

HOW MARASH WAS ABANDONED

(Article written by Vahan Portukalian of Aix-en-Provence, near Marseille, and published in the Armenian daily "HARATCH" of Paris, in its May 11, 1960 issue.)

On the occasion of the 40-th anniversary of the Marash calamity, Mr. Hrant-Samuel, in his editorial of "Haratch" last February 11, was contemplating on the following question: From where did the order for the abandonment of Marash come? Was it from Paris, Beirut, or Adana?

One of the participants in this event was Lt. Col. Corneloup, who used to be a commandant at that time. He is 87 years old now and lives in Aix-en-Provence. Occasionally we meet each other. I told him about the question puzzling the mind of "Haratch" s editor. In spite of his advanced age he still has an extraordinary memory. He is moved when he reminisces about Marash.

As a whole Lt. Col. Corneloup's explanations confirm Paul du Véou's account in "La Passion de la Cilicie" (page 93). *must be first edition! Chap. on Marash is p. 122 in edition of 1984*

First it should be noted that Adana was free from responsibility. The abandonment of Marash was a tragic surprise for General Dufieux, Commander of Adana. This is beyond doubt.

Consequently, accusations against Paris or Beirut all come to nothing. They could not have ordered a limited operation on the Cilician battlefield, from far away, without the consent or without the knowledge of General Dufieux.

Paul du Véou publishes a letter - as an annotation - addressed to him by Gen. Brémont (pages 95-96), according to which General Gouraud had cabled Adana from Beirut saying that "There can be no question of abandoning Marash." Gen. Brémont considers this cable queer and concludes that it is fallacious and that covertly Gouraud must have given the opposite order. The apparent antagonism between Gen. Gouraud and Gen. Brémont and their final clash make the above-mentioned attestation worthless, lacking further evidence. If Gouraud had wanted to abandon Marash, he did not need to yield to his subordinate Gen. Dufieux, thus, with his Machiavellian act, jeopardizing the whole battlefield. Without being emotional it is not possible to attribute such an intrigue to Commander-in-chief Gen. Gouraud, who gives the following answer to Dufieux' tragic telegram:

22 February, No. 384/2

"I have received and read with grief your telegram dated February 15, No. 342/3.

"I am thankful to your valiant troops who fought so courageously against the enemy and the winter, as well as in Marash; to those who resisted and to those who went to their rescue.

"They will have to keep the flag firm in the country which is entrusted to their care.

Gouraud was seriously wounded during the Dardanelle fighting, had undergone amputation and was physically enfeebled. Whether this condition could have undermined his courage and determination - as some people think - is another question.



According to Lt. Col. Corneloup, the real responsibility for the abandonment of Marash falls on the commander of the Marash forces Gen. Querette. Paul du Veou's interpretations reach to the same conclusion. Paul du Véou goes further saying that on his return to France, Querette was called for interrogation before an investigation committee (outcome is not known). Lt. Col. Corneloup confirms this fact and states that it was considered to call him and others as well for questioning but the idea was dropped because all had acted on orders from Querette.

Def?
Gen. Querette had newly arrived in Cilicia, being freed as a prisoner after the armistice with Germany. Long years of captivity had weakened his willpower and capabilities. The Marash army, says Corneloup, was virtually without a commander. Some of the orders received from the general were not in conformity with the situation. They were infeasible and sometimes incomprehensible. Everyone felt compelled to move independently.

Colonel Normand arrived soon after with his column. Without entering Marash and presenting himself to Gen. Querette, he sent a messenger to Commandant Corneloup saying that he is holding the southern part of the city. He also reveals that his ammunition and provisions will hardly suffice for his troops and orders Corneloup to desert Marash and join him to retreat. Corneloup complies with the order, deserts his positions and pulls out.

This was the first blunder. Colonel Normand had no jurisdiction to issue such an order to Corneloup, without the knowledge of the commander-in-chief of the armed forces of Marash General Querette.

No!
When the people become aware of Corneloup's retreat, they panic. Gen. Querette is informed of the news. What should the general have done? He should have sent for Col. Normand and asked for explanation. Instead, he decides to call on Normand at night for consultation. Intimately, he must have made up his mind to join the others, because, before leaving for Normand's camp, he gives orders to his second-in-command Colonel Thibault to make preparations for withdrawal. Right after that, the chief-physician of the American Hospital informs him that Dr. Moustapha wishes to propose surrender of the Turks. In spite of that significant news, the general puts off the meeting with the negotiator, and, sticking to his previous decision, sets off to pay his visit to Colonel Normand.

During the first days of the occupation, Colonel Normand was assigned governor of the Sandjak of Adana. He was incapable of penetrating into and understanding the psychology of the local people. Being a military engineer, he did not actually belong to the infantry. He had the inclination of looking at things from a mathematician's point of view. May be the failure of his mission to Diarbekir a few weeks earlier had driven him to pessimism. Nevertheless, he was a man of character.

Who knows this?
No!
Congratulations
Querette infirmly and forthwith approved of Normand's plan to retreat, without bothering to make mention of the Turks defeat. He returned to his camp and only the next day he sent for Dr. Moustapha. To the proposal of surrender, Querette answered that he had already given the orders for the retreat of the French forces towards Islahieh. The tragic consequences of that feeble-mindedness are well known.

Of course one cannot ~~say~~ possibly say for sure that the fate of Cilicia would have been different, if Marash had not been abandoned. The pressure from external factors prevailed. But the military situation and the civilian set-up would not have been disintegrated so fast, as it happened, causing indescribable suffering and inflicting horrible casualties to the people and the army as well.



The abandonment of Marash did not come as a consequence of backstage political bargaining, but of a gross military blunder rather.

Unfortunately, ancient and contemporary general history can cite several such instances, some of which have caused nationwide calamities.

Vahan Portukalian

Editor's Note: In case of reprinting, please mention the source.