

LIEUTENANT-GENERAL TOVMAS NAZARBEKYAN'S ROLE IN MILITARY OPERATIONS OF THE RUSSIAN ARMY AGAINST THE TURKISH GENOCIDAL FORCES¹ (1914-1916)

Dedicated to the 160th birth anniversary of Tovmas Nazarbekyan

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Lieutenant-general Tovmas
Hovhannes Nazarbekyan

Lieutenant-general Tovmas Hovhannes Nazarbekyan (Foma Ivan Nazarbekov) (1855-1931) is one of those rare military men who participated in several wars: 1877-1878 Russian-Turkish, 1904-1905 Russian-Japanese², during WWI Russian-Turkish, 1918 February-June Armenian-Turkish, then in 1918 December Armenian-Georgian, 1919-1920 Armenian-Tatar¹, 1920 autumn Armenian-Turkish military operations.

During 1914-1918 T. Nazarbekyan³ was one of the witnesses of the tragedy of Western Armenians during the Armenian Genocide. On his order photographs of the consequences of the Turkish genocidal brutalities were taken⁴. In his Memoirs⁵ T. Nazarbekyan presented the reports of his officers who depicted the mass killings of the Armenians organized and committed by the Ottoman authorities in full detail.

¹ This article presents the General's unprinted Memoirs, including the period from June, 1914 to April, 1916 and is mainly based on the memoir notes of T. Nazarbekyan, which are kept in the General's personal fund at the National Archives of Armenia.

² In 1907 T. Nazarbekyan resigned. The reason was that the higher command had refused to grant him the military rank of major-general with the absurd excuse that during the Russian-Japanese war the limit of general rank was reached. The rank would be granted only in case T. Nazarbekyan resigned. Offended by such an attitude he preferred resigning and receiving that rank (probably the main problem here was that T. Nazarbekyan was Armenian and adhered to the Armenian Apostolic church. Such an attitude at this period cannot be explained otherwise). After the start of World War I, he turned to the Caucasian Army asking them to restore him in the regular army. Overcoming some difficulties his request was satisfied (ՀԱԱ, ֆ. 45, ց. 1, գ. 1, թ. 6 շրջ.-7). Unfortunately in his Memoirs the General does not write about what he was doing in the period from 1907 until the end of June 1914.

³ Հայաստանի ազգային արխիվ (henceforth ՀԱԱ, The National Archives of Armenia), ֆ. 45, ց. 1: For T. Nazarbekyan's service list and awards see Аветисян Грант. Генералы-армяне в Российской империи, Ереван, 2008, с. 168-170. One part of the memoirs which includes the period from October 1917 to April 1918 was published in the magazine Բանբեր Հայաստանի արխիվների (ԲՀԱ)/Herald of the Archives of Armenia, see Армянский корпус против турецких войск (ноябрь 1917 г.-июль 1918 г.). Воспоминания генерала Ф. И. Назарбекова. Составитель: Г. М. Шатирян, редактор: Г. А. Аветисян, ԲՀԱ, 3, 1992, էջ 34-153.

⁴ ՀԱԱ, ֆ. 45, ց. 1, գ. 2, թ. 53:

⁵ T. Nazarbekyan's Memoirs were written in 1928-1929. He used not only the documents he had, part of which were lost after his arrest by the Soviet authorities, but also had correspondence with his military friends generals Hovhannes Hakhverdyan [on December 23, 1930 H. Hakhverdyan was arrested in Leningrad on the basis of the indictment forged



Soldiers of the Russian Army in a site devastated by the Turkish genocidal brutalities

During the military operations of 1914-1916 the General repeatedly came into contact with Armenian volunteer units and their commanders. He particularly singled out Dro's volunteer unit to which General M. Silikyan gave the following assessment in one of his letters written during the Soviet period: "Dro's squad is a magnificent squad, the pride and beauty of Armenia"⁶.

Under T. Nazarbekyan's command fought the 1st Armenian volunteer unit of Andranik. General Nazarbekyan was one of those single commanders whose authority Andranik recognized.

by the Soviet security agencies, as if he had been a member of a secret monarchist organization the purpose of which was to overthrow the Soviet power; on April 28, 1931 he was shot. On October 20, 1989 he was posthumously acquitted] and M. Silikyan [he was arrested by the Soviet authorities four times but in all of the cases the accusations were absurd and false. He was shot on November 22, 1937. On November 10, 1987 he was posthumously acquitted (for more details see Սահակյան Ռ., Գեներալ-լեյտենանտ Մովսես Սիլիկյան (կենսագրության անհայտ էջեր), Պատմա-բանասիրական հանդես, 2012, 2, էջ 63-74, Карапетян М. Л., Генерал-лейтенант Мовсес Силикян (к 150-летию со дня рождения), ՀՀ ԳԱԱ Լրաբեր հաս. գիտ. (henceforth Լրաբեր), 2012, 4, с. 291-294] who in their turn helped T. Nazarbekyan to clarify the details of this or that operation, to add in facts to these or those incidents and events (While writing his Memoirs Nazarbekyan had got considerable assistance from Ivan Yenikolopov (Yenikolopyan, 1888-1980). In the 1920s Yenikolopov was the representative of the Archive Department of Soviet Armenia in Soviet Georgia and as far as was possible he supplied Nazarbekyan with documents).

