



THE ZORYAN INSTITUTE

Memoirs of an Armenian Legionnaire

By Sgt. Sarkis Varadian (deceased)

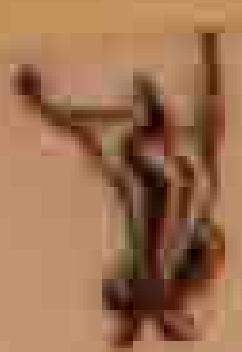
(This article first appeared in the Hairanik Daily on September 18-19, 1961 in Armenian. I had the honor of observing my father ~~to~~ prepare this article in tribute to many of his fallen comrades during this war of liberation for the Armenian People during the first World War. Sitting around the table on that day was his comrades, Matteos Leylegian, Geuregh Atanossian both deceased and Officer Vahram Vartanian now of Fresno California. In tribute to the Tavanians, Najarians, Kasparians, Movsesians, Garabeddians, Gapoians, Hairabed, ~~and~~ Guzelians, and many many other comrades, I have translated this article and hope that thru this historic Armenian Paper our American 2nd and 3rd generation will read about their brave Grandfathers.)

When the city of Marash Turkey was occupied by the allies, our company of Armenian Legionnaires was waiting for word from headquarters to advance toward Marash and relieve the British occupation troops. According to formulated plans the British army which occupied Marash without a fight was to withdraw and the second Armenian Legionnaire Battalion along with some French troops would replace the British. When the Armenian legionnaires were within one hours distance from Marash on the Albistan road, several vantage points were secured by a squad of 25 Armenian soldiers including one additional machine gun section. This same area during the British occupation was protected by 270 Cavalry with two machine gun sections. The British captain advised us to restrict our soldiers from going into town but the civilians were free to go and come and the civilians bearing arms were to be disarmed and if seen at night with arms were to be fired upon.

We had received thru intelligence that a battallion of 6,000 ~~Armenians~~ Turkish soldiers were advancing toward Marash. Our squad of Armenian soldiers

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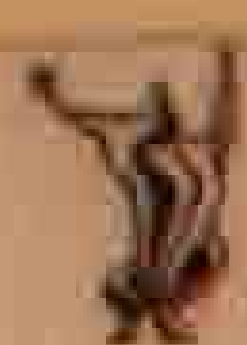
Per Abadec, it was the 1st Battalion



were advised of this and remained on the alert. The native Turks were carrying on their daily activity, traveling with mules and oxes. There was much room for suspicion. Our guards observed many Turks traveling on one road and not returning by the same road. The first week of this occupation passed without an incident. During the second week around 4 am an incident took place as follows: One of the men stationed at one of our vantage points hears Turks speaking in the distance. As the voices gradually come closer, our guard commands the group to halt using French. Upon investigating the guard observes supplies and wood being transported to Marash by the villagers. Our guard taking a wood off the pile strikes one of the Turks and admonishes him for moving during the curfew hours. This very minor incident triggers a rumor among the Turkish villagers that a group of Armenian soldiers are terrorizing the area around Marash. This stopped movement of the Turks in our area for one month. Per instructions received from our headquarters we maintained the surveillance in our given area and had extended our area of coverage. On a given day during our patrol suddenly on a distant knoll we observed a person and when he saw us he vanished. Taking one of my men with me I advanced on the knoll from an opposite direction. My comrade and I surprised the intruder and I commanded him to stand still or be killed instantly. My comrade covered me while I approached ~~the~~ and disarmed the individual of a revolver, a bandoleer of bullets and a knife. When I questioned him concerning his being armed, he stated that he had to guard the wheat fields and he had permission from the British Army to carry a gun. He had no such papers showing authorization however. We released him and when he returned to Marash, he complained to the Mayor who in turn complained to our commander that a group of Armenian soldiers were holding up Turks and terrorizing the country side.



