

FROM THE HISTORY OF THE ARMENIAN VOLUNTEER MOVEMENT ON THE RUSSIAN-TURKISH FRONT DURING WORLD WAR I

Sahakyan R. O.

Doctor of Sciences (History)

During World War I a considerable number of Armenians participated in the volunteer movement with a single aim: to save their compatriots from the genocide and liberate the western part of the Homeland - Western Armenia from the Ottoman despotism. Substantial facts and evidence unmask distortion of the history of the Armenian volunteer movement by Turkish falsifiers whose purpose is the denial of the Armenian Genocide.

During World War I the belligerents used all the material and human resources at hand to achieve victory. People's volunteer units were organized from national minorities. Such policy had been adopted also by the Russian authorities in the Caucasus Viceroyalty¹. After Germany declared war on Russia, the Russian authorities started organizing people's local volunteer units.



The Catholicos of all Armenians Gevorg V blesses the Armenian volunteers

First volunteer formations were organized from Armenians. The Caucasus Viceroyalty gave its consent to the undertaking by the Armenian National Bureau² of the Armenian volunteer movement's organization in 1914-1916³. The Armenian social-political circles mostly supported the idea of formation of volunteer units. The National Bureau singled out some of its members to form a special executive body under its auspices. The "Executive Committee of the

¹ We will not stop on the Northern Caucasian volunteer units since numerous monographs and articles have been written about them, and this problem is not the subject matter of our survey.

² It was established in October 1912 at the Congress of the representatives of the Armenian populated centres of the Russian Empire. The purpose of the Congress was to use the favorable situation created as a result of the Balkan Wars in 1912-1913 and achieve a solution to the Armenian Question. At the Congress a temporary Bureau consisting of 7 people was elected – S. Harutyunyan, A. Khatisyan, A. Kalantar, A. Arakelyan, A. Poghosyan, Hov. Tumanyan, N. Aghbalyan who were in charge of current affairs and carried out work for convening the Second Congress which was held on November 25, 1912 in Tiflis. Almost all Armenian national parties and public organizations were represented there.

³ The National Bureau also provided assistance to refugees.

Armenian volunteer units" headed by Prince Hovsep Arghutyan had to organize the formation and arming of the volunteer units⁴. Its members were Rostom (Stepan Zoryan), Hakob Zavriyan, Simon Vratsyan (Grusinov), Abraham Gyulkhandanyan, Nicol Aghbalyan and Armen Garo (Garegin Pastrmachyan)⁵. On the one hand Bishop M. Ter-Movsisyan directly communicated with the Viceroy, and on the other, S. Harutyunyan and A. Khatisyan communicated with the command of the Russian Caucasus Army⁶.

The Armenian volunteer movement started from September 1914; in the course of a year seven volunteer units were formed⁷.

The 1st volunteer unit was under the command of Andranik⁸, the 2nd - under the command of Dro⁹, the 3rd - under the command of Hamazasp¹⁰, the 4th - under Keri¹¹, the 5th - under Vardan¹². Two volunteer units were organized in the city of Kars but after January 1915 they were dissolved. Then was formed the 6th volunteer unit under the command of Aghanik (Arshak) Janpoladyan and at the end of September - the 7th volunteer unit under the command of Hovsep Arghutyan. The Russian command provided the volunteer units with weapons and ammunition and the rest was to be procured by the Armenian National Bureau.



Andranik Ozanyan

In the course of World War I the opposing military-political forces formed units of volunteers and militia, involving their own population, as well as the population of

⁴ Шатирян Р., Краткий очерк деятельности армянских добровольческих дружин 1914-1916 гг., - "Армянский вестник", Москва, N 10-11, 12 марта 1917, с. 13. From the report of the Executive body presented in February 1915 follows that it was officially established on 10 September, 1914. As a result of a more active and effective participation in these activities the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaktsutyun) Party (ARF-Dashnaktsutyun) began to play a leading role within the National Bureau..

