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# THE ARMY – ENSURING THE PROTECTION OF THE PEOPLE

ON 26 JUNE 2008 IT WAS 90 YEARS SINCE THE FOUNDATION OF THE ARMED FORCES OF AZERBAIJAN. THE PROCLAMATION ON 28 MAY 1918 OF THE INDEPENDENT DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN (DRA) WAS ONE OF THE MOST REMARKABLE PAGES IN THE MANY CENTURIES OLD HISTORY OF OUR COUNTRY. ACCORDINGLY, THE MILITARY CONSTRUCTIONS AND ACTIVITIES OF THE ARMY OF THE DRA HOLD THE MOST IMPORTANT PLACE IN THE MILITARY HISTORY OF AZERBAIJAN.

**W**hen speaking about the military history of Azerbaijan in modern times, it is necessary to mention that **already during the time of the signing of the Russian-Iranian Gulistan Peace Treaty of 1813, as a result**

**of which North Azerbaijan became part of the Russian Empire, its native Azerbaijani population served in the Russian army.** Thus, four Muslim cavalry regiments and a Muslim infantry regiment from Iravan, consisting exclusively of

Azerbaijanis and gaining the highest reputation for displaying valour and courage in battle, participated in the Russian-Iranian war of 1828-1829. Azerbaijanis formed the Caucasian Muslim Cavalry Regiment in 1830. Four Azerbaijani Muslim Cavalry



*Officers of the Cavalry Divisions of the Azerbaijani Army, 1919*

regiments, as well as Bey's squad of Kangarli horsemen and a brigade of mounted scouts (300 men) participated in the 1853-1856 Crimean War. Irregular regiments from Baku, Elizavetpol, Zagatala and Iravan participated in the 1877-1878 Russian-Ottoman war. The regiment from Zagatala was awarded a honoured banner for its success. The Russian XIX century historian P. Zubov noted: 'The Azerbaijanis command their weapons with great ease, are excellent cavalymen, brave and fearless, as demonstrated in their experience in the last wars'. The Russian officers' corps was formed of many nationalities and a visible place among them was held by Azerbaijanis. About 20 Azerbaijanis were generals in the Russian Army before the First World War. The fact that out of 68 Muslims awarded the highest military order of the Russian Empire – the St George – 19 were Azerbaijanis, the names of whom are immortalised on marble plaques in the George Hall of the Kremlin in Moscow, testifies to the military valour of the Azerbaijanis. 16 Azerbaijanis were

awarded the Golden Arms, which was equated with the Order of St George. The artillery general Samad-Bey Mehmandarov was awarded the Diamond Arms.

Cavalry General and Adjutant General Huseyn-khan Nakhchivanski – Commandant of the Guard of the Cavalry Corps, Artillery General Samad-Bey Mehmandarov – Commandant of the Second Caucasian Army Corps and Lieutenant General Ali-Agha Shikhlinski – who commanded the Tenth Army, held high offices in the Russian Army during the years of the First World War. The Tatar Cavalry Regiment formed by Azerbaijanis within the Caucasian Native Cavalry Division (the Wild Division) excelled in this war. The regiment took part in battles on the south-western and Romanian fronts, including in the famous Brusilov Break.

The events of 1917-1918 marked the collapse of the Russian Empire and led to considerable geopolitical changes. In this situation, **military and semi-military units which caused real danger to the people operated in the Caucasus,**



*Infantry Division of the Azerbaijani Army, 1919*

**including in Azerbaijan.**

The proclamation on 28 May 1918 of the independent Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan was a political act but in the beginning this event did not bring substantial changes to the real situation in North Azerbaijan. Because of the acute dependence on oil of **Soviet Russia, which supported the Baku Council created by local Bolsheviks, it rejected the idea of Azerbaijani statehood.** The Baku



*Private infantry of the Azerbaijani Army, 1918*

Soviet, which had the Red Guard at its disposal, being a supporter of Soviet Russia, in every way possible resisted the independence of the DRA and strived to reach their target by military means. In this situation the Armenian nationalist parties the Dashnaksutun and Gnchak strived to realise the dream of creating an Armenian state on Azerbaijani lands. For this they leaned on the Armenian military squads (khumba),



*Orchestra of the Azerbaijani Army, Ganja, 1918*

who 'became famous for' mass murder and pogroms in the territory of the Ottoman Empire in 1915-1916. **Now these khumbas transferred their service to the Dashnaks and their conquerors and carried out 'ethnic cleansing' of the native population of Azerbaijan, including in Zangazur, Karabagh and Nakhchivan.**

On 30 March 1918 Armenian Bolshevik-Dashnak groups began a slaughter of Azerbaijanis in Baku, annihilating more than 11 thousand people. Then followed mass pogroms of Azerbaijanis in the uyezds of Guba, Lankaran, Shamakha and Salyan. **This was a genocide of Azerbaijani people.**

After the proclamation of the DRA the armed forces of the Baku Soviet, led by S. Shaumian, went on the attack in the southern and western regions of Azerbaijan. They took Lankaran, Kurdamir, Ujar and Goychay and began to advance on Ganja – then the capital of the DRA.