⁶ ՀԱԱ, ֆ. 45, ց. 1, գ. 22, թ. 9: For more details see Հայոց պատմություն: Հ. 3, Նոր ժամանակաշրջան (XVII դարի երկրորդ կես-1918 թ.): Գիրք II (1901-1918 թթ., հայ գաղթավայրերը, պարբերական մամուլը և մշակույթը XIX դ. և XX դ. սկզբին) / Խմբագրակազմ՝ Ա. Մելքոնյան և ուրիշ., Երևան, 2015, էջ 467-478, Sahakyan R. O., From the history of the Armenian volunteer movement on the Russian-Turkish front during World War I.- Fundamental Armenology, issue 2, 2015, pp. 58-68. <http://www.fundamentalarmenology.am/datas/issues/ISSUE-2-2015.pdf>



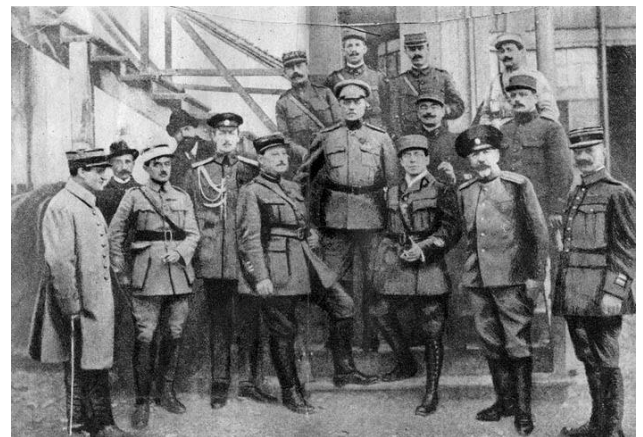
General Andranik Ozanyan

operations and the higher command, he never meant to discredit or defame the Army and the command. The General tried to regard and interpret this or that operation in an unbiased manner and expressed his opinion on this or that decision. At the same time he did not hide his joy and pride when he presented this or that victorious military operation or battle of the Caucasian Army.

The main part of his Memoirs he

In his Memoirs he considered insubstantial the indictments concerning the Armenian volunteers. He denied the false information distributed during Nikolay Romanov's (junior, Nikolay II's uncle) period as officiating, Viceroy of the Caucasus and Commander-in-chief of the Caucasian Army⁷, as if Armenians carried out "mass killings" of Muslims⁸.

T. Nazarbekyan highly appreciated the fighting capacity of the Russian Army and though in some cases he said critical words about the planning of the military



T. Nazarbekian (center) with high-ranking army officers

⁷ For more details see Սահակյան Ռ.. Ռուսեն ավագ քահանա Բեկգույանցի նամակները Արևմտյան Հայաստանում ռուսական իշխանությունների քաղաքականության մասին. Լրաբեր, 2009, 3, էջ 297-301: For the original of the manuscript see ՀԱԱ, ֆ. 45, ց. 1, գ. 28, թ. 7:

⁸ In our days also the factual historical picture is distorted for political purposes. Rafik Safarov, leading researcher of the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography of NAS of Azerbaijan is especially distinguished for falsification: he falsified the information rendered by the sources and twisting the facts, as well as wrongly using the name "Eastern Anatolia" instead of Western Armenia he brought groundless accusations against the Armenians and volunteers serving in the Russian Army and denying the fact about the 1.5 million Armenians subjected to the genocide, he talked nonsense that the Armenians and volunteers serving in the Russian Army "killed 1.19 million Muslims in Eastern Anatolia during 1915-1918". He also makes a similar accusation against Russians who allegedly annihilated 88 thousand Muslims in the province of Batumi in 1915 (see P. Сафаров. Участие народов Кавказа в Первой мировой войне, <http://www.kavkazoved.info/news/2015/02/07/uchastie-narodov-kavkaza-v-pervoj-mirovoj-vojne.html>). Safarov's anti-scientific report (Доклад представлен в ходе международной научно-практической конференции «Кавказ в годы Первой мировой войны» (Пятигорск, 28-30 ноября 2014 г.). Доклады публикуются в авторской редакции.) serves the denial of the Armenian Genocide by Turkey. It should be mentioned that in the autumn of 1914 the Ottoman army and the notorious organization "Teshkilate mahsuse" carried out mass exterminations of Armenians in the province of Batumi, as well as in the district of Kars. For more details see Д. Мартиросян. Трагедия батумских армян: просто "резня" или предвестник армянского геноцида? <http://regnum.ru/news/1236705.html> Ռ. Սահակյան, Փաստաթղթեր Առաջին աշխարհամարտի տարիներին ռուսահպատակ հայերի զանգվածային կոտորածների մասին, ՀՀ ԳԱԱ Լրաբեր հասարակական գիտությունների, 2012, 4, էջ 256-276; Ibid, Բաթումի նահանգի հայության կողոպուտն ու սպանությունները Ա. համաշխարհայինի սկզբում՝ 1914ի աշնանը (փաստաթղթեր). Հայկազեան Հայագիտական Հանդես. 2013, ԼԳ հատոր, Պէրյուզ, էջ 7-45:

starts after the assassination of the heir to the Austrian throne Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo⁹. The Caucasian military district (CMD) had also been led to a fighting condition.

Two thirds of the forces of CMD were removed to the Russian-Austrian front¹⁰. In case of the Ottoman attack the viceroyalty would appear in a dangerous state. T. Nazarbekyan considered the transfer of those forces from the Caucasus a mistake, since in the troop units there were a great number of officers who had participated in the 1877-1878 Russian-Turkish war, had combat experience in mountainous terrain and knew very well the area of military operations¹¹. The Caucasian cavalry division¹² formed in Armavir¹³ and prepared for being sent to CMD was moved to the Russian-Austrian front and later was moved back to the Russian-Turkish front. Among its fighters was Semyon Budyonni - the future Marshal of the Soviet Union.

T. Nazarbekyan mentions with regret that the Russian-Turkish front was unjustly considered secondary, so the High Command in the person of General Nikolay Romanov considered it possible to cede to the Turks even the whole of the Caucasus region. General Nikolay Romanov understood his mistake in 1915 when he was appointed Viceroy of the Caucasus and Commander in Chief of the Army. During his officiating four more army corps were added to the Caucasian Army¹⁴.

