

Heroes of March 25th, 1821 - The Greek Independence Day

On March 25, 1821 the bishop Germanos of Patras raised the Greek flag at the Monastery of Agia Lavra in Peloponnese and that started the War of Independence against the Turks. The Greek War of Independence, also known as the Greek Revolution, was a successful war waged by the Greeks between 1821 and 1827 to win independence from the Ottoman Empire. The Greek War of Independence was a fiercely fought and destructive war against the Ottoman Empire for independence, which started in 1821. The Greeks were the first of the subject peoples of the Ottoman Empire to secure recognition as a sovereign power, a status which they achieved in 1832. The tree of freedom for the Greeks took a fair amount of bravery and sacrifice for it to grow. Countless heroes, men and women, wrote their own history. Here we will focus on some of them, who truly made a difference in so many ways! As we read their stories, let us motivate ourselves to be worthy of their sacrifice and to continue their legacy!

The great poet Rigas Feraios

Rigas Feraios wrote enthusiastic poems and books about Greek history and many became widely popular. One of the most famous (which he often sang in public) is the **Thourio** in which he wrote, "**It's better to have an hour as a free man than forty years as a slave.**" In Greek: «Ὡς πότε παλικάρια να ζούμε στα στενά.... Καλλιῶναι μίας ὥρας ελεύθερη ζωὴ παρά σαράντα χρόνια σκλαβιά και φυλακή»... He urged Greeks to leave the Turkish-occupied towns for the mountains, where they might experience more freedom.

Rigas went to Vienna (with its large Greek community) as part of an effort to ask Napoleon for assistance and support. While in Vienna he edited a Greek-language newspaper, *Ephemeris* and created and published a proposed political map of Great Greece which included Constantinople. He printed pamphlets based on the principles of the French Revolution, including ("Declaration of the Rights of Man" and a "New Political Constitution of the Inhabitants of Rumeli, Asia Minor, the Islands of the Aegean, and the principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia"). He intended to distribute them in an effort to stimulate a Pan-Balkan uprising against the Ottomans.

While traveling to Venice in another attempt to meet Napoleon, Feraios was betrayed and was arrested at Trieste by the Austrian authorities (allies of the Ottoman Turks, the Austrians were concerned the French Revolution might provoke similar upheavals in Austria). He was handed over to the Ottoman Turkish governor at Belgrade where he was imprisoned and tortured. From Belgrade, he was to be sent to Constantinople to be sentenced by the Turkish sultan. While in transit, he was strangled on the night of 13 June 1798 to prevent his rescue by a sympathetic Ottoman Turk governor (Pasvanoglu). His body was thrown into the Danube River. Rigas' death didn't end his influence on Greeks and other leaders finally led the Greeks into revolution, beginning the Greek War of Independence in 1821.

Greeks tried many times to rebel – more than 20 actually. But all of the times they were not well trained or equipped to go against the mighty Ottoman Empire. In one of the most important revolts, the Russian helped at the beginning and hope started to mount. Yet, one more time, the Greeks were betrayed and at the end even more Greeks died at the hands of the Turks.

His last words are reported as being: "I have sown a rich seed; the hour is coming when my country will reap its glorious fruits".

Theodoros Kolokotronis (1770 - 1834)

He came from a family of kleftes and escaped to Zakynthos where he served in the English Army. He returned to Peloponnese on the eve of the revolution and due to his military experience and knowledge he soon became the leading figure in organizing the Greek fighters. He led the siege of Tripolis and its surrender marked the first success of the Greek revolution. The following year (1822) with his courage, determination, patience, and military acumen defeated the army of Dramalis. He was imprisoned by his political opponents but was freed when Ibrahim invaded Greece, against whom Kolokotronis applied guerrilla tactics and was able to inflict major blows to his army. Kolokotronis is considered as the most important figure of the Greek revolution.

