

# FROM THE HISTORY OF THE MILITARY UNIFORM IN AZERBAIJAN (1918 - 1991)



ONE OF THE ACTIVITIES OF THE AZERBAIJAN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC (1918-1920) WAS THE CREATION OF A NATIONAL ARMY.

**O**n 11 December 1917, Azerbaijani deputies of the Transcaucasian Commissariat (TCC) secured an order to establish a Muslim Corps<sup>1</sup> (MC). Based on Order № 155 (19 December 1917) issued by the commander-in-chief of the Caucasian Front, M. A. Przhevalskiy, the formation of a corps began under the command of Lieutenant-General Ali Aga Shikhlinski.<sup>2</sup> However, as A. Shikhlinski wrote in his memoirs, the corps “had no weapons, arsenal, food, clothing and shoes”. Under an agreement with the TCC, Russian army units had to hand over weapons and equipment to national corps. But

the units that had become corrupt under the influence of Bolshevik propaganda surrendered their weapons to Bolsheviks or defected to them with arms. Thus, everything necessary had either to be brought or be taken away by force from troops returning from the front. Therefore, the uniform of the personnel was of Russian origin. In a report (9 February 1918), Shikhlinski noted the distinctive features of the clothing of MC officers and askars: “1. The hat; a 5-pointed star instead of the cockade; 2. Circassian coat and hood; 3. Shoulder straps with an inscription in Arabic “Musulman” and unit number.”

- 1 Süleymanov M. S. Qafqaz İslam Ordusu və Azərbaycan (1918-1920), Bakı, 1999, s. 36
- 2 Дерябин А. Гражданская война в России 1917-1922: Национальные армии. Москва, 1998, с. 34.



*Two officers of the ADR army. The inscription “Azerbaijan” can be seen on the epaulettes embroidered in Arabic script. (From R. Ahmadov’s collection)*

On 26 April 1918, the MC was re-named as a separate Azerbaijani corps.<sup>3</sup> On 28 May 1918, the independence of Azerbaijan was proclaimed, and on 4 June, a friendship treaty with the Ottoman Empire was signed. Under Paragraph 4 of the treaty, the Ottoman Empire promised to assist in creating the Azerbaijani army. On 9 June, the first Turkish troops under the command of ferik (Lieutenant-General) Nuru Pasha entered the territory of Azerbaijan, and **on 26 June, the creation of the Azerbaijani army began on the basis of a separate Azerbaijani corps with the help of Turkish officers.** The difficult economic situation of the Ottoman Empire did not allow them to resolve the question of supplies to the troops. In November 1918, the Turkish troops left Azerbaijan. ADR Minister of War General Samad bay Mehmandarov wrote: “Leaving Azerbaijan, Nuru Pasha admitted that militarily, Azerbaijan was in a difficult situation.”<sup>4</sup> In some units, the soldiers wore sandals.<sup>5</sup> Available clothes were of Russian and Turkish origin, while some of the officers wore British uniforms. The minister of war demanded that the service caps be replaced with a hat within a month, and it was banned to wear a cap.<sup>6</sup>

To provide the troops with warm clothing, Mehmandarov asked the Georgian minister of war for help.<sup>7</sup> Receiving no answer, he took the following measures: **the military clothing left in port warehouses was confiscated; the special selection committee allowed underwear, shoes and**



**boots to be bought in the stores and orders for military uniforms to be placed with tailors; orders were placed with private factories; workshops were established in large military units to repair clothes and shoes.**<sup>8</sup> Conscripts were allowed to bring their own uniforms and were paid compensation for them: 100 manats for a new coat, 60 manats for

a used one, 35 manats for new woolen pants, 20 manats for used ones, etc.<sup>9</sup> The minister of war issued an order on 1 January 1919 to establish standards for the supply of winter clothing, and it proved possible to supply a number of units.<sup>10</sup>

A commission headed by A. Shikhlinski was set up to change the uniform.<sup>11</sup> Based on the order dated 11

3 Süleymanov A. *Azərbaycan Ordusu (1918-1920)*, Bakı, 1998, s. 50

4 “Hərbi bilik” jurnalı, 1994, No 4-5, s. 107

5 Центральный Государственный Архив политических партий и общественных организаций (далее ЦГА ППОО), ф.277, оп.2, д. 79, л.7.