In the morning of October 17, 1914 the German-Turkish warships bombed the Russian Black Sea coast cities of Sevastopol, Novorossiysk and Theodosia. This marked the Ottoman Empire's full entry into WWI. The enemy managed to sink several Russian military and commercial ships and damage a number of coastal buildings. In response to that pirate attack on October 20, 1914 Russia, and then Great Britain and France declared war against the Ottoman Empire.

In such conditions T. Nazarbekyan could not remain as an indifferent observer and presented a report to the Caucasian Army chief of staff, General Nikolay Yudenich in order to serve in the acting army. On October 16, 1914 T. Nazarbekyan was appointed commander of the 2nd Caucasian infantry brigade. The unit would operate

⁹ ՀԱՍ, ֆ. 45, ց. 1, զ. 1, թ. 3:

¹⁰ See E. B. Масловский. Мировая война на Кавказском фронте 1914-1917 г. Стратегический очерк. Париж, 1933, с. 32; История Первой мировой войны 1914-1918, Москва, том 1, 1975, с. 197.

¹¹ ՀԱՍ, ֆ. 45, ց. 1, զ. 1, թ. 5-6: Among the moved units was the 13th Life-Guards Erivan regiment. According to the Soviet Union marshal B. M. Shaposhnikov, the Erivan regiment "was the oldest regiment of the Russian Army and had been founded during the reign of (tzar - R.S.) Mikhail Fyodorovich Romanov (1596-1645 - R.S.) which was stationed near Tiflis" (see Шапошников Б. М.. Военно-научные труды. Москва, 1974, с. 82).

¹² С. М. Буденный. Пройденный путь. Москва, 1959, с. 12-13.

¹³ It was founded in 1839 by the Armenian emigrants in Russia (in the present Krasnodar region) and was called Armavir after the name of one of the old capitals of Armenia.

¹⁴ ՀԱՍ, ֆ. 45, ց. 1, զ. 1, թ. 5 շրջ.-6:

within the 4th Caucasian cavalry division¹⁵ of the *Atropatene squad*¹⁶ located in Northern Persia, the commander of which was General Fyodor Chernozubov.

In his Memoirs T. Nazarbekyan referred to the formation of Armenian volunteer units and some of their commanders. He qualifies them as “beloved folk heroes”¹⁷. T. Nazarbekyan mentions that the Russian command initially allowed forming four units¹⁸.

T. Nazarbekyan considers it important to emphasize the fact that in the summer of 1914, in Karin-Erzrum the leaders of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation refused the Young Turks’ offer to cause disturbances in the Caucasus and support the Turkish army¹⁹.

In November, 1914 the *Atropatene squad* reached considerable success in Northern Persia. It made the Kurdish tribes find ways to reach an agreement with the Russian command and stop their resistance. But the Turkish attack around the city of Sarighamish did not allow the advance to continue and on December 1 the *Atropatene squad* received the command to retreat.

In the battle of Sarighamish the Russian troops totally defeated the 3rd Ottoman army and the Turkish troops were unable to launch an offensive towards the Caucasus Viceroyalty.



Machinegun detachment

In his Memoirs T. Nazarbekyan refers to the self-defense fights of Armenians that started in Van on April 7, 1915. He recalls the details of the reasons of the Armenians’ resistance pointing out that the main reason was the policy of the Ottoman authorities to exterminate Armenians.

During the military operations of 1915 T. Nazarbekyan’s most famous battle was the battle of Dilman (in the basin of Lake Urmia). Having a wide spy network in Northern Persia, as well as in the Russian *Atropatene squad* the Ottoman command had managed to find out that in the city of Dilman and around it the Russians did not have enough troops, so it decided to launch an attack. The attack aimed at defeating the Russians in the region of Dilman, and then attack in the direction of Yerevan and further reach and occupy the oil districts of Baku, at the same time raising the Caucasian

¹⁵ Russian units were often called after the name of the place where they operated. For example, after conquering Van General A. Nikolaev’s unit was given the name the Van squad.

¹⁶ The Iranian name Atropatene-Aderbaigan-“Azerbaijan” later (from the second half of 1918) was stolen and given for pan-Turkic purposes also to a formation artificially created in the cis-Caspian territory of Eastern Transcaucasia.

¹⁷ ՀԱՍ, ֆ. 45, ց. 1, զ. 1, թ. 14 շրջ.-15:

¹⁸ In fact the number of the volunteer units was six. The 5th unit under the command of Vardan (Sargis Mehrabyan) did not move to the front since its warriors had no weapons. One unit mainly composed of Hunchakian volunteers, had formed in Kars. After participating in the military operations it was dissolved in January, 1915.

¹⁹ ՀԱՍ, ֆ. 45, ց. 1, զ. 1, թ. 15 և շրջ.:

Muslims. For that purpose in March, 1915 the 3rd Collective division under Khalil bey's command was sent to Persia from the province of Van.

Khalil's purpose was to move to Jugha (Julfa) after defeating the Russians near Dilman, and then replenish the division with Muslims, invade Zangezur, Artsakh (Karabakh), the provinces of Yelizavetpol (Gandzak) and Baku, aiming at making a raid into Dagestan and with the help of the rebellious Muslim population of the Caucasus separate the region from Russia²⁰.

On April 16, General F. Chernozubov sent to the region of Dilman the 2nd Caucasian infantry brigade under T. Nazarbekyan's command²¹. There were 8 battalions, 12 Cossack sotnyas (hundreds) and 12 cannons under his command. Khalil's 10-12 battalions, 12 cannons and around 6 thousand Kurds stood against the 2nd brigade²².