Georgios Karaiskakis (1782 - 1827)

He grew up in poverty and was forced to the mountains as kleftis. He was one of the first to take part in the Greek revolution and his military genius became apparent during the last years of the struggle. He was appointed by the first Greek government as chief marshal of Eastern Greece and made Elefsina as his headquarters. Following a clash with the Turks at Haidari, he was planning to cut off Kioutachis supplies, during the siege of Acropolis. His initial failures followed two famous victories at Arachova and Distomo. He was killed in a clash with the Turks at Faliro. Karaiskakis is considered the second most important military figure of the revolution, after Kolokotronis.

Konstantinos Kanaris (1793 - 1877)



He came from the island of Psara. He blew up the Turkish armada at Chios and at Tenedos and other Turkish ships at Mytilene and Samos (1824). He attempted to burn the Turkish ships at the port of Alexandria in order to destroy Mehmet Ali's preparations against Greece and failed only due to the fact that at the time the wind was blowing from opposite direction. He became one of the important naval figures of the revolution. With the liberation of Greece, he became involved with politics opposing king Othon. He served several times as a minister and became prime minister. He was brave, courageous, and modest man.

General Makriyannis (1797–1864)



He was born at Lidoriki, in Eastern Greece. When in June 1825, Ibrahim Pasha attacked the mills of Argos with a force of 4,000 foot-soldiers and 600 cavalrymen from his regular army, Mkriyannis, together with Ypsilantis, Mavromichalis and 300 men, defended the position, which commands the approaches to Naples of Romania. They had already repulsed four fierce attacks by Ibrahim when, towards evening, they were reinforced by a detachment of the first regular Greek regiment. Its arrival decided the outcome of the battle and the Turko-Egyptian forces retreated in great disarray, with heavy casualties. The gallant Makriyannis, who was gravely wounded in the fighting, was invited aboard the French Admiral de Rigny's frigate, where he was received by the admiral.

At the battle of Faliron on the 5th of February 1827, Makriyannis commanded the corps of Athenians, under the orders of General Gordon. He distinguished himself again and again in the defense of his position, by bravery in number of minor engagements.

Athanasios Diakos (1788-1821)

A Greek military commander during the Greek War of Independence, was born Athanasios Nikolaos Massavetas (Greek, Αθανάσιος Νικόλαος Μασσαβέτας) in the village of Ano Mousounitsa, Phocis. Soon after the outbreak of hostilities, Diakos and a local brigand captain and friend, Bousgos, led a contingent of fighters to capture the town of Livadeia. On 1 April 1821, after three days of vicious house-by-house fighting, and the burning of Mir Aga's residence, including the harem, the town fell to the Greeks. Hursid Pasha sent two of his most competent commanders from Thessaly, Omer Vryonis and Kiose Mehmet, at the head of 8,000 men with orders to put down the revolt in Roumeli and then proceed to the Peloponnese and lift the siege at Tripolitsa.

Diakos and his band, reinforced by the fighters of Panourgias and Dyovouniotis, decided to halt the Ottoman advance into Roumeli by taking defensive positions near **Thermopylae**. The Greek force of 1500 men was split into three sections. Dyovouniotis was to defend the bridge at Gorgopotamos, Panourgias the heights of Halkomata, and Diakos the bridge at Alamana.

Setting out from their camp at Lianokladi, near Lamia, the Ottoman Turks soon divided their force. The main force attacked Diakos. The other attacked Dyovouniotis, whose force was quickly routed, and then Panourgias, whose men retreated when he was wounded. The majority of the Greek force having fled, the Ottomans concentrated their attack on Diakos's position at the **Alamana bridge**. Seeing that it was a matter of time before they were overrun by the enemy, Bousgos, who had

been fighting alongside Diakos, pleaded with him to retreat to safety. Diakos chose to stay and fight with 48 men; they put up a desperate hand-to-hand struggle for a number of hours before being overwhelmed.