Word came to us from above that unless we stopped this business of terrorizing the Turks, we would be court marshalled. We advised the commanding officer that we were only carrying out the orders he gave in a very effective manner. Six weeks went by in this manner and then we were relieved by another squad of 25 men with two machine gun sections. This small group was not in any position to carry out its mission in view of the fact that since our guard duty period intelligence had told us about the advancing 6,000 Turkish regulars. The 25 men would become a suicide squad. I explained to the new squad leader his tenuous position and he in turn reported this to his commander. He was promised relief from Marash. When my group reached the city we didn't see any people. The city streets were deserted. A horrible thought came to my mind. Where were the thousands of inhabitants of Marash. When we reached our Bivouac area the Captain of the 5th Battalion came to see me in order to brief me about the situation. I explained to him what confronted the 25 man squad replacement of our group and told him that in case of contact with the enemy these 25 Armenian soldiers would not have a chance. I demanded help for these men and in front of witnesses stated that he would be responsible in a military court if he did not heed my warnings. He asked my opinion, and I stated simply he had two choices, call the squad back or give them more support before this Turkish column approaches. That evening the Colonel sent an additional detachment of 50 cavalry men to help the Armenian Gulla fighters. Thus when we were all in Marash it was as if we were in prison. Our quarters were unsatisfactory. One morning when we were returning from our Military drill and when one group of our men were in the Armory and one group outside, we noticed that a French flag was waving above a Turkish fortress. The Turks were drilling in the fortress. One of



Gen. Quirell?

the Turkish soldiers pulled down the French flag and raised the Turkish flag and soon gun fire was directed toward our armory. We alerted our troops to prepare to attack the Turks then suddenly the firing stopped. The commander of our Battalion, name Kereti, had in captivity the Turkish Vallee until peace terms could be accomplished. He didn't expect the Turks to open fire when they were the captured party. Three days later a Turkish soldier approached our commander with a white flag saying that with the return of the Vallee the fighting will be completely stopped. The Vallee was then released, and before the Turkish Vallee reached the Turkish Military area the Turks opened fire again this time on the French hold prison. We were in a stagnant period for three days waiting for orders to return fire or to attack. Orders finally came and fighting started on all sides. The Turks attacked us from several directions and each time were driven back by our fire power suffering huge casualties. Unable to penetrate the Armory the Turks changed there tactics and started firing upon the schools and homes forcing the civilians to seek refuge in our Armory. We numbered in total approximately 1000 soldiers. The ammunition that was being transported to us by way of the Dauros range, was captured by the Turks forcing us to limit our fighting capabilities according to our existing supplies. A valley separated the two turkish units attacking us. We were dug in and our trenches and foxholes lined our defensive position. The Turks in order to dislodge us had to go down into the valley and then advance upon our position. The Turks did just this and as they approached our position, Our commander told us to hold our fire and at the last moment we opened up our attack with machine guns, and grenades and decimated the Turkish soldiers. They suffered such heavy casualties that they did not attack again and withdrew to regroup. Our Commander Kereto,

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hearing the firing and the battle information had assumed that we ~~had~~ had been overrun and had alternate plans with his officers to evacuate toward Zeitoun were it would be safer. Our troops French officers were young and inexperienced and he always consulted us on matters. One such officer was sent to us from the commander to verify the extent of our fighting. This commander had great respect for the Turkish Soldier and he couldn't stomach the thought that a group of Armenians could defeat the Turks in combat. I informed his messenger to return to headquarters and advise the commander that the Turks had been beaten by the Armenian soldiers and he should now change his opinion of the capabilities of the Turkish soldier. We had in our contingent 400 french soldiers, veterans of the Western Front who were eligible for discharge and were to be released from Adana. Within the hour the Turks attacked this group and killed many French soldiers who were one day away from receiving their discharges. This same commander was then threatened with a courtmartial for not protecting these men. Many families lodged a protest and a trial would be pending when he returned to France. One day, before the battle of Marash, a morrocan cavalry with a French officer and an Armenian interpreter (Eznadios Loosavorian) had left from Aintab ~~for~~ for Marash. Half way thru their journey they were surrounded by the Kemalist soldiers and ambushed. Fighting continued into the night and in the darkness only three soldiers escaped the ambush. They made there way to our camp and we tendered to their needs after interrogation. For the protection of an American Hospital in our sector we had assigned 5 soldiers for guard duty. The French commander gave orders to set up the machine gun section in the public square. The Turks observed this from one of their Minarets and directed fire toward the gun emplacement. During the incident, Legionaire Sogomon Pashal~~yan~~ is wounded and the section