6 Центральный Государственный Архив Азербайджанской Республики (далее ЦГА АР), ф.2894, оп.1, д. 40, л.22.

7 ЦГА ППОО, ф.277, оп.2, д. 79, л.7.

8 ЦГА ППОО, ф.277, оп.2, д. 79, л.1; ЦГА АР, ф.2894, оп.1, д. 3, л.1; д. 13, л.28; д. 15, л.82; д. 40, л.73; Süleymanov M. S. *Azərbaycan Ordusu*, s. 226-227

9 ЦГА АР, ф.2894, оп.1, д.40, л.47; оп.3, д. 2, л.1.

10 ЦГА АР, ф.2898, оп.2, д.3, л.5.; ф.2894, оп.1, д.3, л.1.



# IRS Following tradition

*Sleeve signs of various types of AzKA troops (Order of 9 September 1920). Reconstruction. Painter Y. Abaturov. // "Старый уеўхзайз" No 1, 2008*



January 1919, a new uniform was introduced: "A) The hat: a yellow-brown hat for infantry with the same top without laces; for cavalry, artillery, engineer troops and headquarters, a black hat with the same black top without laces. The tops of hats for cavalry: first regiments - white, second ones - blue, third ones - red and fourth ones - orange. For generals and officers of the General Staff, depending on types of troops or like in the infantry. Hats are the same for officers and askars. B) The service jacket: worn at present by most Azerbaijani officers, khaki with bone buttons and a collar. For askars, Caucasian shirts with peaks. Service jackets and coats worn now can be used. Officers are permitted to wear Circassian coats off duty.

C) Wide trousers: gray-blue with lace stripes that existed in the former Muslim Corps. For askars, laces instead of the galloon. After the beginning of mobilization, khaki trousers are mandatory for all but the cavalry. It is possible to wear long pants off duty. D) Officers should be wearing boots on duty. It is possible to wear shoes with spats. Askars - boots and as a temporary measure; shoes: charikhs with patafa (puttees). E) Coat: the existing model made of old cloth with piping on the edge of the collar and tabs, by the type of weapons. The buttons remain as they are until they are changed, while the tabs for the first regiments are red, for the second ones - blue, and for the third ones - yellow. In the cavalry for the 4<sup>th</sup> regiment - green. For askars, coats are made from the so-called army cloth. F) The hoods: only the cavalry is allowed to use them. The colors are according to the top of hats. G) The waist belt without badges is worn by officers on duty and by askar - always. For the cavalry, the waist belt is of Cossack origin... H) Shoulder marks: shoulder straps of the existing model with blue edging. For the cavalry and engineer troops, the lace is made of silver. And for the infantry, artillery and support troops - a gold lace with appropriate instruments. The inscription on the shoulder straps - "Azerbaijan" (in Turkic). I) For officials, the present-day dress is established as a uniform, the shoulder straps are the same as now with blue piping and the word "Azer-



baijan". J) Spurs: To be worn only by officers who are entitled to horses. The cavalry are not entitled to spurs. Military doctors and officials are not entitled to spurs. K) Aglets: the existing types for anyone entitled to them..."<sup>12</sup>

On 25 February 1919, Mehmandarov addressed the parliament, highlighting the need to create a military infrastructure. In the budget for 1919, 399.4 million manats (27.7% of the budget) were allocated for the needs of the army.<sup>13</sup> The army's supply problems were discussed at meetings of the State Defense Committee.<sup>14</sup> At the end of 1919, a tannery of the Ministry of War began operating in the village of Laki.<sup>15</sup> The supply department was dealing with issues of supplying clothing and footwear. **By the end of 1919, the personnel of the Azerbaijani army (25,000) were provided with clothing and shoes.**<sup>16</sup> Clothes of officers and civilian doctors of the Ministry of War were also provided by the state.<sup>17</sup> On 27 December 1919, it was

11 Süleymanov M. S. *Azərbaycan Ordusu*, s. 154

12 ЦГА АР, ф.2894, оп.1, д. 40, л.50-51.