The severely wounded Diakos was taken before Vryonis, who offered to make him an officer in the Ottoman army if he converted from Christianity to Islam. Diakos refused the offer. The next day he was impaled. His last words were... **"I was born a Greek; I Shall Die a Greek."**

The brutal manner of Diakos's death at hands of the Turks (Being roasted on a spit) initially struck fear into the population of Roumeli, but his final stand near Thermopylae, echoing the heroic defence of the **Spartan King Leonidas**, made him a martyr for the Greek cause. A monument now stands at the bridge near Alamana, the site of his final battle. His birthplace, the village of Ano Mousounitsa, was later renamed Athanasios Diakos in his honor.

Manto Mavrogenous (1796 – 1848)



Amongst the heroines of the Greek revolution was Manto Mavrogenous. She was educated at a college in Trieste and spoke Italian and Turkish. She studied ancient Greek philosophy and history. In 1809 her family returned to Mykonos, the island of their origin. She learned with excitement from her father that Philiki Etairia was preparing the Greek revolution. When the news arrived that the struggle for freedom began, Manto invited the leaders of Mykonos to a meeting and persuaded them to join the revolution. This was declared in April 1821.

Laskarina Boumboulina (1771 – 1825)



Yet another heroic woman of the Greek uprising for freedom. Boumboulina came from a rich family from the island of Spetses. This 'Archontissa' (Lady) of Spetses used her wealth to build a navy and became one of the most famous leading figures in the Greek War of Independence. After the success of the revolution in Peloponnesos and Sterea Ellada, the uprising spread in the islands. Spetses was the first of the islands to join the revolution and this was mainly due to Boumboulina's leadership and courage. The example of Spetses was followed by many other islands and therefore the freeing of the Island of Spetses was one of the initial major steps towards victory for the Greeks. Thereafter Boumboulina, with her fleet took part in many naval battles and dominated the Aegean creating problems to the, by far superior, Turkish fleet.

Nikitaras (1784 – 1849)



He was born at Leontari, in Arcadia, the son of a poor peasant farmer. He was a nephew of Kolokotronis and he, too, served in the army of the Ionian Islands. In 1821 he became head of a band of rebel fighters. He fought Kiaya Bey at Kaki Scala and in March and April 1822, at Ayia Marina, Nikitas fought successfully under the leadership of Odysseus against Dramali, who was threatening Thermopylae. After Dramali's invasion of the Morea, Nikitas took up a position commanding the narrow passes on his route back to Corinth. There the Greeks inflicted a terrible defeat on the enemy, killing 3,000 Turks. The result of this battle won for him the nickname of Tourkophagos. At the siege of **Mesolongi**, Nikitas gave further proof of his pure and selfless patriotism. The sailors bringing reinforcements to the besieged town demeaned payment in advance. But there was no money. Then Nikitas flung down his sword, a priceless weapon which he had won from a high-ranking Turk, and cried out, "All I have is this sword. I offer it to my country!" His fine example had an immediate effect. All present

stepped forward eagerly to donate whatever they could afford.

Papaflesas or Gregorios Dikaios (1788 - 1825).



Papaflesas was born at Messinia in 1788. In his teens he became a monk. The Turks, knowing his revolutionary character forced him to leave Greece. At Constantinople, where he went, became one of the key members of "Filiki Etairia". Under Ypsilantis orders he returned to Peloponnesos and started preaching the ideal of freedom, preparing so the people for the revolution. He was a key figure of the Greek Revolution. When in 1825 Ibrahim landed with thousands of Turkish army in Peloponnesos, Papaflesas leading 2000 men marched against him. During the battle which took place at a place called **Maniaki**, on 20 May 1825, Ibrahim with 6000 Turks attacked and killed 600 Greeks and their leader Papaflesas, who fought bravely to the bitter end. At the end, Ibrahim said that if they were more Greeks like Papaflessas, he would better turn back and leave Greece.

May their memory be everlasting! May we embrace their sacrifice with passion and respect, and may God help all of us to be worthy to claim that we are their descendants!

They were not just born of Greek blood – they proved it!

**Hellenic Affairs District 7 Co-Chairmen,
Yiannis Apostolakis and George Rados PDG
Demetrius E. Tasoulas, Governor - District 7**