⁵ Տառնապետեան Հ., Հ. Յ. Դաշնակցութիւնը իր կազմութիւնէն մինչեւ Ժ. Ընդի. Ժողով, Աթէնք, 1988, էջ 121:

⁶ HAA, ф. 402, оп. 2, д. 10, л. 70. During World War I the Armenian population of the Russian Empire was 2.054 million. In 1914-1917 13% were mobilized. 50 thousand Armenians served in the armies of the Entente. During World War I of 1.8 million Armenians living in Transcaucasia 147.344 conscripts were mobilized. From those mobilized, 121.921 people or about 83% from the total number were fit for military service. See: Арутюнян А. О., Кавказский фронт 1914-1917 гг., Ереван, 1971, с. 317. Карапетян М., Участие армян в Первой мировой войне (1914-1918 гг.), Ереван, 2014, с. 48.

⁷ The Armenian volunteer units (militia) were also called *gund*, *khumb* and *banak*.

⁸ Andranik Ozanyan (1865-1927) was the prominent figure of the Armenian national liberation movement, national hero of the Armenian people, brevet major-general of the Russian Army. In 1891 he became a member of the national Social-Democratic Hinchakyan Party (SDHP) and some time later left it and joined the ARF-Dashnaktsutyun which he twice left - in 1907 (renewed ties with the party in 1914) and in 1917.

⁹ Dro (Drastamat Kanayan, 1883-1956) was the Armenian political, state and military figure, a member of the ARF-Dashnaktsutyun.

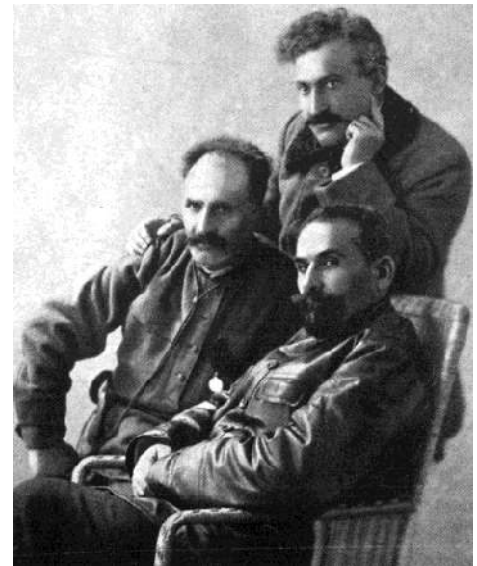
¹⁰ Hamazasp (Srvandztyan, 1873-1921) was the Armenian national liberation movement's figure, a member of the ARF-Dashnaktsutyun.

¹¹ Keri (Uncle, Gavafyan Arshak, 1858-1916) was the Armenian national liberation movement's figure, a member of the ARF-Dashnaktsutyun; he was killed in a battle on 15 May, 1916.

¹² Vardan [Khanasori Vardan (Sargis Mehrabyan, 1867-1943)] was the Armenian national liberation movement's figure, a member of the ARF-Dashnaktsutyun.

adversary countries. For this purpose they did not stint their finance or various political promises.

Among other countries the Russian Empire also started the formation of volunteer units. At a meeting with the Czech and Slovak political emigrants on September 4, 1914 Nicholas II expressed his approval of their offer on the formation of the Czech and Slovak military units in the territory of Russia. On December 4 the tsar signed the draft of a proclamation addressed to the Czech people, in which he gave a promise to create "a mighty Slavic state"¹³. In February 1915 Polish legions were formed which were subsequently reformed into cavalry regiments.



Vardan, Dro, Hamazasp



Nikolay Nikolayevich Yudenich

On July 31, 1914 Chief of Staff of the Caucasian Army, General Nikolay N. Yudenich announced the decree of Nicholas II, which stated the need to recruit volunteers. The authorities began to form units consisting of volunteers and militias - representatives of the population of the Caucasus Viceroyalty. Even before the outbreak of war Russian diplomacy intended to arm and involve the Christians living in the north-west of Persia against the Turks¹⁴.

On August 9, on the order of Commander-in-Chief of the Caucasian Army, I. I. Vorontsov-Dashkov, it was allowed to form volunteer units from the representatives of the local population¹⁵.

The Ottoman command aimed at opening in Persia a new front against Russians by drawing into military operations Muslim elements, mainly Kurds, consequently Russians attacked first and military operations started in Northern Persia.