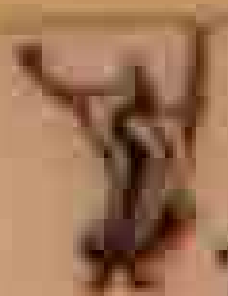


becomes pinned down and remains contained until darkness. We then changed the position of the gun to the other end of the compound and further secured its position with sand bags. We soon came under fire from Turkish cannons that had been placed in strategic positions within a half mile of Marash. These guns were hitting some of our 75 millimeter cannons.

A vantage point was needed badly and quickly. Sgt. Zedig Garabedian (Troy N.Y.) Corporal Guiregh Atanossian (Cranston R.I.) and Corp. Garabed Kasparian and two additional men along with machine guns mounted a steep hill on the Easter^N side of Marash and awaited orders. We had no opportunity to give these brave men any kind of relief and they had to remain alert and ready to fire. The weather became very cold and one of the men of the section was badly wounded in a skirmish. Relief was needed and Guiregh Atanossian volunteered to make his way back to headquarters for ammunition and relief. As Atanossian descended the hill the Turks opened fire on him each time he would make a movement from foxhole to foxhole. We observed thru glasses and so did the Turks. They thought they had killed this brave Armenian fighter and I too thought he had been hit. I had lost sight of him after the first volley of rifle fire that was directed toward him. As I looked thru my field glasses I could see Atanossian again racing from position to position and eventually to safety. (I had the pleasure of living next door to this brave comrade of mine in Cranston R.I. and to raise our two families as one.) (Both of these brave men are now deceased). Geurig Atanossian returned to his dangerous position after darkness with supplies and successfully evacuated the wounded soldier. We held our position for 24 days and ~~with~~ Armenian Lekeonagans battled the Turkish Army and inflicted tremendous casualties on the Turks each time they tried to advance. The Turks soon tried



to envelope us from the Eastern side of the city and where the Armenian Armory was located. We anticipated this and so the ^{did} Garabedian and Atanossian who reported the attempt and this too ended in disaster for the Turks. During the fighting 3 young Armenians had reached us from Zeitun asking for supplies for the Zeitun heroes. We had received our supplies by then and we equipped these brave lads and sent them on their way with haste. The Turks seeing the hopelessness of their situation tried another tactic. They sent word to us that their fight is with the French and not the Armenians. This amazed us to no end. What stupidity said some of our officers. We then fought alongside our french comrades with more vigor. On the 19th day of fighting our communications system was hit and we had no contact from all sides. At approximately 11 AM a French ^{plane} ~~plane~~ was hovering above. With white sheets of paper we marked our position and signaled for assistance. The flyer dropped a message saying he received ours and disappeared. At Three oclock another French Plane appeared and dropped a message saying that help was on the way. The Turks also got word of this message. The news of help arriving gave us some hope and the pace of the battle increased. During the fighting the Captain called me to his headquarters and asked me to stay with him and not the troops. I looked at him with disgust and my first thought was that he was going crazy. I asked him how one can give orders from a room and ⁺ he knew what was going on and also informed him that the lives of Armenian soldiers were at stake and a tactical error in his part will cost him his life. He left me and walked away without an answer. I returned to the troops and quickly checked the progress the Turks had made in trying to envelope us again from the East side. We placed two addition guns on the east side and with Garabedian and Atanossians sections established a ⁰crissfire. We further reenforced our East side by directing some of our 75 Milimeter cannons along this ⁰crissfire. When the Turks made another assault



