rob them of their contribution so that Balkan monarchies alone can be credited as the sole liberators of Macedonia, and to justify Macedonia's division, which was finally completed after the Second Balkan War. That is why there is insufficient data on the Macedonian losses suffered in the Balkans Wars" (Vanche Stojchev. "Military History of Macedonia". Military academy. Skopje, 2004. Pages 428 and 429)

After the Bulgarian government announced a general mobilization on September 17th, 1912, many Macedonians answered the call and came to join the fight. In fact there were so many that the Bulgarian army began to form volunteer Partisan detachments to be dispatched at the enemy's rear. But this kind of turnout should not have been a surprise because according to issue 3 of the February 10th, 1911 weekly bulletin, "Study of Ottoman Turkey and its Army", "Macedonian immigrants now more than ever were obsessed with the idea that Macedonia can only be liberated by Bulgaria". The article went further on to say that "Macedonian involvement cannot be underestimated because in a war Macedonians can play a decisive role. One thing is certain, no Macedonian, young or old, can resist becoming a volunteer and joining a Macedonian unit if such a thing was to be created."

The Bulgarian government created volunteer units and used Macedonian immigrants to fight the rear of the Ottoman army inside and outside of Macedonia. Units were expected to provide their own weapons and supplies because the Bulgarian government refused to take responsibility for their actions if for any reason their actions were to become known to the Ottomans or to the Great Powers who would have condemned them, particularly since the allies were planning to partition Macedonia and annex it for themselves.

To add insult to injury, the Bulgarians asked the Macedonians to take an oath of loyalty to the Bulgarian Tsar and to Bulgaria. The purpose of the oath, besides demanding loyalty to the Tsar and to Bulgaria, obliged them as it did the rest of the regular army, even though they were not regulars, to be prosecuted by Bulgarian legal authorities.

The role of these units was to destroy bridges, railroads, telephone and telegraph lines and other vital facilities at the rear of the Ottoman army. The plan was to create 52 Chetas consisting of 20 to 30 Partisans each. Their leaders were tasked with gathering provisions from the local population and recruiting local Chetas. The idea was to create local nets similar to the ones operating during the 1903 Ilinden Uprising.

During a nine day mobilization 59 partisan Chetas, one partisan battalion and four special partisan detachments, all consisting of Macedonians, were created in Bulgaria alone. On September 12th, 1912 they were sent to Macedonia to fight.

Mobilization of Macedonians in Bulgaria continued and by the end of September 1912 five battalions were created and another five were created in October. At the beginning of November three brigades were created, consisting of four battalions.

After these units were armed by the Bulgarian army, the Macedonians were sent to the front in Thrace where they were disbanded and subordinated to other commands.

Regardless of the fact that these Macedonians were sent to fight far away from their homeland, they proved to be excellent fighters.

Bulgaria continued to recruit Macedonians and by the spring of 1913 had recruited more than 12,000 fighters.

But in spite of the loyalty oath to the Tsar and Bulgaria and the fact that Macedonians agreed to fight the Ottomans outside of Macedonia, the Bulgarians were still afraid that the Macedonians might create their own army and initiate a war of independence and the formation of a Macedonian state.

Part 35 – Macedonia's Occupation by the Allied Armies

After the failed Ilinden Macedonian National Uprising in 1903 the Macedonian people lost hope in their own ability to liberate Macedonia and started looking to their neighbours for help. So it was no surprise when the Allied Greek, Serbian and Bulgarian armies invaded Macedonia. The Macedonian people welcomed the neighbouring armies not as their conquerors but as their liberators.

The momentous occasion prompted many Macedonians to raise arms, and assisted by the foreign armies hoped to drive the Ottomans out of Macedonia. In fact Macedonians felt they were obligated to help the armies and fiercely fought to show their gratitude. Macedonians fought in the front and rear and bravely took on the mighty Ottomans at every opportunity. Macedonians liberated cities and villages and led the foreign armies to many victories and, as the Macedonians gained ground and liberated villages and towns, they established Macedonian authority. But as the Ottomans were driven out and the war began to subside, the Macedonians began to see a different side to its liberators, an ugly side suspected by a few but unexpected by the majority.

Macedonia's occupation by the allied armies during the First Balkan War was conducted in three phases. During the first phase, which took place in the months of October and November 1912, the allied armies established coordination of their operations and made contact with the Macedonian population, gaining the support of the Macedonian Chetas. The Macedonian people saw the Macedonian Chetas as the "Macedonian Army" fighting alongside the Allies to liberate Macedonia. This was made very clear by the Macedonian immigrants in a publication in the magazine "Macedonian Voice". (Cf. Makedonski Glas, Op.cit.p.38.) (Vanche Stojchev. "Military History of Macedonia". Military academy. Skopje, 2004. Page 443)

During the second phase, which took place between the months of December 1912 and January 1913, the Greeks, Serbians and Bulgarians established their respective occupation regimes, disarmed the Macedonian Chetas, disbanded earlier established local Macedonian authorities, restricted the Macedonian peoples' movements and brought violence, terror and killing to the Macedonian population.

During the third phase, which began in February 1913, the occupation of Macedonia officially began with the establishment of administrations, churches and police stations; all geared to carry out systematic attacks on the Macedonian National consciousness. This systematic attack began with the arrests and elimination of prominent Macedonian intellectuals, particularly those who struggled for the Macedonian cause. As a result of these attacks, many Macedonian intellectuals were forced to leave Macedonia, ending up in Russia where they established a colony in St.

Petersburg. This colony, which for a long time kept the Macedonian dream of independence alive, served as a beacon of enlightenment for all Macedonians and pleaded Macedonia's case before the Great Powers.

After the Ottomans were driven out, the allied armies expected the Macedonian population to cheerfully surrender authority to them. But instead, wherever they went they found local Macedonian authority already established.

Before being sent to Macedonia the allied armies were told that they would be fighting the Ottomans to free their own kind living in Macedonia. In other words, the Greek soldiers were told that they would be liberating "Greeks" in Macedonia. The Serbian soldiers were led to believe that they would be liberating the "Serbians" in Macedonia and the Bulgarians were told that they would be liberating the "Bulgarians" in Macedonia. All armies were led to believe that there were no Macedonians living in Macedonia; only Greeks, Serbians and Bulgarians.

The armies however were not only disappointed but confused when they found liberated towns and cities with local Macedonian authority already established. To solve their problem, first the Macedonians were told that they were prohibited from declaring themselves Macedonian and were given a choice of declaring themselves either "Greek", "Serbian", or "Bulgarian". As a result many people began to suspect something was not right.

But no sooner had the allied armies established themselves in the cities, towns and villages in the respective territories they occupied, than they began to establish military and administrative rule, thus enforcing Macedonia's occupation.

The Greek Supreme Command ordered its military to enter Solun and establish Greek authority as soon as possible. Greek military and administrative authorities were subordinated to the Major Greek Army Headquarters stationed in Solun with King Constantine as the Chief. Greek authority in the small towns and villages was also established by the garrison commanders stationed there. At that point Macedonia was viewed as a temporary district and responsibility for managing it was given to P. Argiropoulos.

On October 31st, 1912 Greek Prime Minister Elefteros Venizelos recommended that Greek King George appoint Konstantinos D. Raktivan, the Greek Minister of Justice, as governor of Macedonia; a position filled until now by the Greek army. To support the newly created administration, 10 consulate officials and 168 gendarmes from Crete, under the command of Lieutanent Colonel A. Monferaton, were dispatched on a special ship called the Arcadia from the port of Piraeus to Solun. The Solun port however was closed to Greek ships and only allowed ships flying the French flag. The French consul in Solun who managed the port allowed

only Ottoman and other pre-authorized ships to dock but would not allow ships flying the Greek flag.

Failing to enter the Port of Solun, Raktivan was instructed to dock in Elefterhorion, a smaller port nearby; but again could not. After several unsuccessful attempts Venizelos recommended that Raktivan hoist the French flag on his ship before entering the port of Solun.

Raktivan landed in Solun on October 30th, 1912 and immediately paid a visit to the British consul. With British support Raktivan was able to open the Solun port to Greek ships, thus providing passage to the new administration and to the gendarmes from Crete to land.

By Decree, on October 31st, 1912, King George appointed Raktivan governor of Macedonia and the Greek occupied part of Macedonia was divided into 3 districts (Solun, Ber and Seres) and 18 Regions. The chiefs to administer the districts and regions were brought from Greece and the Greek occupation of Macedonia was guaranteed by the Greek army, police and by the gendarmes from Crete, well known for their hatred and cruelty towards the Macedonians.

On May 30th, 1913 the Ottomans signed a Peace Treaty in London, thus surrendering the territories west of the Enos - Midia line so that an Albanian state could be created with borders to be determined later.

On October 12th, 1912, right after the Kumanovo battle, the Serbian government established a special regime to begin occupying Macedonian territory. After winning the Kumanovo battle, the Serbian 1st Army Headquarters requested a police commissar, a gendarmerie detachment of 25 gendarmes and 10 cavalrymen to be sent to Kumanovo, as soon as possible, along with a number of officers to preserve law and order in the city. A police unit was also requested to be sent to Skopje after it was occupied by the Serbian army.

On October 13th, 1912 a number of foreign consuls led by Kalmikov, the Russian consul, instructed the Ottomans not to enter Skopje because the city had surrendered to the Serbian army, which had already established provisional military authority in the city.

On October 15th, 1912 Serbian Minister Nikola Pashich together with Police Commissar Milorad Vujichich introduced the first Serbian provisional administration and territorial division of the Serbian occupied part of Macedonia.

Approved by General Radomir Putnik, Chief of Supreme Command, the Document included not only the already occupied territories, but also Macedonian territories to be occupied in the future. The document showed 8 districts and 28 regions. The districts and regions were located as follows: 3 districts with 11 regions were located in Kosovo, 1 district with 4 regions was located in Albania and 4 districts with 13 regions were located in Macedonia. Macedonian territories to be occupied by Serbia

included Kumanovo, Presevo, Kratovo, Kriva Palanka, Skopje, Kachanik, Veles, Tetovo, Brod, Gostivar, Kichevo, Debar and Radomir Regions.

The borders specified in the document more or less coincided with the borders agreed to by the March 13th, 1912 secret Serbian - Bulgarian Treaty. But as Serbia continued to experience successful military campaigns its appetite for more Macedonian territory increased.

After capturing Bitola, the Serbian army pushed on into Western Macedonia establishing 2 more districts; Bitola and Negotino (later renamed Kavadartsi). By the start of 1913, Serbia acquired 6 districts with 23 regions in Macedonia which included Lerin Region; a Region previously liberated by Macedonians and later confiscated by the Serbian army.

On June 3rd, 1913, acting in accordance with the Greek-Serbian demarcation line Treaty, Serbia had to relinquish to Greece 132 Macedonian villages it had captured, 8 of which were located in Gevgelija Region, 20 in Lerin Region, 7 in Bitola Region, 38 in Prespa Region and 59 in Ohrid Region. For its efforts Serbia received only 4 villages, Bach, Dobroveni, Dolni Kremen and Gorni Kremen, all located in Lerin Region which Serbia attached to Bitola Region.

For the first half of 1913 the Macedonian population was thrown into confusion not knowing to which country it belonged and where the borders were located. The population in Lerin Region, for example, was first occupied by Serbians and then by Greeks. Although the Serbians had established administrative rule in Prilep Region, it was unknown to which country the villages in Moriovo belonged.

When Macedonians from the villages Vitolishta and Palchiste inquired of Major Mihajlo Nenadovich as to which country the villages in Mariovo, across the Tsrna Reka River, belonged he did not know. So he sent them to Nenadovich and Brejovich who also did not know. They in turn sent the Macedonians to Voden to inquire from the Greek authorities but the Greeks did not know either and told them that the villages must belong to Greece. But to make sure the villages did belong to Greece, a Greek battalion was dispatched to occupy them.

When the Serbians discovered a Greek military presence only 10 km from Prilep, the Serbian army dispatched Vasilije Trbich's forces to throw the Greeks out, pushing them across the Tsrna Reka River into Meglen Region. The situation in Gevgelija was also uncertain as to who was in charge, as each of the three armies claimed to have entered the city first and sought the right to establish authority. To solve that problem a triple condominium was created. But on April 2nd, 1913 an agreement was reached and Gevgelija and Dojran Regions were given to Serbia.

On December 14th, 1912 a Decree on administering the Serbian occupied part of Macedonia was approved and remained in force until August 18th, 1913, when a new Decree was approved. The second Decree

was made void by the November 20th, 1913 Decree which annexed the Macedonian territory to the Kingdom of Serbia.

Police and gendarmerie units were established in order to maintain law and order and were deployed in each district. Each district chief was given a gendarmerie detachment of 20 gendarmes and each region was given 30 gendarmes. Early on there were about 1,000 gendarmes deployed in Macedonia, 600 Serbians and 400 locals; loyal citizens of the newly occupied territories.

Police forces were required to maintain constant communication with the military authorities so that the districts and region chiefs could acquire help from the military as required.

Serbian currency was also introduced in Macedonia, replacing the Ottoman lira, and administrative personnel from Serbia were appointed to the most responsible positions. Lesser positions were awarded to former teachers, priests and other Serbian agents who were already living in Macedonia.

Establishment of Bulgarian rule in Macedonia began immediately after the Bulgarian army began its occupation of Macedonia.

On October 10th, 1912 Major General Georgi Todorov, Chief of the 7th Rila Division, began his survey of the occupied territories and started to appoint personnel sent over from Bulgaria to administer the various districts. In the meantime the Bulgarian army, supported by Macedonian Chetas, continued to advance deep into Macedonia covering as much ground as possible. By December 4th, 1912, the date of the truce, the Bulgarian army had occupied the territory of Macedonia east of the line Tsarev Vrv - Gevgelija - Nigrita - Gulf of Orfano and the Aegean Sea. The Bulgarians named their occupied part of Macedonia "Macedonian Territories", on which they established military police authority managed by Governor General Mihail V'lkov and chief secretary Mihail Zelkov.

The Bulgarian occupied part of Macedonia was organized into 4 districts; Seres, Drama, Shtip and Solun (renamed to Kukush District on December 12th, 1912). The districts were further sub-divided into regions, which coincided with the Ottoman cazas. Included in the Drama District were Drama, Kavala, Pravishte, Sarishaban and Rupcho Regions. Included in the Seres District were Seres, Ziljahovo, Nigrita, Demirhisar, Petrich, Melnik, Gorna Dzhumaja (Blagoevgrad), Razlog and Nevrokop (Gotse Delchev) Regions. Included in the Solun (Kukush) District were Solun, Lagadina, Kukush, Dojran and Gevgelija Regions. Included in the District of Shtip were Shtip, Pehchevo, Kochani, Radovish and Strumitsa Regions. Agents that had been previously sent to Macedonia from Bulgaria, to spread Bulgarian propaganda, were appointed district chiefs.

In the beginning of 1913 General V'lkov created a two member commission, consisting of Dr. Bogdan Filov and Professor Atanas

Ishirkov, and dispatched it to Macedonia to find important cultural and historical monuments, which were later taken to Bulgaria.

As the occupation of Macedonia continued a rift between the three occupiers began to develop as each expected more of the others. To manage these expectations, two separate commissions were established. A Bulgarian - Greek commission was formed in February 1913 and a separate Bulgarian - Serbian commission was established some time later. Unfortunately the commissions could not come to any agreements because the crux of their problems was that all three countries wanted more of Macedonia's territory and none was willing to give up any.

On February 24th, 1912 Greek and Serbian representatives held a secret meeting in Solun where they signed a treaty to work jointly against Bulgaria, in an effort to take Macedonian land away from Bulgaria. Bulgaria in the meantime moved its army from Thrace to Macedonia in an effort to occupy all of Macedonia and take it away from Greece and Serbia.

As a final note to this drama the Macedonian people not only lost their opportunity to free themselves and create their own state but lost countless lives in the process as they unwittingly helped their enemies occupy and carve up their country.