Starting from September 20 to December 2, 2500 rifles "Berdan" were given to Assyrians. However, there was a catastrophic lack of weapons. In December, 11 Assyrian volunteer units were formed in Urmia¹⁶.

¹³ Such a promise was also given to the Armenians; however these were mere promises never to be realized.

¹⁴ Саргизов Л. М., Ассирийцы стран Ближнего и Среднего Востока. Первая четверть XX века, Ереван, 1979, с. 34, 36; Նազարյան Ա. Ս., Հայկական զորամասերի կազմավորումը Կովկասյան ճակատում (1914-1918 թվականներին), Երևան, 1999, էջ 24.

¹⁵ Масловский Е. В., Мировая война на Кавказском фронте 1914-1917 г. Стратегический очерк. Париж, 1933, с. 39, see also: "Кавказ", Тифлис, N 182, 12 августа 1914. As Hrachik Simonyan mentions, Vorontsov-Dashkov, being "much better aware of the interests of Russia than his insane predecessor (former Governor of the Caucasus G. S. Golitsin - R.S.), significantly changed the policy of the Russian state towards the Armenians", see: Սիմոնյան Հր., Անդրանիկի ժամանակը, երկու գրքով, գիրք Ա, Երևան, 1996, էջ 364:

¹⁶ Саргизов Л. М., op. cit., с. 34-35. However, L. M. Sargizov does not specify the number of volunteers included in them, the weapons and equipment system, where they were fighting and in what battles or operations they were involved.

In the Caucasus Viceroyalty the volunteer units were at first formed of Armenians, then of the mountaineers of the North Caucasus, and later - of Georgians and Greeks¹⁷.

The enrollment of volunteers who wanted to enter the Armenian units began in early September 1914. In the Armenian public, political and religious circles, particularly in the ARF- Dashnaktsutyun ranks, the inevitability of war with the Ottoman Empire was fully realized. The ARF-Dashnaktsutyun had accurate information that the Turks were preparing for war. That is why on the direct orders of I. I. Vorontsov-Dashkov the Armenian National Bureau of Tiflis and the high Russian civilian and military authorities took the lead in the process of organizing the Armenian volunteer units. At a meeting held at the governor's office were present the military assistant to the Viceroy, General A. Z. Mishlaevskiy, the director of the office of viceroy, N. L. Peterson, the mayor of Tiflis, Alexander Khatisyan (Khatisov), the Chairman of the Caucasian Armenian Benevolent Organization, Samson Harutyunyan (Arutyunov), the spiritual leader of the Armenian Diocese of Imereti and Georgia, Bishop Mesrop Ter-Movsisyan and a public figure, a doctor by profession, Hakob Zavriyan (Jacob Zavriev), the Armenian side was requested to organize units of volunteers¹⁸.



Կերի 15 մայիսի 1916 թ. Թիֆլիսի միտ. Կերի 15 մայ 1916 թ. Թիֆլիսի միտ.

Keri (Arshak Gavafyan)

During the meeting the Armenian representatives expressed their wish that the Russian government in advance would obtain consent of neutral powers to exert pressure on the Ottoman government and prevent the danger of pogroms and massacres of Armenians¹⁹.

A considerable number of Armenians took part in the volunteer movement since they were convinced that being within the Russian Army the volunteers would be able to protect the Western Armenians from massacres. They cherished the hope that once free, the Armenians would get rid of the Turkish domination and gain autonomy under the patronage of Russia.

In September and October 1914 volunteers from different countries arrived in Tiflis. From 800 to 1000 Armenians turned to the Russian Ambassador to Cyprus. On the recommendation of the SDHP they had to go to Russia and join the volunteer movement.

The Armenians of New Nakhijevan (Rostov-on-Don),



Hovsep Arghutyan

¹⁷ Масловский Е. В., *op. cit.*, с. 38. The cavalry division formed from mountaineers was sent to the Russian-Austrian front. Two Georgian volunteer units were formed and sent to Persia in 1915, see: Масловский Е. В., *op. cit.*, с. 40.

¹⁸ НАА, ф. 818, оп. 1, д. 533, л. 6. The Armenian voluntary movement was mostly organized by the ARF-Dashnaktsutyun.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Ekaterinodar (Krasnodar), Akhaltsikhe, Akhalkalak and Artsakh provided the volunteers with finance and uniforms. Volunteers arrived from Bulgaria, Romania, France, the USA and other countries.



