

# Marking a Jewish military milestone

EVAN ZLATKIS

THE Centenary of Anzac Jewish Program (CoAJP) is looking for descendants and relatives of Jewish diggers who served at Gallipoli to be part of next year's major Anzac centenary commemorations.

CoAJP – working under the umbrella of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry (ECAJ) and with the Federation of Australian Jewish Ex-Service Associations (FAJEX) and the Australian Jewish Historical Society (AJHS) – is planning a number of events across the country to provide a “fitting legacy to the thousands of Jewish servicemen and women who exemplify the rich multicultural contribution to Australia's defence”.

CoAJP national coordinator Peter Allen, who is a board member of the NSW Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen and Women (NAJEX), said he was keen to “see that the Jewish community has a presence in the centenary of Anzac events”.

“We know that there were something like 300 Jewish soldiers who were involved in the Gallipoli campaign, of whom 55 we believe were killed in action or died as a result of wounds,” Allen said.

The projects – funded by government grants and community donations – will run between 2015-18.

Among the events is an Anzac centenary commemorative service at The Great Synagogue on May 3, 2015, which will see civil and military dignitaries, ex-servicemen, descendants, the Governor-General and NSW Governor come together to remember Gallipoli and WWI within a Jewish context, with psalms, choral music, stories from descendants and an audio-visual presentation.

“We're keen to get in contact with descendants or family members of those soldiers, in particular those soldiers who were killed at Gallipoli,” Allen said. “We want them to be part of that service [at The Great Synagogue].”

He said the service would refer directly to those soldiers by name and “we would like anybody who's got family connection to them to be involved and attending”.

“One of the difficulties is a number of soldiers who were Jewish actually didn't put Jewish on their release form, they put another religion for all sorts of reasons, so

we've got a list of soldiers who we're confident were Jewish and then there's another list of soldiers we believe were Jewish but [are] not confirmed,” Allen said. “If we can get that confirmed then we'd be a lot more comfortable consolidating that list of Jewish soldiers. The records aren't always that clear.”

Other projects include a book by popular author and military editor Mark Dapin about the history of Jews in the Australian military, which Allen hopes will be published mid-to late next year.

“There hasn't been a book written appropriately about that topic; there's been bits and pieces done but nothing comprehensively enough that we feel is appropriate,” he said.

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**Peter Allen**  
CAJP coordinator

Another proposal is an exhibition at the Sydney Jewish Museum in 2015-16, showcasing an exclusive collection of 172 photographs of the Gallipoli campaign and the Western Front. The photographs were taken by Harold Collins, a Jewish-Australian soldier who served as a stretcher-bearer at Gallipoli and as a mechanic in the Australian Flying Corps in Egypt and France.

Allen said the exhibition will be “quite a significant attraction for the museum in the broader sense, not just for the Jewish community” and hopes it will form the backbone of a national travelling exhibition in subsequent years until 2018.

Other proposals include a National Jewish War Memorial at the ACT Jewish Centre in Canberra; a General Sir John Monash exhibition at the Jewish Museum of Australia in Melbourne in 2015; the development of educational programs and materials; and a War Memorial Plaque for Tasmanian Jews who served in WWI and WWII at Hobart Synagogue.

For more information on the Centenary of Anzac Jewish Program visit [www.najex.org.au](http://www.najex.org.au).



**General Sir John Monash, the most notable of Jewish diggers to serve at Gallipoli.**

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