

CAUCASIAN BATTLEFIELDS

A HISTORY OF THE WARS ON THE
TURCO-CAUCASIAN BORDER

1828-1921

BY
W. E. D. ALLEN
AND THE LATE
PAUL MURATOFF

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CHAPTER XLI

THE TURKISH INVASION OF TRANSCAUCASIA, 1918

MAPS I, 19, 38; cf. 34, 35, 36, 37

SINCE May 1917 a kind of informal armistice had come into being all along the Russo-Turkish front. On the Russian side the line was only thinly held, and it became thinner as the achievements of the Revolution penetrated more deeply into the morale of the troops who had won this line at the cost of so much endurance and sacrifice. Self-demobilization started rather later than on the European front, but by the beginning of November discipline—and with it the stability of the front—had almost completely disappeared.

The Russian general headquarters which, under General Przevalski, continued to function in Erzurum viewed the situation with a gloom which was shared by the Christian minorities of the occupied provinces of Turkey, and almost equally by the non-Muslim nationalities in Transcaucasia. At the same time the western powers had reason to fear a German-Turkish advance towards the Baku oilfields at a moment when shortage of oil was tending to weaken the Austro-German war machine in Europe.

The Russian staff of the Caucasian army was not in a position to organize any effective resistance to a German-Turkish advance. The war against Turkey was almost more unpopular than that against Germany, and since April revolutionary crowds had been demonstrating against the 'Imperialists' war' and proclaiming 'We don't want the Dardanelles'. Any organized Russian resistance on the Caucasian front became impossible after the Bolshevik *coup d'état* of 7 November. As only a few hundred Russian officers were prepared to continue the defence of the Caucasian front, Russian general headquarters was compelled to rely only on the national formations developed during the period of the provisional government. These bodies were more or less legalized by the establishment of a Transcaucasian federation which was set up in response to the transfer of power in Russia to the government of the soviets. This federation comprised the nucleus of three subsequently independent states, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. But, while the existing federation

did not recognize the actual (Soviet) government in Moscow, it yet hesitated to proclaim complete separation, in view of the possibility of fresh changes which might follow. The federation was not represented at the peace negotiations at Brest Litovsk, whither it had, however, been invited to send delegates by the Germans (who managed to make tactical use of the Ukrainian representation). When the soviets, on 28 December, signed an armistice with the central powers, the federation had no alternative but to follow suit, if only to retain the support of their own masses who were clamant for peace. The divergent tendencies and interests of the three national groups constituting the federation immediately became evident; for while the Tartars of Azerbaijan were prepared to base hopes for the future on Turkish friendship, the Georgians were hesitant and the Armenians dismayed and desperate. The Georgians had only an insignificant national army (not more than 10,000 men); they were prepared to enter into negotiations without delay, and their leaders relied on their own political ability to conciliate the Germans and procure protection from the Turks. The Armenians remained strongly pro-Ally—and fundamentally pro-Russian—and they tried to develop a national army with the help of Russian general headquarters on the Caucasian front and in the eventual hope of securing support from the British.

By 1 January 1918 the Armenian Corps consisted of two divisions of Armenian rifles, three brigades of Armenian volunteers, a cavalry brigade and some battalions of militia. Each of the two divisions was composed of four regiments, regimental strength being fixed at three battalions. The volunteer brigades were made up of four battalions each and the cavalry brigade was composed of two regiments each four squadrons strong. The rifle divisions were made up of men from the Armenian rifle *druzhiny* (battalions) which had seen hard and honourable fighting during the campaigns of 1914-16. Their numbers were increased by Armenians from different units of Yudenich's army who had decided to join their compatriots. The volunteers were natives of Turkish Armenia who joined the national army on the spot—in Erzincan, Erzurum, Van and the Eleşkirt valley. There was no lack of good equipment to be acquired in the rear areas of Yudenich's dissolving army, and the infantry was well provided with machine guns. The artillery might have been stronger but for the lack of trained gunners available among the Armenians. However, six batteries (each of four field guns) represented the artillery of each of the two divisions, while mountain batteries were organized for attachment to the three volunteer brigades. Units were weak in effectives: the

strength of a battalion fluctuated between 400 and 600 men. Thus with twenty-four battalions of riflemen and eight battalions of volunteers, the Armenian national army did not exceed 16,000 infantry, 1000 cavalry and some 4000 militiamen. Even with the help of 10,000 Georgians (whose morale was doubtful) such a small army could not hope to hold a Turkish offensive, particularly when it is remembered that the luckless Armenians were dependent on long and disorganized lines of communication already infested by bands of hostile and angry Muslims.