13 Стеклов А. *Армия мусаватского Азербайджана*. Баку, 1928, с.65.

14 Süleymanov M. S. *Azərbaycan Ordusu*, s. 196

15 ЦГА АР, ф.2894, оп.1, д. 15, л.99.

16 The author thanks Azad Huseynov for providing a photocopy of A. Shikhlin'ski's report of 9 February 1918 and a photograph of a Muslim Corps officer's epaulette; Rovshan Ahmadov for a photo of two officers of the ADR army. A number of photos of officers and soldiers, as well as a photo of the epaulette of a junior officer of the Azerbaijani army were published in IRS-Heritage magazine, No 3 (33), 2008, pp. 12-15.

17 Süleymanov M. S. *Azərbaycan Ordusu*, s. 229



*Sleeve signs of various types of AzKA troops (Order of 9 September 1920). Reconstruction. Painter Y. Abaturov. // "Старый цейхгауз" No 1, 2008*



decided to allocate funds for sewing 30,000 sets of uniforms in 1920.<sup>18</sup> On 2 February 1920, funds were allocated for the purchase of uniforms for generals, staff and senior officers and civilian doctors of the army.

It was decided to buy outerwear in Italy. The government commission included Major-General Ibrahim Aga Usubov from the Ministry of War.<sup>19</sup> **On 23 November 1919, the Commission signed a contract with Italian companies to purchase 25,000 sets of clothing**<sup>20</sup> that were to be delivered to Turin on 20 December and then to Batumi. But dockers and stevedores began a strike in Italy. The commission left home after the company promised to fulfill the terms of the contract immediately after the strike.<sup>21</sup> However, the purchased clothes arrived only in May 1920 after the ADRs had fallen and were seized by units of the 11<sup>th</sup> Red Army and the military forces of the Azerbaijan SSR.<sup>22</sup> Speaking in Moscow on 12 June 1920, Lenin noted: "The other day, a comrade from the Caucasus was telling me that an entire Red Army division was dressed in Italian

Bersaglieri" (Bersaglieri are Italian head-dresses).<sup>23</sup>

The minister of war issued Order № 125 (26 February 1920), demanding that commanders keep the issue of supplying clothes to the personnel under control. On 15 March 1920, another draft campaign began, and all conscripts were provided with uniforms.

**The minister of war demanded that units carry out work to explain the moral and patriotic meaning of the uniform.**<sup>24</sup> **The archives contain orders that indicate how tough Mehmandarov was in demanding respect for the uniform.**<sup>25</sup> In a letter to the Cabinet, he requested a ban on the wearing of military-style clothes by employees of other ministries.<sup>26</sup>

The Azerbaijani army had the following ranks: general of troops, lieutenant-general, major-general, colonel, lieutenant-colonel, captain (cavalry captain), staff captain (cavalry staff captain), lieutenant, second lieutenant (cornet in the cavalry) and ensign.<sup>27</sup> The pattern of the galloon on the shoulder straps, the number and arrangement of the stars conformed to those in the tsarist army.<sup>28</sup> Soldier ranks included askar, junior sergeant, sergeant (chavush), senior sergeant, while gizirs (sergeant-major in the tsarist army) were considered an intermediary link between the officers and soldiers. **The badges of troops in the**



**full uniform conformed to those in the tsarist army** (small metal badges were worn by officers on the shoulder straps, and large ones made from fabric – by soldiers on the sleeves and collars): infantry - crossed rifles, cavalry - crossed sabers, artillery - crossed cannons, automobile units - wings on the steering column with wheels, engineer units - crossed shovel and pick, and aircraft - wings and propeller. The cockade on the hats was regulated by



18 Ibid, p. 227; ЦГА АР, ф.2894, оп.1, д. 15, л.115.

19 Süleymanov M. S. Azərbaycan Ordusu, s. 227

20 Ibid, p. 228

21 Ibid, p. 229

22 Степков А. Армия мусаватского Азербайджана, с.42.

23 Дерябин А. Гражданская война в России 1917-1922: Красная армия. Москва, 2003, с.22.