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they were actually decimated. The Armenian soldiers were fighting with such fury, with revenge in their hearts and the memory of their loved ones the Turks had already killed. On the 20th day of the siege, another French plane approached and dropped a final message saying that a fully armed division will reach us in two days. The Turks also received this message and immediately offered to discuss peace terms. Our desire was not to discuss peace but to fight on to victory. First they implied surrender and then peace. We debated whether what our course of action should be. In a firefight many civilians could be killed. Within two days after a standstill, an 8000 force of French troops arrived and relieved us. Upon reaching Marash they mistakenly opened fire on us and this was soon corrected and they stopped firing. The Turks at this moment were deeply concerned and the new commander had threatened to level Marash to the ground. At 5 oclock the next day word was received by our commander to withdraw from Marash toward Eslaye. All of the firepower was directed toward the Turkish positions so that our troops were able to move out. We evacuated our positions without casualties and left nothing for the Turks. We rendezvoused below Marash and headed toward Eslaye by way of Davros. This was a 3 day march. The weather was very cold and on the second day it snowed. Many of the ~~///~~ civilians marching along with our column froze and some died along the way. It was sad to see our people suffer but some welcomed death knowingly ~~///~~ and with such bravery. 40 years has gone by and I would not have written this article had not some of my Lekeonagan ungers requested me to do so. I write this article in tribute to my Armenian Legionaire Comrades during the 43rd Anniversary of the battle (This article was printed in the Hairenik daily on 9/17/61) and in tribute to those who gave their lives in seeking revenge for the



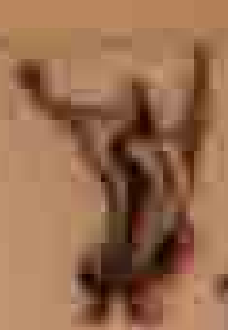
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Armenian nation and restitution of the Armenian lands after 600 years of subjugation. The Armenian people still have a score to settle with the Turk. The debt will remain unpaid until our captured lands ~~are~~ are returned to our present Armenian and our people allowed to live in freedom and decide their own destiny. Armenian Legionnaires ~~participated~~ fought the Turk on all battlefields and many died. They fought with such valor. One and One Half Million martyred Armenian souls looked upon these brave men during the campaigns and thanked God that such men were left on the earth to care for their loved ones.

Sgt. Sarkis Varadian (deceased)

Translated by Varad Varadian.



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Based on Maldjian's own story in
his Memoirs de Mgr. Jean Nashan

Reverend Father

The ~~Abbot~~ Pascal Maldjian.

Among those brought before a Court Martial was a young Catholic priest -- ^{Reverend Father} the ~~Abbot~~ Pascal Maldjian. As a boy of nine he had witnessed the great massacre of 1895, when his father was killed in Marash, along with eight to nine thousand other Armenians. That slaughter had been commemorated in the grim names given to certain quarters of the city: the section known as Boghas Kesan or the Place of Throat Cutting; and Kanle Dere, the Bloody Stream. The boy spent the next eight years in Jerusalem and eight more in Rome studying for the priesthood. On the very day of the assassination which triggered the World War at Sarajevo -- June 28, 1914-- he departed from Rome to assume his duties as Priest in the Armenian Catholic Church -- Sourp Purgitch, or Church of the Saviour. in Marash, reaching that city less than a month before the outbreak of war.

In 1916 Turkish gendarmes captured two Armenian guerillas in the mountains north of Marash as they were returning to their hide-away on Akhyr Dag with a supply of groceries purchased in Marash from a Turkish merchant. The police, seeking the source of these supplies, enquired among the Armenians merchants and learned that ^{Father} the ~~Abbot~~ Pascal had recently purchased a considerable stock of provisions from one Nishan Yaghjian. Police came to the church for the priest:

"Are you a priest or a revolutionary?" one of them shouted.

"My business is to preach the Gospel -- only that!" he replied, whereupon one of the police struck him on the mouth. Taken to the court for a hearing, he denied the charge that he was in communication with the Armenian guerillas/ ^{and stated} that he had purchased supplies for his brother Pierre who had a small store at Intilli, serving the laborers on the railway. These goods had been shipped