

THE TURIE VILLAGE

By Christ Anastasoff

Situated between small hills, the Turie village lies against a background of low mountains. To the south and southeast is the Koukoul ridge, a continuation of the Vich mountain; on the east is the Chaula ridge, with its gorgeous be⁵sch trees, and on the north and northwest is the Kamenik ridge, commanding two important passes; on the east it overlooks the road from Turie to the village of Tursie, and to the west the road to the village Statitza.

Topographically, Turie is situated at the highest sea-level point of the Kostour district in southwestern part of Macedonia. Turie is bordered by the villages of Tursie, Nered, Statitsa, Babchor, and Konomladi.

Within its boundaries Turie contains several hundreds of acres of level ground. Some meadows, some marshes, and some vegetable gardens. For the most part its land is unproductive. Erosion and rocky hills characterize the agricultural land of the village. Agriculture, of course, is the chief occupation of its inhabitants. Some sheep raising was carried on, but was not adequate to satisfy the needs of the villagers. Over 500 of them depended upon this meager resources of its land. Tilling from sunrise to sunset, Turie's inhabitants were unable to "make ends meet." In addition, Turkish tax collectors made it extremely difficult for the peasants to be self-sustaining. For the most part, the whole social economy of peasant Macedonia was affected by the Turkish tax collectors.

With its sixty or more well built rock stone houses, a church and a school building, Turie was a typical mountain village of a peasant country. In my time (1908), there were about 500 inhabitants.

Only few kutsolachs, hired as shepards, were among the villagers. The rest of them were Bulgarian speaking peasants.

The centuries of Byzantine spiritual domination was no longer to be tolerated. In the later part of the nineteenth century the Turie villagers followed the bulk of the Macedonian peasants in affiliating themselves with the Schismatic Bulgarian Church. They accepted the Exarchate as their spiritual guide in preference to the Constantinople Greek Patriarchate. Was not the latter an ally of the reigning Turkish Sultans? Why should they support an institution that kept them in spiritual and political bondage?

Free from partisan infiltration, and a purely Bulgarian speaking village, Turie served as rendez-vous outpost for the Tchethniks of peasant Macedonia. There had not been an insurgent's band that did not stop in Turie. Like in many other villages, much of the Tchethnik's arsenal was stored in Turie. From my childhood, I can recollect two incidents that lead to the uncovering of hidden stores of arms. Playing hide and seek in the basement of our house, I reached for a shelf-like board of a chicken nest. My weight was too much for the strength of the board. Fearing corporal punishment from my father (at the time God knows where he was with the village Tchethniks), I made an attempt to put the board in its original place. Climbing over a quickly made scaffold, I noticed to the left of the chicken nest a compartment filled with rifles and rounds of ammunitions. Eight short and two long types of Manlikher and four Gra system rifles, I counted. Reporting this to my mother, I was told to keep my mouth shut and say nothing to anyone about it; for if my father were to find out that I had knowledge of the hidden arms, terrible punishment

would be inflicted upon me. I kept my word. I said nothing to anyone about it. Nevertheless, I constantly feared that I was to be given a "going over", for knowledge of such secrets was not permissible for children.

One beautiful summer afternoon, I and my "band" of playmates, went out of the village and gathered near our vegetable garden. We carried with us our home-made wooden "rifles." The Tchethnik's way of life we were imitating. We built fire, misappropriated some potatoes from the near-by gardens, and covered them with hot ashes to be baked. Meanwhile, we proceeded to build some sort of "trenches" to "defend" ourselves in case of a "Turkish attack." On the embankment adjacent to our garden was a large pile of cobble stones. To build our defense positions, we utilized every available stone. To our astonishment, another discovery was made!

In the embankment under the cobble stones was buried a wooden box. Pulling the lid of the box, there we saw four long Gra system rifles and some cartridge belts. Immediately we destroyed our trenches and piled the stones on top of the box. On finishing our job, we quickly scrambled from there.

The following day, with the fall of darkness, my father came home. Uniformed and armed to the "teeth", he had just returned with some of the village "militia" from some task assignment. I was anxious to report our great "discovery". To my way of thinking discovery it was, since these arms were buried outside the village homes. No sooner had I described the place and the uncovered rifles, without even a chance to finish my narrative, then my father began to pound upon me, one on the right, then on the left, again and again. Terror and bewilderment fell upon me. Such was my reward for playing "Tchethniks" at an unknown to us "restricted" zones.

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However, two days later, curiosity brought us again at the same spot. The cobble stones were there, but not in the same position as we piled them. We readily established the fact that the rifles were no longer there!

We wondered why such useful rifles should be hidden out in the open. Analysis of Tchethnik's strategy, solved the mystery. To search for hidden arms and Tchethniks, quite often the village was besieged by Turkish troops. Should a band of Tchethniks be confronted in the village, then certain designated villagers, under some pretext, can get through the Turkish cordons, rush for the hidden arms and, if necessary, open fire to the back of the Turkish line. Undoubtedly, this was an effective strategy in the annals of fighting. Macedonia.

Geographically, the village of Turie was in the area of the 1903 Ilinden Insurrection. The villagers participated in the Insurrection in every possible way. Several of its inhabitants were killed while engaged with the Turks. In many occasions, the village "militia" rendered assistance to the Tchethniks. The entire fighting strength of Turie participated in the Bigla skirmish. Hundreds of Turkish troops were slain there. The renowned Tchethnik leader, Mitre Vlacho, was wounded in this battle. The village contributed many other services for the cause of freedom. Few villages can boast of their geniouses as can Turie. There was old Pavle Manchhoff, carpenter, gunsmith of unusual inventive ability, and on top of all, "official surgeon"! With a razor and a pair of pliers as his surgical instruments, how many bullets did he extract from the wounds of Tchethniks?

During the post-Insurrection repressions, hundreds of villages were brought to ashes by Turkish vengeance. Assisted by christian spys, the Turkish hords carried out their destructive and repressive

policy. Free from partisan infiltration, Turie immersed unmolested during the insurrectionary period. It was these events that caused some of Turie's inhabitants to emigrate to America.

Note: The following persons now in America were born in Turie: Christ Ansstasoff, History instructor, St. Louis Public Schools, Dr. Sylvester Slerioff, Dentist, St. Louis, Missouri, Dr. Ivan Lazaroff, Bacteriologist, St. Louis Health Department, Vlado S. Anastasoff, Chemical Engineer in charge of research section, Shell Petroleum Company, Lazar Sotiroff, Architect, Dr. Tam Sterioff, Chiropractor, Louis J. Anastasoff, Technician.