24 ЦГА АР, ф.2894, оп.1, д.39, л.114; д.5, л.10, 31;

25 Süleymanov M. S. Azərbaycan Ordusu, s. 333

26 Ibid, p. 333

27 Ibid, p. 256

28 Дерябин А. Гражданская война в России 1917-1922. Национальные армии. Москва, 1998., с.37



# IRS Following tradition

an order of 9 February 1918: a crescent (with its ends upwards) and an eight-pointed star cut from brass (bronze) and painted in golden color.<sup>29</sup>

On 28 April 1920, the Azerbaijani Democratic Republic ceased to exist following an invasion by the Soviet 11<sup>th</sup> Red Army. The Azerbaijani Revolutionary Committee (Azrevkom) announced the establishment of the Azerbaijan Soviet Republic. **The people's military and navy commissar (PMNC) of the AzSR, Chingiz Ildrim, issued orders 2 and 3 (28 April 1920) banning the wearing of epaulettes, orders and decorations<sup>30</sup> and order № 17 (5 May 1920) establishing new military insignia. All insignia was red.** A five-pointed star was placed on the hat, and above it there was a crescent and a five-pointed star. A crescent and five-pointed star was worn on the left sleeve above the elbow, and a five-pointed star below the elbow above the cuff. Commanders also had to wear signs indicating their official position, which were sewn above the cuffs: squad commander - one triangle, assistant platoon commander - two, sergeant-major - three; platoon commander - one square, a company commander - two, a battalion commander - three, a regiment commander - four; a brigade commander - one diamond, division commander - two, army commander (Assistant PMNC) - three, front commander (PMNC) - four diamonds.<sup>31</sup> **On the basis of units of the old army, an Azerbaijani combined red infantry division was formed. On 7 May 1920, Azrevkom issued a decree to establish an Azerbaijani Red Army (AzKA) and Azerbaijani Red Navy.** The army

was subordinate to the commander of the 11<sup>th</sup> army and the navy to the commander of the RSFSR Caspian Flotilla.

By 12 May, a number of top and middle-ranking ADR army officers were arrested. Some of them were shot on the island of Nargin in the Baku Bay (there were camps for prisoners of war here during World War I). The creation of state and local government bodies of the new regime was accompanied by arrests of officials and employees of the former authorities. Soldiers of the 11<sup>th</sup> Red Army requisitioned property, in other words, engaged in looting. The result was a series of uprisings in Ganja, Karabakh, Zagatala and Lankaran in May-July 1920. **After the suppression of the largest Ganja uprising, it was decided to disband the old units and recreate AzKA.**

The new PMNC of the AzSR, Aliheydar Garayev, signed order № 595 (9 September 1920), which described sleeve emblems by the types of AzKA troops. Signs in the form of vertical crimson diamonds (100 x 63 mm) were introduced in the infantry; the globe was embroidered at the bottom and a yellow metal badge in the form of two crossed rifles was fixed on it. The middle of the sign was embroidered with a red star and crescent trimmed with yellow silk at the edges. Ten rays forming a pair radiated out from the crescent and the tips of the star, reaching the edge of the same color. Images of the Earth, stars, crescent, rays and edging are the same on the sleeve signs of other types of troops. In artillery - a crimson mark shaped as a projectile; a badge in the form of two crossed guns. In the cavalry - a blue sign shaped as a horseshoe; a badge in

the form of two crossed Caucasian sabers and a dagger with its edge turned downwards. In the engineer troops - a black sign in the form of a square; a badge in the form of crossed axes and shovels; hammer and the French key; an axe and anchor; a pick and shovel (according to the specialty of engineer troops). In aviation - a blue sign shaped as a horizontal diamond; below the star, wings were embroidered with gray-white silk, and a badge shaped as a propeller was attached underneath.<sup>32</sup>

On 6 April 1921, the PMNC of the AzSSR issued a certain secret order changing the shape of the sleeve aviation badge and introduced a special badge for aviators. Images of the globe, rays and edging were removed from the sleeve badge, and an anchor and a sword were added. Graduates of the Baku flying school, pilots and aviation group leaders of the Azerbaijan SSR had the right to wear the badge. The metal badge was oval and depicted an oak wreath, a star and a crescent, an anchor, a propeller, a torch and carried an inscription in the Turkic language "Azerb. Sov. Soc. Rep." and "1338".<sup>33</sup>