In the morning of April 16, 1915 the enemy attacked and occupied Dilman. The units of the 2nd Caucasian infantry brigade appeared in a difficult state since not all the forces had arrived yet. General T. Nazarbekyan recalls: "At that difficult moment I noticed a small unit advancing. They appeared to be an Armenian unit under Sumbat's (Smbat Boroyan - R.S.) command that had been sent to the mountain pass of Sevablur (Black hill) for intelligence gathering..."²³. On T. Nazarbekyan's order the volunteers took positions to the south-east of the village Mukhanjik to resist the enemy that was trying to encircle the left defense flank, and not to let them pass to the rear. Realizing that the success of the battle depended on the bravery of Armenian soldiers the General commanded Smbat "to die but not to retreat"²⁴.

The positions occupied by the Armenians were the keys of Dilman. The enemy's dense troops attacked the defense site taken by the Armenian unit. According to T. Nazarbekyan: "the unit's members had to fight at close with the enemy. Owing to Sumbat's (Smbat - R.S.) energy and intrepidity all the rapid attacks of the enemy were unsuccessful and after that the enemy stopped the offensive and retreated"²⁵.

In the morning of April 17 additional units arrived including the other companies of the Armenian 1st unit under the command of Andranik. That day the enemy only cannonaded the Russian positions and did not take active actions.

In the early morning of April 18, at 4 AM the enemy attacked. The main blow of the Turkish attack was directed at the center and left flank of the Russian defense. The whole weight of the defense of the center was taken by the Armenian 1st unit. Andranik

²⁰ Корсун Н.. Алашкертская и Хамаданская операции на Кавказском фронте мировой войны, М., 1940, с. 154.

²¹ Масловский. Е.В., Мировая война на Кавказском фронте 1914-1917 г. Стратегический очерк. Париж, 1933, с. 156.

²² Н. Корсун. Алашкертская и Хамаданская операции, с. 42. According to T. Nazarbekyan's Memoirs the enemy had 16 battalions, 2 squadrons, 8 cannons, 12 machine guns and 5 to 6 thousand Kurds, see ՀԱՍ, ֆ. 45, ց. 1, գ. 2, թ. 33 2րդ.-34:

²³ ՀԱՍ, ֆ. 45, ց. 1, գ. 2, թ. 27 2րդ.-28:

²⁴ ՀԱՍ, ֆ. 45, ց. 1, գ. 2, թ. 28:

²⁵ ՀԱՍ, ֆ. 45, ց. 1, գ. 2, թ. 28 2րդ.:

personally went through the volunteer positions, encouraged the fighters “reminding them of their responsibilities”²⁶.

Failing in the center, the Turks directed their blow at the right flank of the Russian defense aiming at passing to the Russian rear. The soldiers of the 6th artillery regiment positioned here, mainly staffed with reserve troops, wanted to leave positions. Only after T. Nazarbekyan’s weighty intervention they continued to fight²⁷.

The attack of the enemy was halted after which T. Nazarbekyan started a counterattack with his forces. In his turn Andranik, taking the fighters for attack, pushed out the Turks from the village Barchishli which finally cemented the Russians’ victory. The fight stopped only at night²⁸.



On April 19, T. Nazarbekyan commanded to start chasing of Khalil’s division. On the same day the congratulatory telegram of Viceroy of the Caucasus I. I. Vorontsov-Dashkov and General F. Chernozubov addressed to T. Nazarbekyan was received, which said that the latter was presented for the award Order of St. George, 4th class.

In the battle of Dilman the Turks’ loss was about two thousand killed, and that of the Russians’ - 600 killed and 800 wounded²⁹. 21 of the volunteers were killed and 55 wounded³⁰.

On April 19, the 2nd Caucasian brigade within the *Atropatene squad* moved in the direction of Van. The General gladly records that on May 4 Van was liberated from the Turkish-Kurdish encirclement as a result of the advancement of the Armenian volunteer units and Russian forces.

T. Nazarbekyan also recalls the warm welcome the population of Van showed towards the volunteers and Russian Army. The General records the important fact that the Russian command appointed Aram Manukyan Governor of Van and the liberated regions. T. Nazarbekyan proudly records: “The Van defense showed that Armenians can counterattack the strong enemy with their meager resources”³¹.

After the liberation of Van by the Russian *Bayazet squad* the enemy began to accumulate forces on the southern shore of Lake Van. In order to protect Van from that side an advance guard under I. Trukhin’s command was sent there. Besides the Russian divisions the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th Armenian units were included in it. By joint forces they succeeded to put the enemy forces to flight and capture their four cannons.

²⁶ Զորավար Անդրանիկի Կովկասեան ճակատի պատմական օրագրութիւնը, 1914-1917. Օրագրուած զօրավարին թիկնապահ զինուորէն, Ե., 2000, էջ 18:

²⁷ ՀԱԱ, ֆ. 45, ց. 1, գ., թ. 37 շրջ.:

²⁸ Андраник Озаян. Документы и материалы. Составители: Руководитель-А. О. Арутюнян, В. С. Эволян, С. С. Мирзоян, П. Г. Сафян, Г. М. Шатирян, Вестник архивов Армении, Ереван, 1991, 1-2, с. 166.

²⁹ ՀԱԱ, ֆ. 45, ց. 1, գ. 2, թ. 42 և շրջ.:

³⁰ Կարապետյան Մ., Հայկական կամավորական խմբերը և ազգային գումարտակները Կովկասյան ռազմաճակատում (1914-1917 թթ.), Ե., 1999, էջ 80-81:

³¹ ՀԱԱ, ֆ. 45, ց. 1, գ. 2, թ. 58 շրջ.:

On June 16, 1915 T. Nazarbekyan moved with his brigade along the northern shore of Lake Van. On their way they saw the empty Armenian villages, which had been destroyed and were full of corpses of people.

On June 18 the brigade camped in the Armenian village Panz, and on June 21, they reached Artchesh. According to the General the Russian soldiers, among whom there were those from Kuban, were surprised by the abundant crop of the province, which surpassed theirs³².