On the Ottoman side, 153,000 soldiers were killed, wounded and captured. Bulgaria lost 73,000 soldiers, Serbia lost 30,000 soldiers, Greece lost 28,671 soldiers and Montenegro lost 10,000 soldiers. Material damage to Bulgaria was estimated to be one billion and 300 million French franks, Serbia lost 590 million franks, Greece lost 467 million franks and Montenegro lost about 100,000 franks.

Unfortunately there is no data to show losses on the Macedonian side even though the war took place in Macedonia and hundreds of thousands of Macedonians participated. But outside of material and human losses, the Macedonian people also lost their freedom and opportunity to create their own country. Worse than that, Macedonia was carved up into three pieces and completely lost its identity and history and the Macedonian peoples' existence was buried forever. Besides those losses, the Macedonian people also suffered massive economic losses and starvation.

Not counting the independent and local Chetas that took part in Macedonia's liberation from the Ottomans, more than 100,000 Macedonians fought alongside the Allied armies but were never registered as Macedonians, not even the fighters that lost their lives. However there are estimates that put the dead to several thousands but on a different scale, hundreds of thousands of Macedonians fled Macedonia because of the terror and oppression they experienced first from the Ottomans and later from the so-called "liberators", the Greek, Serbian and Bulgarian armies. Instead of improving, as was expected, the situation in Macedonia became worse after the Ottomans left.

When the Second Balkan War was still raging in Macedonia in 1913, the Carnegie Endowment dispatched a Commission on a fact finding mission to investigate atrocities committed in Macedonia during the Balkan Wars. According to the Commission, the cities Voden, Negus, Enidze Vardar, Ber and others were turned to dust. The people living in these cities had no choice but to flee and as a result became permanent refugees.

According to official Bulgarian sources, 111,560 Macedonian refugees were taken by Bulgaria, Greece took 156,659 and 135,000 fled with the Ottomans. The Commission also noted that during the Ottoman army retreat from Macedonia, the Ottomans burned down 170 villages. The Allied armies also burned houses and robbed the Macedonian population of its material possessions and livestock.

In June 1913 the Greek army burned down the entire city Kukush, 39 villages and more than 4,000 houses in Seres. Similarly the Greek army burned down villages in Solun, Strumitsa, Gorna Dzhumaja and Vardar Regions. But this was only the beginning. Besides being subjugated, the Greek occupied part of Macedonia was soon to be denationalized and repopulated with Turkish Christian settlers from Asia Minor and from beyond.

Part 36 – The Tikvesh Uprising against Serbian Occupation

Expecting that the allied foreign armies would leave Macedonia after the Ottoman army was driven out the Macedonian people began preparations to establish their own control over Macedonian territories. But as the war slowed down the allied armies had no intention of leaving so Macedonians had no choice but to take matters into their own hands.

After the Ottoman army was defeated in Kumanovo and began its retreat towards Bitola and Lerin, its retreat was followed by Ottoman authorities in the wider region. In a vacuum of authority, on October 20th, 1912, the Macedonians in Kavadartsi established a body of six people to act as the local authority and maintain law and order. Within a couple of weeks a local police force was established and about fifty constables were appointed. Later a new commission, headed by Tase Bashkov, was elected consisting of ten people.

While this was going on a Serbian army division, at the time located in the Kavadartsi vicinity, closely cooperated with the Macedonian Commission and justified its presence as temporary. Then with no warning whatsoever, on December 17th, 1912, Serbian police authority was established by decree and a new commission, manned by personnel from Serbia, was imposed on the community.

About a week and a half later Colonel Urosevich, the Serbian division commander, was dispatched to meet with the local Macedonians and explain to them that local non-Serbian authorities, organizations, commissions, etc., had been disbanded in accordance with Serbian law. At this point a local priest named Mihail asked the commander if it was not him who, when the Serbian army first arrived, said that the Serbian stay here would be temporary. The commander replied that what he had said in the past was no longer valid and that from now on, he was the sole authority appointed to protect Serbian interests.

About a week later the commander returned and informed the people that Belgrade had issued orders to close down all Macedonian schools so that Serbian schools could be established in their place. The commander then went on to declare that all the locals in the Tikvesh vicinity were Serbians who had been assimilated by the Bulgarians in the past but soon would all become Serbians again. At this point Risto Mihov, a young Macedonian teacher, asked the commander, admitting that the commander had to follow orders, if in his stay in Macedonia he had learned anything about the people? In the Serbian commander's silence the young teacher went on to say that all the people around him were Macedonians who had fought for Macedonia and strongly emphasized to the commander that the Macedonians would fight again, even against him if they had to.

Soon afterwards more than fifty Macedonian schools were closed and religious service in the Macedonian language was abolished. Serbian

authorities began to terrorize and assimilate the Macedonian population and Serbian teachers and priests were brought from Serbia to make sure that Macedonians were taught to speak Serbian. Those Macedonians who refused to learn Serbian and would not accept the Serbian indoctrination were labeled "Bulgarian" and were exiled from Macedonia or executed outright.

The Serbian authorities were particularly cruel to the Macedonian revolutionaries and to the former insurgents, many of whom they exiled and executed. Among the revolutionaries to die by Serbian hands were Macedonian Vojvodas Petar Oblakcheto, Krsto Leontiev, Krsto Trajkov, Atanas Lutviev and Leshanski. (Vanche Stojchev. "Military History of Macedonia". Military academy. Skopje, 2004. Page 450)

The routing out and terrorizing of Macedonians was delegated to the formerly illegal and most notorious Serbian bands led by Vasilije Trbich, Jovan Babunski and the Ottoman Yaja Aga, now working for the Serbians.

By now the Macedonian people found themselves in a totally unexpected, unfortunate and unacceptable situation. True to the words of young Risto Mihov, the people of Tikvesh decided it was time to fight back. Led by local and district leaders of the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (MRO) the people of Tikvesh began preparations for an Uprising directed against the Serbian occupation of Macedonia. Two Chetas were assembled from the veterans of the Ilinden and Young Turk Uprisings, a district Cheta consisting of 30 insurgents and a local Cheta consisting of 20 insurgents and placed under the command of Vojvodas Doncho Lazarev and Misho Shkartov. Soon afterwards they were joined by Chetas from other regions including those of Alekso Martulkov and Konstantin Tsipushev.

Soon after their arrival in Kavadartsi the Cheta chiefs held a meeting in Jovanche Shkartov's house. The meeting was attended by Vojvodas Lazo Fertikov, Tsanko Hadzhidemirski, Doncho Lazarev, Misho Shkartov and some local prominent people. Without much deliberation the Macedonians decided it was time to take up arms against the new occupier and begin arming the people. Vojvoda Lazarov volunteered to conduct a propaganda campaign and inform the population of what was going to happen as well as organize them for the uprising.

Fortunately the Tikvesh units that had volunteered to fight alongside the Bulgarian army in Odrin, by April 1913, had begun to return home and they too began to join the insurgency, bringing the number of fighters in Tikvesh to over 120.

As relations between Serbian authorities and the Macedonians in Tikvesh deteriorated, especially after the May 1913 census, the atmosphere became very tense. During the census, Macedonians were forced to declare themselves "Serbian" or "Bulgarian" and those who refused to pick one or the other were severely punished. When the

Serbians did not get the results they expected they escalated the terror against the Macedonians killing MRO member Aleksandar Vidov and torturing Natsa Pindzhurova, Dime Pindzhurov's mother.

As word got around of an imminent Uprising in Tikvesh, more Chetas began to arrive, including those led by Vojvodas Vasil Chakalarov, Deacon Evstatij, Panajot Karanfilov, Eftim Sprostranov, Petar Chaulev and Milan Gjurlukov. A revolutionary Headquarters was established and led by two groups. One group, led by Misho Shkartov, operated from Negotino and the second led by Doncho Lazarov and Dime Pindzhurov operated from Kavadartsi.

In May 1913 Doncho Lazarov organized a conference in Begnishte that was attended by more than 60 local representatives from the Tikvesh Region villages. The greatest concern expressed by the attendees was Macedonia's imminent division by the three new occupiers. In order to prevent Macedonia's division, the group decided to expedite preparations so that the Uprising could begin in June. No exact date was given but its start would be signaled by the setting of fires in the villages and by the burning of houses that were occupied by Serbian gendarmes and officials. It was also decided at this meeting to burn Dolni Disan to the ground because the entire village was occupied by Pomaks who were now loyal to the Serbian authorities and had committed violent crimes against the Macedonian population.

News about the Uprising spread like wildfire and more armed insurgents began to pour in, gathering in Vatasa where, on June 12th, 1913, the beginning of the Uprising was proclaimed.

The first act of rebellion was the raising of the region's 1903 Ilinden, Macedonian flag. Just seeing the Macedonian flag flying high lifted the Macedonian spirits and riled up the crowd to chant anti-Serbian slogans.

After finding out what had just happened, Serbian authorities dispatched a Serbian military unit, reinforced with local Bashi-Bazouks, to Vatasa to disperse the crowds. The sudden appearance of Serbian soldiers in the vicinity sent the Macedonians into hiding. Many, including Doncho Lazarov's Cheta, hid in underground tunnels near the village. Unable to find the rebels frustrated the Serbians who then took their anger out on the unarmed civilian population.

Seeing how the situation had turned, Lazarov took advantage of it, summoned all Chetas in the vicinity, including the one led by Misho Shkartov, and launched an attack on the rear of the Serbian army stationed at Pepelishte and Mushantsi. By launching an attack on the Serbian army, Lazarov was hoping to not only draw in the Serbian unit out of Vatasa but to draw in the rest of the Macedonian Chetas operating in the vicinity as well as the Bulgarian army.

The first battle of this Uprising took place on June 19th, 1913. It was an unexpected and surprise attack which led the Serbian Tikvesh District Chief Secretary Dushan Nikolich to call for reinforcements from Skopje.

On June 20th, 1913 Nikolich sent a message to the Serbian Supreme Command informing his superiors that his soldiers, personnel and gendarmes had to retreat from Negotino because they had been attacked by local renegade bands. Serbian command wasted no time and the same day dispatched its 14th Infantry Regiment commanded by Jevrem Ilich and about 1,000 soldiers from the 5th Regiment from Veles to the trouble zone. In the meantime the Serbian army, police and administration personnel stationed in Kavadartsi were evacuated and sent to Gradsko.

On June 21st, Nikolich again informed his superiors at Supreme Command that heavily armed residents from Kavadartsi had taken positions around the city, while Bulgarian Chetas (Chetas that had fought alongside the Bulgarian army) were moving towards Prilep. Supreme Command responded by immediately ordering the formation of a strong detachment from the companies stationed in Bitola, Krushevo and Kichevo and one battery from Bitola to be sent to Kavadartsi and Krivolak to crush the uprising.

In the next six days the Macedonian insurgents fought gallantly and would not allow the enemy to enter the villages Palikura, Rosoman and Ribartsi.

In the meantime more Chetas joined the fight and with the help of the local population managed to free Kavadartsi, Krivolak and Negotino. After the Serbians were driven out the Macedonians established their own control which lasted for seven days. A Municipal Council was established consisting of 12 members as well as a commission consisting of three members.

While waiting for a Serbian counter attack about 1,000 insurgents took up defensive positions. Some took to the hills and set up positions near Palikura and Grbovets while others took positions in Manastirets and Ribartsi. The insurgents in Negotino took up positions on the right bank of the Luda Mara River at the mouth of the Tsrna Reka River. While waiting for the counter attack it was anticipated that help might arrive from other regions of Macedonia. Even women joined the fight, one of whom was Efka Mojsova.

Supported by Yaja Aga's Bashi-Bazouks, the Serbian infantry arrived with artillery and cavalry backup and took up positions on the left bank of the Trna Reka River. A battle broke out starting with a Serbian artillery attack against the insurgent positions at Manastirets, Sirkovo and Ribartsi, followed by an infantry and cavalry attack. The attacks however were quickly repulsed and both sides retreated to their initial positions with heavy losses.

Reinforced by newly arrived units, on June 25th, 1913, the Serbian army regrouped and again carried out a very strong counter offensive against the Tikvesh insurgents. There was heavy fighting for two days outside of Kavadartsi during which time the city population fled to the mountains, Radovish and Shtip.

In the evening of June 26th, 1913 the Serbian army breached the city defenses and stormed the city terrorizing the remaining population, killing 25 people and burning down about 50 homes. In Negotino 171 people were killed and 250 houses and 300 stores were burned down.

On June 27th, 1913 Fillip Zhivotich, Kavadartsi District Secretary, informed Serbian Supreme Command that the situation in Kavadartsi had been extinguished.

Having been driven out of their defensive positions, the Macedonian Chetas fled and set up a refugee camp near the village Konopishte, where the various refugees and Chetas assembled. At this point the council of Vojvodas decided that all women and children should return to their homes and suggested that the young men cross the Vardar River and flee the country to save themselves. Vojvodas Shkartov and Lazarov retreated to Kozuf Mountain and the remaining refugees returned to the city.

On July 17th, 1913 Dushan Nikolich again informed Serbian Supreme Command that Serbian rule and the administration in the region had been restored. Later the Serbians amnestied those who had escaped and fled the country and carried out another census just to show the world that Tikvesh belonged to Serbia and that its population was all Serbian.

According to a Carnegie Commission report and to records kept by Blazho Videnov, one of the Macedonian leaders who took part in the uprising, about 1,200 people were killed and many women were raped during the Uprising. Of the 1,200, 363 were from Kavadartsi, 263 from Negotino, 89 from Vatasa and the rest from other places in Macedonia. On top of the rapes and killings about 1,000 houses were also burned down. Most of these atrocities were committed by members of Yaja Aga's Bashi-Bazouks and by Vasilije Trbich's Serbian detachment.

Even though the Tikvesh Uprising was an armed struggle against Serbian rule it was also a protest against Macedonia's division. The entire Uprising was organized and led by local Macedonian Revolutionaries, supported only by the local population. In seven days they not only liberated the entire Tikvesh Region but also established Macedonian authority. The people of Tikvesh, once again, demonstrated the existence of a Macedonian national consciousness, patriotism and a desire for freedom and independence. Even though the Tikvesh Uprising was only a local incident, it was of great significance in the history of the Macedonian people and an indication of their eternal desire to be free and have their own independent and sovereign state.

Part 37 – The Second Balkan War and Macedonia's Partition

The London Conference adjourned on August 11th, 1913, officially declaring an end to the First Balkan War. In spite of all the deals made during the conference, the resolutions left all parties dissatisfied. Serbia was dissatisfied with losing the Albanian territory. Serbia appealed to Bulgaria to grant it access to the Aegean Sea via Solun and the Vardar valley but its appeals fell on deaf ears. Greece also was not happy with Bulgaria's invasion and annexation of Odrin. To balance her share, Greece wanted Serres, Drama and Kavala as compensation. That too fell on deaf ears.

Seeing that Bulgaria was not going to budge and the fact that neither Greece nor Serbia alone could take on Bulgaria militarily, should a conflict arise, Greece and Serbia concluded a secret pact to jointly work against Bulgaria. In short, the objective was for Greece and Serbia to take the territory west of the Vardar River away from Bulgaria and divide it and have a common frontier.

After stumbling upon the Greek-Serbian pact, despite Russian attempts to appease it by offering it Solun, Bulgaria remained bitter and in a moment of weakness was lured away by Austria. By going over to Austria, Bulgaria in effect broke off all relations with the Balkan League. Russia, disappointed with the Bulgarian shift, made it clear that Bulgaria could no longer expect any help from Russia.

In what was to be termed the "Second Balkan War", the Bulgarian army, unprovoked, on June 30th, 1913 attacked its former allies on Macedonian soil. The conflict also drew in the Ottomans and Romania.

After a truce between the Ottomans and the allies was concluded on December 4th, 1912, besides Western Macedonia, the Serbian army had occupied part of Albania and had gained access to the Adriatic Sea. Austria-Hungary however, wanting that region to remain under its sphere of influence, strongly opposed Serbia's plan. This unfortunately created a cascading effect threatening Russian plans to gain access to Istanbul and forcing France to take measures against Austro-Hungarian expansion by advising Serbia not to withdraw from the Albanian territories. Great Britain came in support of Greece wanting Greece to expand northward and eastward into Ottoman territory in order to block Russian influence in the Balkans and in Istanbul.

