

HAYTOUG

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE ARMENIAN YOUTH FEDERATION WESTERN UNITED STATES
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EDITORIAL

Throughout our history, the life of the Armenian soldier has been one of difficulty and resilience. From Avarayr to Sardarabad to Shushi, our heroes have fought and defended our very existence. They have fought with the ideal that no Armenian should be oppressed and no Armenian land should be occupied. Warriors defended our culture and religion for centuries, fedaysi rescued countless lives and organized resistance during the genocide, volunteers fought for liberation in Artsakh, and throughout all the struggles have proven that no force, no matter how great or malevolent, can defeat principle and determination.

Today, with socio-economic troubles compounded by physical injuries, the state of our freedom fighters from yesterday is in need of change. Many have been left without the healthcare they desperately need while the government

looks away. They are often times kept jobless because the injuries they sustained in the Artsakh war have left them handicapped. All while a government who was founded on their sacrifice offers little to nothing in terms of the care they need. The current struggle of our servicemen and women has left a deep stain among the Armenian nation. Today, more than ever, we must stand with our soldiers.

We must make sure that the Armenia they struggled to defend is governed by the ideals that have existed for millennia. Those who served are the embodiment of freedom, honor, and sacrifice.

Our nation cannot survive and thrive when the most honorable among us have been cast aside into the shadows, neglected and even killed. Stories of injured veterans of the Artsakh liberation movement, to stories of crimes against

current servicemen, to the tragic murder of Vahe Avetyan at the hands of an oligarch's henchmen paint a worrisome picture of the treatment of our nation's brave men and women.

With Azerbaijan hinting at war on a regular basis, glorifying an ax-murderer and continually violating the ceasefire, there is no better time than now to loudly proclaim that we stand with our freedom fighters.

We must be soldiers for our soldiers. We must be soldiers for our cause and our nation. Yet our fights are not confined to a battle field but rather against those who try to tarnish everything our heroes have fought to defend. There is no question that the new generation stands ready to defeat any of our nation's enemies, both external and internal.



WITH OUR

The Armenian Youth Federation has proclaimed 2012 as the Year of the Armenian Freedom Fighter. The AYF Western Region Chairperson, David Arakelyan, explains the reasons behind that decision and shares his experiences of interactions with azadamardiks in Armenia.

The history of our people is a tale of survival and victory against great odds and powerful enemies. From Vartanank to Sardarabad, the Armenian people have shown that our determination to live on the land of our ancestors cannot be shaken even by the mightiest of the foes. Over the course of the centuries, we have had to prove that determination to those who aimed to destroy our culture and our country. Most recently, an existential struggle was waged for the

liberation of Artsakh, which was able to defend itself through the tremendous sacrifice of its people and the uncompromising stand of Armenians worldwide against the genocidal policy of the Azeri government.

This year, we are marking the 20th anniversary of the Liberation of Shushi, perhaps the most important victory of the war, which ultimately enabled the independence of Artsakh and ensured the survival of its people.

Shushi was the new Vartanank, the new Sardarabad for the generation of our parents and it stands as one of the most glorious pages of the Artsakh Liberation struggle. Every year in May, the celebratory parades in Yerevan and Stepanakert mark this important victory and send a clear message to our enemies that our military - the only guarantee of our existence - is capable of defending our country and our people.



SOLDIERS

What remains in the backdrop of the military fanfare and the loud speeches of government officials are the stories of those who fought and bled for the liberation of Artsakh. With all the pride that the Armenian political establishment takes in the victory in this war, these same politicians have failed to take proper care of those who risked their lives and sacrificed their health to give us a free Artsakh. Obviously, this is not the only area where the efforts of our government have not been sufficient to address the existing problems. But from the many stories of neglect and betrayal by the state, the story of our freedom fighters is the most embarrassing and painful one.

This state of affairs is especially dangerous given the ongoing

ceasefire violations by Azerbaijan and the constant threat of renewed hostilities. The recent events on the border prove that we must have a strong military with high morale in order to ensure the security of Armenia and Artsakh. That, in turn, requires having a society where

those who protect our country have the respect they deserve and receive the treatments they need for wartime wounds and injuries. Without that, our ability to respond to another possible aggression from Azerbaijan significantly weakens, exposing our country to new threats and new dangers. And we know all too well that a failure to properly defend our borders will have detrimental consequences for our people and our statehood.

Under these circumstances, the Armenian youth has an important role to play in filling the void left by the government. We are the generation that enjoys an independent Armenia and a free Artsakh, which would not have been possible without the sacrifice of our freedom fighters. It is our turn to rise to the oc-





casion and honor these heroes, tell their stories, learn from their deeds and help them in their time of need. We should not forget that these guys were not much older than we are (and many were even younger) when they left their homes and took up arms to protect our country. They have had to live with the consequences of that decision ever since, having been deprived of many things that the rest of us take for granted. Showing appreciation and support is the least we can do for those who have sacrificed so much for us.

That is the main reason why the Armenian Youth Federation has proclaimed 2012 as the Year of the Armenian Freedom Fighter. During the course of the year, we have organized a number of events to educate the public about the problems faced by the azadamardiks and to raise funds to assist them in solving their health issues. What we have accomplished so far, though significant, is not sufficient to make the impact we want to make on the lives of freedom fighters in Armenia and Artsakh. This is an issue that should concern not

just the AYF, but all Armenians, in the homeland and in the Diaspora alike, and I encourage everyone who is reading these words to join the effort and become a part of the solution to those problems.

The fact that those problems exist and they are deep and serious became very obvious to me when I visited Armenia earlier this year. This short trip - the first one I took since leaving Armenia 20 years ago - left a lasting impact on me and reinforced the urgency and the importance of this campaign. The people I met - the individuals who helped our nation in the time of need - are now in need of help themselves, some confined to a wheelchair, others unable to see due to severe eye injuries and many others incapable of finding work because of various health impairments. As most of Armenia's population, these men (and women) live in homes built during the Soviet era which have not seen any repairs since the country became independent. Many have no jobs and the ongoing economic problems are compounded by the physical pain from injuries and

the unbearable red tape that makes getting medical help through government programs nearly impossible.

