


Serbian Anzac ban irks marchers

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Police in Melbourne surround descendants of Serbian war veterans in the CBD on Thursday. The Serbians claim they were prevented from marching on Anzac Day due to alleged links to the Christchurch shootings.

Members of Melbourne’s Serbian community have expressed anger at the RSL after police were engaged to prevent about 20 descendants of Serbian war veterans from marching in Thursday’s Anzac Day parade.

The RSL says the descendants were asked to remove themselves from the march because their status as descendants “was not clear to organisers”.

A Croatian-Australian man, Dinko Dedic, has claimed credit online for bringing about the ban, saying he and other Croatian groups had highlighted in letters to the Department of Veterans’ Affairs and the RSL the fact that Christchurch shooter Brenton Tarrant played a Serbian Chetnik anthem during his deadly rampage.

Savo Kovacevic, a spokesman for the Serbian Chetnik war veteran community, told *The Weekend Australian* he and other descendants of World War I and World War II veterans, as well as some elderly veterans, had been marching in Anzac Day parades for more than 40 years.

Australian-born Mr Kovacevic said he marched in honour of both his grandfathers, who fought as Serbs on the side of the allies in WWII.

“This year, we were stopped by the police,” he said.

“An RSL field marshal told us we were not marching. We asked, ‘What’s the reason? Can we have it in writing?’ And we didn’t get an answer.

“The field marshal said, ‘If you don’t disperse, that will be dealt with accordingly’, and then close to 15 police officers surrounded us.

“It was intimidating, confronting and embarrassing, and we’ve still had no explanation.”

Serbian veterans and their descendants marched undisturbed in other capital cities, including Sydney and Adelaide, and two veterans aged in their 90s who were escorted in cars were allowed to continue in Melbourne.

Serbia was on the side of the Allies in WWI. In WWII, when Serbia was part of the kingdom of Yugoslavia, Serbian royalist Chetniks, led by general Draza Mihailovic, fought against the Nazi invasion, before forming a loose alliance with the Germans to fight communist guerillas after the Allies had switched support to the Partisans under Josip Broz Tito.

The group clashed violently with the Croatian fascist Ustasha, as well as Serbian and Bosnian Muslims, at various points throughout the 20th century.

On his Croatian nationalist website Projekt Velebit (a newspaper and Croatian community group in Victoria), Mr Dedic claimed credit for the Anzac march ban, citing both the Christchurch attacks and Norway’s 2011 Anders Behring Breivik massacre to which he had drawn attention in his letters.

Mr Kovacevic said Australian Serbs marched in honour of their WWI and WWII veterans.

“That lunatic and what he did in Christchurch is no representation of the Serbian people of anywhere. He doesn’t represent Serbs at all. We feel that we’re being targeted,” he said.

A Victorian RSL branch spokesman said the Anzac Day march was for Australian and Allied veterans “and where appropriate, their descendants”.

“In Melbourne this Anzac Day, some descendants were asked to remove themselves from the march, as their eligibility was not clear to the organisers,” the RSL spokesman said.

A spokeswoman for Victoria Police said there was an unknown issue with a group of Serbian ex-servicemen marching “because parade participation protocol was not met”.

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