Armenian volunteers that arrived from the USA in Petrograd

Volunteers were armed with rifles of various calibers and systems - "Mosin", "Berdan", "Mauser", "Mannlicher", "Gra" which caused misunderstanding during the distribution of ammunition²⁰. In addition to the modern weapons the volunteer battalions needed doctors, nurses, field telephones and kitchens, topographic maps, field binoculars, sapper shovels, soldiers' pots and medallions, compasses, bandages, medicines, horses, boots, felt boots, warm socks, etc.²¹.

The first combats against the enemy showed that the cavalry volunteers fought poorly with swords; long rifles also hindered them. Therefore the National Bureau decided to ask the Armenian people to rearm the fighters with their help. For cavalry volunteers "Mausers" and carbines were obtained. It was particularly difficult with the ammunition, because in Russia only two or three plants produced cartridges for the "Mauser" pistol and their products were first of all sent to satisfy the demand of the Russian-Austrian front, because the Russian-Turkish front was considered secondary.

²⁰ HAA, ф. 428, он. 1, д. 133, л. 10. Only Andranik's volunteer unit received Russian rifles known as "Mosin".

²¹ Ibid. ф. 503,, он. 1, д. 56, л. 5-6. For the complete equipment of volunteers there was need for 41 kinds of different things - from overcoats to bandoliers. For the complete outfit of a single soldier it was necessary to spend in average of 90-100 roubles (Սահակյան Ռ., Հայ կամավորական խմբերի գործունեության պատմությունից, ԲՀԱ, 2008, N 1, էջ 44-61).

Due to the donations of the Armenians volunteer units were provided with the necessary weapons and uniforms to participate in the military operations. Here is what Cornet of the Trans-Baikal Cossack Brigade (Bayazit²² unit), subsequently Colonel F. I. Yeliseyev writes in his memoirs about the arming and equipment of volunteer formations: "The volunteers were well-equipped. They wore long khaki tunics with large pockets, trousers; all of good quality. They said that all that was "American." They were armed with Russian rifles, and a great number of them had long "Mauser" pistols with wooden holster-cases just as the gun-stocks for long range shooting"²³. F. I. Yeliseyev was also fascinated by the horses of Artsakh of cavalry volunteer formations. He noted that the commanding officers had the same equipment and weapons as ordinary volunteers, except for rifles.



Khecho (Khachatryan-Amiryan Khachatur)

The command of the Caucasian Army and the National Bureau made a decision to form four volunteer units.

The 1st volunteer unit was formed in Salmast²⁴ and its commander was Andranik Ozanyan.

The 2nd volunteer unit was formed in Igdir of Surmalu²⁵ uyezd under the command of Dro (Drastamat Kanayan).

The 3rd volunteer unit was formed in Kagizvan of Kars province under the command of Hamazasp Srvandztyan.

The 4th volunteer unit was formed in Sarikamish city under the command of Keri (Gavafyan Arshak). The number of soldiers in the 1st volunteer unit had to be 1500 and in the other three volunteer units - 400. For various reasons there were 1200 warriors in the 1st volunteer unit, 382 - in the 2nd, 430 - in the 3rd and 470 - in the 4th, total 2482 warriors. There were 600 volunteers in the reserve²⁶. The Russian command supplied them with 2500 rifles. In December 1914, the 5th volunteer unit was ready to be sent to the front, but because of

the lack of weapons it had to be postponed.

It should be noted that the Armenian volunteer movement had a semi-legal status, since it was officially initiated by the Caucasus Viceroyalty and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Empire. The formation of Armenian volunteer units received an ambiguous reaction from the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) of the Russian Empire.

²² Ancient Armenian Kogovit district.

²³ Елисейев Ф. И., Казаки на Кавказском фронте. 1914-1917: Записки полковника Кубанского Казачьего полка в тринадцати брошюрах-тетрадах, Москва, 2001, с. 85-86.

²⁴ According to the Armenian sources, Salmast was a city in the district of Zarehavan in Norshirakan (Parskahayk'), the seventh province of Great Armenia. In 1828-1830 many Armenian families resettled from Salmast to the eastern regions of Armenia within the borders of the Russian Empire as a result of the Treaty of Turkmenchay signed between Russia and Persia.