On June 23, the brigade reached the Armenian village Norashen, and the next day the General received an order to advance towards Artske. On June 26, the brigade moved from Artske to Khanik where they reached at 5 PM. On their way they saw Kurdish villages with their inhabitants and in Khanik there lived Circassians³³, who had left with the retreating Ottoman army.

On June 27, T. Nazarbekyan received an order from the corps commander General P. Oganovski to make an attack in the direction of Kop on June 28.

On June 28, according to the order of the corps commander, the 6th Caucasian infantry regiment went towards Later, then Derik where General Oganovski's headquarters was located.

In the morning of June 29, the Russian forces attacked with the purpose of driving the Turks out of Kop and liberating the village Purkhus³⁴. However, the attack failed and the Russians suffered considerable losses.

On June 29, the enemy getting reinforcements started to attack. The measures taken by the Russian command failed since the enemy had managed to occupy the heights dominating over the terrain.

On June 30, T. Nazarbekyan received an order to move to the village Later with his forces - the 5th Caucasian infantry regiment and one battery of mountain artillery, and to attack and occupy the village Torton on July 1. It could be concluded from the intelligence data that the enemy had managed to prepare well - the dominating heights were in their hands, the trenches were in several rows. The enemy force was about three battalions. Thus, the attack was fraught with large losses, so T. Nazarbekyan decided to use his superiority in artillery. The success was supported by the circumstance that one of the batteries managed to open flank cannon fire which decided the outcome of the attack. The Turks could not resist and escaped in panic. The General records: "When we approached the enemy positions or to be more exact, the trenches, we were shocked by the scene that rose in front of us. All the trenches were literally filled with corpses which was the result of the shrapnel fire of the two cannons

³² ՀԱՍ, ֆ. 45, ց. 1, գ. 3, թ. 16:

³³ In the 19th century Russia fought to strengthen its position in the Northern Caucasus. The mountain dwellers showed fierce resistance to the Russian troops. In 1859 the Russians managed to gain victory and a considerable number of Muslim mountain dwellers (the Adyghe, Chechens, Kabardians and others) left for the Ottoman Empire. They were known by the collective name Circassian.

³⁴ It is famous for its early medieval Armenian church.

that had shot along the trenches. Most of the people were tall, tough, with dark faces and in a very good outfit”³⁵.

The same day General P. Oganovski ordered to deploy one battalion of the 5th regiment and four mountain cannons in a nearby village in the morning of July 2. It meant weakening the 5th regiment. T. Nazarbekyan considered that the enemy would get additional forces and definitely attempt to return its lost positions, so the regiment would find itself in a difficult state. But General Oganovski kept to his point of view. T. Nazarbekyan ordered colonel Dokuchaev to strengthen the positions and be alert since it was possible that the Turks would try to attack at night.

The attack on the enemy's position was first successful. With the support of the artillery the right column rapidly advanced and threatened to move to the enemy's rear; it was also observed that the Turks had begun to panic. On the whole the attack went according to the plan. But at that time artillery and gun shots were heard in the rear, from the direction of Torton. At the same time large troops of the enemy were moving in the direction of General T. Nazarbekyan. It was obvious for the General that colonel Dokuchaev had not managed to repress the enemy and now the Turks were attacking from the direction of Torton. The situation was grave. The enemy's numerous forces were threatening from three sides.

According to the General, at that hard moment military chief³⁶ of the Labinsk Cossack Regiment, Pyotr Abashkin³⁷ approached him asking to let him attack with his cavalry regiment since the terrain was suitable for such an operation. As T. Nazarbekyan confessed: “To be honest, I was very much surprised at this initiative and, of course, I happily consented”³⁸.

The rapid and unexpected attack of the Cossack cavalry regiment had a shocking effect on the Turks who started to retreat irregularly. In its turn the infantry made an attack. Around 300 soldiers and several officers of the enemy were captured³⁹.

The next day T. Nazarbekyan received an order to leave one battalion of the 6th regiment, 2 mountain cannons and with 4 private battalions to move towards Torton, and then Nazik⁴⁰, which at that time appeared to be the Turks' rear, in front of General Sharpantie's⁴¹ squad, and then to move in the direction of Mush. The above-mentioned operation would be carried out by several squads simultaneously.

³⁵ ՀԱԱ, ֆ. 45, ց. 1, զ. 3, թ. 25:

³⁶ A military rank in the Cossack troops which was equivalent to the rank of lieutenant colonel.

³⁷ Pyotr Abashkin (1868-1934), Russian military, Cossack, major-general.

³⁸ ՀԱԱ, ֆ. 45, ց. 1, զ. 3, թ. 33 և 34 :

³⁹ ՀԱԱ, ֆ. 45, ց. 1, զ. 3, թ. 34:

⁴⁰ It was famous from old times in the Armenian province of Turuberan for its scenic Lake Nazik beloved by Armenians.

⁴¹ Claas-Gustav-Robert Sharpantie (1858-1918), general of the Russian Army, commander of the Caucasian Cossack division.

On July 5, 1915 T. Nazarbekyan's squad made an attack in the direction of the villages Nazik and Metsk occupying the settlements. And near the village Tapavank the Cossacks captured about 500 Turkish soldiers, who they sent to Manazkert.

On their way they met Armenians miraculously saved from the Turkish-Kurdish atrocities: they were mainly from the Armenian settlements of the Mush Valley. As the General confesses, he wanted to adopt one of the orphans but the boy refused saying that he had to find his parents, and if he failed to find them alive, he would avenge the Turks⁴².

As T. Nazarbekyan writes in his Memoirs, during those days they received disturbing news that the Turks' troops had been largely supplemented and that the situation in the districts of Kop and Manazkert was alarming.