I vividly remember the trip to Hrazdan (in the Kotayk province) to visit Armen Begyan, a young man in his late 30's who was just 19 years old when he joined the newly formed Armenian Armed Forces and went to the front lines. Having fought in Karvajar and Mardakert, Armen was wounded and spent a long time in snow and cold prior to being rescued by his fellow soldiers. As a result, he lost mobility in both of his legs and is now confined to a wheelchair. I found him and the remaining three members of his family in the living room of his small apartment. The family cannot afford to heat the entire home, so they eat, sleep and live in that one room. Armen needs expensive treatments and post-surgery rehabilitation, but obviously cannot afford any of that: his monthly pension is barely enough to cover the cost of food.

Even in his situation, the proud soldier is not asking for charity. I was surprised to hear that he actually

wants to get a special car, which he can use to work and take care of both his family and his medical needs. It is a shame that he has not been given this opportunity by his own country, but we have taken on his cause and want to help this azadamardik become an independent member of the society, something which is very challenging in Armenia for people with mobility issues and something that Armen wants more than anything else.

In the city of Charentsavan, I met Hamlet Vartanian. He is known by everyone in the small town because of the deformation of the eye (a scary picture) that was caused by the war-time wounds. In 1993, he was actually treated for leg injury and got a blood infection as a result of the unscrupulous 'care,' which caused a damage in his nerve and resulted in the shift of the pupil of his eye. The condition is not only uncomfortable since Hamlet lives in constant pain and under the close scrutiny of the local kids, but also dangerous for his overall health. He has waited for 15 years to start living a normal life, to have a family and build a better future for him and his mother. That will not be possible unless we all show our support to this azadmardik.

I had a particularly inspiring encounter with a man named Mikayel Apresian, who was a commander of the 'Artsakh' military unit during the war. When I walked into his small one-bedroom apartment in the suburb of Yerevan, a gray-haired man in his 70's (or so it seemed; in fact, he was only 57) slowly approached me, breathing heavily and with great difficulty. Mikayel had a distinguished military career, and in both his actions and his speech, one could see the once charismatic commander who led his men towards many victories. I spent a long time talking to him about the war, his comrades, and his life since he retired. Mikayel did not want to talk about his condition, which, as I found out, was already hopeless: he had been diagnosed with cancer. With a weak voice interrupted with severe coughs, he told me some of the most memorable stories I heard

during my trip. Towards the end of our conversation, his friend asked for help in paying for Mikayel's chemotherapy. Unfortunately, the cancer had spread too far and wide by then, and it was too late to stop its destructive work. Mikayel Apresian passed away shortly after my return to the US.

Mikayel's death is a testament to the urgency of the situation. Our freedom fighters have endured enough in the battlefield and they deserve a better treatment from all of us. Most of them, unwilling to discuss their medical needs, were more concerned (or

and admiration that I developed towards these individuals during the course of my visit. At the end of our interviews, I asked each of them whether they would choose to do the same thing if they had a chance to go back in time. The answer that I invariably received was a unanimous and an unwavering 'Yes.' Despite the years of neglect, pain, suffering, and deprivation these people are still the soldiers that our nation can count on in the time of need. They are not just a part of the story of our glorious past; they can and will be the writers of the story of our future.



as it seemed to me, disappointed) by the simple lack of attention from the authorities and the public at large. They neither complain about their conditions nor demand too much from people around them. More often than not, we use this modesty as an excuse to ignore their needs until one day it is too late to do anything. As an Armenian, I am ashamed that we have to deal with these problems a generation after the war, but I also know that if we do not do something about this issue today, tomorrow might be too late.

The last thing I wanted to share about my trip is the deep feeling of respect

It is up to all of us, me and you, to help them write that story. We owe it to them and to ourselves to give these people the chance to have normal lives as a way of expressing our deep gratitude for their service to our nation and the gift that they have given to our generation – the gift of a free and independent Artsakh. That gift must be cherished and preserved so that we can add new victories to the liberation of Artsakh and make our shared dream of a free, independent and united Armenia a reality in our lifetime.

David Arakelyan



WOMEN'S STRUGGLE

IN THE ARTSAKH WAR

In all societies, the **discrimination** women experience during and after armed conflict stems from a traditional understanding of gender roles. The Armenian society, deeply entrenched in **patriarchy**, is no different. The perception of women as nurses, wives and mothers is the norm, whereas men are cast as **aggressors** and soldiers. Although **women** in the struggle for Artsakh's **liberation** originally entered the war effort as nurses, it wasn't long before many of them grew impatient of their limited roles and began to take up arms.

Varduhi Gevorgyan, who was awarded with the Battle Cross Medal for her participation in the war, said:

"I swore on the grave of my first commander and a good friend of mine from childhood that Karabakh [Artsakh] will be freed. Our people must live in peace. Back then, Gayane Arakelyan and I spoke to Arkady Ter-Tadevosyan asking his permission to create a female unit. After receiving approval, we posted the announcement. A few days later, we already had twenty-eight volunteers. Eighteen of them were sent to a training center, and eight girls were ready to go into battle.

Now, we can proudly say that the female unit was not inferior to the male unit in any sense; sometimes we even surpassed them. Sometimes, they wanted to be like us."

Women who wanted to join their male compatriots in the trenches met resistance. Men wouldn't allow them to join fighting units and tried to convince them not to fight. Garineh Danielyan, a freedom fighter, explained that although the men tried to convince her, to stay at home she wouldn't budge. She was so stubborn that they eventually had

no choice but to accept her. She said, "At first, I was the only female in our group; I didn't know there was a woman's group in the city. Later, when they came to Shushi, we joined forces. It's one thing when you're alone with men, it's another when there are women with you."

During this time, women fell victim to corruption and bribery, solely based on their gender. Anoush Ter-Taulian, a diasporan Armenian living in Artsakh since 1994, recounted the stories of young women who gained or retained posts in return for giving in to the sexual advances of army leaders and generals. Others, on the other hand, were forcibly summoned to a newly-built mansion to face severe punishments for refusing these advances. In one case, an entire family from Martakert fled Artsakh to avoid the consequences of refusal.

Gen. Samvel Babayan, Karabakh's Defense Minister and Commander-in-Chief (1994-2000), is the man responsible for these developments and credited with provoking a culture of machismo and corruption in the military. As a result, women's efforts to break down barriers and achieve gender equality— during and after the war —were threatened.

History often fails to recognize the contributions of women. Women who have exercised power, determined the course of events, and fought for our rights and our peoples are often forgotten. Women's roles in the war should be honored and particularly respected due to all the hardships they faced as a result of their courage. Just like their male counterparts, they too had the next generation in mind when risking their lives for their homeland. We must now ask ourselves – what have we done and what will we do to carry on the legacy of women like Varduhi Gevorgyan, Gayane Arakelyan, Garineh Danielyan, or Anoush Ter-Taulian?