The feelings of the Muslims towards the Armenian national army became clear even before the Turks began their advance. The same Dersim Kurds, who had themselves turned against the Turks in the autumn of the previous year, but had given no trouble to the Russian conquerors during the interval, became restless as they saw the Russians evacuating the regions of Erzincan, Kelkit and Bayburt and handing over to weak Armenian detachments who were concerned to protect their own compatriots. Local encounters between Armenians and Kurds immediately broke out and there were killed and wounded on both sides almost every day. In the meantime the behaviour of disbanded Russian troops on their way home was far from exemplary and gave pretext to the Turks—if they needed one—to intervene.

It would have been strange if the Young Turk government of Enver Paşa had not considered the revolution in Russia as the predestined moment for the realization of all their ambitious schemes in the direction of the Caucasus. Pan-Turanian expansion might yet compensate for the loss, or impending loss, of the Arab provinces. Even the less romantic circles in the army might at least find the moment opportune for the recovery of the traditional frontier of 1878. During the middle months of 1917 the Turks were attentively observing the course of events in Russia. By the end of the year it was decided that the moment had come to pass to action. For this action the Third Army under Vehip Paşa had been reserved; and it explains why the Turks, despite the complete lull on the Russian front and the urgent need for reinforcement on the fronts threatened by the British, kept the Third Army ear-marked for a Caucasian adventure.

The Third Army held the front between Tirebolu on the Black Sea and Kemah on the Kara-su branch of the Euphrates.¹ The Second

¹ II Caucasian (5th, 11th and 37th Caucasian Divisions) and I Caucasian (9th, 10th and 36th Caucasian Divisions) Corps, to which must be added the 5th and 12th Infantry Divisions of the Second Army, embodying remnants of the disbanded 8th Division.

Army, in the meantime, had finally disbanded, the 5th and 12th Divisions being incorporated in the Third.¹ After a rest of nearly a year all these troops were in better moral and material condition than Turkish troops on the Caucasian front had been in since the beginning of the war. But effectives remained modest with an average of only 5000 bayonets per division. With some auxiliary troops Vehip Paşa could dispose of between 45,000 and 50,000 men with 160 guns including a few Austrian and German howitzers. Such a force was more than sufficient to overcome any resistance on the part of the Georgians and Armenians.

The Transcaucasian Federation was anxious to enter into peace negotiations with Turkey at the earliest possible moment. The Turkish government expressed its willingness to negotiate, and after a month of preliminary steps a conference was proposed at Trebizond. Meantime the Transcaucasian Diet, with singular lack of sense of the realities of the situation, was busy elaborating its conception of the conditions of peace. The session opened on 23 February 1918 and on 1 March the Diet approved conditions which provided for the re-establishment of the Transcaucasian frontier of 1914 and for the right of self-determination of the peoples of eastern Anatolia with the guarantee of the autonomy of Turkish Armenia under the sovereignty of Turkey.

Some weeks before these peace proposals had been elaborated by the Transcaucasian Diet, Vehip Paşa had initiated military action against the Armenian detachments who were holding the front line following the withdrawal of Russian troops. Vehip began by sending repeated protests against the action of disbanded Russian soldiers and the massacres of Muslims committed by Armenian bands. At the beginning of February the activity of the Kurds in the Erzincan region increased and skirmishes took place with the small Armenian force still in occupation. Under the command of Colonel Morel (formerly Russian military attaché in Tokyo), the force round Erzincan consisted of three volunteer battalions (the Erzincan Regiment), one squadron and six guns with a few local irregulars—a total of 2000. Colonel Morel was virtually isolated since the nearest Armenian troops were in Erzurum (a hundred miles to the east) and his communications could easily be cut by the Kurds.

Suddenly Turkish infantry appeared in front of the Armenian post at Çardaklı (on the road to Zara and Sivas) and captured it (12 February).

¹ The 1st, 47th and 11th Divisions had been moved elsewhere. The 5th was stationed at Muş, the 12th at Palu.

Another Turkish column appeared on the march from Kemah and on 13 February the Turks were within seven miles of Erzincan. Morel had no choice but to attempt an immediate evacuation and retreat on Erzurum. The retreat occupied eleven days between 14 and 24 February and was carried out with remarkable steadfastness and skill under bitter winter conditions (40–50% of troops and refugees were frost-bitten). The retreating column—as in Tergukasov's epic withdrawal from the Eleşkirt valley half a century before—had to cover thousands of panic-stricken fugitives against repeated attacks from the Dersim Kurds. The Turkish 36th and 5th Caucasian Divisions followed the retreating Armenians and occupied Erzincan and Mamahatun. Elements of the 5th Caucasian Division, in the meantime, entered Bayburt. II Caucasian Corps also moved forward against the Georgians and by the end of February had taken Trebizond and Gümüşane.¹