On July 8, 1915 T. Nazarbekyan received an order to retreat. On July 9, his squad left the village Kanashir and reached Tapavank. They got alarming news. Commander of the Labinsk Cossack Regiment Colonel A. Noskov⁴³ reported from the Mush Valley that 12 Turkish battalions were advancing⁴⁴. The retreat was associated with great difficulty because a large number of refugees were coming from the Mush Valley, and it was necessary to ensure their safety. T. Nazarbekyan says the following: "A lot of soldiers, in spite of the exhaustion, carried the refugees' children on their shoulders. I witnessed the following scene in Tapavank: a one-legged Armenian was asking the soldiers to save his little brothers. The Armenian soldiers readily took them. They wanted to seat him (the elder brother – R. S.) on the two-wheeled cart (transporting – R. S.) cartridges, but he categorically refused to follow them saying that he had decided to die in his house"⁴⁵.

On July 19, 1915 T. Nazarbekyan entered Arnis with the available forces from where he moved out on July 20 with a great number of refugees. He left one battalion of the 7th infantry regiment, the 1st and 2nd Armenian units, the Nerchinsk Cossack regiment and one artillery battery in Arnis and ordered to wait until the last refugees passed from Artchesh and Van.

⁴² ՀԱՍ, դ. 45, գ. 1, զ. 3, թ. 44 շրջ.:

⁴³ Alexander Noskov (1870-?), a Russian military, Cossack, colonel, commander of the 1st Labinsk Cossack regiment. In his memoirs T. Nazarbekyan communicates an important fact about those "predominant" forces. He writes: "The Labinsk Cossack cornet (I don't remember the surname) had been sent for the squad headquarters communication. Later he told the officers of my headquarters, that when on July 9 the Labinsk regiment commander was preparing a report for me from the Mush Valley, he turned to his officers and said that they had to make General F. Nazarbekov retreat. He asked how many birds there were on the tree. Somebody counted them and said - 12. Then report that from the Mush Valley 12 *taburs* (battalions - R. S.) are attacking". See ՀԱՍ, ֆ. 45, գ. 1, զ. 3, թ. 48 շրջ.-49:

⁴⁴ ՀԱՍ, ֆ. 45, գ. 1, զ. 3, թ. 48 շրջ.-49:

⁴⁵ ՀԱՍ, ֆ. 45, գ. 1, զ. 3, թ. 48:



Armenian refugees retreating from Van-Vaspurakan

In the Berkri gorge a great number of refugees had accumulated. The sight of the escape of Armenian and Assyrian refugees from Northern Persia in December, 1914, rose before the General's eyes again. They were protected by Dro's unit and the squadron of frontier guards under the command of rittmeister⁴⁶ Korolkov that had

voluntarily joined him. The soldiers and Cossacks assisted the refugees as much as they could.

On August 20, 1915 a letter by I. I. Vorontsov-Dashkov, the Caucasus army commander-in-chief, was received from the 4th Caucasian army corps headquarters, which said that General T. Nazarbekyan, as a very deserving officer of the front, had been awarded with the French military medal "Médaille militaire"⁴⁷.

At that time the command of the Caucasian army, in the person of General N. Yudenich, initiated vast secret operations in order to occupy the fortress of Erzurum (Karin). General N. Yudenich was hurrying to occupy the city as it had become known that the Allies had decided to stop the operation of occupying the straits in January, 1916. And it would give a chance to the Ottoman command to move additional forces from Dardanelles to the Russian-Turkish front, and it made N. Yudenich hasten the planned operation.



In October, 1915 T. Nazarbekyan's 2nd Caucasian infantry brigade was reorganized into the 2nd Caucasian infantry division. Commander of the 4th Caucasian army corps, General P. Oganovski, tells T. Nazarbekyan that he has presented him for the rank of lieutenant-general. But, as it turned out later, the presentation of the corps commander "disappeared" for unknown reasons. At T. Nazarbekyan's request General P. Oganovski presents him for the rank of lieutenant-general the second time, but in vain.

In his Memoirs General T. Nazarbekyan mentions military senior pastor Ruben Bekgulyants who was visiting the military units to address the spiritual needs of the Armenian soldiers. At the same time he actively assisted in moving the orphan children to the rear⁴⁸.

⁴⁶ Rank of a senior officer in the cavalry.

⁴⁷ The full name is "Médaille militaire". It was established in 1852. In its significance the medal is second only to the order "Legion of Honour".

⁴⁸ Ruben Bekgulyants (1875-1935), senior pastor.

On November 29, 1915 General T. Nazarbekyan received an order to make an attack. General Vladimir de Witte was appointed commander of the 4th Caucasian army corps.

On December 19, 1915 Commander-in-chief N. Romanov made an instruction to the troops to attempt to attract the Kurds to their side and eliminate the hostility between the Armenians and Kurds. The General T. Nazarbekyan believed that it was impossible to realize such an intention, because “the cultural level of the Kurds is at a very low level, especially that robbing and killing Christians is considered courage and pride for every Kurd”⁴⁹.

During January 1916 T. Nazarbekyan's military units carried out enhanced intelligence which became difficult due to the continuous heavy snowfall. They learnt from a captive Kurd that the enemy was retreating. General Nazarbekyan's forces managed to occupy Khnus. The Armenian volunteers also directly participated in the attack.



A quarter of the town of Mush in Taron, Western Armenia

On February 3, 1916 T. Nazarbekyan and the Armenian volunteers liberated Mush. The same day the Russian troops occupied Erzurum. This is how T. Nazarbekyan qualified that operation: “In spite of the severe weather, difficult terrain, inevitable shortage of food and the Turks' assistance from the west and south (in the fights - R. S.), after the five-day long unprecedented attack the tempered Caucasian army managed to occupy Erzurum, where was the Turkish stronghold in *Asia Minor*”⁵⁰.