Nora Kayserian

Danielyan, G. (2008). Personal interview with T. Aghabekyan.

Kasbarian, A. (2001). Challenging the Order or Reconfirming It? Reflections on Nationalism and Gender in the NagornoKarabakh Self-Determination Movement, 1988-1995. Doctoral Dissertation, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey.

Ter-Taulian, A. (2001, January). Personal interview with A. Kasbarian.



That Which is Worth Fighting For:

An Interview with Roger Kupelian

HAYTOUG: Can you tell us a little about Fugitive Studios? What exactly does it work on and how did it come about?

ROGER KUPELIAN: Fugitive Studios Entertainment is a production company and Invader Digital Visual Effects is the visual effects arm. They have different mission statements but converge when the time is right.

H: A good segment of the stories and projects you have worked on deal with themes of armed conflict and fighting for freedom. What fundamentally draws you to tell such stories?

R.K.: Just my background. Every country of my childhood ended up mired in civil war or open conflict: Sierra Leone, Lebanon, Ancient and Soviet Armenia etc. Also, the best and worst of people comes out during conflict, which heightens the drama in storytelling. It's what I have seen and experienced but, thankfully, it has not scarred me beyond what art can't repair.

H: In 1994, you traveled to the frontlines of the war in Artsakh and documented the story of men and women who put their lives on the line to liberate their homeland. What was that experience

like and what drove you to such lengths to document what was going on there?

R.K.: I just needed to see for myself what was going on. It was my last year of college and I sold my film equipment and bought the latest video camera for the trip. My family's historic experiences had something to do with it too. (One grandpa was a fedayeen and the other a photographer, at the time of the Medz Yeghern). Bottom line, I saw a lot of lip service and very few people actually willing to help. That's as true today as it was then, by the way.



H: Having spent time directly in the trenches with the freedom fighters of Artsakh, how important would you say it is for the community to stand by the side of our soldiers, whether during times of combat or peace?

R.K.: Very important. They walk our talk. It's that simple. We complain of all these little silly things and they have dealt with some big things, and it only takes a trip down to that region to see its importance.

H: In your latest project, East of Byzantium, you delve into late antiquity with the historic "Battle of Avarayr" and developments surrounding Armenia's struggle to survive as the first Christian nation. What are some of the main lessons from this historic battle that stand out to you and what do you think we can draw on as a people today?

R.K.: Always surrounded, but holding our ground. Faith, hope and respect for our ancestors. But more than that, learning from the past to inform the present. Even with all the debates around some of the facts of Avarayr, the basic story of how they persevered against all odds and finally got what they wanted from the Persians (and

their countrymen) is crucial. Some feel those stories are more legendary than factual but then again, legends are more valuable to a culture than mere facts that inspire nothing. Legends and Myths are based on facts, and they embody Truths.

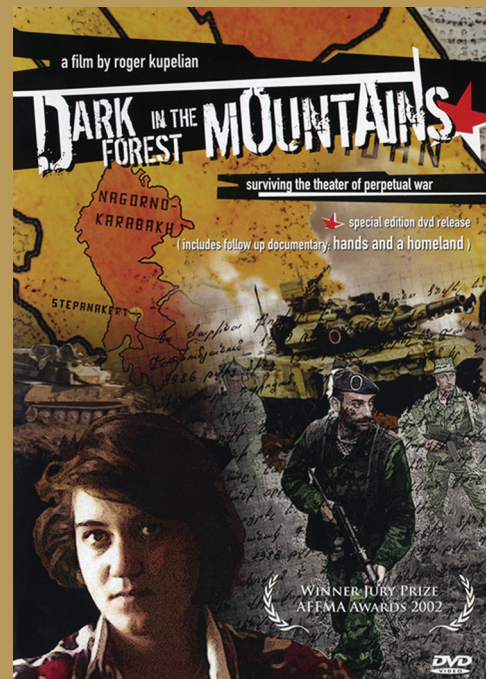
H: Where does the East of Byzantium project currently stand? Can you tell us about any recent developments?

R.K.: The first graphic novel, WAR GODS, is rolling out and the project as a whole is involved in the recent Mel Gibson developments.

H: Where can people go to find out more about your work and show their support?

R.K.: They can hit rogerkupelian.com and also like East of Byzantium on Facebook. Also our www.eastofbyzantium.com site is being revamped with addresses of stores that are selling the book.

H: Is there anything you would like to add or speak on regarding your work or this issue's theme of the freedom fighter that we didn't address in these questions?



R.K.: Being someone who is ready to sacrifice for the freedom of your own tribe should extend to the freedom of every tribe. I've lived in many places around this planet, and the human need for freedom, connection, and self-worth and dignity is a common value. Any jackass can shoot a gun, but a system of values around which you are ready to sacrifice is a lifestyle that builds character. And oh yes, keep your sense of humor.



Read. Connect. Engage.

HAYTOUG.ORG



TO THOSE WHO WITH THEIR DARING LIVES MOCKED THE GRIM DEATH AND PROUDLY RADIATED LIGHT ON OUR BLACKENED LIVES

It was you, who on the thistly and crimson road towards freedom, turned into reality our most admirable and daring dreams.

It was you, who from the peaks of behemoth, defiant cliffs plunged into the people's suffering sea which was swollen and boiling with storm under your feet.

It was you, who in times of oppression and suffocating panic in the dark, illuminated the path for the confused and abandoned souls with the shine of your ardent eyes.

Glory, to you.

In the midst of the superb division and colossal battle, on your open and pale foreheads hung the hopeful gaze of the deprived, the unfortunate.

Your iron martial vigor disturbed the malice, foolish keystone and aroused the emotion of freedom on tortured souls.

And now, O excellent, oath taken giants, kneeling before the altar of Freedom, I offer you your blood-stained dreams.

And to you, anonymous and missing warriors, heroes fallen in the

quiet forests and dreary pits of the valleys, whose last lament was lost within the storm, whose bones the soil is now absorbing with a sob.

To you all, with tears of worship and admiration, to that bloodied ideology that numerous generations have embraced with fondness and now thanks to you lustrously shines on our bleak horizon.

Glory, to you.