The March events and the following offensive of the troops of the Baku Soviet clearly showed that **the lack of an armed force of the**

**DRA placed the whole existence of the Azerbaijani people under threat. 26 June 1918 therefore, saw the declaration of the foundation of the Azerbaijani Corps,** which formed the backbone of the national army of the independent Azerbaijan. According to the agreement with the government of the Ottoman Empire, the

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**Caucasian Islamic Army,** led by the Ottoman general Nuru-Pasha and the Azerbaijani general Ali-Agha Shikhlinski, was formed with Azerbaijani fighters (5 thousand men) and Ottoman volunteers (6 thousand men). This army defeated the Bolshevik and Dashnak armed forces in heavy fighting in the summer of 1918. Then they managed to oust the unit of the English expeditionary corps commanded by General L. Dunsterville from Azerbaijan. In the end, Baku – the capital of the DRA, was liberated on 15 September 1918.

However, in November of the same year as a condition of the Mudros armistice the Ottomans left the DRA, for which then laid ahead to protect its independence and territorial integrity on its own. In this situation the national military unit showed itself worthy, gaining victories in sustained battles. The War Ministry, led by Samad-bey Mehmandarov and Ali-Agha Shikhlinski, successfully resolved numerous problems relating to the organisation, kit, provisions and training of the military divisions.

Mighty fortifications were created on the northern border of the DRA in May-June 1919 which prevented invasion by the Volunteer Army of A. I. Lenikin. In September-November 1918, in August-November 1919 and in March-April 1920 attempts at aggression on the part of the Ararat Republic were prevented.

One of the main problems put in front of the leadership of the DRA at the very beginning was a shortage of national officer personnel. The establishment of the National Military School (**Milli Hərbiyyət Məktəbi**)

resolved this problem. In the beginning of 1919 the Engineering School, which subsequently came to form part of the National Military School, the Military-Railway School in Baku and the School of Military Medical Assistance in Shusha were opened.

Originally, the military banner of the fighting divisions was the three-coloured state flag. On 18 December 1919 the General Staff established a project for a special Fighting Banner. The project was put together by the use of sketches of banners of the Azerbaijani khanates of the XVIII



century and traditions of the Turkic and Muslim worlds. With decorative ornaments from the tomb of the famous Central Asian Commander and Emir Timur, the flag had the inscriptions 'Azerbaijan' and 'Help from Allah and Victory is Near' (the Koran, 2:214) using Arabic script.

On 1 February 1919 uniforms for servicemen of all types of troops, designed in accordance with national peculiarities, were officially chosen: Karakul papakha (a type of hat) and shoulder straps with the word 'Azerbaijan' embroidered on



*Artilleryman of the Azerbaijani Army, 1919*

them.

**Military parades were held in Baku and Ganja on state and folk holidays with the aim of raising the spirits of the people:** on 24 March 1919 and 20 March 1920 for Novruz-Bayram, on 28 May 1919 in honour of the anniversary of the DRA, on 30 June and 6 September 1919 – for the holidays of Ramadan-Bayram and Gurban-Bayram (sacrifice), 15 September 1919 – in honour of the anniversary of the liberation of Baku from the Bolsheviks and

Dashnaks and on 4 January 1920 – for the recognition of the independence of the DRA by European states.

The national armed forces were quickly created and numbered 30 thousand men. By 1920 two infantry divisions (each with three regiments and auxiliary parts), two separate infantry regiments and a separate infantry battalion had been formed. The cavalry was made up of horse divisions (three regiments and auxiliary parts) and a separate division. The artillery consisted of two brigades (each with a light and a heavy division), a separate mortar division and a separate howitzer battery (in all 56 cannons, 4 mortars and 4 howitzers). The army also had an armoured train, armoured car platoons (6 armoured cars) and some hydroplanes and aeroplanes. The military naval fleet consisted of two gunboats, three dispatch boats and the infrastructure of a military port.

**In the creation of the army of the DRA undisputable contributions belong to the prominent Azerbaijani military leaders – War Minister and Cavalry General Samad-bey Mehmandarov, his Deputy Artillery General Ali-Agha Shikhlinski, Head of the Common Staff and Major General Habib-bey Salimov, the Head of the General Staff and Lieutenant General Muhammad-bey Sulkevich and the Division Commanders Teymur-bey Novruzov, Javad-bey Ikhlini and Ibrahim Usubov.**

Today the armed forces of the Republic of Azerbaijan continue the tradition of its military predecessor – the army of the DRA. Established in terms of the undeclared war of Armenia and its supporters against Azerbaijan, the army, together with the whole country, lived through

## DOCUMENTS



*Shoulder strap of junior officer. One can see the inscription Azerbaijan in Arabic script. 1919*

the difficult period 1991-1993.

A new stage in military construction began in 1993 under the leadership of Heydar Aliyev. The formation of military divisions on the basis of modern requirements quickly brought about a turning point in the progress of the war and liberated a series of previously occupied territories. The army was equipped with modern weapons and questions of conscription of youths into armed service were decided. There was an absolute qualitative jump in the sphere of training the officers' corps. There was a considerable achievement in issues of military provisions and training. Azerbaijan joined NATO's Partnership in the Name of Peace programme and Azerbaijani servicemen participate in training and teaching of this alliance.

**The Azerbaijani peacekeeping contingent worthily carried out and continues to carry out missions entrusted to it outside the**



Azerbaijani peacekeeper team

THE AZERBAIJANI PEACEKEEPING CONTINGENT WORTHILY CARRIED OUT AND CONTINUES TO CARRY OUT MISSIONS ENTRUSTED TO IT OUTSIDE THE COUNTRY.

**country.** Great attention is devoted to the study and promotion of the military history and military tradition of the Azerbaijani people. A Decree by the President of the Republic on 22 May 1998 declared 26 June the Day of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

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