The start of the Second Balkan War sparked a crisis in the region which the Great Powers attempted to resolve by peaceful means. Russia advised Serbia to retreat from Albanian territories in order to avoid conflict with Austria – Hungary. There were also recommendations made that the allies withdraw from Macedonia and follow up on the December 1912 suggestion, made in the London Conference, that Macedonia be given autonomy under Ottoman sovereignty. But that suggestion was

rejected. The one suggestion that was followed up on was that made by Austria-Hungary on December 27th, 1912, to create an autonomous Albanian state. This meant that Serbia would have to evacuate all Albanian territory. By the May 30th, 1913 Peace Treaty of London, the Albanian territory was defined as the entire territory north of the Enos-Midia line previously ceded to the Balkan allies. The Ottomans were also ordered to leave Crete and the Great Powers were to decide on Albania's borders.

Serbia did retreat from Albania and gave up on its plans to gain access to the Adriatic Sea but now found itself landlocked, so it looked to Bulgaria to grant it access to the Aegean Sea. Serbia's plan was to acquire a bigger chunk of Macedonia. Dissatisfied with Bulgaria's silence on the matter, Serbia cancelled its Serbian-Bulgarian treaty regarding the current division of Macedonia. Greece in the meantime requested of its partners to recognize its share of southern Macedonian, including its rights to Solun. Bulgaria, while categorically refusing to cede Macedonian territories to its partners, was secretly hoping to occupy all of Macedonia and acquire Solun for itself.

On June 1st, 1913 Serbia and Greece signed a secret treaty by which they agreed to forcefully take more Macedonian territory away from Bulgaria. Using the tense situation to its advantage, Romania too jumped in and requested of Bulgaria to hand over southern Dobruja. Not to be outdone and in hopes of gaining back some of their lost territories the Ottomans too jumped into action.

Austria-Hungary also took advantage of the situation and to draw Bulgaria into its sphere of influence, on June 29th, 1913, began an assault on Bulgaria's former allies thus initiating the Second Balkan War.

Caught in the middle of all this were the Macedonian people who were now being mobilized by force to fight on all sides of the conflict. Macedonians drafted in the foreign armies were well aware that they had been deceived and knew very well that the war they were about to fight was about Macedonia's permanent occupation and imminent division. They felt deep hatred towards the Serbs, Bulgarians and Greeks and deserted their armies at every opportunity.

The Macedonian economy also suffered during this time, particularly in the rural regions where Macedonians were forced to provide for the armies and work digging trenches and fortifying their positions. Outside of those being mobilized by force by the Bulgarian army, Bulgaria also mobilized about 40,000 young Macedonians between the ages of 20 and 26 to create the Seres, Drama and Odrin Brigades. These Macedonians were forced to fight against their will and to the detriment of their own people.

Bulgaria's entry into the Second Balkan War began with King Ferdinand's order number 234 and directive number 22 issued on June 1st,

1913, which called for an urgent transfer of the Bulgarian army from the Thrace front to the western front in Macedonia.

Bulgarian Supreme Command was planning to attack and defeat the Serbian army in two decisive strikes; first in the Morava River valley and then in Ovche Pole. The plan was to encircle the Serbian armies and force them to surrender.

Assuming Austria-Hungary was going to protect it from Romania and the Ottomans by preventing them from joining the war against Bulgaria, Bulgarian Supreme Command left its borders with these countries unprotected.

Meanwhile, on June 1st, 1913, Serbian and Greek Supreme Commands, in accordance with article 6 of their Military Convention, signed a Protocol to co-operate in case of a Bulgarian attack.

On June 3rd, 1913 Greece signed a Treaty with Bulgaria defining the demarcation line between the Bulgarian and Greek armies. On June 6th, 1913 Greek Supreme Command issued an order to strategically deploy the Greek army on the Gulf of Orfano -Besik Lake -Lagadina Lake - hills north of Solun and the village Karasuli line. By June 13th, 1913 Greece had its forces regrouped and ordered to hold back the Bulgarians.

The first battle of the Second Balkan war began in Bregalnitsa on June 30th, 1913 when the Bulgarians unexpectedly attacked the Serbians. Many Macedonians were drawn into the battle and fought on both sides. The Macedonian -Odrin Opolchenie units fought on the Bulgarian side, while the Macedonian Osogovo detachment fought on the Serbian side. As the battle entered its second day, the Serbians, in need of reinforcements, decided to mobilize 30,000 men, mostly from Macedonia, and dispatched them to the front without any training. By July 7th, 1913 more Serbian reinforcements began to arrive and as the Greek army began its advance towards the north end of the front in an effort to cut off Bulgarian retreat, the Bulgarian army disengaged and retreated.

During the Bregalnitsa battle both Serbian and Bulgarian armies experienced mass desertions on the front lines. The deserters were Macedonians who not only knew each other from before but had come to the realization that the objective of this war was to divide Macedonia.

All three armies showed no hesitation in using Macedonians to fight on their fronts, even if they had to fight each other, Macedonians against Macedonians. All three recruited young men from the Macedonian population and, with no training, forced them to fight on the front where many were killed.

If destroying Macedonia's future generations was not enough, all three belligerents also helped themselves to the Macedonian population's food supplies threatening the civilian population, particularly the women and children, with starvation.

By July 2nd, 1913 a second front had developed in Kukush Region and fighting between the Bulgarian and Greek armies began. But due to a strong barrage of artillery fire from the Greek side, the Bulgarians retreated without a fight disappointing the Macedonians enough to discard their weapons and walk away. Kukush is Gotse Delchev's birthplace and the Bulgarians abandoned it without a fight. Their retreat was disgraceful. If Delchev was truly Bulgarian as they had claimed, then the Bulgarians would not have left Kukush without a fight.

Over the next few days the Greek army continued to push the Bulgarians back until they reached Belasitsa where they ended their advance.

When it became clear that the Bulgarians had lost to the Serbians and Greeks at Bregalnitsa and Kukush, the Romanians began to mobilize their armies. At that point the Romanian government informed the Bulgarian government that Romania's armies were going to invade Bulgaria in order to recover southern Dobruja. Given the vast size of the Romanian force, Bulgaria decided to remain passive and on July 13th, 1913 allowed the Romanians to cross the Bulgarian border. The next day the Romanians crossed the Danube River and on July 20th, 1913 reached the Berkovitsa-Vratsa –Orhaniya line. By July 25th, 1913 the Romanians came to within 5 km of Sofia where they were stopped by request from Germany.

In the meantime seeing that Bulgaria was losing to the Serbians and Greeks, the Ottomans also entered the fore. On July 15th, 1913 Ottoman forces crossed the Enos –Midia border and on July 23rd, 1913 entered Odrin. But due to Great Power intervention the Ottomans were stopped before crossing the Bulgarian border.

After Romania and the Ottomans entered the Second Balkan War, Bulgaria had little choice but to capitulate and on July 30th, 1913 signed a truce and entered negotiations for the division of Macedonia.

The Peace Conference in Bucharest began on July 30th, 1913 and was attended by six Great Power representatives. The Balkan delegations, except for the Bulgarian, were led by their Prime Ministers. Chairing the Conference was Prime Minister Titu Maioresku of Romania. The conference was organized in plenary and special sessions led by military delegations. Special commissions were also established to deal with special issues.

The Conference took place in a tense atmosphere and was constantly interrupted because of the many parties involved. Military operations were ordered to cease on July 31st, 1913 and a preliminary truce was signed under the following conditions:

1. Demarcation lines marked with white flags were to be drawn where the advance guards had reached on July 31st, 1913, precisely at noon.

2. The truce was to begin on July 31st, 1913, at noon, and was to last for five days.
3. Movement of the troops and provisions were not to be interrupted.
4. In order to terminate hostilities, the "warring powers" were to inform each other of their current positions.
5. Supreme commands of the "warring powers" were to immediately inform all their forces of the truce.
6. Articles 40 and 41 of the war conventions on land were to be observed.

When the Bucharest Conference began the various parties decided to leave Bulgaria out of the plenary sessions and separately discuss Bulgarian issues between Serbia, Romania, Greece and Montenegro. The first treaty to be signed was between Bulgaria and Romania.

On August 5th, 1913 Jackson, the American representative at the Conference, read a note sent by his government which in part said that the US government was interested in putting provisions in the Treaty to protect the civil and religious rights of the population in the regions proposed to come under the sovereignty of these five states. Maioresku accepted the American proposal and some discussions took place in that regard but on Venizelos's (Greek prime minister) suggestion this provision did not enter the Peace Treaty, thus depriving the Macedonian population of its rights.

The most difficult problem the Conference faced was reaching an agreement about Macedonia's division. In addition to the Greeks, Serbians and Bulgarians wanting things to go their way, there were also all kinds of proposals made by the Great Powers. While the Russians wanted to divide Macedonia one way, Austria-Hungary, to placate Bulgaria, wanted to divide it a different way.

Russia suggested that the border between Serbia and Bulgaria be drawn between the Vardar and Struma rivers so that Shtip could be given to Serbia and Strumitsa and Kochani to Bulgaria. The junction between the Serbian-Greek-Bulgarian borders would be Gevgelija. The Greek-Bulgarian border would extend from Gevgelija down the Struma river valley to Drama, with Drama and Seres going to Greece. The Great Powers would then determine the border from Drama to the Aegean Sea.

Austria-Hungary suggested that the Serbian-Bulgarian border be drawn along the Vardar River so that lands west of the river would be given to Serbia and lands east of the river would be given to Bulgaria. The Greek-Bulgarian border would be drawn so that the southern part of the Struma River and the coast from Kavala to Enos would be given to Bulgaria.

The Serbian delegation disagreed and requested that the border be drawn from Gorna Dzumaja along the Struma River down past the Rupel Gorge.

On August 6th, 1913 Bulgaria and Serbia came to an agreement that Stip and Kochani should be given to Serbia and Strumitsa and Radovish to Bulgaria. While their military representatives drew up the border on topographic maps, a commission of experts from Belgium, Switzerland and the Netherlands was put together to deal with specific problems.

Drawing the Greek -Bulgarian border was a little more challenging mainly because Greece did not want to give Bulgaria access to the Aegean Sea. Greece insisted that the border be east of Belasitsa Mountain, north of Seres, Drama, Ksanthi up to Makri on the Aegean Sea. Under this scenario Bulgaria would acquire a 40 km long coast stretching from Makri to Enos. Dissatisfied Bulgaria requested of Maioresku, the Romanian Prime Minister, that it be given the Port of Kavala otherwise there would be no agreement. France and Britain however did not agree with Bulgaria's request and Kavala was given to Greece.

Bulgaria agreed to continue with the talks under Russian, Italian, and Austro-Hungarian assurances that they would soon revise the Treaty to include this Bulgarian request.

On August 7th, 1913 Protocol number 9 was signed, drawing the Greek-Bulgarian border from the Serbian-Bulgarian border, over Belasitsa Mountain down the mouth of the Mesta River to the Aegean Sea. Then on August 10th, 1913 the Bucharest Conference adopted the text and the negotiations were over.

With the signing of this treaty Macedonia's fate was sealed. The territories Macedonia, Kosovo, Metohija, Vasojevitsi, Sandzhak, Thrace and northern Epirus, previously occupied by the Ottomans were expropriated by the three belligerent states, Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria.

Serbia received roughly the Vardar Region of Macedonia, Kosovo, part of Metohija and part of Sandzhak, an area of 39,000 km2 inhabited by 1,290,000 people.

Montenegro received Vasojevitsi, part of Sandzhak and part of Metohija. Its territory was increased by 7,000 km2 and its population by about 260,000 people.

Greece was given northern Epirus, roughly the Aegean Region of Macedonia, part of Western Thrace, the Chalcidice Peninsula with Solun and a large number of Aegean Islands. Greece was given 51,300 km2 of land populated by 1,624,000 people.

Bulgaria was given roughly the Pirin Region of Macedonia, greater Strumitsa and parts of eastern and western Thrace. Bulgaria was given 21,000 km2 of land inhabited by about 600,000 people. Bulgaria was also given access to the Aegean Sea which extended from the mouth of the Mesta River to the mouth of the Maritsa River and the Port of Dedeagatch.

Romania received southern Dobruja, an area of 800 km2 populated by 303,000 people.

On August 11th, 1913 just after the Treaty was signed, Austria-Hungary, Russia and Bulgaria requested revisions to the Treaty. But then a couple of days later, on August 14th, 1913, Russia changed its mind and the dreaded 1913 Treaty of Bucharest to this day remains incomplete and without the signatures of some Great Powers.

No one, not even the Great Powers took any requests from the Macedonian people not even for the preservation of their identity.

On March 1st, 1913 Georgi Konstantinovikj, Dimitrija Chupovski, Natse Dimov and Aleksandar Vezenkov, representatives of the Macedonian colony in St. Petersburg, signed a memorandum demanding independence for Macedonia and sent it to Edward Grey, Foreign Minister of Great Britain, as well as to the ambassadors of the Great Powers in London. Unfortunately the Great Powers were not interested and, in the absence of the Macedonian people, sanctioned Macedonia's division.

As has been shown in this and previous chapters, the Balkan Wars were not about liberation but about land grabs resulting in the occupation and division of Macedonia. During the two year Balkan Wars duration, Macedonia was partitioned three different times by three different divisions. The first, as agreed by the March 13th, 1912 Serbian-Bulgarian Treaty called for the Deve Bair–Ohrid line to be drawn. The second division took place after the First Balkan War when a border was proposed to coincide with the frontlines. The third division took place on August 10th, 1913 after the Treaty of Bucharest was signed.

The only standards used to determine these borders, in all three cases, were force of arms, lies and deceit.

Instead of liberating it, the 1913 Bucharest Treaty enslaved Macedonia and turned it into provinces of the belligerent Balkan states which wasted no time in forcefully denationalizing and assimilating the Macedonian population.

Part 38 – The Ohrid – Debar Uprising

Macedonia's division by the 1913 Treaty of Bucharest, approved on August 10th, 1913 by the Great Powers, left the Macedonian people in shock and disbelief. Macedonia had not only been snatched from their hands but now, after two millenniums since Roman times, it had been again partitioned.

It would have been better if Macedonia was left intact and given to any one of these countries, including the Ottomans, perhaps as an autonomous province, but to have it divided was not acceptable. Many Macedonians were dissatisfied with the turn of events and sought ways to reverse them.

The Macedonian colony in St. Petersburg was the first to react with dissatisfaction and launched an appeal to have the division reversed. But, as before, the appeal was ignored.

As events continued to unfold it became apparent that the Treaty of Bucharest had left more than just the Macedonians dissatisfied. But in the interest of avoiding a war that might spread throughout all of Europe, the Treaty was left as it was. This dissatisfaction unfortunately split the parties into two camps, those who agreed with the Treaty and those who disagreed.

Having lost the most from this experience, Bulgaria was one of the first parties to call for Macedonian autonomy after the Treaty of Bucharest was signed. This gave some Macedonians, including some Macedonian Revolutionary Organization's (MRO's) leaders, hope that there was a chance the division could be reversed by diplomatic or even by military means if necessary.

To prepare for such a contingency, in August 1913, MRO leaders met with Mehmed Sefadin Pustina, leader of the Albanian Revolutionary Committee in Elbasan and signed an agreement to jointly take actions against the Serbian regime.

The Bulgarian government also became involved and together with MRO appointed a three member commission consisting of Dr. Balabanov from Shtip, Dr. I. A. Georgov from Veles and Dr. P. Pavlov from Skopje and charged them with the task of going to Vienna to lobby Austrian-Hungarian politicians to help reverse the Treaty of Bucharest and its division of Macedonia. Their job was to inform Austrian-Hungarian politicians about the situation in Macedonia and to let them know that a mistake had been made in allowing the Serbian and Greek regimes, considered to be much stricter than the Ottomans, to occupy and divide Macedonia. They encouraged Austria-Hungary not to give up on the Macedonian people and if necessary to engage all its forces to reverse the division.