⁴⁹ ՀԱԱ, ֆ. 45, ց. 1, գ. 7, թ. 22 2րդ.-23:

⁵⁰ Ancient Armenian city Karin-Erzurum was in Western Armenia, but since the headquarters of the Turkish troops from Asia Minor (which geographically is to the west of the Armenian Highland) was stationed there, so T. Nazarbekyan mentions “Asia Minor”.

Its fall was inevitable, but that it could happen so fast was a surprise to us⁵¹. Colonel Movses Silikyan (Moisey Silikov) (in the future - general), commander of the 6th regiment of the 2nd Caucasian infantry division was appointed military commandant of Erzurum.

Around 50 families had remained in Mush, among which there were Armenians as well. Most of the Armenians had been killed in the summer of 1915. Only craftsmen had been left alive. There was shortage of food in the city. The Armenian quarter of the city was almost completely destroyed. The liberation of Mush gave a chance to the Armenians who escaped the Turkish-Kurdish massacres, mainly the Armenians of Sasun, to descend to the city from the mountains.

On February 8, 1916 T. Nazarbekyan sent one battalion with two cannons and a Cossack sotnya to restrain the Kurdish attacks in the direction of Baghesh (Bitlis). They managed to destroy the Kurds and make them escape with significant losses.



General Movses Silikyan

T. Nazarbekyan received an order to send help on February 11 to General D. Abatsiev's squad which was moving from Datvan to Baghesh. On their way they had constant fights with the Kurds. The weather and the rivers and streams that had overflowed ahead of time hindered the advance as well.

On one of the bridges across the Euphrates the General met two volunteers of the 4th Armenian unit who were looking for their relatives. T. Nazarbekyan noticed that the projections of the bridge were completely red. One of the volunteers clarified that in 1915 the Turks and Kurds threw the Armenians into the river from the bridge and those who refused to obey, were beheaded. And that is where the red colour of the projections came from⁵².

On February 18, three people, the representatives of the Armenians who had remained alive in Mush visited T. Nazarbekyan. They told in detail about the Turkish-Kurdish atrocities.

During the time he was in Mush one of his subordinates, Staff-captain Krim-Shamkhalov came to T. Nazarbekyan. He reported that he had managed to gather detailed and accurate information from the Turks and Armenians about the massacre of Armenians by the Ottoman authorities. The General asked the officer to present the facts in the form of a report, which was done. Krim-Shamkhalov's report is fully presented in the General's Memoirs⁵³.

⁵¹ ՀԱԱ, ֆ. 45, ց. 1, գ. 10, թ. 7 շրջ.-8:

⁵² ՀԱԱ, ֆ. 45, ց. 1, գ. 10, թ. 17 շրջ.-18:

⁵³ ՀԱԱ, ֆ. 45, ց. 1, գ. 10, թ. 20 շրջ.-27: The report of the Staff-Captain was first published by academician M. Nersisyan (see Հայերի ցեղասպանությունը Օսմանյան կայսրությունում: Փաստաթղթերի և նյութերի ժողովածու. Կազմ.՝ Մ. Գ. Ներսիսյան, Ռ. Գ. Սահակյան, Մ. Գ. Ներսիսյան խմբ., Ե., 1991, էջ 501-504). The copy of Krim-

Two German missionaries - Alma Johansson and Bodil Bjorn witnessed the massacres of the Armenians of Mush.

In the morning of February 19 the Russian troops occupied Baghesh (Bitlis). The road leading from Mush to Baghesh was subjected to the attacks made by the Kurdish chieftain Musa bek's bandits. The General depicts Musa bek as the sworn enemy of Armenians and Christians in general⁵⁴. Mainly the servicemen of the rear units fell victim to the Kurds. The punitive groups organized several times by the Russian command had no essential effect.

The units and troops that were in Mush and in the neighbourhood were in grave conditions: there was shortage of food. The supply service could not provide the necessary food. As T. Nazarbekyan confesses he did not know what to do to provide people with food. This problem was solved by a renowned figure of the Armenian liberation movement, member of ARF Rostom (Stepan Zoryan) who was the plenipotentiary of the Caucasian department of the union of All-Russian cities. He asked the General to provide him with troops in order to look for corn in the desolate villages. T. Nazarbekyan agreed on the condition that half of the found corn would be given to the troops. The mutual agreement gave an opportunity to solve the problem of food⁵⁵.

T. Nazarbekyan recalls the atrocities which were based not only on his personal observations but also on the reports received from unit commanders. Through Ashot Atanasyan, agronomist and public figure, he sent the reports, as well as the photographs of the massacres to the American representative in Van.

The intelligence data received at the beginning of March proved that the Turks planned a large attack on Baghesh. T. Nazarbekyan decided to send there one battalion and two mountain cannons as an assisting force. At the same time Kurdish armed

Shamkhalov's report was found in Leo's personal archive of the Institute of History of NAS RA (Ֆ. 1, ց. 1, գ. 226, թ. 1-6). We managed to find the original of the Staff-Captain's report in the National Archive of RA, which was fully published (see Ռ. Սահակյան, Աշոտ Աթանասյանի գործունեությունը Արևմտյան Հայաստանի վերաշինության գործում, Բանբեր Հայաստանի արխիվների, 2007, N 1-2, էջ 37-54). During the inquiries made in the National Archive and relevant literature we managed to find some information about the person of Krim-Shamkhalov (Sokolov). In April, 1918 lieutenant colonel Krim-Shamkhalov was chief of the intelligence department of the Armenian corps. On May 12, there came updated information about the possible Turkish attack on Alexandropol. This was reported to Krim-Shamkhalov who decisively denied the received information. Moreover, on May 15, before the Turkish intrusion into Alexandropol the Lieutenant-Colonel refused to leave, giving reasons that his wife was sick, տե՛ս ՀԱԱ, ֆ. 45, ց. 1, գ. 28, թ. 101, 104. The above-mentioned makes us assume that Krim-Shakhalov was either a hidden enemy whom the Russian counterintelligence was looking for in 1915, or he had decided to go over to the Turkish side. In his memoirs Marshal of the Soviet Union S. Budyonni renders interesting information about Krim-Shamkhalov. The latter had been a Kabardinian, according to other information - a Karachay prince who had converted to Orthodoxy. S. Budyonni expresses a negative opinion about him as a person and officer. S. Budyonni had been appeared in the Military Field Court by Krim-Shamkhalov for military violation and the court had decided to sentence him to death. But the sentence had changed and the future Marshall was deprived of the award Order of St. George, 4th class (see С. М. Будённый. Пройденный путь, М., 1959, с. 13,16, 21).

