

IMPORTANT EPISODES FROM GENERAL ANDRANIK'S ACTIVITY

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DOI: 10.54503/1829-4618-2022.2(16)-70

Abstract

The need to put a number of newly discovered materials into scientific circulation is aimed at refuting the still circulating faulty point of view that during the heroic battles of May, 1918 General Andranik was inactive, particularly in the region of Lori.

Those materials prove that the famous general, fighting victorious battles and strengthening himself in the Vorontsovka-Dsegh area, fought three victorious battles against the Turkish troops on May 22, because of which, in particular, he did not participate in the heroic battle of Gharakilisa.

Keywords: Andranik, Gharakilisa, Alexei Kolmakov

1. In issue N109 of the "Horizon" newspaper of June 7, 1918 we came across a remarkable fact, which is a significant and reasoned addition to the painful issue that is regularly discussed and speculated among our public and experts, namely the activities of Andranik in the Vorontsovka-Jalaloghli (Stepanavan)-Dsegh area and his non-participation in the heroic battle of Gharakilisa.

On May 21, 1918, the correspondent of "Horizon" stated: "In the evening I heard that the local army (Turkish-V.M.) came and took positions in Ghara Ina and the surrounding areas. Andranik went against them with his army and returned again to go better prepared. The whole evening and night passed restlessly: on the one hand the army was preparing, and on the other hand the people were evacuating according to Andranik's order.

The army was divided into three parts. Armed, taking shovels and pickaxes, they went to dig positions and strengthen themselves against the Turks. Jalaloghli was emptying. A battle between the Turks and Andranik began at 6 o'clock in the morning of May 22.

In the evening, when we reached Kurtan, a soldier came and told us that Andranik had repulsed three attacks of the Turks, defeated them, and pushed them back a few versts. One of his soldiers was killed, 4 were wounded, and he had brought them back to Kurtan. There were 4 trains in Sanahin: armored, sanitary, military and for refugees. All of them were full, not only inside the cars, all the sections and balconies, but also the roofs. Each car was filled with 2000-3000 adults and children. On May 23 we arrived in Alaverdi and on May 24 - in Tiflis".¹

¹ Horizon, June 7, 1918, n.109.

2. Noteworthy information has been preserved in the memoirs of poruchik of the Siberian detachment Alexei Kolmakov, a neutral party in this case. The “Siberian” detachment that arrived in Armenia from Irkutsk in December, 1917 and the 210 Western Armenian soldiers that were part of it, joined Andranik’s “Separate Strike Force” at the beginning of 1918.

A. Kolmakov states the following: “Then came the news that Gharakilisa was in danger. But what could we do being tormented and hungry? We were not even able to send the cavalry, and we could not even think about sending the infantry. The next day (probably after May 30, when the Turkish troops entered Gharakilisa (Vanadzor) — V.M.) soldiers retreating from the pressure of the Turks began to arrive. There were officers with them, too, including the commander of the Armenian special regiment, Colonel K. (Korganov-Ghorghanyan - V.M.).

Andranik convened a meeting, during which the newcomers demonstrated the hopelessness of further struggle, believing that the only way out of the situation was fleeing to Tiflis. Andranik failed to convince them. They set out for Sanahin to surrender. Part of them was slaughtered, the other part fled to the forests. Hovhannes Tumanyan and his family also had to hide in the forests of Lori for about a week. We went to Dilijan by the mountain road”².

3. According to A. Kolmakov, on April 10, 1918, i.e. during the days of the fall of Kars and the declaration of the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic, the armed company moved to Akhalkalak. Andranik stayed in Alexandropol for a few days to issue orders to the border guard service, particularly not to violate the border line established by the Akhuryan River and, according to Kolmakov, he fought a victorious battle³.

At the same time, the Tiflis Bureau of the ARF telegraphed the representatives of the party in Alexandropol that “the Siberian company consisting of Western Armenian prisoners of war, led by Russian officers, is leaving this minute (April 10 - V.M.). The company gives the impression of a disciplined military unit. There are also 800 Western Armenians in that echelon, together with Andranik. According to the Self-Defense Council (they mean the Security Council under the leadership of V. Papazyan - V.M.), Andranik himself organized that military detachment. The National Council (Armenian National Council – ANC - V.M.) being against sending him to the front, why didn’t they take any measures to prevent his departure? Having informed you of this, the National Council believes that you can give Andranik such an assignment in some distant region that his activities would not adversely affect your military units. It is desirable to leave the Siberian company in your military detachment. It is necessary that Andranik receive your instructions at the Alexandropol station”⁴.