On August 23rd, 1913, Macedonian and Bulgarian delegates led by Leopold Mandl, a representative of the Austrian-Hungarian government,

held an assembly in Vienna during which Georgov requested that Macedonia be allowed to organize a referendum to determine the Macedonian peoples' national declaration. He also emphasized that there was great danger that the Macedonian population would be forcibly turned into Serbians and Greeks. Macedonians did not want to be turned into Serbians and Greeks and with help from Austria-Hungary, were prepared to fight against Serbia and Greece. If the Great Powers wanted peace in the Balkans then Macedonia and Albania must be given autonomy.

Mandl was in favour of Macedonian autonomy and said that Macedonia deserved to be helped because the Macedonian people had suffered the most in these wars.

A Resolution was passed calling Macedonia's division between Serbia and Greece a violation of the Macedonian peoples' rights, an illegal and uncivilized act. The resolution called on the Great Powers to reconsider the Bucharest Treaty and correct the injustice done to the Macedonian people.

The resolution was sent via telegram to 150,000 Macedonian refugees in Sofia and to the Albanian government in Vlore.

Yane Sandanski too came out in opposition of the Treaty and began his own campaign against it, particularly against Macedonia's division. Sandanski supported the idea of autonomy for Macedonia and saw hope in it if Austria-Hungary was to give it its support.

In August 1913 Sandanski took a trip to Tirana and Vlore and, with representatives of the Albanian Revolutionary Government, organized preparations for a joint Macedonian -Albanian Uprising. The goals of the Uprising were to cancel the Bucharest Treaty and establish autonomy for Macedonia and Albania. Unfortunately, because of subtle differences between Sandanski's plan and that of the Austro-Hungarians, Austria-Hungary intervened and cancelled Sandanski's plans. Discouraged, Sandanski gave up and left Albania.

Seeing that there was no mention in any of the agreements of Bulgaria giving up its share of Macedonian lands, a number of prominent Macedonians in Sofia requested of Bulgaria to be the first to relinquish its part of Macedonia and let Macedonians establish a princedom in that part of Macedonia. Then, supported by Austria-Hungary, the princedom would request of the others to relinquish their parts of Macedonia. Unfortunately the Bulgarian government rejected the proposal, once again showing its true intensions towards Macedonia.

Despite Austro-Hungarian disapproval, MRO and the Albanian provisional government continued with preparations for an uprising and at the same time gaining Bulgarian and Ottoman support. While the Bulgarians were in support of the MRO the Ottomans threw their support behind the Albanians.

The plan was for the Uprising to commence with Macedonian and Albanian Chetas attacking the Serbian and Greek rear while the Bulgarian and Ottoman armies would mount a frontal attack.

Unfortunately opposition parties in Bulgaria were against such an uprising in Macedonia because many believed that cooperation between the Albanians and Macedonians would not last and there would be no benefits for Bulgaria to become involved. However the Bulgarian government continued to prepare for war with Serbia and Greece.

On August 29th, 1913 Bulgaria signed a Treaty with the Ottomans to carry out joint actions against Serbia and Greece, according to which Bulgaria was to give up Odrin, Dedeagatch and Gyumyurdzhina in exchange for Ottoman help to take as much Macedonian territory as possible away from Serbia and Greece. After the treaty was signed, the Bulgarian government ordered one of its divisions to mobilize new troops and commence operations in order to occupy Gevgelija, Strumitsa, Kavala, Drama and Seres. At the same time MRO began to recruit Macedonian volunteers in Sofia and to create new Chetas.

But before any of these plans could be put into action, the French, British and Russian representatives in Sofia found out and vigorously opposed them. So without Bulgarian and Ottoman support it was now up to the Macedonians and Albanians to commence the Uprising. It was agreed by the Albanian Revolutionary Committee, through written authorization, that the Albanian Chetas would come under MRO command and would be led by Vojvodas P. Chaulev, P. Hristov and M. Matov.

On August 25th, 1913 Vojvoda Tane Nikolov met with the MRO Vojvodas in Sofia and informed them of the plan for joint actions against Serbia and Greece in Macedonia and asked them to cooperate with the Albanians. A follow-up meeting was called in Sofia during which the Albanian League in Bulgaria also pledged its support to join the MRO in the uprising.

Before the Uprising was to begin, the plan called for the MRO to send some of its Chetas across the Bulgarian -Serbian border and the rest by Austrian ships from the Black Sea via the Danube River to Trieste and further into Albania. The new Chetas would then join Chaulev and Matov in Macedonia.

In time Vojvodas Matov and Chaulev mobilized about 12,000 insurgents, consisting mostly of Macedonians and some Albanians and Ottomans. Some of the Vojvodas and insurgents expected to arrive from Bulgaria unfortunately never made it to their destinations.

What later became known as the Ohrid -Debar uprising began unexpectedly on September 7th, 1913, not as the planned Uprising but as a spontaneous result of a Serbian provocation in the village Episkupija. The day after Serbian authorities terrorized the population in Episkupija, 300 insurgents from the Debar Detachment launched an attack on the 19th

Serbian Regiment stationed in the village Luzuna capturing 18 mountain guns, 7 machine guns and a large cache of ammunition.

The momentum of the sudden attack on the Serbians scattered the Uprising in three different directions. One group of insurgents continued to push the Serbian army towards Gostivar and Mavrovo. A second group coming from Debar advanced on the Serbian strongholds in Lopusnik and Kichevo. A third group appeared in Struga and attacked the Serbians stationed near the village Velesta. As more insurgents joined the fight, a number of towns and cities in western Macedonia were quickly liberated and local authority established.

Among those who established authority in Ohrid were Lev Ognjanov, Dimitar Ivanov, Ivan Grupchev, Lev Kachkov, P. Hristov, Petar Filev, Dam Tsana and Irfan Bey. Among those who established authority in Galichnik were Evrem Avramov, Ilija Efremov, Eftim Giovski and Riste Efremov. (Vanche Stojchev. "Military History of Macedonia". Military academy. Skopje, 2004. Page 481)

Albanian armed units, trained and instructed by the Austrian-Hungarians and led by Gagliardi were given the task of securing the Serbian -Albanian demarcation line established back in December 1912 at the London Conference. Austria-Hungary's goal was to move the line eastward so that the Ohrid, Struga and Debar Regions became part of Albania.

The Serbians meanwhile, still hoping to access the Adriatic Sea, established a propaganda group in Albania to disarm the Albanians and convince the Albanian population to join Serbia. This however provoked some Islamic and militant Albanians who formed a fighting group called the "Katchaks" and who fought for the liberation of Albania as an Islamic country. This drew support from many Ottoman officers and soldiers who also joined the group.

The Katchaks fought fiercely, not only against the Serbian army and police, but also against the Macedonian population in an attempt to cleanse the region of Macedonians.

The Serbians reacted quickly and fiercely against the Uprising by engaging all their available forces which were more than a match for the Macedonian insurgents who by now were running out of ammunition. But more disappointing than that was the let down from Bulgaria and Austria-Hungary, both of whom promised help but beyond moral support, delivered nothing.

Chaulev and Matov decided to withdraw from the battles and regroup and organize a defense line about 20 km east of Ohrid, taking a defensive position on the hills at Petrino and Bukovo.

On September 17th, 18th and 19th, 1913 the insurgents fought bravely against the Serbian forces but were overwhelmed by the sudden attack at Golak Mountain by 600 Greek soldiers. At that point Petar Chaulev

dismantled his Cheta into small groups and allowed the fighters to retreat to the mountains where they were to spend the winter. Chaulev, Matov, Georgiev, Sibakov, Atanasov and the other Vojvodas and insurgents fled to Albania.

On October 6th, 1913 the Serbian District Chief in Bitola informed Serbian Command that the insurgents were defeated and had retreated to Albania and that the situation in the border region had been pacified.

After the Ohrid -Debar Uprising was suppressed, the Serbian army, police and former illegal bands again began to terrorize the Macedonian population. Schools were closed and all non-Serbian educators were expelled or killed. Special martial courts were opened to prosecute the Macedonians and Albanians who had participated in the uprising. Many people were killed and their houses were burned down.

Material damage and revenge killings for Macedonian participation in the Ohrid -Debar Uprising continued for a while, which prompted the Bulgarian government to suggest that a part of it's national budget be set aside for organizing another general uprising in Macedonia in the spring of 1914. Austria-Hungary too was encouraged to set aside government money for this purpose.

In the meantime MRO established its own cooperation with Ottoman representatives and agreed to conduct joint operations in Macedonia to protect the Ottoman and Macedonian civilian populations from Serbian retribution.

MRO also met with Albanian representatives in Sofia and agreed to carry out joint activities in the spring of 1914. According to the Albanians who attended this meeting, Austria- Hungary was ready to support the insurgency both financially and militarily.

A new MRO committee was established specifically for the purpose of preparing and coordinating military activities in the future. General Geshov was appointed president of the new committee, Lieutenant Colonel Aleksandar Protogerov was appointed his assistant, and Nikolov, Matov, Drvingov, Todor Aleksandrov, Chaulev, Stojanchev, Dr. Vladov, Zankov and Takvor were appointed members of the committee. It was decided that the Committee would remain inactive until the next spring, but was charged with organizing a struggle that would involve all of Macedonia.

Part 39 – Macedonian Involvement in WW I

Only a few years since their fatherland was snatched out of their hands and torn apart by Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria, the Macedonian people were about to enter into yet another indignant Great Power war. Still suffering from the wounds of the two Balkan Wars and from having their country occupied and partitioned, the Macedonians by now had completely lost confidence in their neighbours to help them gain their independence. The Macedonians however were not the only ones unhappy in this new arrangement. Bulgaria was dissatisfied because it received the smallest part of Macedonia, hardly a prize for its effort and losses. Serbia was not satisfied because, in spite of its great effort and expense, it still did not gain access to the Aegean Sea. Greece too, in spite of the large chunk of Macedonian territory it unexpectedly received, was dissatisfied because it did not gain the Shar Planina Mountain ranges; a natural border of strategic military significance. Germany and Austria-Hungary were also not satisfied because the newly occupied region by Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria fell under British, Russian and French influence, which cut them off from their Asian connections. All this dissatisfaction caused friction between the various parties and laid the foundations for yet another conflict; the Great War.

To stem the tide, alliances were broken and new ones forged. Greece and Serbia joined the Entente Powers to safeguard what they had already while Bulgaria joined the Central Powers in hopes of getting more of what it did not get. While Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria became willing pawns in this Great Power struggle, Macedonia, yet again, unwillingly took centre stage in the conflict. And as unwilling participants, the Macedonian people were now mobilized by the Greek, Serbian and Bulgarian armies and forced into a fratricidal war.

Greece was one of the last Entente countries to mobilize its forces. By then it was common knowledge that mobilization was imminent so many Macedonians from Greek occupied Macedonia fled their homes and hid in the mountains to avoid the draft. Also, of the ones who were unfortunate enough to have been drafted, in spite of the threat of being executed, many deserted. By the start of the war about 20,000 Macedonians were mobilized into the Greek army, of whom about 8,000 deserted soon afterwards. (Vanche Stojchev. “Military History of Macedonia”. Military academy. Skopje, 2004. Page 512) Macedonian recruits were assigned to large, regular Greek army units to prevent them from deserting and to keep a close eye on them.

The situation in Serbia was somewhat different. As soon as Serbia gained control of the Macedonian territories and its people, it began to draft them into its army ranks. In January 1914, the Serbian Minister of War issued orders to have the entire male population, excluding Muslims,

ages 20 to 29 drafted into the Serbian army. By March 5, 1914 three Macedonian regiments were created, each consisting of 4,000 recruits, led by Serbian officers.

Bulgaria took a similar approach to that of Serbia in the draft of Macedonians into its military. After gaining control of the Macedonian territories it occupied, Bulgaria began drafting Macedonians under the age of 25, as Bulgarian citizens, and those between the age of 25 and 30 were required to pay military tax. Bulgaria also drafted Macedonians who deserted the Greek and Serbian armies. These recruits were given special status and were not dispatched to fight on the front lines, instead they were sent to assist the German army. On October 30, 1916 the Bulgarian Minister of War dispatched orders to his districts to select the best 2,000 Macedonians and send them to assist the 11th German Division. All in all 22,351 Macedonians were recruited into the Bulgarian army. (Vanche Stojchev. "Military History of Macedonia". Military academy. Skopje, 2004. Page 504)

By avoiding the drafts and by the large numbers of desertions, it was evident that the Macedonian people were not happy about fighting in a war that protected the interests of their enemies who occupied them and partitioned their fatherland, so they harshly opposed the recruitments. This unfortunately did not help their situation and turned what was supposed to be a general draft into a forced mobilization. The Macedonians in Greece received the worst treatment with the escalation of fear and terror campaigns. But it was the Macedonians in Serbian occupied Macedonia who publicly showed their dissatisfaction. This was manifested on April 15, 1914 during a line-up in Bregalnitsa to pledge an oath of loyalty to Serbia and the Serbian king, which the Macedonian recruits refused to take, prompting the Serbian officers to beat them in public, frightening the guests and dignitaries. As a result of their refusal to take the oath, 30 Macedonian recruits, considered the ring leaders, were jailed and the rest were taken away never to be seen again. Their act of loyalty to Macedonia and the Macedonian people however was unfortunately misused by the Bulgarian propaganda machine, which called the oath refusal "a Bulgarian revolt" and used it to create false concerns about the supposed "Bulgarians" (not the Macedonians) being mistreated by Serbia. As is well known however, the only concerns Bulgaria had were its own dissatisfaction that it had not received enough Macedonian territory from the Bucharest Treaty and was now looking for an opportunity to change that.

Historians attribute the start of World War I to Francis Ferdinand and his wife Sofia being assassinated on June 28, 1914, in Sarajevo. Being prepared for war, Germany and Austria-Hungary used the assassination as an opportunity to declare war on Serbia. On the pretext that the Serbian government had something to do with the assassination, Austria-Hungary

demanded that Serbia allow investigations to be carried out by Austrian personnel on Serbian soil. But after Serbian authorities refused, the Austrian-Hungarian Empire declared war on Serbia.

Choosing the option to fight, Serbia, on July 12, 1941, ordered a general mobilization of its entire army. Macedonian recruits who were already inducted into the Serbian army in April 1914 were assigned to various divisions and immediately sent to the front. Macedonians who were called on to join the July 12th mobilization resisted bitterly. About 12,000 Macedonian recruits were assigned to Serbian units during the first phase of the mobilization which lasted from July 31 to August 10, 1914. But because Serbia could not muster enough forces during the first phase, it initiated a second and third phase during which it recruited more and older people ages 20 to 60, from its "newly occupied territories". Muslims were also recruited. The total number of Macedonians recruited after the second and third phase was 53,048.

Besides facing resistance from the Macedonian population, Serbian authorities had to also deal with Bulgarian and Austrian propaganda calling on Macedonians to desert the Serbian army and join the Bulgarians. There were even secret channels organized to transport Macedonian deserters to the Bulgarian camps. Austria was attempting to influence the Macedonians to desert the Serbian army in an attempt to weaken Serbia and at the same time attract Bulgaria to its side. To sweeten the deal, Austria even offered its Macedonian prisoners of war to Bulgaria. If they declared themselves Bulgarians, Austria would release them and dispatch them to Bulgaria through Romania. By January 1915, 1,950 Macedonians left the Austrian camps and arrived in Bulgaria and by the end of February 1915, the number jumped to 3,000. In 1916 the Bulgarian government was informed that Austria had about 6,000 Macedonian prisoners of war remaining in its camps. According to Bulgarian and Serbian sources, about 30,000 people deserted the Serbian army, of whom 21,106 were Macedonians.

Many more Macedonians however still fought for Serbia and many sacrificed their lives in doing so. The exact number who died for Serbia is unknown because Serbia refused to recognize them as Macedonians. Some indirect recognition was given by Aleksandar, heir to the Serbian throne, on December 15, 1914 when he said: "In this solemn moment, when the Serbian flag is proudly hoisted over Belgrade, I must fulfill my obligation and express my gratitude to all our brothers, who we liberated from the Turks, and who fought shoulder to shoulder with you in this war. You are witnesses to their courage and their love for the fatherland. Men from Kosovo and Vardar, Zegligovo and Bregalnica, Bitola and Porece proved to be worthy and equal to their brothers from Sumadija and Morava". (Vanche Stojchev. "Military History of Macedonia". Military academy. Skopje, 2004. Page 492) But the Macedonians were neither

liberated nor did they love the Serbian fatherland; they only fought because they had to save their own lives and died to save the lives of those for whom they cared.