²⁵ The origin of the toponym is connected with the name of the Armenian church *Surb Mari* (St Mary) (Հակոբյան Թ.Խ., Մելիք-Բախչյան Ստ. Տ., Բարսեղյան Հ.Խ., Հայաստանի և հարակից շրջանների տեղանունների բառարան, Երևան, 1998, էջ 726).

²⁶ HAA, ֆ. 818, օր. 1, ժ. 533, լ. 9. See also: Ղորղանեան Գ., Հայերու մասնակցութիւնը համաշխարհային պատերազմին Կովկասեան ռազմաճակատին վրայ (Նիւթեր պատմութեան համար), «Հայրենիք», Բոստոն, թիւ 11, սեպտեմբեր 1927, էջ 68):

The MIA and the majority of political figures and statesmen of the Government and the State Duma were against the volunteer movement aiming to dissolve the volunteer units²⁷, because some of the commanders and fighters of volunteer units were active participants of the Armenian liberation struggle.



Count I. I. Vorontsov-Dashkov

However, the Viceroy of the Caucasus, Count I. I. Vorontsov-Dashkov was able to counter the strong arguments in favor of the Armenian units and, therefore, during his governorship the MIA only once tried to make a proposal to dissolve the volunteer units, but the headquarters of the Caucasian Army resisted it. Later, the divisions were dissolved following the departure of I. I. Vorontsov-Dashkov²⁸.

The commander of the Caucasian 4th Army Corps General P. I. Oganovskiy accepted the proposal of the National Bureau on the formation of a reserve militia, but the Armenian volunteer units were not united in a military unit. They acted in different Russian military formations

and in different parts of the front. In the initial phase of the military operations the volunteers were mainly used in intelligence.

The equipping, arming and military training of the volunteer formations had not yet been completed when there came the order from the command of the Caucasian Army to immediately dispatch the volunteer units to the front. The command and the National Bureau had to remediate the shortcomings in the training of the volunteer units in the process of military operations²⁹.

On October 23, 1914, the 1st volunteer unit was sent to the front, on October 24 - the 2nd volunteer unit, on November 1 - the 3rd volunteer unit and on November 6 - the 4th volunteer unit.

In the time of the battle of Sarighamish (December 22, 1914 to January 17, 1915) the 5th volunteer unit under the command of Vardan (Sargis Mehrabyan) was sent to Alexandropol. The number of volunteers in this unit was 700 people, but the unit was not armed. The decision to send the volunteer unit to



Hamazasp (Hamazasp Srvandztyan)

²⁷ Арутюнян А.О., *op. cit.*, с. 316.

²⁸ We should mention the important fact that the German intelligence actively fought against the Russians. In 1916 the "League of non-Russian peoples" was organized in Stockholm, which included almost all Russian socialist and national parties and representatives of different nationalities except Armenians. The purpose of the league was to revolutionize Russia and withdraw the country from the war [see: Пипия Г. В., *Германский империализм в Закавказье в 1910-1918 гг.*, Москва, 1978, с. 33-38; Սահակյան Ռ., Առաջին համաշխարհային պատերազմի նախօրյակին և ընթացքում ռուս-թուրքական ռազմաճակատում հետախուզական հետախուզական ծառայությունների գործունեության պատմությունից (1914-1917 թթ.), Պատմաբանասիրական հանդես (այսուհետև՝ ՊԲՀ), 2011, N 3, էջ 94-119].

²⁹ See: Армяне в Первой мировой войне (1914-1918 гг.), Москва, 2014, с. 55-56.

Alexandropol was probably psychological and, in all likelihood, it was intended to dispel the panic among the population, as in the vicinity of Sarighamish city there were persistent fights, as well as the Muslim residents of Adjara and Kars province had rebelled³⁰ and the Turkish troops occupied some border settlements and continuing the genocide committed in Western Armenia they began massacres of Armenians, as well as Russians and Greeks (that were subjects of Russia) in border regions of Eastern Armenia and panic swept almost through the whole Viceroyalty.

