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Geelong parliamentarians Richard Marles and John Eren find common ground across Gallipoli's trenches

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DANNY LANNEN Geelong Advertiser



Labor MPs Richard Marles and John Eren share heritage as Gallipoli adversaries. PIC: Alison Wynd

GEELONG parliamentarians Richard Marles and John Eren have tried to imagine how the conversation might have gone against Gallipoli's brutal backdrop.

What might Mr Marles' great uncle Leo and Mr Eren's grandfather Hamdi said had they chanced to meet amid the bloodshed, rivals in the Great War.

None can say, but the notion is as powerful as the fact of their presence there at the same time and what exists a century on.



MPs John Eren and Richard Marles.

“It is remarkable to think that in an area which is not that large, here were two people engaged on opposite sides of the conflict on the very day we will celebrate 100 years later, and their descendants are the best of friends and representing the same part of Geelong,” Mr Marles said this week.

“If you could have imagined the conversation ... could they have imagined what they were doing then would see two generations down the line their descendants being literally the best of friends.”

Mr Eren, now Member for Lara and Victorian Minister for Veterans’ Affairs, was born in Turkey and grew knowing the legend of his grandfather who fought at Gallipoli and was reputed to have become close to Turkish chief of command Mustafa Kemal Ataturk.

Despite having grown up in the country Mr Eren is now on his first visit to Gallipoli as part of a delegation including Prime Minister Tony Abbott, Opposition Leader Bill Shorten, Federal Minister for Veterans Affairs Michael Ronaldson and shadow minister David Feeney.

He has spoken of the acceptance of a Turkish-born person as an Australian state minister as a demonstration of Australia’s greatness.

Mr Marles’ great uncle Leo Pearce landed at Gallipoli at 8am on April 25, within a few hours of the original landings, as part of the 1st Division and spent six months dealing with casualties as a stretcher bearer.

Due to his beliefs he had requested a non-combat role but he finished the war bearing a gun on the Western Front and was awarded a Distinguished Service Order for his frontline heroics.

His brother Percy, Mr Marles' grandfather, also served with distinction on the Western Front and was awarded a Military Cross.

Mr Marles said at one point the two met in a scene of surely immense pathos, Leo coming back from the carnage on the front line as Percy was advancing.

"You could just imagine, what on earth would Leo have said?" Mr Marles said.

Both brothers survived.

Mr Marles said while he and Mr Eren had been aware of their individual connections with Gallipoli they had only recently started contemplating their common ground.

"It is genuinely incredible when you think about where both of us are now," he said.