² Poruchik Alexei Kolmakov 2018: 34.

³ Poruchik Alexei Kolmakov 2018: 37, 40.

⁴ Banber Hayastani archivneri 1965, n. 1, p. 26.

This attitude towards Andranik was not new. After the fall of Erzurum, in April, 1918, when the Trabzon negotiations began and the ARF, following the Turkish position adopted by the Seim, underscored the negotiation process with the Turks, the Chairman of the Security Council, Vahan Papazyan, sent such an instruction.

On April 15, V. Papazyan gave an order to the commander of the Armenian Corps T. Nazarbekyan regarding the need to remove Andranik's detachment from the front line. The document stated: "Is it expedient to position the Western Armenians led by their brilliant military commander Andranik against the Turks under the conditions of a truce, while he may disobey your orders in the positions he occupies? So is it not possible to replace his detachment with another military unit?"⁵

In our opinion, in the issue of Gharakilisa the approach of T. Nazarbekyan, one of Andranik's "accusers" is controversial. On the one hand, there is his well-known order to Andranik to protect the Lori steppe and to strengthen himself in the Vorontsovka-Dsegh area, and on the other hand, there is the assessment that "having captured the favorable heights of Bzovdal and Jalaloghli, Andranik did not show resistance to the Turks and put the Gharakilisa detachment in a difficult situation"⁶.

In this regard, poruchik A. Kolmakov's testimony about Andranik's next steps is important. According to him, "we and all the refugees gathered in the village of Chivtali⁷", after which followed Andranik's order: "I have destroyed the large Tatar gangs, I have opened the road, move immediately in the direction of Jalaloghli". "We went to Jalaloghli, and from there to Kolageran, we went up to the village of Dsegh," mentioned A. Kolmakov⁸.

4. Remarkable details about Andranik are also revealed in the work of Susanna Hovhannisyan, the author of H. Tumanyan's scientific biography, in particular, about H. Tumanyan's activity in Dsegh, Lori during the period of March-July, 1918.

On March 1, 1918 the Armenian Patriotic Union was formed in Tiflis under the chairmanship of the writer, and its primary goal was the organization of self-defense⁹. On the instruction of the ANC, H. Tumanyan was appointed the authorized representative of the regions of Lori, Pambak, Ghazakh-Shamshadin and Borchalu. Together with others, he in fact managed, in particular, the self-defense operation of Lori and Gazakh-Shamshadin.¹⁰

By order of Georgian Menshevik Noah Ramishvili 50 soldiers, 1 officer and 2,000 rubles were put at Tumanyan's disposal in order to procure weapons. The transportation of weapons to Gharakilisa was carried out by H. Tumanyan himself. By the way, the ANC obstructed that job and refused to provide money; the US Consulate

⁵ Andranik Ozanyan 1991: 282-283, according to Melikyan 1998: 58.

⁶ NAA, f. 121, l. 2, f. 92, p. 6-12, according to Banber Hayastani archivneri 1965, n.1, p. 59.

⁷ A village in the Alexandropol county, nowadays the village of Zuygaghbyur of the Ashotsk district.

⁸ Poruchik Alexei Kolmakov 2018: 43, 45, 50.

⁹ Hovhannisyan 2019: 664.

¹⁰ Hovhannisyan 2019: 665.

in Tiflis helped. On May 15, after the fall of Alexandropol, the writer turned to A. Chkhenkeli, the President of the Seim. He distributed weapons to militiamen and he gave the 50,000 rubles that he received from the ANC for literary activities, as a monthly salary to the officials of 13 regions of the Patriotic Unions, soldiers, the military commissar of Gharakilisa, the Security Council of Armenia, and the National Council of Jalaloghli.¹¹

On May 18-25, 1918 Andranik lived in Tumanyan's paternal house in Dsegh. The writer's paternal home served as a headquarters for the General,¹² and Andranik's victorious battles are related to those very days.

Thus, the combination of facts proves that Andranik was not inactive after the fall of Erzurum, "he was not having fun with Tumanyan in Dsegh", but he was fighting, receiving H. Tumanyan's active support, moreover, on May 22, he fought three victorious battles against the Turks in Jalal-Oghli.

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Translated from Armenian by Syuzanna Chraghyan

The article has been delivered on 20.09.2022, reviewed on 07.10.2022, accepted for publication on 14.10.2022.

¹¹ Hovhannisyan 2019: 666-667.

¹² Andranik Ozanyan 1991: 445.