In addition to the above-mentioned volunteer units under the Caucasian 4th Army Corps in early 1915 a special intelligence unit was formed from Armenians³¹. At the beginning of 1915 Armenian headquarters was established in Igdir and it received the refugees and as a result of their questioning valuable intelligence data was obtained. The head of the headquarters was an employee of the intelligence unit of the IV Army Corps, warrant officer Tigran Devoyan.



Fyodor Eliseev

In some units served Armenian translators, and as writes F. I. Yelisseyev: "They were civilians, and under every sotnia³² squadron... with daggers and rifles... At the same time they were warriors. Sometimes they were taken to hard officer patrols"³³.

In November and December 1914 two volunteer units were formed in Kars under the command of an officer of the Russian Army Harutyunyan and member of the SDHP, Harutyun Gasparyan. 500 warriors of the units under the command of H. Gasparyan participated in the military operations in the direction of Olti³⁴. From January 20 to January 23, the volunteer units fought fiercely. After the crushing defeat of the enemy the Armenian volunteer units were dissolved. Russian Army officer Aganik (Arshak) Janpoladyan was instructed to form new sub-units from these groups. 350 soldiers joined his volunteer unit under the command of Pandukht (Mikayel Seferyan).

³⁰ Мартиросян Д. Г., Трагедия батумских армян: просто „резня“ или предвестник армянского геноцида? „Родина“, Москва, N 4, 2010, с. 68-71, // <http://www.regnum.ru/news/cultura/1236705.html>. Սահակյան Ռ., Փաստաթղթեր Առաջին աշխարհամարտի տարիներին ռուսահպատակ հայերի զանգվածային կոտորածների մասին, Լրաբեր հասարակական գիտությունների, Երևան, 2012, N 4, էջ 256-276:

³¹ In his memoirs Colonel Walter Nicolay singled out the abilities of Armenian scouts (Николаи Вальтер, Тайные силы. Интернациональный шпионаж и борьба с ним во время мировой войны и в настоящее время, http://militera.lib.ru/h/nicolai_w/index.html). According to General E. V. Maslovskiy, on the eve of the war the head of the Intelligence division of the Caucasian Army radically changed the way of the intelligence gathering, but without creating a new one. According to the General, the officer of the General Staff "... managed to destroy whatever existed as the war started, when it was too late to create something new" (Масловский Е. В., op. cit., с. 47).

³² Cossack squadron.

³³ Елисеев Ф. И., op. cit., с. 110.

³⁴ The toponym Olty is derived from the name of fortress Voghtik (as well as district Voghtik/Vokaghe) located in ancient Armenian Taik, the 14th province of Great Armenia (Երեմյան Ս.Ս., Հայաստանը ըստ "Աշխարհացոյց"-ի, Երևան, 1963, էջ 76, 110: Հակոբյան Թ.Խ., Մելիք-Բախշյան Ստ.Տ., Բարսեղյան Հ.Խ., Հայաստանի և հարակից շրջանների տեղանունների բառարան, Երևան, 1998, էջ 170, 188).



Hayk (Gay) Bzhshkyants

In this volunteer unit Hayk Bzhshkyants - Gay occupied the rank of officer. It should be noted that from time to time H. Bzhshkyants sent correspondence to the Armenian newspaper "Gaghapar"³⁵, where he not only told about the battles and the suffering of the Armenian people, but also made theoretical deductions about conduct of further military operations³⁶. Thus was formed the 6th volunteer unit from the representatives of the SDHP³⁷.

According to the characteristics given by General Tovmas Nazarbekyan (F.I. Nazarbekov), "favorite people leaders" were commanders of the volunteer units³⁸.

According to E. V. Maslovskiy, commanders of the volunteer units fully devoted themselves to the cause of liberating the Homeland³⁹, and according to General Movses Silikyan (Moisey Silikov)⁴⁰: "Dro's volunteer unit is a glorious one, the pride and joy of Armenia"⁴¹.



Voldemar Ozols

Second lieutenant, Vladimir Anatoliyevich Ozols (Voldemar Ansovich Ozols) largely contributed to the formation and coordination of the volunteer units⁴².

It should be noted that during 1914-1916 the number of volunteer units reached ten of which one was a reserve. Altogether about 10 thousand Armenians were included in the volunteer units.