Avedis Aharonian

On the Road to Freedom

Translation by Sanan Haroun

ՆՐԱՆՑ՝ ՈՐՈՆՔ ԽԻՉԱԽ ՈՐՈՆՔ ԽԻՉԱԽ ԿԵԱՆՔՈՎ ԽԻՉԱԽ ԿԵԱՆՔՈՎ ԴԱԺԱՆ ԿԵԱՆՔՈՎ ԴԱԺԱՆ ՄԱՅԸ ԴԱԺԱՆ ՄԱՅԸ ՅԵԳՆԵՑԻՆ ՄԱՅԸ ՅԵԳՆԵՑԻՆ ԵՒ ՅՊԱՐՏ ՅԵԳՆԵՑԻՆ ԵՒ ՅՊԱՐՏ ԵՒ ՅՊԱՐՏ ՄԱՅՈՎ ՄԵՐ ՍԵՒ ՄԱՅՈՎ ՄԵՐ ՍԵՒ ԿԵԱՆՔԻՆ ՄԵՐ ՍԵՒ ԿԵԱՆՔԻՆ ՓԱՅԼ ԿԵԱՆՔԻՆ ՓԱՅԼ ՏՈՒԻՆ ՓԱՅԼ ՏՈՒԻՆ

Դուք էիք՝ որ Ազատութեան տատասկոտ ճանապարհին ցաւոտ ու բոսոր մշուշի մէջ ամենից մեր գեղեցիկ, ամենից խիզախ երազները հիւսեցիք:

Դուք էիք՝ որ ըմբոստութեան ժայռերի բարձրութիւնից գահալէժ՝ նետուեցիք ժողովրդի մեծ տառապանքի ծովը, որ ուռած ու մրկածուփ եռում էր Ձեր ոտների տակ:

Դուք էիք՝ որ բռնութեան ու արհաւիրքի խեղդող խաւարի մէջ Ձեր բոցավառ աչքերի փայլով մոլորուած ու լքուած հոգիների ուղիները լուսաւորեցիք:

Փա՛ռք Ձեզ:

Հոյակապ բաշխումների ու

հսկայական պայթարի մէջ Ձեր բաց ու գունատ ճակատներին կախուած մնացին բոլոր զրկուածների, բոլոր դժբախտների յուսացող հայեացքները:

Ձեր երկաթ բազուկների գոռ հարուածները չարիքի խօլ կամարները դղրդեցին եւ տանջուած հոգիների մէջ ազատութեան յոյզերը փոթորկեցին:

Եւ այժմ՝ ճվ հոյակապ, ուխտուած հսկաներ, Ազատութեան խորանի առաջ ծնրադիր՝ Ձեզ եմ նուիրում Ձեր արիւնով ցողուած այս կարմիր երազները:

Եւ Ձեզ, ճվ անանուն ու կորած մարտիկներ, լուռ անտառներում եւ մռայլ ձորերում ընկած հերոսներ, որոնց վերջին

հառաչանքները մրրիկների հետ եւ տարւում, որոնց ոսկորները հողմերն են լիզում հեծեծալով:

Ձեզ բոլորիդ, պաշտամունքի եւ հիացմունքի արցունքով եւ Ձեզնով այս վսեմ, այն արիւնաներկ Գաղափարին, որին այնքան սերունդներ փարել են խանդաղատանքով եւ որ ահա Ձեր շնորհիւ փայլփլում է մեր մռայլ հորիզոնի վրայ:

Փա՛ռք Ձեզ:

Աւետիս Ահարոնեան

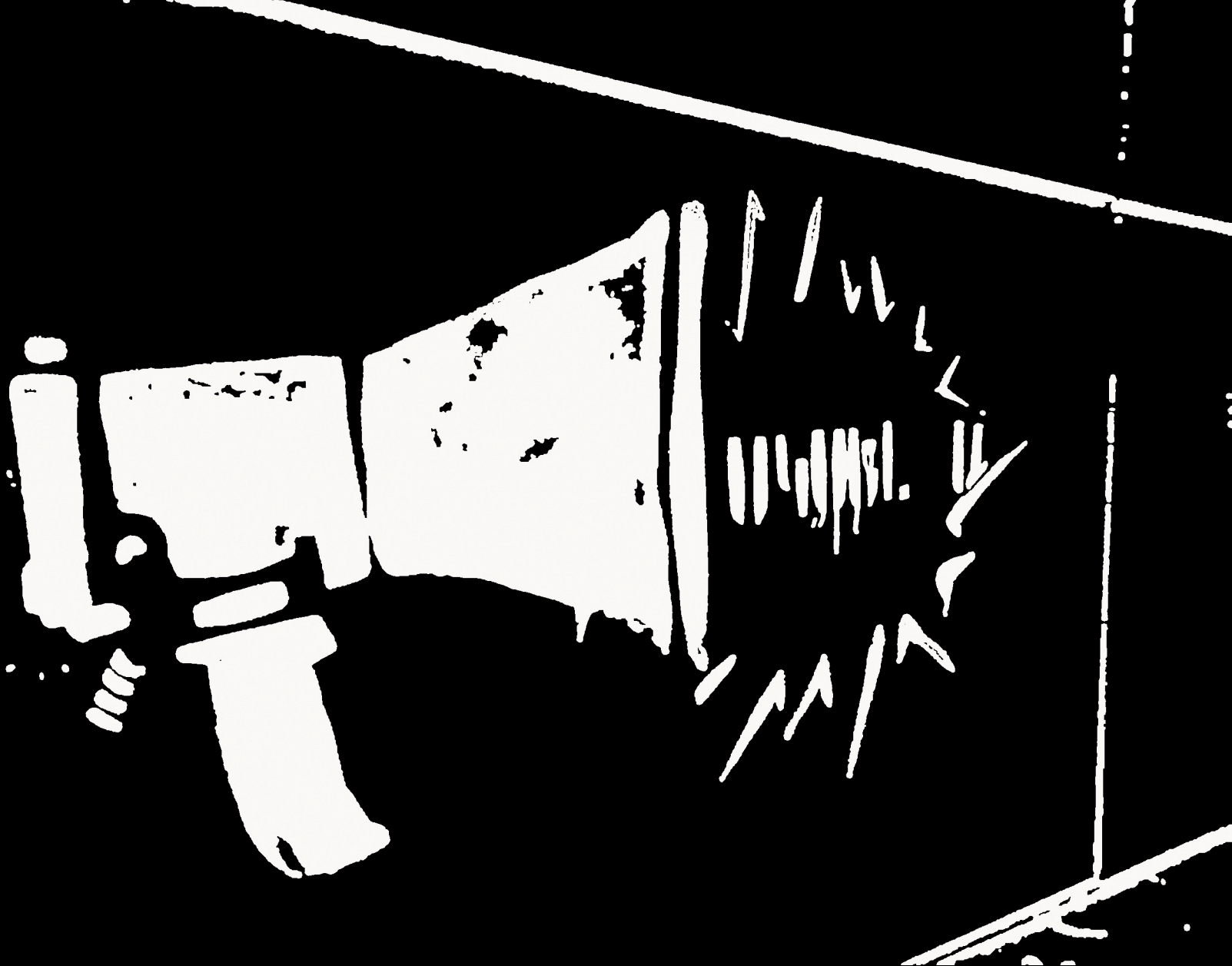
Ազատութեան
ճանապարհին

STAND



SN FILM





FIGHTING A COLD WAR

ON BEING A SOLDIER DURING PEACETIME

Most of us will not give the ultimate sacrifice for our country. The reasons we give to not join the armed forces will vary in validity, but a time will always come when some of us are forced into physical conflict for the sake of others. During those sad and unfortunate times when might makes right, pens become less valuable and history is written in blood. Yet, the times after war and tragedy are precisely when great philosophies are forged, during the aftermath and digestion of what has occurred.

“I HAVE NOT PARTICIPATED IN ANY FIGHTS, BUT I HAVE NEVER IN MY LIFE TAKEN HALF A STEP THAT HASN'T BROUGHT ME TO YOU, I START AND END WITH YOU, LIKE A CIRCLE.”

— PARUYR SEVAK

The time that followed the culmination of WWII saw a revival and evolution of many philosophies: Jean Paul Sartre brought the rebirth of existentialism; J. Robert Oppenheimer saw himself “become death” after his work on the Manhattan Project; the Geneva Conventions sought to have humane wars in the future (if such things exist); and, of course, the Cold War was born.

Today, Armenia seems to beg for a renaissance and a revolution. The country has been independent for over twenty years and, aside from the Artsakh War, the greatest threats to our nation have come from within. The Armenian people have slowly allowed an oligarchy to take control — an oligarchy that no longer feels the need to even mask itself as a democracy. An authoritative government that preaches democracy yet does whatever it wants is a government that fears the power of the people. Armenian politicians no longer have that fear because even the greatest philosopher cannot overcome tank shells and bullets. The people's responsibility is to stay involved in government and create an atmosphere that welcomes critical discourse, debate and conflict. Kings are mortal, but ideas are not.

The enthusiasm and nationalism that we have seen in America through Armenian

Students' Associations, the Armenian National Committee of America, the Armenian Youth Federation and other organizations is very motivating — yet most of the American-Armenian population is out of the loop and apathetic to the current and future welfare of Armenia. The community leaders in America and in Armenia must nurture an active populace and a rich marketplace of ideas. We must elect officials unafraid of being wrong — officials who are not conservative or reluctant to change because of their ego and image to uphold. In our search for the truth, we must not forget that we can only seek it and never possess it. We must humbly defend our opinions with the knowledge that we may be wrong. Above all, we must respect others who seek to find the truth, and distrust all who claim to have found it.

We as a people are not unique in our challenges. Countless other societies have been conquered, enslaved and discriminated against. We are not unique, but that does not diminish the amount of blood and suffering our ancestors have endured for us to still be here. The thought of losing all feeling provokes a great deal of emotion, because to lose life is to pay the highest price. And to learn nothing from those who gave all to death and abandon our memories of them is to commit treason against

humanity. On the cosmic scale, all human drama, tragedy and conflict seems petty and anthropocentric. In 1969, we went to the moon and discovered the Earth, yet on our pale blue dot we continued to kill for our imperfect thoughts and opinions on life. We must not forget that we are humans first and Armenians second, although humans have not yet collectively evolved to care about one another globally. Our genes are most common within family first, culture second and finally in people from other ethnicities. Charity starts at home, and so our most precious and grueling fights must come from within.

The ways in which you choose to serve our culture are many, but to do so is imperative. A stagnant culture is built from stagnant individuals who resist change because of fear, bigotry and ignorance. Paruyr Sevak, speaking of Armenia, once said “I have not participated in any fights, but I have never in my life taken half a step that hasn't brought me to you, I start and end with you, like a circle.” The resources are in front of us and the demand for bright ideas is strong; all that needs to be done is to start walking towards the truth — while never forgetting road we travelled.

Hovhanness Mkhitarian



An Insult to Service:

Continued Abuse in Armenia's Military

Of the 228 Armenian soldiers who died between 2007 and 2011, only 32 were killed as a result of ceasefire violations on the frontline with Azerbaijan. The remaining 196 were non-combat deaths, largely a result of hazing, bullying and human rights abuses within Armenia's military.

Let that sink in for a moment.

For all we say about Azerbaijan to the east and Turkey to the west, today's biggest threat to the lives of Armenian soldiers may, in fact, be us.

Although this problem has plagued the Armed Forces of Armenia since its formation 19 years ago, human rights abuses within the world of the military have especially been a topic of media scrutiny since the summer of 2010, when within the span of two months almost 10 soldiers died in non-combat related shootings.

Military officials called it a suicide when Lieutenant Artak Nazarian turned up dead in the July of 2010. Nazarian's family, on the other hand, heatedly claimed that their son was either murdered or driven to suicide by abuses. Forensic reports came back showing Nazarian had suffered injuries on his face and body hours before his death. On July 28 of that same year, a soldier stationed in Karabakh went on a shooting spree killing two lieutenants, three privates and, finally, himself. Shortly after, on August 17, Junior Sergeant Haroutiun Vardanian shot Junior Sergeant Arsen Chobanian.

When Vartan Seviaan was found dead in a southeastern Armenian military unit during the August of 2011, military officials claimed that he had committed suicide after finding out his girlfriend had married another man. Seviaan's family said he did not even have a girlfriend, and that he had

complained to them about being harassed by one of his officers shortly before the alleged suicide.

Earlier this year, Paylak Shahnazarian was killed in a Kabarakh military base by Khachatour Sargsyan, after Shahnazarian reportedly cursed at Sargsyan for hazing him in his sleep with toothpaste.

Despite all of these senseless murders, Seyran Ohanian, Armenia's current Defense Minister, believes he is doing a fine job of improving human rights conditions in the army.