The situation unfortunately was no better in Bulgaria and those attempting to escape the Serbian or Austrian-Hungarian clutches had no idea what they were getting into when they joined the Bulgaria army. Among the few that did know what they were doing and were prepared to do something about it was Yane Sandaski, then living in Melnik. In his frequent travels to Sofia, Sandanski used his influence to convince those whom he trusted that Macedonia would never have a future as long as Ferdinand and Radoslav's revenge seeking government were in power. Sandanski and his like minded friends decided that in order to avoid disaster, Ferdinand had to be eliminated. With Ferdinand out of the way, Peoples' rule would be established and Bulgaria would not have to enter the war. A group consisting of Yane Sandanski, Mihail Gerdzikov and Krsto Stanchev was created and given the task of establishing contact with the anti-war political parties. Unfortunately the idea did not have much support and the plan was abandoned, but not unnoticed by Ferdinand's supporters. Some time later Ferdinand summoned Sandanski, proposing that he work for him and organize Macedonian units to fight for Bulgaria. Sandanski however had ideas of his own and proposed to the king that he would lead Macedonian units only if they fought under the Macedonian flag and for the Macedonian cause. On his return to Melnik, on Apri1 22, 1915, Sandanski was ambushed and murdered.

Dissatisfied with the 1913 Treaty of Bucharest, Bulgaria went into a state of desperation and sought alliances with whoever would help her gain the most of Macedonia. Still believing that Austria-Hungary would support Macedonian autonomy, as it did during the Balkan Wars, the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (MRO) too began to look to Austria-Hungary, hoping that it would support a revision of the 1913 Treaty of Bucharest and reunification of Macedonia. However, as mentioned earlier, Austria-Hungary's motive for drawing in Bulgaria and the MRO were to weaken Serbia and bring it to its knees. If there was any hope of Austria-Hungary supporting Macedonian autonomy, by the start of the First World War that hope was lost. Unbeknownst to MRO, Austria-Hungary was more interested in placating Bulgaria than it was in supporting the Macedonian question. So the notion of supporting Macedonian autonomy was quickly replaced by the notion of supporting an autonomous Macedonia to be annexed by Bulgaria.

Taking Austria-Hungary's gestures seriously, MRO was able to not only muster its own forces but to create alliances with Albanian and Turkish forces that also looked to Austria-Hungary for support. Their first task was to go behind enemy lines and stir the Macedonian population into initiating an armed uprising against the Serbian regime. The MRO and its

allies were also tasked with destroying a crucial bridge near the village Udovo in order to cut off the Entente line from providing the Serbian army with weapons, ammunition and military equipment. MRO and its allies accepted their assigned tasks and continued to operate from January to March 1915, carrying out military and propaganda missions as expected, particularly in the border areas.

Unfortunately because of the sense of hopelessness they were feeling, knowing very well that they might, yet again, be fooled by false promises, or because their sons were serving in the Serbian army and would be endangered if the did rise, the Macedonian people in the Serbian occupied part of Macedonia were reluctant to rise. Regardless however, the MRO and its allies continued with their plan to attack the bridge near the village Udovo and to occupy Valandovo. The attack on the bridge, which lasted through April 1st and 2nd, 1915, was bloody and unsuccessful, but the attack on Valandovo was a success and the town was occupied for one day until Serbian reinforcements arrived and re-occupied it. Unfortunately, it was most unfortunate that Macedonians had to be engaged on both sides of this conflict.

Unable to destroy the Udovo bridge in April, a second mission was put together for September, this time supported by the Bulgarian army. Two columns of joint MRO and Bulgarian forces were dispatched from Strumitsa to Udovo on the morning of September 30, 1915. The right column consisted of one company from the 14th Macedonian Infantry Regiment, one company from the 13th Rila Infantry Regiment and one company from the Border Battalion. The left column consisted of one company from the 14th Macedonian Infantry Regiment, one company from the 13th Rila Regiment and 50 MRO fighters. Other units were tasked with providing security for the retreat when the operation was completed.

Upon their arrival at the scene, on the evening of September 30, 1915, a battle broke out and despite their great effort the columns were unable to destroy the bridge. After this the job of destroying the bridge fell entirely on the MRO and the Macedonians. Again most of the victims in this battle were Macedonians, since both the Serbian and Bulgarian armies employed Macedonians in their units. Besides that, the Macedonian civilian population also suffered when houses and entire villages were burnt down, especially those in the path of the battle zones.

The latest successes in Valandovo and Germany's victory over Russia in April 1915, boosted Bulgaria's confidence in the Central powers, prompting Radoslavov's pro-German government to publicly announce its aspirations towards Macedonia. Because of the Russian defeat, the Entente powers were inclined to offer Bulgaria what it wanted if it joined the Entente. But Bulgaria wanted all of Macedonia. Having Serbia's agreement to give up the Bulgarian desired Macedonian territory, the Entente gave in to Bulgarian demands. The offer however was not

accepted by Bulgaria because by then Bulgaria had secretly negotiated a better deal with the Central powers and had become a member of its coalition.

The pro-Entente Greek government followed Bulgarian-German negotiations very closely and was quick to react to Bulgarian threats against Serbia; itself threatening to retaliate to which Wilhelm II, the German chancellor, responded with a threatening telegram to the Greek king Constantine who happened to be the son-in-law of the German king. On March 6, 1915 the Greek Prime minister was replaced with the appointment of a prime minister who was willing to keep Greece neutral. The same Greek Prime Minister was again replaced after winning the elections in Greece but in 1917 the Entente powers forced the Greek king to abdicate and Greece joined the war on the Entente side.

The first major attack on Serbia by the Central powers took place on November 6, 1915 with the bombing of Belgrade. Pushed from the northern front by Austrian-Hungarian and German forces, the Serbians had to retreat towards Kosovo in order to continue their withdrawal to Solun. But their path was blocked and they were forced to retreat through the Albanian and Montenegrin mountains towards the Adriatic Sea. Because it was winter, the retreat turned out to be very difficult. The cold weather, hunger, being improperly dressed and unprepared, constantly being attacked on the way by pursuing Bulgarians and killed and robbed by Albanian armed gangs, the retreat took a toll on the Serbians. More than 72,000 Serbian soldiers, among whom were many Macedonians, lost their lives in a very short time.

On February 19, 1916, 151,828 Serbian soldiers and approximately 14,470 civilian refugees made it to the Adriatic Sea and were transported to Corfu where they were reorganized. By the end of May 1916, the entire Serbian army, approximately 150,000 men, was sent to Solun and after a brief training period at the beginning of August, the army was dispatched to the Macedonian front stretching from the River Vardar to Pelagonia along the line Vardar to Kozuf, Veternik and Dobro Pole to Kajmakcalan, to the road Banitsa in Lerin Region.

By now new alliances were forged and battle lines drawn, mostly on Macedonian soil. As fronts began to develop deserters were court marshaled, including many Macedonians who refused to fight in other people's wars.

After Bulgaria occupied the Macedonian territories promised to it by the Central powers, it divided them into two districts. Later, when Bulgaria occupied a part of Greek occupied Macedonia, it created a third district. In total the two districts under former Serbian control covered nine regions, which included Skopje, Kumanovo, Tetovo, Shtip, Tikvesh, Bitola, Ohrid, Prizren and Prishtina Region. As soon as these districts were created Bulgaria began to mobilize the population, calling on all men between the

ages 30 and 40 to join the draft. By September 1916, the total number of people mobilized was 28,920; 10,773 Christians, 18,101 Muslims, and 46 Jews. (Vanche Stojchev. "Military History of Macedonia". Military academy. Skopje, 2004. Page 502) These were disappointing numbers for the Bulgarian authorities who, in spite of their strong propaganda calling for Macedonia to be liberated, were not believed by the Macedonian people. In other words, the Macedonian people still remembered what had happened to them after the Balkan Wars.

By October 1915, a large front began to develop in Macedonia with the Entente forces concentrating in Solun. By mid-November the French and British had arrived in Solun with a combined force numbering 150,000 soldiers. Commanded by the Frenchman Maurice Sarrail, this force, whose job was to secure rail traffic from Solun to Skopje, was known as the Eastern Army. Stretching from the southern slopes of Belasitsa -the village Tatarli - Demir Kapija –Kavadartsi, this front was created and mandated with the task of preventing Central forces from penetrating into Solun and reaching out towards the Suez Canal, Africa and Asia. This force was also responsible for staging a counter-offensive against German, Austro – Hungarian, Bulgarian and Turkish forces that might venture in that direction. The army's role also included providing assistance to the British, French and Russian forces, assisting in Serbian restoration and putting pressure on the pro-German Greek king Constantine not to allow Greece to join the Central powers.

By December 1915, the Central forces commanded by Friedrich Scholtz, a German, were gathering strength and developing their own front in Macedonia with the Austrian-Hungarians taking positions in Albania and Macedonia, stretching from the Ionian Sea to Lake Ohrid. The Bulgarians and Germans taking positions from Lake Ohrid to Bitola and along the Greek border to Prilep.

Behind them, near Veles and Shtip, stood another German and Bulgarian force to protect their rear. A combined force was also placed along the Greek border following the Belasitsa Mountain north of Lake Dojran. The Bulgarians were taking positions along the Strumica -Petric - Nevrokop line, along the Mesta River valley to the Aegean Sea. The Turks took positions in Skopje and Prilep. These front lines remained unchanged until May 1916, when the Central forces occupied the Rupel Gorge, Drama, Seres, Kavala and other cities, and later the eastern region of Greek occupied Macedonia to the Aegean Sea.

By May 1916, both sides were well rooted in Macedonia and as they fought they continued to reinforce their strength bringing the Entente numbers to half a million soldiers with the British occupying the sector stretching from the Gulf of Orfano along the valley of Struma to Butkovo Lake, along the Krusha Mountain slopes to the Galik River. A combined force of French, British and Italian soldiers occupied the region from Galik

to the Vardar River. The Serbians occupied the region from the Vardar River to Lake Prespa and a French-Russian force occupied the region south of Lake Ostrovo to Lake Kostur. A combined Italian and French force in the meantime occupied the region west of Lake Ohrid to southern Albania to the Ionian Sea.

At the same time the Central forces had formed a front along Bitola Region on Nidze Mountain near Duditsa, the Vardar River valley from Duditsa to Lake Dojran, the Struma River Valley from Lake Dojran to the Gulf of Orfano, and from Lake Ohrid to the Ionian Sea.

The Macedonian front extended over many mountain massifs where the height at some places exceeded 2,000 meters above sea level and stretched some 600 km from the Gulf of Orfano to the Ionian Sea. More that 450 km of the front was located inside Macedonia, existed for 3 years from 1915 to 1918 and was constantly active.

Sensing that this might be a short war, both the Serbians and Bulgarians tried to take advantage of it and employed every means at their disposal, including taking vicious attacks at each other all on Macedonian soil. And besides turning the Macedonian population into their victims, they both employed Macedonian soldiers on their fronts.

One such vicious attack was the battle of Gornichevo, which took place when the Bulgarians attempted to take that region from the Serbians. Bulgaria's motive for this was to further expand its territory in Macedonia. On August 17, 1916, while one Bulgarian force attacked the British positions in the Struma River Valley, a second Bulgarian force attacked the Serbian forces and gained access to Gornichevo, Banitsa and Sorovichevo.

Displease about this, particularly since Bulgaria was now trying to obtain Macedonian territories given to Greece, the Entente ordered a regrouping of its forces and launched a counter attack against the Bulgarians. The battle of the counter attack, initiated by the Serbian army, took place in Gornichevo on September 12, 1916 by a strong artillery barrage. About six hours later the Bulgarian artillery began to fire and no village remained in the vicinity that was not burned down and turned to dust. That entire densely populated area was on fire placing the Macedonian civilian population in peril. The battle continued with the same intensity all through the night and the next day. It was not until Serbia brought reinforcements that the Bulgarians withdrew. This was the first vicious battle between Serbia and Bulgaria on Macedonian soil. Although Serbia succeeded in pushing Bulgaria out of this region it tallied up severe losses with more than 7,200 dead.

Of the many battles that took place in various parts of Macedonia, including the ones in the mountains, the next vicious battle was that of Tsrna Reka. After fighting several battles for the dominance of Bitola from October 20 to November 14, 1916, the Entente came to the realization that

it would not be able to take it so General Sarrail moved the battle to Tsrna Reka. On October 22, Sarrail reinforced his position with Serbian, French and Colonial troops and began his attack. At the same time the Germans counter-attacked the Serbians but the attack was repulsed and the Serbians began to dig themselves in. Then on November 10, 1916 the Serbians breached the Bulgarian front and occupied Polog, pushing the Bulgarians 4 km south of Bitola and thus allowed the French and Russians to enter Tsrna Reka. On November 18 the Germans attacked the French and Serbian forces on Selechka Mountain. The Serbian, French and Colonial armies retaliated with a strong counter attack pushing the Germans and Bulgarians back.

Combat operations in this region continued until the end of November 1916, when Bulgaria sent 40 additional battalions to reinforce its position. In the next three months the combined Central forces penetrated almost 40 km and re-occupied Bitola.

Prior to Bitola's occupation, the German and Bulgarian armies kept bombing Bitola from their positions in the mountains from March to October 1917, during which time they nearly destroyed the city. On March 4 alone, Bitola was bombed by 2,000 shells, some loaded with poisons from which 50 people died in horrible pain. On March 19, 60 shells were fired and on March 20, another 350, most of which contained poisons killing 47, wounding 20 and destroying 76 buildings. On March 26 and 27 Bitola was bombed by 93 shells which damaged 260 buildings. From May 6 to May 10, 183 shells were fired killing 9 people and damaging 15 buildings. From May 12 to 14, Bitola was bombed with 226 shells, eight people were killed and 40 buildings damaged. On May 18 and 19, 30 shells were fired, nine people killed and eight buildings demolished. On July 7 and 9, 146 shells were fired, four people were killed and nine houses were demolished. The severest was the bombing on August 4, when 2,000 shells were fired and the city was set on fire. Then on August 8, Bitola was attacked with 1,764 shells killing 18 people, wounding 15 and destroying 620 houses. On August 21 and 22, 665 shells were fired, three people were killed, five were wounded and 44 buildings were destroyed. On October 4, 7 and 8, Bitola was attacked again with 1,057 shells, seven people were killed and 37 buildings were destroyed. It was estimated that Bitola suffered the most serious blow of all cities that were involved in the conflict in World War I. (Vanche Stojchev. "Military History of Macedonia". Military academy. Skopje, 2004. Pages 519 and 520)

While this was going on the Bulgarians continued to make gains against the Greeks in Drama and Kavala and extended their sphere of influence from the Gulf of Orfano along the Struma Valley to Krusha Mountain. On December 6, 1916 their defense positions were strengthened

and this newly established front line remained intact until it was finally breached in 1918.

On June 12, 1917, Greek king Constantine abdicated and the new Greek government, headed by Prime Minister Venizelos, joined Greece to the Entente. By the fall of 1918, Greece dedicated nine divisions to this conflict. In the meantime a trench war and a crisis began to develop in the Bulgarian and Serbian armies which spent the winter of 1916-1917 in disease ridden trenches where many became sick and died. The crisis intensified after Macedonians discovered what Serbia and Bulgaria were up to and then refused to serve in their armies. Macedonians showed their discontent by massive desertion and either joined the French led labour force or hid in the mountains. Between March and August 1918, 2,132 soldiers deserted from the 2nd Bulgarian Army alone. (Vanche Stojchev. "Military History of Macedonia". Military academy. Skopje, 2004. Page 520)

Another major battle that took place on Macedonian soil was the battle at Dobro Pole. This was one of the final battles between the Entente and the Central powers that marked the beginning of the end of World War I. After General Franchet d'Esperey's appointment to Supreme Commander of the Entente allied forces at the Macedonian front in July 1918, he toured the entire front and recommended an offensive take place. The idea was to breach the Central Power front and invade Kavadartsi, Demir Kapija and Negotino Regions, creating a wedge between the German and Bulgarian armies. When this was to be completed, French, British and Greek forces were to attack enemy positions in the Vardar and Struma River Valleys.