The Armenian volunteer movement can be divided into the following stages:

1. From September to October 1914 when the recruitment of volunteers started and units began to be formed and equipped.
2. From October 1914 to January 1915 when six volunteer



Tovmas Nazarbekyan



Movses Silikyan

³⁵ «Գաղափար», Թիֆլիս, 1916, 24 փետրվարի, N 4, 3 յուլիսի N 55, 6 յուլիսի N 56:

³⁶ Hayk Bzhshkyants (1887-1937) future Soviet military commander and researcher, as well as – a professor and head of the department of the History of wars and military art at the Air Force Academy named after N. E. Zhukovskiy. He became a victim of Stalin's political repressions.

³⁷ Նազարյան Ա. Ս., օր. cit., էջ 46-47, ՀԱԱ, ֆ. 282, օր. 1, ժ. 7, լ. 2. Սիմոնյան Հր., օր. cit., էջ 388:

³⁸ ՀԱԱ, ֆ. 45, օր. 1, ժ. 1, լ. 14-15 օժ.

³⁹ Масловский Е. В., օր. cit., с. 38.

⁴⁰ Սահակյան Ռ., Գեներալ-լեյտենանտ Մովսես Սիլիկյան (կենսագրության անհայտ էջեր), ՊՐՀ, 2012, N 2, էջ 63-74: Карапетян М. Л., Генерал-лейтенант Мовсес Силикян (к 150-летию со дня рождения), Вестник общественных наук НАН РА, 2012, N 4, с. 291-294.

⁴¹ ՀԱԱ, ֆ. 45, օր. 1, ժ. 22, լ. 9.

⁴² Later head one of the groups of the illegal residency of the Main Intelligence Administration [(the Russian acronym: GRU) of the General Staff of the Soviet Armed Forces] in France (1940-1945).

units participated in military operations and gained experience of warfare. The final date of the end of the first stage is the Sarighamish operation.

3. From January to April 1915 when there was a reformation and equipping of volunteer units at the rear with new reinforcement. Training activities were organized to teach soldiers modern warfare. At the headquarters of the Caucasian 4th Army Corps officer short courses were organized for those volunteers who had secondary education. However, after some time the officer courses were terminated. At this stage the volunteer units were organized according to the requirements of war time, they had their rear provision, health, telephone and other units. The volunteers were presented the requirements of military discipline, the disciplinary code was drafted, and on February 1, 1915 military police consisting of 9 volunteers was organized in Andranik's volunteer unit. A military tribunal was established too⁴³.

4. From April 1 to July 1915 when the 5th volunteer unit was officially formed and included the 2nd, 3rd and 4th volunteer units under the command of Vardan, it received the name "Araratian" and became part of the Trans-Baikal Cossack Brigade under the command of General A. M. Nikolayev. The volunteer units distinguished themselves in the Battle of Dilman (April 16-18, 1915, the 1st volunteer unit) and during the liberation of Van city⁴⁴ (the 1st and 5th volunteer units)⁴⁵ and the Van province from the Turkish troops and Kurdish irregular regiments.



Nikolay Baratov

5. With the July retreat of the Russian forces from Van in 1915 came to the end another stage of the Armenian volunteer movement in the Russian-Turkish front. From October 1914 to July 1915 in the battles were killed 485 and 1260 volunteers were wounded and put out of action because of illnesses and missing⁴⁶. The Executive Committee reorganized the volunteer units and the 7th volunteer unit (23 officers and 862 warriors) was organized and ready under the command of Hovsep Arghutyan to leave for the front by September 30, 1915⁴⁷. The unit participated in battles near Lake Urmia and until the May of 1916 suffered losses - 18 volunteers were killed and 90 wounded⁴⁸.

6. On 7 May, 1915, the 6th volunteer unit left for the front and entered into the Army corps under the command of General N.N. Baratov⁴⁹.

⁴³ Андраник Озаян. Документы и материалы. Составители: Арутюнян А. О., Эвоян В. С., Мирзоян С. С., Сафян П. Г., Шатирян Г. М., Բանբեր Հայաստանի արխիվների, N 1-2, Ереван, 1991, с. 155-158.