Since his appointment to the position in 2008, he has set up a board of human rights activists, doctors, and psychologists to critically assessed the way soldiers are treated and has arrested dozens of officers in abuse cases. The Defense Minister and his aides argue that the fact that they are

even criminally pursuing or arresting perpetrators of abuse is a huge step forward compared to past administrations. They add that the numbers of non-combat deaths are actually decreasing.

The families of these dead soldiers and human rights activists are far from impressed. Human Rights Watch's 2012 World Report and the United Nation's 2012 Human Rights Committee report both cited military abuses in their assessments of ongoing problems within Armenia. Human rights advocates claim the Defense Ministry is not doing enough to prevent the root causes of these problems and are putting pressure on Armenia's government to reform the military.

Artur Sakunts, head of the Vanatdzor office of human rights group Helsinki Citizens Assembly, told reporters in January, "While the Ministry of Defense invested significant resources to redress the situation, we still do not see any real change. They haven't become transparent, the level of secrecy remains the same, alerts about corruption risks are not considered duly, and so on."

Dedovshchina, Censored Critique and What's at Stake

Dedovshchina, or "the grandfather system," is considered by many as the root cause of ongoing abuses in Armenia's Armed Forces. Although most armies have newer recruits, *dedovshchina* became an extreme system of ritualized bullying in the Soviet military that came out of the 1960s and was practiced in Armenia's Soviet army.

Under *dedovshchina*, conscripts are split into ranks depending on their length of service. New soldiers are subject to orders and humiliation by the oldest ranking soldiers, known as "grandfathers." Many suffered intense beatings by "grandfathers," which sometimes resulted in death. For some young soldiers, *dedovshchina* became too intense to handle, causing them to mutilate themselves or commit suicide □ a story that sounds all too familiar.

Issues such as these, which unnecessarily make life unbearable for the soldiers dedicating their lives to Armenia, need to be discussed openly in the public to truly be confronted. However, the military has traditionally been secretive about its



practices and encourages a taboo on criticism. Voices of dissent are often cast as treacherous, given that Armenia's volatile neighbors create a fundamental need for a strong military.

A major shift to the military's censorship came in September of 2010 when a Youtube video surfaced, recorded on a cell phone, showing an army officer abusing two young conscripts. In the video, a pot-bellied officer, whose back is to the camera, pulls the first soldier -- hardly 18-years old -- by the ear and begins to repeatedly slap him across the face. The soldier silently takes the abuse, while the second young soldier submissively stares at the ground, reluctantly waiting for his turn to be beaten. The video added to the growing outrage over the non-combat deaths and challenged the taboo on critique of the military.

But this tide of public discourse is being stifled again by the government and military establishment. Hovhannes Ishkhanian, a 24-year old author living in Yerevan, is currently under official investigation and faces 2 years of jail time for three stories he published in his latest book. The stories, which have prompted numbers of Yerevan book stores to pull his work from their shelves, allegedly defame the military. The stories in question deal with the two years he spent in the army, describing what a terrible, lonely and depressing place it can be for a young conscript...

Silencing dissent is not going to solve the military's problems. Though they point the

finger of treason at all individuals brave enough to speak out against these human rights abuses, the military establishment is the true traitor to Armenia for allowing these conditions to exist and to persist.

With Karabakh's peace mediation efforts by the international community entering its umpteenth year of stalemate, and Azerbaijan's war rhetoric increasing as fast as its military budget, the unfortunate reality is that Armenia is far from a future of assured peace and stability. The reason Armenia won the war against Azerbaijan was because the army was united, passionate and ready to fight for its lands. The grim truth is that if these non-combat deaths continue and the military refuses to enact serious reforms to combat this internal war, then there is no way an army full of demoralized, harassed and abused soldiers will win a war against anyone else.

Razmig Sarkissian

Sources: Gayane Abrahamyan of Eurasia.net; Rodric Braithwaite of Open Democracy Russia; Irina Hovanissian, Suren Musayelyan and Naira Bulghadarian of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty; and Armenia Now.

The mentioned Youtube video can be found under the title, "Բանակի իրական դեմքը".

A RIDDLE WRAPPED IN AN ENIGMA MAKING SENSE OF THE NAGORNO-KARABAKH IMBROGLIO

On February 20, 1988, the regional soviet (council) of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast' (NKAO) adopted the following resolution:

Welcoming the wishes of the workers of the Nagorny Karabakh Autonomous Region to request the Supreme Soviets of the Azerbaijani SSR and the Armenian SSR to display a feeling of deep understanding of the aspirations of the Armenian population of Nagorny Karabakh and to resolve the question of transferring the Nagorny Karabakh Autonomous Region from the Azerbaijani SSR to the Armenian SSR, at the same time to intercede with the Supreme Soviet of the USSR to reach a positive resolution on the issue of transferring the region from the Azerbaijani SSR to the Armenian SSR.¹

Couched in a relatively dull and formal language that was so characteristic of official Soviet announcements and declarations, the framers of the resolution believed they were exercising their right to secede from the Azerbaijan SSR and place the NKAO under the jurisdiction of the Armenian SSR. But while some hoped and indeed expected to see such a peaceful transition in early 1988, the declaration of the NKAO would prove to be the first volley fired in a conflict that would embroil the region and the two former Soviet republics, and give way to a war that resulted in the deaths of tens of thousands.

My aim here is not so much to advocate for one side or another, but to provide to the reader with a brief outline and explore some of the more salient aspects of the Nagorno-

Karabakh conflict and how it became one of the most enduring legacies of the breakup of the Soviet Union. To make any sense of it, one has to revisit the tumultuous period of 1917–21, when domestic convulsions led to the dissolution of the Russian Empire and the subsequent independence of the three republics: Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. With the melting away of the central Russian administration, the three South Caucasus republics found themselves at odds over who was to assume control over what region, including Nagorno-Karabakh (Mountainous Karabakh) and Lower Karabakh (collectively referred to as Karabakh). Armenia laid claim to former Russian provinces of Kars and Elisavetpol (where Karabakh lay), whereas Azerbaijan's territorial pretensions envisioned a vast state that stretched from the Caspian Sea in the east all the way to the Black Sea in the west, leaving a rump Armenian state with its center at Yerevan². The Armenian community of Nagorno-Karabakh shared little desire to join Azerbaijan and the same could be said about the Muslim inhabitants' attitude toward becoming citizens of the Armenian republic. But as words failed to accomplish compromise, fighting and massacres erupted, pitting the Armenian and Muslim populations of the region against one another and culminating in the destruction of the city of Shushi in March 1920 after a failed Armenian uprising.