⁵⁴ ՀԱԱ, ֆ. 45, ց. 1, գ. 10, թ. 35 2րդ.:

⁵⁵ ՀԱԱ, ֆ. 45, ց. 1, գ. 11, թ. 19:

groups appeared in the heights of the Mush Valley. The Russian forces managed to parry the enemy's attack and start counterattack. The 1st Armenian unit stood out in the fights. On May 15, the unit was ordered to pass to Baghesh to strengthen the defense there.

On March 16, the fights for Baghesh continued on the same scale. In their reports the unit commanders once again mentioned about the good armament and combat readiness of the enemy, as well as about the constant Turkish attacks. However, the Russian forces continued to keep their positions not letting the Turkish-Kurdish forces advance.

On March 25, T. Nazarbekyan received a report which said that the Turks had started to attack. It was inferred from their actions that they wanted to bypass the Russian defense wings and separate Baghesh from Mush. The Kurds became more active in their actions.

On March 26, the Turkish-Kurdish attack went on. The enemy managed to advance more and more in the Russian defense wings. The situation became threatening. General T. Nazarbekyan sent his last two battalions to the defense troops. Worried by the created situation, on March 29 the General moved towards Baghesh. On their way they met refugees of Sasun, exceptionally women and children. They were walking in ragged clothes. It deeply moved T. Nazarbekyan. He recalls: "I wanted so much to encourage them in their mother tongue (our mother tongue, i.e. Armenian - R.S.) but to my shame I was able to do it only mentally, as I did not know my mother tongue to the degree to realize my wish personally"⁵⁶.

T. Nazarbekyan received encouraging news - Baghesh had managed to resist thanks to the three battalions he had sent. They had managed to encircle one of the Turkish units, defeat and capture about 500 soldiers and officers and machine guns⁵⁷.

In the morning in Baghesh T. Nazarbekyan witnessed a shocking incident: about 50 naked Russian soldiers were running down the mountains. It turned out they had been captured by the Kurds who had feasted all night. They had brought a great number of young Armenian girls and treated them with terrifying violence and then they had undressed the Russian soldiers and started to shoot at them. Some of them had managed to escape⁵⁸.

On March 31, the corps commander and T. Nazarbekyan reached Baghesh. On April 1, T. Nazarbekyan and colonel Obratzov, commander of the Baghesh squad, studied the positions. The same day assistant forces came to Baghesh; the 3rd Armenian unit under Hamazasp's (Srvandztyan) command was among them. Owing to all this significant forces accumulated in Baghesh which created a great chance to counterattack the enemy and occupy the heights dominating over the city but the commander of the 4th Caucasian Army corps, General de Witte did not even consider it

⁵⁶ ՀԱԱ, ֆ. 45, գ. 1, զ. 12, թ. 19 և 202.

⁵⁷ ՀԱԱ, ֆ. 45, գ. 1, զ. 12, թ. 23:

⁵⁸ ՀԱԱ, ֆ. 45, գ. 1, զ. 12, թ. 24:

necessary to answer the suggestion. The latter appointed T. Nazarbekyan as commander of the Baghesh squad, ordering him to protect the city.

On April 6, T. Nazarbekyan, his chief of headquarters and the officer of the field engineer service studied the terrain and decided where to build the defense positions. Both the servicemen and the able-bodied population were included in this work⁵⁹. At this part General T. Nazarbekyan's Memoirs ended.

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

⁵⁹ In the Russian-Turkish front the Russian forces had managed to destroy completely the enemy. In 1917 preparations were made to occupy Constantinople but as a result of overturning the Provisional Government and coming into power of Bolsheviks (in October) all the efforts were dashed. The Russian Army started to leave the front. The Armenians were left almost alone against the Turkish forces. It was necessary to organize a regular army to resist the enemy. T. Nazarbekyan was among the Armenian and Russian officers who stayed in Armenia and initiated the organization of the Armenian Army together with his supporters. The Armenian military showed its fighting efficiency during the May heroic battles of 1918 when the enemy's advance was restrained and the last remains of the Armenians were saved from total annihilation, and on May 28 was proclaimed the Republic of Armenia. General T. Nazarbekyan had his serious contribution in this. He occupied different command posts in RA. On December 2, 1920, after the establishment of the Soviet power in Armenia T. Nazarbekyan and several hundred officers were unfairly arrested. The General was sent to Moscow, the Butyrka prison and then to the concentration camp of Ryazan. Upon returning the General established himself in Tbilisi. He kept body and soul together with the help of the food given by the American Committee for Relief in the Near East. The General was sick and was not able to move about. The Soviet authorities of Georgia had refused to appoint him a pension, giving reasons that during the war T. Nazarbekyan had not been wounded. In August, 1928 they even threatened to throw him out of the house⁵⁹. The renowned Armenian General T. Nazarbekyan died living in difficult conditions. After the collapse of the USSR and the restoration of Armenia's independence a lot of good names of Armenian soldiers were restored, including that of T. Nazarbekyan. One of the quarters of Yerevan was named after him and a military medal was established by the Ministry of Defense of RA.