⁴⁴ It should be emphasized that in Van Armenians defended themselves from the Turkish regular troops that had been committing the Armenian Genocide ("Голос Армении", 2014, 17 ноября: <http://www.golosarmenii.am/article/25869/genocid-rossijskoj-istoricheskoy-nauki>)

⁴⁵ Khecho (Khachatryan-Amiryan Khachatur, 1872-1915) in the lead of the cavalry company of the Araratian voluntary unit successfully helped the self-defence forces of Van fighting against the Turkish regular troops and first entered the city (5 May, 1915). He was killed in battle near Datvan on 6 July, 1915.

⁴⁶ НАН, ф. 818, оп. 1, д. 533, л. 29.

⁴⁷ Ibid., ф. 1267, оп. 1, д. 2, лл. 4 а -17 а ; "Армянский вестник", Москва, 1916, N 11, 10 апреля, с.1.

⁴⁸ «Հորիզոն», N 49, 3 մարտի 1916; «Արեւ», N 129, 15 յունիս 1916 "Армянский вестник", 1916, N 21, 19 июня, с. 18:

⁴⁹ General N.Baratov was one of the famous commanders of the Caucasian Army.



Grigor Avsharyan

On 23 October the commander of the unit, Grigor Avsharyan was killed during the battle⁵⁰. He was succeeded by Hayk Bzhshkyants. The voluntary unit was included in the 1st Army corps and took part in the Erzurum operation⁵¹. After it the unit fought also in other battles and near Mamakhatun Hayk Bzhshkyants was wounded. The commander of the volunteer unit became Pandukht (Mikayel Seferyan).

7. From July 1915 to the summer of 1916 the Armenian volunteer units took part in almost all major military operations. The Armenian units directly participated in the preparation of the operation of Erzurum (Karin). Together with the Russian troops and Cossack units they ensured the secrecy of the operation of Erzurum.

6. From December 1915 to the summer of 1916 the Russian command began dissolving the Armenian volunteer units. The dissolving of units had purely political motives⁵².

Thus, the self-defense of the Western Armenians in 1915 and the Armenian volunteer movement in 1914-1916 were a response against the policy of genocide committed by the Young Turk government of the Ottoman Empire. Turkish falsifications (of the history of the self-defence of Armenians and the Armenian volunteer movement) are abortive because the Armenians in Western Armenia rose up to resist Turkish armies which accomplished genocide. Armenians defended their families and Homeland.

Armenian volunteers, enrolled in the Russian Army, participated in the liberation battles of a considerable part of Western Armenia, where the civilian population was massacred by Turks. For example, thanks to the help of Armenian volunteers rendered to the self-defense forces of Van (who fought against attacks of Turkish troops) two hundred thousand Armenians were saved from genocide, but on the way of retreat to Eastern Armenia part of them was killed by Turkish bands.

The volunteers' experience of fighting against the Turkish army became very useful in May, 1918 when Turkish troops invaded the Ararat valley aiming to occupy also Eastern Armenia by continuing genocide. But the Turks were defeated by the Armenian forces in the heroic battle of Sardarapat, which heralded the birth of the First Republic of Armenia on May 28, 1918.

***Translated from Armenian by
S. E. Chraghyan***

⁵⁰ Шатирян Р., Краткий очерк деятельности армянских добровольческих дружин 1914-1916 гг., "Армянский вестник", N 31, 26 марта 1917, с. 8.

⁵¹ Корсун Н. Г., Сарыкамышская операция на Кавказском фронте мировой войны в 1914-1915 гг., Москва, 1937, с. 112, 171.

⁵² However, the Russian command continued to use the Armenian volunteer militia not only in the territory of Western Armenia, but also in Trapezunt province, carrying out several successful operations (November 2, 1916). (see: Флот в первой мировой войне. Том 1, Москва, 1964, с. 483-484; Боевая летопись русского флота, Москва, 1948, с. 418. In the archive of the Institute of History of NAS RA the memoirs of a participant in the operation can be found. See: архив института Истории НАН РА, личный фонд Лео, фонд 1, оп. 1, д. 225. It is necessary to note that since 1916 the Armenian volunteers served in the Allied forces of France (Գալաթիական Ռ., Հողվածների և հրապարակումների ժողովածու, Երևան, 2013, էջ 127-144) and Great Britain.