In 1920 Russia returned to the Caucasus in the guise of the Bolsheviks and brought both countries into its orbit. Soviet Russia also assumed the burden of resolving the Karabakh conflict. Although the Azerbaijani

communist leader, Nariman Narimanov, had renounced in November of that year — admittedly, in less than sincere terms — his country's claims not only over Nagorno-Karabakh, but also Zangezur (Syunik) and Nakhichevan³, the Soviets selected the Caucasian Bureau (Kavburo), a committee kept under the watch of Soviet Commissariat of Nationalities, Joseph Stalin, to adjudicate a final settlement. In a split 4-3 decision July of 1921, the Kavburo chose to leave Nagorno-Karabakh in Soviet Azerbaijan, a decision guided by any combination of reasons ranging from placating an Azerbaijani populace still unenthusiastic to embrace Soviet rule, to demonstrating a gesture of good faith to Mustafa Kemal's Nationalists in Turkey, for whom the Soviets had pinned high hopes of spreading the socialist revolution in Muslim world. As a probable form of concession to the Armenians in 1923, Nagorno-Karabakh's status was upgraded to that of an 'autonomous oblast'. It was accorded with a token level of autonomous governance, though actually left to the whims of Baku⁴.

Over the next seventy years, then, the NKAO saw its Armenian population dwindle from an overwhelming 94% to almost 75% as the Azerbaijani population rose. The Soviets did attempt to instill a deeper sense of friendship among Armenians and Azerbaijanis and were in some respects successful. Inter-marriage was common and some in the region still yearn for a return to the seemingly more predictable and easygoing times of the Soviet period. In reality, the differences between the two peoples were only papered over by the central authorities



and harmonious relations were maintained at a superficial level. The presence of a commanding figure largely prevented the outbreak of interethnic fighting. But similar to how the death of Tito triggered Yugoslavia's unraveling of Yugoslavia, the diminishment of Soviet central power helped facilitate the fall of the USSR. When the reformist Mikhail Gorbachev became the new secretary general in 1985, Armenians saw an opportune moment to press their case on Karabakh. It was in the spirit of perestroika and glasnosts, Gorbachev's liberalizing policies that cautiously encouraged criticism of the system, the regional council of the NKAO issued its declaration, giving way to popular demonstrations in Yerevan and Stepanakert, NKAO's capital.

But on what legal grounds had the regional council based its decision on? The Soviet constitution, revised and amended in 1977, was itself a confusing document that could plausibly be used to support the arguments of two opposing parties. Article 72, for what it was worth, conferred all the union republics with the "right freely to secede from the USSR."⁵ Article 78, which Azerbaijan and Moscow invoked to reject the regional council's decision, on the other hand stipulated that the "territory of a Union Republic may not be altered without its consent," and could only be carried out through mutual agreement of the states concerned⁶. Armenia's Supreme Soviet gladly accepted union with the NKAO, while Azerbaijan's rejected it outright. And so, the region's fate remained in a state of flux. Massacres of Armenians by Azerbaijanis in Sumgait in February 1988 and Baku in January 1990 undoubtedly sowed more discord than anything else, ensuring that a peaceful compromise would remain far in the offing.

From 1988 to 1990, Moscow did undertake a number of steps to break the impasse: the introduction of direct "special rule" in late 1988 and the establishment of a Special Administrative Committee. However as the Soviet Union's demise accelerated, an enmity between Armenians and Azerbaijanis continued unabated and spilled over into mutual bloodletting. The central authorities realized that they were quickly losing control over events on the ground. In his

efforts to preserve the integrity of the union through the form of a loose confederation, on April 3, 1990 Gorbachev introduced the Law on the Procedure for Solving Issues of Secession of a Soviet Republic from the USSR, where under Article 3 the right to secede was extended to autonomous regions inside the union republics⁷.

Yet it was not until September 2, 1991 that the NKAO finally declared its independence in accordance with the guidelines set out in the April 3 law. Azerbaijan had declared its independence on August 30 and this is worthy of some attention. When the NKAO eventually issued its declaration of independence it did not indicate specifically from which entity it was seceding from: the USSR or a nominally independent Azerbaijan (and differing views of interpretation of this act do exist)⁸. But it was an attempt to sidestep an obstacle: the notion of union with Armenia was dropped and the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (NKR) chose instead to act under the principle of self-determination. Space here does not allow for even a cursory evaluation of the diametrically opposing principles of self-determination and territorial integrity, which are frequently invoked by both sides nowadays to support their arguments. What is clear, however, is that by December 10, 1991, when Nagorno-Karabakh held the requisite referendum on independence — boycotted by the local Azerbaijanis — it passed by a 99.9% margin. The Armenians had opted for a future that did not envisage being a part of Azerbaijan.

What entailed was a three-year long war that resulted in the NKR obtaining de facto independence from Azerbaijan (as well capturing a vast swath of territory falling outside of the former NKAO's borders), but not attaining a permanent peace agreement. The question of Nagorno-Karabakh is mistakenly referred to nowadays as one of the former Soviet Union's forgotten "frozen conflicts." Peace talks between Armenia and Azerbaijan, with the mediation of France, Russia and the United States, have repeatedly broken down in the past due to the uncompromising positions of the parties and one is always unsettled by prospects of the eruption of a new war (a

threat which current President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan makes on a regular basis).

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict thus does not lend well to any simple solutions. The unfortunate reality is that, with perhaps the exception of Czechoslovakia in 1993, the alteration and new demarcation of borders is rarely an affair that is settled without violent conflict. This does not necessarily mean that the options for the Armenians and Azerbaijanis involved have been narrowed down to the continuation of the status quo and the renewal of hostilities. In the end, all parties involved in the dispute will have to take into consideration the aspirations of the other in order to reach a deal that will not only be viewed as just, but as viable to ensure peace for the region for the generations to come.

Armen Manuk-Khaloyan

¹ Published in Sovetsky Karabakh, Feb. 21, 1988, as cited and translated by Thomas de Waal, Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War (New York: New York University Press, 2003), p. 10.

² Richard G. Hovannisian, The Republic of Armenia: Volume II, From Versailles to London, 1919-1920 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), pp. 191-95, maps 4 and 5.

³ Nagorny Karabakh v 1918-1923 gg.: Sbornik Dokumentov i Materialov [Nagorno Karabakh in 1918-1923: Collected Documents and Materials], ed. Vardges A. Mikayelyan (Yerevan: Armenian National Academy of Sciences Press, 1992), pp. 600-02.