After two months of preparations the plan was put into action on September 14, 1918, with an artillery barrage against the enemy which lasted all through the 14th and overnight into the 15th. The next day there was hand to hand combat sometimes involving Macedonians, even among close relatives, on both sides of the front. After severe vicious battles the Bulgarians began to retreat.

On September 17, 1918, the Entente allied forces took positions on Topolec peak and from that point forward had the Central Power forces on the run. On September 21, 1918 the Serbian Army arrived in the Demir Kapija, Kavadartsi and Negotino Regions, constructed a bridge on the Vardar River from Krivolak to Gradsko and from there began its counter offensive in Shtip, Veles and Prilep, thus concluding the Dobro Pole offensive.

Taking advantage of the success of this latest offensive and of the low morale of the Bulgarian army, Entente forces continued to widen the gap in the 20 km wide and 12 km deep German-Bulgarian front. Highly motivated by their recent success the Serbians continued their advance, determined to prevent the Germans and Bulgarians from creating a new front.

Aware of the situation at the front, the Bulgarian government, on September 26, 1918, sent representatives to Solun to request a time out in the next 48 hours. But Franchet d'Esperey rejected their request and advised them to seek peace. The Bulgarian government accepted and on September 29, 1918, signed a truce which signaled the capitulation to the Bulgarian army. All military operations ended on September 30, 1918, in accordance with the terms of the truce and the Bulgarian units operating west of Skopje were taken captive, while those east of Skopje were disarmed and sent back to Bulgaria.

German command however did not recognize the truce, as German units gradually retreated expecting reinforcements.

On October 30, 1918, Turkey capitulated followed by Austria-Hungary on November 4th and Germany signed a capitulation agreement on November 11, 1918.

Macedonian personnel losses and material damages were never estimated or recognized, even though the Macedonian population was mobilized by force and the brunt of the war took place on Macedonian soil. It was estimated that in total there were about 60,000 Macedonians inducted into the Serbian army, 133,887 into the Bulgarian army and about 20,000 into the Greek army. The total number of Macedonians mobilized in World War I was estimated to be about 213,000. (Vanche Stojchev. "Military History of Macedonia". Military academy. Skopje, 2004. Page 527)

During World War I, military forces from both the Entente and the Central Powers entered Macedonian territory through a violent occupation and established their own administrations. The Bulgarians established their own authority and so did the Entente forces when General Sarrail disregarded existing Greek rule, expelled official Greek authorities from Solun, declared a state of war and established his own authority over the entire territory occupied by Entente forces. Thus the military occupation of Greek occupied Macedonia was publicly declared and lasted until November 1918.

After the 1919 Peace Treaty of Versailles, Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria retained the Macedonian territories awarded to them by the August 10, 1913 Treaty of Bucharest with the exception of Strumitsa Region, which previously was given to Bulgaria, was now given to Serbia. Greek, Serbian and Bulgarian authority was quickly reestablished in the respective Macedonian territories and Macedonia once again found itself under the same old occupation. Greek, Serbian and Bulgarian authorities resumed their assimilation and denationalization policies, exposing the Macedonian population to severe measures of repression.

Part 40 - Macedonia between the Great Wars

After the 1919 Peace Treaty of Versailles was concluded and the 1913 Treaty of Bucharest was ratified, Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria reestablished authority over their respective Macedonian territories and resumed their assimilation and denationalization policies forcibly turning Macedonians into Greek, Serbians and Bulgarians under the harshest measures.

Serbia quickly took the initiative to change peoples' names into Serbian sounding ones, colonized the most fertile parts of Macedonia with Serbian colonists and installed the Serbian language as the official language of correspondence in its occupied part of Macedonia.

Greece took its assimilation policies a step further and replaced all Macedonian names, both personal and toponyms, with Greek sounding ones. Each family and person were stripped of their Macedonian name and given an alien name. The Macedonian name of every village, town, city, river, lake, mountain, township, region, etc., in the entire Greek occupied Macedonian territory was changed and replaced with a Greek one. Meaningful names that had historical, cultural, mythical and symbolic meaning for the Macedonian people were replaced with alien meaningless names, very difficult to remember. Clearly this was a Greek attempt to not only erase everything that was Macedonian from the geographic map but to also erase everything Macedonian from the memory of the Macedonian people. Unfortunately that was not all that Greece perpetrated against the Macedonian people. During the 1930's the Macedonian language was banned and Macedonians were forbidden from speaking it, even in the privacy of their own homes. This was done to a people that spoke no other language and without the simplest care as to how they were going to survive. I do not believe a word has yet been invented to describe the Greek cruelty perpetrated against the Macedonian people, a cruelty that still exists to this day about which no one seems to care, not even those who supposedly champion human rights.

It seems that the only opposition to this cruelty came from Bulgaria, not because Bulgaria cared for the Macedonian people but because Bulgaria was smarting from what it had lost for a second time and was looking for ways to recover it. But instead of making things better, Bulgarian complaints about the mistreatment of the so-called "Bulgarians" in Macedonia prompted both the Greek and Serbian regimes to further cleanse the Macedonian population. While the Serbs evicted Macedonian people affiliated with the Greek Patriarchate and Bulgarian Exarchate Churches from their Serbian occupied Macedonian territories, the Greeks evicted those affiliated with the Serbian Patriarchate and the Bulgarian Exarchate Churches. But even after that Bulgaria continued to complain, claiming that all Macedonians were Bulgarians.

If this "Bulgarian interference" in any way served the Macedonians, in a positive way, it did so by keeping the Macedonian question alive. By maintaining that the Macedonian question was not resolved, as had been claimed by Greece, Serbia and the Great Powers after Macedonia's partition in 1913, Bulgaria, in a small way, helped some Macedonians, especially those who had left Macedonia, to hold onto their Macedonian national consciousness, not to accept Macedonia's division and to continue to struggle for liberation and unity.

Macedonians with a developed Macedonian national consciousness who dared to show their sentiments in public were exiled from Greek, Serbian and Bulgarian occupied Macedonia and many found their way to various cities in Europe and the world, from where they continued to work for the Macedonian cause. But unfortunately there was always some external factor or some kind of "ideological reason" to divide them.

Many Macedonian intellectuals, after fleeing the oppressive atmosphere at home, managed to educate themselves abroad only to be caught up in the clutches of another ideological division, the so-called "left" and "right".

At the same time it was well understood that the "right", which was in power at the time, was against the Macedonians and against the creation of a Macedonian state. Those on the left, on the other hand, saw the Macedonian Revolutionary Struggle as a potential ally in the struggle against the right, particularly against the Balkan monarchies. But in order to entice the Macedonians to see things their way, the left needed to give the Macedonians its support and did this by recognizing the Macedonian nation and its place in the Balkans.

By accepting the problems Macedonians were faced with, the communists or "left" expected the Macedonian Revolutionary Movement to initiate a revolution in the Balkans, which would later expand to all of Europe. This however was a Macedonian problem and had to be solved by Macedonians and for this reason the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (MRO) needed to be bolstered, starting with uniting all of its various factions. Their first attempt was to unite all the parties grouped around MRO and its current leader Todor Aleksandrov and bring them all under the influence of the communists and the Comintern.

The first serious negotiation to create a United Macedonian Revolutionary Organization began in 1923 and ended successfully in Vienna in May 1924 with several agreements being reached. The MRO's character, it was decided, would more or less remain the same as that of the Ilinden era; that is to fight for the liberation and unification of Macedonia. Unfortunately Todor Aleksandrov and Aleksandar Protogerov, the then leaders of the MRO, removed their signatures immediately after signing the agreements. This created friction between the delegates and

placed a permanent wedge between the forces on the right and those on the left.

Denouncing the work of the left, on July 10, 1924, Todor Aleksandrov declared that his MRO was the only competent Organization to struggle for a free and independent Macedonia. Unfortunately when he called Greece and Serbia "occupiers of Macedonia" he neglected to mention the same for Bulgaria.

Being divided along too many lines, any attempt made to unite the Macedonian forces at that time was futile. This unfortunately only served the interests of the Macedonian people's enemies, Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria, who also strongly opposed any form of Macedonian political unity. To be sure that Macedonian unity was never achieved, at least in the short term, Macedonia's enemies, particularly the Bulgarians, took further action and on August 31, 1924 had Todor Aleksandrov murdered and replaced with Vancho Mihajlov who took over the MRO leadership after the February 25, 1925 Gorna Dzhumaja Congress.

Mihajlov took complete control of MRO and personally directed its activities. He reorganized MRO's military wing and added new divisions. The militia was reorganized along with the Organization's intelligence service and both were given new directives. A new combat strategy was also worked out and secret armed groups were introduced in almost every village, town and city in his jurisdiction. Small versatile armed units were also created for the purpose of invading the Serbian and Greek occupied parts of Macedonia and carrying out various missions, assassinations and terrorist activities.

It was estimated that in the period from 1925 to 1928, in the Serbian occupied part of Macedonia alone, 149 armed incidents were recorded during which 43 officials were killed and 76 wounded, 90 civilians were killed or wounded, 25 soldiers and gendarmes were killed and 23 wounded, and 9 MRO fighters were killed and 15 wounded. (Vanche Stojchev. "Military History of Macedonia". Military academy. Skopje, 2004. Page 531)

MRO under Mihajlov's leadership, after Aleksandar Protogerov's assassination on June 7, 1928, took an unusual turn and became a "state within a state". Mihajlov not only took control of the MRO and its military wing but also imposed his own rules on the entire civilian population under his jurisdiction. He introduced the collection of taxes and implemented a recruitment program to recruit civilians into his military and militia formations. In fact the MRO Central Committee under Mihailov's rule went as far as to create military and judicial rules for administering the entire region under MRO influence and made an effort to induct the entire civilian population into its militia formations.

Mihajlov's rules and personal interests were supported and enforced by his militia, which he seeded in almost every populated sector of his

jurisdiction. The smaller formations consisted of a group of about 30 persons that, when necessary, could combine with other small groups to form larger formations. In 1927, in Nevrokop Region alone, 7,390 people had joined Mihajlov's militia of whom 5,853 were armed. Mihajlov even employed students in his intelligence service, all paid for by the tax money he collected from the Macedonian people.

By carrying out armed missions and assassinations, Mihajlov attempted to demonstrate to the European Powers that the Macedonian question was not resolved, at least not until the entire Macedonian territory was annexed by Bulgaria. After 1929 Mihajlov attempted to stifle the reestablishment of friendly relations between Bulgaria and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. In fact, to maintain control of his jurisdiction, Mihajlov persecuted everyone who got in his way including communists, anarchists, federalists, members of MRO (United), the Agricultural Party and all persons who seemed suspicious. Mihajlov was responsible for the murder of many prominent Macedonians including Gjorche Petrov, Dimo Hadzhi Dimov, Vladislav Kovachev and Arseni Jovkov.

Unfortunately, instead of improving the situation for the Macedonian people, Mihajlov's murderous rampage completely discredited the Macedonian Liberation Movement and its reputation abroad. The European public did not approve of such behaviour and called for such activities to be curtailed. Taking advantage of the situation the Greek and Serbian regimes were first to react by taking strict measures against the Macedonian population in their respective areas.

Having European public opinion turned against him and being cut off from the Greek and Serbian occupied parts of Macedonia, Mihajlov quickly became a liability to Bulgarian interests.

During a coup in Sofia on May 19, 1934, a new government took power in Bulgaria and among other things ordered a halt on all of MRO and Mihajlov's activities inside the Bulgarian state. In fact this new government outlawed all Macedonian organizations, associations and newspapers. MRO's records, properties and weapons were all confiscated by the Bulgarian police. Among the material confiscated were 10,938 rifles, 7,767 bombs, 637 revolvers, 47 machineguns, 15 automatic rifles, 3 mortars, 701,388 bullets and 21,339,421 levs (Bulgarian currency). (Vanche Stojchev. "Military History of Macedonia". Military academy. Skopje, 2004. Page 532)

Being forced out of Bulgaria, Mihajlov found sanctuary in Istanbul, Warsaw, Berlin and Zagreb and was supported by political factions in Italy, Germany, Hungary, Croatia and other places where assassins were in demand. Mihajlov was credited with planning Yugoslav king Aleksandar's assassination in October 1934 in Marseilles. The king was assassinated by Vladimir Georgiev Chernozemski, a member of Mihajlov's MRO.

While the right wing MRO pursued violence and terror, the left wing came to an agreement in 1924 to unite all other MRO factions under the name MRO (United) by which it was recognized by the Comintern and accepted as a partner in the Balkan Communist Federation in 1925. MRO's recognition by the communists, particularly by the Balkan communist parties, implied that a Macedonian people with a Macedonian consciousness existed and was struggling to free itself and to create an independent Macedonian state. Gotse Delchev's ideology, along with the Krushevo Republic platform, was adopted as part of MRO (United)'s platform while MRO (United) itself set its course to liberate and unite Macedonia.

This was going to be a socialist revolution under the influence of the Comintern where a Balkan communist federation was going to be created in which Macedonia would be united within its ethno-geographic borders and would become an equal member among the other Balkan countries. At least this was the plan, initially.

Many Macedonians saw this as a good plan and an opportunity to finally realize their dreams. By accepting MRO (United)'s meager demands and recognizing the Macedonian people as an identity with the need to liberate itself and create its own country, the communists became very influential over the Macedonian people, drawing many into their ranks.

I must emphasize at this point that MRO (United) was not a communist organization. It was a national revolutionary organization just like its Ilinden predecessor which fought to liberate all of Macedonia. Most Macedonians who joined the communist parties in their respective countries did so because there was no Macedonian communist party at that time. They joined the communists not because they were "ideological believers" of communism but because the communists were willing, at least in principle, to help them achieve their goals, gain their independence and create their own country.

The creation of a Balkan communist federation would have meant that all people in the Balkans would coexist as nations of one country under the influence of one party, something like the Yugoslav model which came to exist later. Unfortunately not all communist parties in the Balkan countries were comfortable with that idea, even though they initially approved it.

Because there was no Macedonian communist party, the Macedonian party members were integrated into the communist parties of the countries in which they lived. Unfortunately due to more pressing and more important concerns, Macedonian issues were given little to no attention. In other words these parties cared more about their own country than they cared

about Macedonia, particularly in nationalistic countries such as Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria.

There were also other factors which influenced MRO (United)'s ability to work in the various occupied parts of Macedonia. Factors such as the forced assimilation and repression had taken a toll on the Macedonian people in the occupied territories. Also there was no communication between the younger Macedonian generations now divided and occupied by a foe determined not only to erase their national identity but to eradicate their language, culture and everything that was Macedonian.

After its acceptance by the Cominturn, the MRO (United) established branches in all three parts of occupied Macedonia. The branch established in Bulgarian occupied Macedonia issued several publications including one about the Macedonians in Greece wanting to speak their mother tongue in public and in schools. In 1935 it publicly made a bold statement declaring that the Macedonians living in Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria were neither "Slavophone Greeks", "pure Greeks", "Serbians" nor "Bulgarians", they were simply Macedonians; a people with a past, present and future, not as a patchwork of the imperial states but as an independent Macedonian nation which had been fighting for decades to gain its own right to self-determination.

The Bulgarians unfortunately did not see things the same way and began to arrest MRO (United) leaders. The heaviest blow came in 1936 when about sixty distinguished leaders and activists were arrested and taken to court. At their trial the group was accused of openly stating that they were Macedonians fighting for the establishment of a Macedonian nation. The group did not deny the charges, despite the heavy sentences it was going to receive. Their courageous stand found wide echoes among the Macedonian masses in Bulgaria and helped them raise national awareness regarding their problem. The trial ended with all receiving heavy sentences. Tried in absence were also members of the MRO (United) Central Committee, Dimitar Vlahov, Vladimir Poptomov and Metodi Shatorov, who at the time were working abroad.