**Based on Order № 45311 (29 October 1922), military clothing and insignia according the model valid in the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army (WPRA) of the RSFSR were introduced in AzKA.** According to A. Stepanov, "judging by the photos and real things, the Azerbaijani insignia was different by the fact that the sleeve valve carried a star and a crescent".<sup>34</sup>

With the creation of the Soviet Union, the organization of unified armed forces began; as a transitional measure, a number of units were trans-

29 Ibid, p. 37

30 Степанов А. Азербайджанская Красная армия 1920 -1924 гг. // "Старый Цейхгауз", № 1, 2008, с.32.

31 Ibid, p. 32

32 Ibid, pp. 34-35

33 Ibid, p. 35

34 Ibid, p. 37



*The first graduates of the Azerbaijani combined military school, 1923 (Museum of Azerbaijani History)*



ferred to the territorial-militia system. By the end of 1924, eight regional divisions were created in the USSR, and the first of them was the Azerbaijan Infantry Division (Azdiviziya). The division commander - a former tsarist officer, holder of the Georgiyev weapon, commander of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Cavalry Karabakh Regiment of the ADR army, Jamshid Nakhchivanski (in documents before 1920 - Jamshid Khan Nakhchivanski) - was also a commander of the territorial troops of the Azerbaijan SSR and chief of the Baku garrison.<sup>35</sup> The dress code of the Azerbaijani division corresponded to the model established in the Red Army, but the tabs had Cyrillic letters "AzD" and the sign of the type of troops, while the sleeve valves were embroidered with a crescent and a red star. In April 1925, the chairman of the USSR Revolutionary Military Council, Mikhail Frunze, inspected the division and gave a high assessment of the bearing and military capability of the personnel.<sup>36</sup>

In photos after 1925, the commanders' tabs have insignia accepted in the Red Army, while the abbreviation "AzD" disappeared. **The high level of the preparedness of the Azerbaijani division was taken into account in 1929, when territorial divisions began to disband in the USSR.** On the basis of Azdiviziya, the Azerbaijan Mountain Infantry Division led by Division Commander J. Nakhchivanski and Chief of Staff Gambay Vazirov was created: *"Azdiviziya is the pride of the Red Army. The division became a model part of the Red Army, a powerful and well-armed mainstay of the Soviet Union."*<sup>37</sup> In 1936-1940, almost all the high-ranking and middle-ranking Azerbaijani commanders, including Division Commander J. Nakhchivanski were executed or sent to labor camps, and the Ordzhonikidze Azerbaijan Mountain Infantry Division was renamed the 77<sup>th</sup> Mountain Infantry Division.

In 1941-1945, the 77<sup>th</sup> Mountain

Infantry Division, the 223<sup>rd</sup>, 396<sup>th</sup>, 402<sup>nd</sup> and 416<sup>th</sup> Infantry Divisions were created or reorganized and given the status of national divisions of Azerbaijan, but they had no specific uniforms. **By 1946, the 416<sup>th</sup> Division (under the number "216"<sup>38</sup>), the most well-known Azerbaijani division, maintained its status as a national division. This division lost its national status in the mid-1950's** as a result of Khrushchev's military reforms. In 1971, on the initiative of the then head of the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic, Heydar Aliyev, the Nakhchivanski boarding school opened in Baku. The military uniforms and insignia at the school conformed to the models established in the Suvorov and Nakhimov schools operating in other cities of the USSR.

Only after the proclamation of the independence of the Azerbaijan Republic and the creation of a national army in 1991, did the traditions of national military clothing and insignia revive. 🌟

35 Иванов Р.Н. Именем Союза Советских...Москва, 2007, с. 316.

36 Газета "Бакинский рабочий", 19 апреля и 30 апреля 1925 года.

37 Газета "Красная звезда", 3 ноября 1930 года.

38 Vəliyev İ. A. Azərbaycan milli atıçı diviziyaları Böyük Vətən Müharibəsində. Bakı, 2005, s. 62-191; Безугольный А.Ю. Народы Кавказа и Красная армия. 1918-1945 годы. Москва, 2007, с. 247-260.