⁴ Throughout the course of the Soviet Union's history, Armenians in the enclave and Armenia itself repeatedly tried to raise the question of union to the authorities in Moscow in a series of letters and petitions, but these were largely ignored and fell on deaf ears: The Artsakh File: Documents and Facts of the Region of Mountainous Artsakh, 1918-1921, ed. Gerard J. Libaridian (Cambridge, Toronto: Zoryan Institute, 1988), pp. 42-52.

⁵ "Constitution (Fundamental Law) of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics," <<http://www.departments.bucknell.edu/russian/const/77cons03.html>>. Accessed July 21, 2012.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ "1990 USSR Law on Secession," <http://www.nkrusa.org/nk_conflict/ussr_law.shtml>. Accessed July 21, 2012.

⁸ The declaration can be found here <<http://www.nkr.am/en/declaration/10/>>. Accessed July 21, 2012.



MARTIAL

The Armenian people have had a long history of military prowess. From ancient times, the Armenians were famous for their cavalry, which was used not only by our kings to defend the country's borders, but also by our neighbors, including the Roman and Persian Empires. The Byzantine military elite was largely composed of Armenian generals and commanders, many of whom waged wars against their ancestral homeland. During the Bagratuni kingdom, the use of iron became widespread and allowed for the maintenance of the Ayrudzi (cavalry), which was one of the strongest military forces in the region. With advances in technology, heavy fortifications became an important element of the defense system for both the Bagratuni capital of Ani and the Cilician Kingdom. From the latter era, a number of castles and fortresses still stand as a stark reminder of the past military glory.

In the Ottoman and Russian Armies, the Armenians also played an important role. During the early stages of the Turkish rule, Armenians were the core of infantry archers units, which used composite bows and arrows to fight the enemy. Of course, the fedayi movement in the 19th century saw the rise of a number of great commanders, whose names will be forever remembered by the Armenian people. Some of the greatest military leaders of Armenia received their training in the Russian Army, by serving the czars in their eternal quest to expand the Empire's sphere of influence. A few of those individuals played a great role in the liberation struggle of the Armenian people and the establishment of the First Republic. The World War II and the Artsakh Liberation struggle gave us a plethora of new heroes, once again proving that the Armenians are not only great merchants and artists, but also a courageous people with strong martial traditions.

Tigran the Great (95BC – 55BC)

Under Tigran's rule, Armenia reached its greatest territorial extent, with the 'king of kings' personally heading the armies in battles against the Cappadocians, Syrians, the Kingdom of Pontus, the Parthian and Roman Empires. Tigran's military skill, strategic planning, and capable cavalry enabled him to craft stellar victories in the battlefield until the joint attacks from Romans and Parthians combined with the betrayal of his own son forced him to acknowledge Roman protectorate over Armenia. Though he was deprived of most of his conquered lands, Tigran proved that the Armenians are a force to be reckoned with and a nation that cannot be easily subjugated by even the most powerful enemies.

Ashot Yergat (914 – 928AD)

After the martyrdom of his father, King Smbat, at the hands of Arab conquerors, Ashot secured the support of the Byzantines, and for six years, fought to drive the enemy out of Armenia and consolidate the Bagratuni lands under his control. Ashot was also able to quell internal rebellions headed by his brother and father-in-law, ultimately receiving the title of the Shahanshan ("King of Kings") from the Arabs. Ashot was then forced to fight a war on two fronts, with both the Byzantines and the Arabs resuming their attacks on Armenia in 922 – 923, but he was ultimately able to put an end to the invasion and reinstate his authority over the country despite the fact that the enemy armies were twice as large as the Armenian forces. King Ashot received the nickname of "Yergat" ("Iron") for his military skills and the ability to successfully fight off his multiple foes.

Garegin Njdeh (1886 – 1955)

Having gained experience in the Balkans Wars of 1912, General Garegin Njdeh played an instrumental role in the defense of Karakilisa in May of 1918 by inspiring the population to take up arms against the Turkish invaders and organizing the local resistance movement. His heroic stance against both the Turks and the Soviets in Zangezur in 1920 allowed for the inclusion of that strategically important region into the Soviet Armenia, thus ensuring that Armenia would not be encircled by Turks and Azeris. Njdeh's uncompromising struggle and devotion to his people and his national philosophy of "Tseghagron" have earned him the reverence of generations of Armenians and secured him an important place in the pantheon of Armenian heroes.

TRADITIONS



Andranik Ozanian (1865 – 1927)

Another hero of the Armenian Liberation Struggle, General Andranik earned the affection of the people of Mush for protecting the locals against the incursions and the pillage of the Turkish and Kurdish military bands. His participation in the Battle of Holy Apostles Monastery and the Second Sassoun Resistance made him an object of veneration of Armenians and a source of trepidation for both local Turks and Kurds. Andranik commanded the Armenian Volunteer Units on the Caucasus Front during World War I, and valiantly fought against the Turks in Nakhichevan, Syunik and Artsakh in 1918. He is considered to be one of the greatest heroes of the Armenian Fedayi Movement and his memory has been eternalized by the Armenian people in multiple songs and poems.

Hovannes Bagramyan (1897 – 1982)

One of only 42 marshals of the Soviet Union and the first non-Slavic commander of a Front during World War II, Hovannes Bagramyan had participated in the Battle of Sardarabad prior to becoming one of the key military commanders of the Soviet Army. He was a great strategist, whose advice and skill allowed for the successful execution of a number of military operations against the Nazi German Armies. For his contributions to the victories in S. Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and the Baltic, Bagramyan was twice awarded the title of a Hero of the Soviet Union. He played a key role in securing the victory of the Soviet Army against the Nazi forces and is considered to be one of the greatest Armenian military commanders of the 20th century.

Arkady Ter Tadevosyan (1939)

The name of the legendary commander Arkady Ter Tadevosyan is synonymous with the victory at the Battle of Shushi (May 9, 1992), which was the turning point of the Artsakh Liberation struggle. The Mountain Fox (a nickname he received in Afghanistan) first joined the “Sasuntsi Davit” detachment to protect the border villages of Armenia against Azeri shelling and later devised the operation “Wedding in Mountains,” which succeeded in bringing Shushi under Armenian control. After the war, the Hero of Artsakh, Arkady Ter Tadevosyan played an important role in the formation of the Republic’s Army and is currently training specialists for the Armenian Armed Forces.

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