Towards the end of 1925 and 1926 the MRO (United) with the help of the communists began to form branches in the Serbian occupied part of Macedonia. Soon after branches were established in Veles, Kumanovo, Shtip, Skopje, Prilep, Kavadartsi, Strumitsa, Gevgelija and other places, they began receiving newspapers and publications such as "Macedonian Work" (Makedonsko delo) and "Balkan Federation" (Balkanska Federatsija) from the MRO (United) headquarters in Vienna. The Vienna based headquarters was engaged in extensive publishing activities, printing and distributing various publications throughout Macedonia, the Balkans, Europe and America.

Unfortunately MRO (United)'s struggle for an independent Macedonia was not well received by the Serbian authorities either and here too MRO

(United) found it difficult to operate, especially after the January 6, 1929 dictatorship. After a secret printing press was discovered, Serbian authorities became suspicious and arrested a group of 49 people in Veles. This literally put the publications, including the worldwide well-known "Macedonian Work" (Makedosko delo) publication, out of commission. Members of MRO (United) who were arrested received heavy sentences and were imprisoned.

It took a little longer for MRO (United) to establish itself in Greek occupied Macedonia but with the help of the Communist Party of Greece (CPG) it took root there too.

The CPG had a revolutionary platform and stood behind the unification of the whole of Macedonia and for its inclusion in the federation of Balkan Peoples as an equal member. This was of enormous significance in attracting the Macedonian people into its ranks.

Soon after establishing itself in Greek occupied Macedonia the MRO (United) made contact with the Central Committee of MRO (United) in Vienna. This was done through Dimitar Vlahov, a leading MRO (United) personality and through Nedelko Pop Nedelkov, a famous Macedonian revolutionary.

A distribution channel was soon established through Solun for receiving and distributing the newspapers "Balkan Federation" (Balkanska federatsija) and "Macedonian work" (Makedonsko delo) as well as a variety of propaganda materials sent out by the central organization in Vienna. Another distribution link was made through Albania which involved the clandestine transportation of difficult and dangerous materials, which in 1934 led to the death of Gjorgji Krontselchev in Solun at the hands of the Greek police.

Immediately after the CPG's Fifth Congress, a conference was arranged to take place in Voden in March 1934. During this conference, attended by delegates from Voden, Kostur and Enidzhe Vardar Regions, the MRO (United) leadership for the branch in Greek occupied Macedonia was elected. Andrea Chipov, a well-known Macedonian revolutionary, Communist functionary and candidate-member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Greece, was appointed head and Hristo Galabov, Mihail Kljonev and Aleko Tenekedzhiev were elected leaders. The seat of the organization was established in Solun along with a small printing press used to publish leaflets and other propaganda material.

The Comintern and CPG's recognition of the Macedonian people as a distinct Macedonian nation greatly contributed to MRO (United)'s success in Greek occupied Macedonia, which prompted it to put forward demands for the opening of Macedonian schools, for the use of the Macedonian language in public life and for other national and cultural rights for the Macedonian people.

Proof of these demands being supported by the leaders of the Greek Communist Party can be found in the following statement made by Sklavenas, leader of the Parliamentary Communist Group, in the Greek Parliament on April 25th, 1936: "The question which the government is ignoring in its declarations is that of granting equality to both the local population and to the national minorities living inside Greece. This in the main concerns the Macedonian nation. Anyone who has traveled through Macedonia, especially in those districts which are inhabited by compact masses of Macedonians, has surely felt the particular pressure which is being exerted upon them. The right to have their own schools, to use the Macedonian language and practice their own customs is strictly forbidden to them. Such a situation has compelled the Macedonian population to organize itself and to wage a struggle to achieve these rights, a struggle in which we cannot but support them." (A History of the Macedonian People, Skopje: Macedonian Review Editions, 1979. page 310)

A statement such as the above went beyond certain attitudes held at the time by the leadership of the CPG. During the CPG's Sixth Congress, held in December 1935, suggestions were made to replace the slogan "united and independent Macedonia" with the slogan "full equality for the minorities". This change was justified because of the change in the population's composition in Greek occupied Macedonia as a result of the Asia Minor colonists being settled there.

Circumstances which had been favourable for the MRO (United) only a short time ago quickly became unfavourable, especially after the Metaxas dictatorship came to power in August 1936. The new regime declared the CPG and the MRO (United) illegal and set in motion large-scale arrests, prosecutions and internments for both. Among those affected by this were Andrea Chipov, Lazo Trpovski, Hristo Galabov, Trifun Hadzhijanev, Aleko Tenekedzhiev, Foti Urumov and Kosta Dumov. Thus the life of MRO (United) in Greek occupied Macedonia also came to an abrupt end.

Part 41 - Macedonian involvement in pre-World War II

Prior to the start of World War II the situation in occupied Macedonia was Grim. After taking control of the Greek government, the dictator Metaxas suppressing all political opposition, outlawed all political parties and imprisoned leaders who would not pledge their loyalty to him. The media was also heavily censored. He then declared war on the Macedonian people by attacking their labour unions, leaders and declaring strikes illegal.

Being a military man himself, Metaxas dedicated much of the State's finances to modernizing the Greek army in both manpower and military hardware. In the sphere of education, he re-wrote the Greek history to support his own ideologies declaring that there were three great periods in history: classical, Byzantine and his own regime, which was then known as the "Regime of the Fourth of August". He created a National Youth Organization to bring children together from various social classes and provided military training for boys and domestic skills for girls. Even though the Metaxa regime was ideologically similar to that of Spain and Italy, the Greeks at the time were very loyal to Britain.

To maintain control of his kingdom, King George II of Greece turned Greece into a dictatorship. In 1936 General Metaxas, minister of war, was appointed to take charge of Greek affairs.

While there were some prospects for basic human rights for the Macedonian people in the Greek State in the early 1920's, those prospects died as Greece tightened its grip on the Macedonian population by implementing more oppressive and racist assimilation policies. On December 18, 1936 the Metaxa Government issued a legal act concerning, “Activities Against State Security” and by this act thousands of Macedonians were arrested, imprisoned and expelled from their homeland. Among other things, Metaxas on September 7, 1938, by legal act 2366, outlawed the Macedonian language and prohibited people from speaking it by imposing heavy fines and imprisonment.

In 1938 Australian author Bert Birtles in his book “Exiles in the Aegean” wrote, “In the name of ‘Hellenism’ these people (Macedonians) are being persecuted continually and arrested for the most fantastic reasons. Metaxa's way of inculcating the proper nationalist spirit among them has been to change all the native place-names into Greek and to forbid use of the native language. For displaying the slightest resistance to the edict-for this too is a danger to the security of the State-peasants and villagers have been exiled without trial.” (Page 112, John Shea, Macedonia and Greece The Struggle to Define a New Balkan Nation)

The situation was similar in Yugoslavia, especially after king Alexander declared himself dictator of Yugoslavia in 1929, suspended the constitution and subdivided his kingdom in such a way that the Serbs

would be a majority in all districts. He also abolished trade unions and removed personal liberties. The Serbian occupied territory of Macedonia was referred to as "South Serbia" and the Macedonian language was forbidden from being spoken in public. Macedonia's history was revised in favour of Serbia and people's surnames were modified to sound Serbian. Place names too were changed and replaced with Serbian ones. Unlike the Metaxa regime however, in the late 1930's, Yugoslav regimes began to relax their tight grip and allowed unofficial and limited use of the Macedonian dialects to be spoken in the streets of Macedonia and in plays and drama clubs.

In Bulgaria events followed a similar course as in Yugoslavia and Greece. A military coup was imposed in May 1934, the 1879 constitution was abolished and political organizations and trade unions were suppressed. In 1935 King Boris III, in a bloodless coup, overthrew the old dictatorship and replaced it with his own Royal one. Bulgarian governments since Bulgaria's inception in 1878 have officially and adamantly denied the existence of Macedonians arguing that all Macedonians are Bulgarians. Thousands of Macedonians, who over the years tried to express different views, were jailed or exiled.

The claim that Macedonians are Bulgarians was used to justify violent assimilation acts and to deny Macedonians their basic human rights. Ever since its inception in 1878, Bulgaria has been obsessed with possessing Macedonia and has caused immense suffering for the Macedonian people.

The downfall of the Tsarist Russian Imperial Empire, the break-up of the Habsburg Austro-Hungarian Empire and the demise of the Ottoman Empire removed three of the Great Powers from internal Balkan influence. While Britain played a less active role, France and Italy attempted to form competing alliances in the Balkans but did not have the military might to enforce them. The Balkan governments, on the other hand, for the first time had an opportunity to adjust their relations with each other and form alliances to protect their mutual interests. Unfortunately their hatred for one other and fear of losing Macedonia always broke up such alliances and again allowed outsiders to play a role in their internal affairs.

Germany's humiliating defeat in the World War I, coupled with her economic plight in the 1930's, gave rise to a new kind of German radicalism. Hitler exploited the situation and turned it to his own advantage. Hitler, in the short term, also gave the German people what they desired most, work and hope for a better future. Unfortunately, in the long term, he delivered disaster not only to the German people but also to many other nations, including Macedonia.

As a new-world order emerged from the World War I, new alliances began to form. On one side stood the Axis partners, initially consisting of Germany, Italy and Japan. As war broke out, Albania, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Finland and Thailand also joined. On the other side the Allied

partners emerged consisting of Britain, the Soviet Union, the USA and China. As the war progressed more and more nations joined the allies, totaling about fifty before the war was over.

In September 1940 Germany, Italy and Japan signed a cooperation agreement. This basically identified their intentions with respect to each others' spheres of influence, defining their political, economic and defense strategies as well as their obligations to each other. The agreement came to be known as the “tripartite pact”.

After war broke out in the Balkans, the first to fall to the Axis powers was Albania. By an ultimatum delivered to Albanian king Zogu, on March 23, 1939, Italian troops landed in Albania and occupied its territory on April 7, encountering little resistance. Soon after consolidating control in Albania, on October 28th, 1940, Italy declared war on Greece. Greece, however, turned out to be tough to defeat and Metaxa's foresight in arming his state paid off.

Official history praises Greece and Greek soldiers for their bravery and fighting spirit but neglects to mention the contributions and sacrifices Macedonians made to keep Greece safe. Macedonians were the first to be dispatched to the front lines in Albania, taking the full brunt of the offensive as well as the winter cold. More Macedonian men suffered from gangrene than from Italian bullets and bombs. Unprepared for the frigid temperatures, many men lost their fingers, toes, limbs and even their lives to frostbite. Food too was in short supply. The brave Macedonian soldiers had to fight off starvation as well as the Italians. They did this to protect a country that refused and still refuses to recognize them.

All their sacrifices were in vain because six months later, on April 6th, 1941, the German army marched into Greece. Again the Macedonians fought bravely but they were no match for the well-trained, well-disciplined German army.

When the Germans reached Athens, the Greek government capitulated and the soldiers on the Albanian front were left on their own. Some were told to go to Epirus and regroup, expected to make the long trek on foot. Others were told nothing and were left to roam the countryside. Eventually they were all picked up by German patrols, disarmed and sent home. The returning soldiers were given a hero's welcome. Unfortunately for those who were wounded, lost fingers, toes and limbs to frostbite, there was no compensation or a thank you for their loss and pain.

The German invasion was a welcome relief for the soldiers from the Italian front, but at the same time it posed an uneasy uncertainty as to what was going to happen next. No one was certain how the new invaders were going to react. The Macedonian people, having ample prior experience with being occupied, were expecting the worst. As history would show however the new invaders were a mixed blessing for the Macedonian people.

After war broke out in Europe, Bulgaria allied itself with the axis powers and on March 1, 1941 joined the German led pact. The entry of German troops into Bulgaria put Yugoslavia in a difficult position. To avoid German wrath, on March 25, 1941, the Yugoslav Regent, Prince Paul, also joined the German led pact. This did not sit well with young King Peter who, with the help of the Yugoslav military, staged a coup and deposed the Regent. This meant that Hitler had to re-negotiate his relationship with Yugoslavia. Hitler was counting on Yugoslavia to allow him passage to attack Greece. The new situation angered Hitler and instead of negotiating he signed directive number 25 declaring Yugoslavia an enemy of Germany and ordered its destruction. Hitler wanted a swift strike so he withdrew troops from the Russian campaign to accomplish it.

It took Hitler's army 12 days to demolish Yugoslavia, a small diversion in his destructive career, but there are those who believe that this little diversion changed the course of history. To begin with it gave Russia just enough time to adequately prepare for an offensive, which ultimately led to Germany's defeat. Secondly, the violent nature of the attack created the right conditions for a Partisan uprising, which ultimately helped to establish the Republic of Macedonia. The battle for Yugoslavia and Greece was swift and effective. When it was over the Germans, as an ally to the axis powers, allowed Bulgaria to occupy the Serbian occupied part of Macedonia and the eastern region of Greek occupied Macedonia. Later, after the Italians left, Germany allowed Bulgaria to occupy western Macedonia as well.

Many Macedonians from the Serbian part of occupied Macedonia who had suffered under Serbian regimes welcomed the Bulgarian invaders as saviours and liberators. Their euphoria however was short-lived as the Bulgarians quickly began to oppress and forcibly “Bulgarize” the Macedonian population. If there had been any pro-Bulgarian sentiment before the invasion, it quickly evaporated after the occupation. Germany's violent entry into Yugoslavia, coupled with Bulgarian oppressive attitudes towards the Macedonian people, gave birth to an underground Macedonian resistance movement.

In Greek occupied Macedonia, after the Germans settled in, life for the Macedonian people took on an uneasy normalcy. The Greek police, who had supported the Metaxa regime before the occupation, now cooperated with the German military and again became active in Macedonia. To counter the Greek police and its oppressive tactics the Italians rearmed the old insurgents from the 1903 Ilinden Uprising and sent them to active duty. Many of the “old timers” were angered by Greece's oppressive laws and were spurred back into action by Bulgarian propaganda condemning Greece’s oppressive tactics. The Bulgarians were well aware of the unfavourable conditions the Greek Government had created in Greek occupied Macedonia and used the opportunity to create problems for the

Greeks. Insurgent actions were limited at best and were restricted to the Italian zones of occupation, because the Germans would not tolerate armed actions in their zones.

The Partisan movement in Yugoslavia was more organized and more progressive than the one in Greece. Led by Tito, the Communist partisans in Yugoslavia organized a war of national liberation in which the Macedonians, led by General Tempo, fought on an equal footing. Macedonians formed their own section of resistance even before they were recognized and accepted by Tito. The first anti-fascist war of national liberation began in the Republic of Macedonia on October 11, 1941. October 11th is the "Second Ilinden" for the Macedonian people.

Since 1941 all Macedonians have celebrated October 11, 1941, "Macedonian Revolution Day". The Macedonian people by their actions, loyalty and patriotism earned their place in the world. By hardship, determination and the spilling of blood the Macedonian people demonstrated their desire for freedom and the willingness to govern themselves. The Great Powers in 1829 (by the London Protocol) satisfied the Greeks by making Greece a country. Similarly in 1878 (by the congress of Berlin) Russia liberated the Bulgarians, making Bulgaria a country. Unlike the Greeks and Bulgarians, however, the brave people of Serbian occupied Macedonia had to fight by themselves, for themselves, to earn their place in the world among the free nations.

For just over a year the Macedonians of Serbian occupied Macedonia endured enough Bulgarian treachery to last them a lifetime. Then in April 1942 they rose up and demonstrated their displeasure. Macedonian Partisans took up arms against the Bulgarian army but were massacred in a bloody battle. Unarmed Macedonians then took to the streets to protest the massacre and they too were cut to pieces.

To escape persecution, many of the Macedonian Partisans in Yugoslavia fled into Greek occupied Macedonia. Some entered the Italian zones near the village Besfina and the rest penetrated the German zones in the region around the village Sveta Petka and quickly went underground. The Besfina force, before it had a chance to make contact with the local population, was spotted by the old insurgents who quickly sprang into action. Seeing uniformed men on the Besfina hillside startled the old timers and thinking that it was a Greek police invasion force, they appealed to the local Italian garrison and were given arms and permission to attack. When the insurgents began the offensive the Partisans backed off and sent representatives to negotiate. They went from village to village and spoke with the local chiefs. The strangers wore handsome uniforms and conducted themselves seriously, with charm and charisma. They spoke long and well about freedom, liberty and the treachery of the Bulgarian Fascists.

When the insurgents found out that the uniformed men were Macedonians just like themselves they accepted them with open arms, gave them (surrendered) their weapons and many voluntarily joined their forces.

The Partisans who landed in Sveta Petka, because of a German presence, had to work under cover but they too succeeded in recruiting volunteers from the local population. After the Partisan penetration, the Macedonian people in Greek occupied Macedonia learned much about the real Bulgarian intent and ceased to believe the Bulgarian propaganda. The old Ilinden guard was demobilized and replaced by a Partisan movement.

Partisan organizers took extraordinary measures to explain to the Macedonian people that they were fighting for the freedom and liberation of the Macedonian people from the tyranny of the oppressive states. The Macedonian involvement in this war, and later in the Greek Civil War, was not about "Communist ideologies" or about alliances or obligations to the Great Powers. It was simply the next stage in the long struggle for "liberation from oppression" and to fulfill a longing for freedom, re-unification and self-rule.

Unfortunately the Macedonian contribution in fighting against Fascism is not only under emphasized but also misinterpreted by historians. I will once again say that the Macedonian people, during World War II, rose on the democratic side and fought against fascism for the liberation of the states in which they lived. The Macedonian people, like many other people in the Balkans, fought to liberate their homeland and thus earn their place in the world. This cannot be ignored and must be recognized and recorded as such in history.

Word of a Macedonian Partisan movement in Greek occupied Macedonia spread like wildfire. People came out on the streets to freely speak their native Macedonian language, to sing songs and write Macedonian plays and poetry. The Partisans even set up Macedonian schools and taught children patriotic songs, poems and Macedonian history, using local Macedonian dialects. The younger generations, for the first time, saw written words in their beloved, sacred Macedonian language. The newfound freedom brought happiness to the lives of the oppressed Macedonian people who welcomed the Partisans into their villages as "our own children". The newfound confidence and strength projected by the Macedonians terrified the Greeks, especially the ones collaborating with the enemy, so for a while they stayed away and were no longer a threat.

The Germans and Italians did not care one way or another about Macedonian affairs as long as there was no trouble for them. Macedonian interest in Partisan activities continued to climb, bringing new recruits and volunteers to the cause. Youth organizations were created with young men and women recruited to be the eyes and ears of the community and to help

defend the villages. Many young volunteers of military age were recruited and trained to perform policing and civic duties in the newly formed organizations.

The organization “Macedonian People's Liberation Front” was formed and recruited fighters from the Kostur, Lerin and Voden regions. It even cooperated with Greek organizations with similar ideologies. Later there was talk about re-uniting Macedonia, possibly through a Balkan confederation. Britain unfortunately was against the idea and discouraged Greece from taking part in such matters. Bulgaria too could not agree and withdrew support. As usual the Bulgarians wanted to become rulers of Macedonia, which was unacceptable to the Macedonians.

There is a story told that about five hundred young Macedonian civilian men gathered in the village D'mbeni, eager to join the Partisan movement. Word of this reached the Greek Partisan leadership which appeared to be terrified at the prospect of such an all Macedonian strong force. There was nothing that the Greeks feared more than losing Greek occupied Macedonia. The Greeks by this time had formed their own Partisan movements (outside of Greek occupied Macedonia) and began to negotiate with the Macedonians about combining forces. For some time Greek Partisan representatives tempted the Macedonians to join them. When negotiations failed to achieve results, the Greeks tried ordering the Macedonians to surrender their arms. Macedonians were well aware of Greek treachery and refused. Instead they sealed the borders from Bigla to Korcha, rendering the region free and inaccessible to the Greeks. Initially the Macedonians acted alone but later they decided to join a wing of the Greek Popular Liberation Army.

In Serbian occupied Macedonia the pre-Second World War situation was becoming extremely difficult. There was unbearable exploitation of the people and deprivation of their human and national right. The Macedonian people were under constant pressure under the Serbian chauvinists and Macedonia was being transformed into a colony with its natural resources being exploited ruthlessly. The Macedonians under Serbian control were undervalued and disparaged the most.

But as the pressure to forcibly turn Macedonians into “Serbians” increased Macedonians were becoming more stubborn and began to pay more attention to their own national identity. They found themselves in a bad situation out of which they could see an escape through liberation. This is precisely why they greeted the April 18, 1941 Bulgarian invasion force with such enthusiasm. They also believed the Bulgarian propaganda which was telling them that the Bulgarians were there to liberate Macedonia from the 30 year long Serbian oppression.

But very soon after the Bulgarians established military, police and administrative authority in Serbian occupied Macedonia, the people began to see for themselves the true face of Bulgaria. The Bulgarians were not

there to liberate the Macedonians, they were there to enslave them and turn them into Bulgarians. The many police stations and numerous police officers they employed did their duty by carrying out all forms of repressive measures against the Macedonian population.

The Bulgarians took inventory of all goods, including livestock and properties, owned by the villages and requisitioned most of them. Taxes were increased and imposed on livestock and prices were allowed to go up, introducing measures which pushed the Macedonian people into extreme poverty.

Unable to cope economically, many people began to organize for an armed uprising.

Germany's attack on the Soviet Union and the August 14, 1941 Atlantic Treaty, which stipulated "all nations which would take part in the anti-fascist struggle will have their rights to self-determination recognized and they would be allowed to create their own independent states" further motivated the Macedonian people in all three parts of occupied Macedonia spurring them to join the anti-fascist movements.

Being occupied by one occupier or another was no motivation for the Macedonian people to go out and fight. The Macedonian people saw this conflict as any other in a series of conflicts in which they would find opportunity to fulfill an age old dream, liberate themselves and unite their country.

Unfortunately this time they were led by three different antagonistically opposing regimes thus robbing the Macedonian people of coming together under a single leadership and under a single Macedonian liberation front.

Part 42 - Conclusion

I would like to conclude this book at this point in history as there is much too much that unfolded in Macedonia during the Second World War and beyond to place it all in one book. Summarizing it also will not do it justice so I will leave it for someone else to carry forward. I do however want to mention, for those who are interested, that I have written another book entitled "The Macedonians in Greece 1939 – 1949" which analyzes events that partake in what we Macedonians from Greece call "the terrible years". Here is part of the book's introduction as a preview of what the book is about:

Very little has been written about the Macedonians in Greece and their involvement in World War II and in the Greek Civil War. Macedonians who live in Greece to this day are afraid to speak of their terrible ordeals for fear of repercussions from the Greek authorities or because it is simply too painful for them to remember. To this day it is taboo in Greece to speak of the Greek Civil War.

The Macedonians in Greece it seems have been ignored by all sides. Yugoslavia has ignored them because it did not want to ruin its good relations with Greece. Greece on the other hand, to this day claims that Macedonians simply do not exist and wants no part of them. Bulgaria, even though it has a large Macedonian immigrant population from Greece, has yet to recognize the Macedonian people as a distinct ethnic group. So in reality no one really cares about the Macedonians in Greece and as a result very little to nothing has been written about them. "Indeed, the Macedonians in Greece are hardly ever mentioned in scholarly literature and have been virtually forgotten as a people and as a national minority." (Andrew Rossos)

This is most unfortunate not only because the Macedonian contribution to the struggle against Fascism and Nazism has been completely omitted, but because the Macedonian people themselves living in Greece despite their contributions, have been completely ignored as if they didn't exist.

In the chapters of the book "The Macedonians in Greece 1939 – 1949" I we will make an attempt to tell the Macedonian side of the story as it unfolded from a Macedonian point of view.

The story begins with an overview of events starting with Macedonia's invasion, occupation and partition by Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria in 1912, 1913 to events leading up to the start of World War II.

A more detailed approach will then be taken to explain the Macedonian involvement in World War II and in the Greek Civil War.

This is not a story about battles fought and strategies applied but rather a story about the human factor and about struggles for equality and human rights. It is a story that will reveal, perhaps for the first time to English speakers, of how the Macedonians in Greece were treated by Greek

authorities and by the Great Powers during the war years from 1939 to 1949.

Greece has accused the Macedonian people living in Greece of being autonomists, separatists, communists and even of being foreign agents. But as we will see, none of these accusations are true; the only things Macedonians are guilty of are struggling for equality and human rights.

In spite of all assurances made by the Macedonian leadership during World War II and during the Greek Civil War that it had no intention of leading an autonomist or separatist movement, the Greek leadership always remained suspicious and used every opportunity to stifle the Macedonian struggle.

Since the Macedonian people are of one ethnic group and recognize themselves as one ethnic Macedonian identity regardless of where they live, the term "Macedonians" will refer to all Macedonian people worldwide. References like "Macedonians in Greece" or "Macedonians in Canada" will mean "ethnic Macedonians living in Greece" or "ethnic Macedonians living in Canada".

It is also important to emphasize at this point that the Macedonians living in Canada, Australia, the USA and other places outside of Macedonia are Macedonian migrants who over the years immigrated to those places, whereas the Macedonian people living in Macedonia are indigenous to Macedonia and have lived in Macedonia for many millennia. The Greek, Serbian, Bulgarian and Albanian people, who now live in Macedonia, are colonists who immigrated to Macedonia or were placed there by their respective states over the years, mostly after Macedonia's occupation in 1912.

I decided to use "Greek occupied Macedonia" and "Bulgarian occupied Macedonia" to refer to those regions in order to bring attention to the plight of the Macedonian people living there. Even though Macedonians are indigenous to Macedonia and feel they are its original landowners and caretakers, Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria and Albania by act of war occupied, partitioned and annexed Macedonia for themselves in 1912, 1913. Besides losing their lands, these Macedonians, especially those living in Greece and Bulgaria, since then have been economically deprived and culturally oppressed. They have been stripped of the right to call themselves Macedonian, practice their Macedonian culture and speak their Macedonian language. Since 1912 many have also been evicted from their homes, stripped from their lands, forcibly assimilated into foreign nations, tortured, jailed, murdered and denied their ethnic identity, language and culture simply because they are Macedonian. It is also evident that Macedonians have been denied economic opportunities like well paid jobs, positions of authority in government, positions in educational institutions, high positions in the military, etc. The reasons for this are obvious. By denying the Macedonians their ethnic identity Greece and Bulgaria can

claim that Macedonians don't exist and if Macedonians don't exist there will be no claims laid to the lands they acquired illegally by war. Above that, both Bulgaria and Greece have adopted parts of the Macedonian heritage and thus have claimed parts of Macedonia's history as their own. To acknowledge the existence of a Macedonian identity would then mean admission of cultural theft. Therefore from a Macedonian point of view to call those regions of Macedonia "occupied" is more than justifiable.

Yet, in spite of all this, the Macedonian people in Greece fought against Fascism and Nazism in World War II in order to help preserve Greece. They did this because they wanted to live in peace as equals to the Greeks, a concept the Greek mind cannot accept to this day.

Be it in World War II or in the Greek Civil War, the Macedonian people, proportionally speaking, bore the brunt of the wars. The heaviest battles during the Greek Civil War including the decisive ones, took part in Western Greek occupied Macedonia in the area bordering Yugoslavia and Albania. Greek occupied Macedonia served as a base for the political and military operations of the "democratic movement" and as the headquarters of both the Communist Party of Greece and its military wing the Democratic Army of Greece. Greek occupied Macedonia was also of strategic importance to the CPG because its allies Yugoslavia, Albania and Soviet Russia were located to the north and access to them could only be gained through the cooperation of the Macedonian people in Greece. "As one participant and close observer put it: '[They] were turned into military workshops for the DSE (DAG), where everyone, young and old, male and female, served the needs of the DSE (DAG).'" (Andrew Rossos)

Besides civilian cooperation, a proportionally large number of fighters had also joined the ranks of the left. "Reliable statistics do not exist, but Macedonians seem to have constituted only around a twentieth of the total population of about seven million. Their estimated representation in the DSE (DAG) ranged from more than a quarter in April 1947 to more than two-thirds in mid-1949. Risto Kirjazovski maintains that they numbered 5,250 out of 20,000 in April 1947; and Lieutenant Colonel Pando Vajnas claimed that in January 1948 there were about 11,000 Macedonian partisans in the DSE (DAG). According to C. M. Woodhouse, 'they numbered 11,000 out of 25,000 in 1948, but 14,000 out of less than 20,000 by mid-1949.'" (Andrew Rossos)

Even though there was a proportionally large Macedonian contribution to both World War II and to the Greek Civil War there is very little to none attributed to the Macedonian people and to their sacrifices.

Besides addressing the Macedonian contribution, in the chapters that follow in the book "The Macedonians in Greece 1939 – 1949", I will also address the violence and scare tactics the Greek State employed to counter the Macedonian struggle and the atrocities it committed in the process.

In doing research for this book I encountered the term “Slavo-Macedonians” used by authors, mostly by Greeks, to refer to ethnic Macedonians. The use of this term implies that there is more than one “variety” of Macedonian but outside of “Slavo-Macedonians” no “other type” of Macedonian was identified. So for the purpose of this write-up, as mentioned earlier, the term “Macedonians” will be used to refer to the ethnic Macedonians no matter where they live. Further, we Macedonians consider the term “Slavo-Macedonian” to be derogatory to the Macedonian people who self-identify as “Macedonians”. The term “Slavo-Macedonians” is intentionally employed by Greek authors to isolate and segregate Macedonians making them feel inferior, like foreigners on their own ancestral lands. The development of the modern Macedonian nation is no different than the development of any other modern nation but we don’t see the same authors use terms like “Slavo-Greek”, “Slavo-Bulgarian”, “Slavo-Serbian”, “Slavo-Albanian”, etc., to refer to other ethnicities even though elements of what make up the modern Macedonian nation are present in the Greek, Bulgarian, Serbian and Albanian nations.

Therefore we justifiably feel that the use of the term “Slavo-Macedonians” is intentional and unnecessary and we recommend that it not be used in any context to refer to ethnic Macedonians.

And since I began the introduction of the book “Macedonian Struggle for Independence” with a quote of one of my favourite authors I would also like to also end it with one;

“At the end of my book (“Macedonia Yesterday and Today”) devoted to Macedonia, I (Giorgio Nurigiani) should like to express once again my great affection for its gallant sons who are fighting today for a brighter and happier future. Their progress is manifest; what I was able to see in their towns and villages gave me sincere pleasure. One of my most cherished dreams has been realized: to see for myself the life and cultural rise of this reawakening people, which is today making heroic efforts to further its spiritual and material progress and strengthen its national consciousness.

There may be some people who will criticize me for not having spoken in my book about certain historical, ethnographical rights which Macedonia's present-day neighbours could put forward as claims. I consider it superfluous to raise this question now when we have before our eyes a Macedonian State, firm and immovable in its sacred title-deed:

Macedonia for the Macedonians!

Only through reconciliation and co-operation will it be possible to strengthen the foundations of a true and lasting peace, so indispensable today for nations both great and small. I have never in my life felt hatred for any people, and I have always believed that the most irreconcilable differences, potential causes of bloody human conflicts, can be solved only

by justice, prudence and honest dealing between man and man, inspired by love, which alone brings human spirits together in brotherly concord.

My feelings towards the Macedonian people have always been disinterested and they will remain so in the future. I have never been interested in the political aspirations and claims of certain statesmen who adapt themselves to the interests of the moment. But I have always had faith in what is eternal in the heart of a people:

Its national consciousness!

During my last stay in Macedonia I was able to see it as it really is: kind, hospitable, free from any adventitious fanaticism, devoting all its energies to its creative development. Whether it will be able to justify all these efforts and sacrifices for its future existence will depend entirely on its heroic sons, conscious of their nationhood and always ready to die for their freedom and independence." (Giorgio Nurigiani, "Macedonia Yesterday and Today", pages 171 and 172)

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