These movements of Turkish troops were unopposed except for the skirmishing round Erzincan. Neither the Turkish government nor the new rulers of Transcaucasia considered themselves to be at war; and the Turks might claim that they were reoccupying their own provinces. The Armenians, however, were confronted with a very special problem: the protection of the Armenian population in the districts which the Turks were in process of reoccupying. The issue of the peace negotiations was unknown, but immediate danger threatened all Armenians living in the regions of Erzurum, Hınıs, Van, Malazgirt and the Eleşkirt plain. These unfortunate people preferred not to await the coming of the Turkish army and asked for immediate evacuation beyond the Transcaucasian border. To protect them and to give them time to withdraw, a considerable part of the new Armenian national army was dispersed between the various centres populated by Armenians. Erzurum was garrisoned by a detachment under command of the famous partisan leader Antranik² (who had been promoted to the grade of major-general). Other detachments held Hınıs and Van, while inside the old frontier two groups were concentrated at Aleksandropol and Erevan. This disposition was determined not by any strategic plan but by the protective necessities of the moment. Fear of the Tartars of Azerbaijan and Nahçıvan imposed the relatively large reserve held behind the Aras.

¹ For events in Erzincan and Turkish relations with the Armenians and Kurds at this period, see Ali Kemali, *Erzincan tarihi* (History of Erzincan), 1932, pp. 117 *et seq.* Cf. also Kâzım Karabekir and Korganov in Bibliography, (6) (d) (vi). For a Russian account of the situation in Trebizond, see S. R. Mintslov, *Trapezondskaya epopeya*, Berlin (no date).

² After the war Antranik settled as a farmer in California.

The small Armenian army was thus spread over a very wide area.¹ In command was General Nazarbekov (Nazarbekian), an Armenian by origin, formerly commanding the 2nd Caucasian Rifle Division—an officer who had never been very fortunate in the field. A considerable number of imperial officers, the majority of them Armenians by origin but including also a number of Russians, made up the staff and the unit commands. About 300 young Russian officers had formed an officers' battalion which fought beside the Armenians. The Georgian army, numbering less than 10,000 men, was concentrated between Kutaisi, Akhaltzikhe and Batum. It was commanded by the Georgian General Gabayev (Gabaishvili), a capable officer, formerly commanding the 3rd Caucasian Rifle Division, who found himself unable to contend with the disorganization and lack of morale in the ranks of the Georgians. At the head of both these armies was the commander of the Transcaucasian front, the Russian General Lebedinski; but the real confidence of the Transcaucasian government was given to the Georgian, General Odishelidze.

While the Transcaucasian Diet was still awaiting the opening of the peace negotiations with the Turks at Trebizond the conclusion of the Treaty of Brest Litovsk was announced. By this instrument the Soviet government agreed to exclude from Russian territory the districts of Batum, Ardahan and Kars, where the fate of the population was to be decided by a plebiscite organized in conditions of absolute freedom. This turn of events clearly endangered the Christian minority of the area involved, since it was believed that the Turks did not take the plebiscite condition seriously and considered that the new situation simply promised a reversion to the frontier of 1877. In a state of high emotion the Transcaucasian delegation arrived in Trebizond on 8 March; but the arrival of the Turkish delegation was intentionally delayed and the conference did not open until the 14th.

By 25 February the Turkish vanguard (two regiments of the 36th Caucasian Division with Kurds) was approaching Erzurum. The Armenian patrols fell back on Ilica. By 8 March other units of the Turkish 36th Division with elements of the 5th and 11th Caucasian

¹ At Erzurum, 1st Rifle Regiment, one battalion of 4th Rifle Regiment, five battalions of Erzurum and Erzincan volunteers—3000 infantry, 400 cavalry with eight guns; at Hınıs, 2nd Rifle Regiment and the Hınıs and Karakilise regiments of volunteers; at Van, the 5th Rifle Regiment and two battalions of Van volunteers; at Aleksandropol, 7th and 8th Rifle Regiments; and at Erevan, 3rd and 6th Rifles and one battalion of the 4th.

Divisions had appeared along the road from Bayburt. The Armenian position at Ilica was easily outflanked by converging columns marching from Erçek in the north and from Tekedere in the south. On 10 and 11 March the Armenians were fighting round Ilica and Tekedere, but the great difference in the strength of the opposing forces was obvious and, on the night of the 11th, General Antranik gave the order to evacuate Erzurum. The city was occupied by the Turks on the morning of the 12th, when a rear-guard action at the gates raised Armenian losses at Erzurum to 600 killed and wounded. On 14 March, the day on which the Trebizond Conference opened, the Armenians retreating from Erzurum were already on the old Russian frontier at Karaorgan. On the 12th, General Nazarbekov had ordered the Armenian detachment at Hınıs to evacuate that town. The 2nd Rifle Regiment joined Antranik, while the Hınıs and Karakilise volunteers withdrew through Kop and Malazgirt into the Eleşkirt valley.

The first item on the agenda of the Trebizond Conference was Vehip Paşa's telegram to General Lebedinski (10 March) insisting on an immediate evacuation of the districts ceded to Turkey at Brest Litovsk. The Transcaucasian delegates protested indignantly that they did not recognize Brest Litovsk and were not bound by its conditions. Discussions continued along this line and the Transcaucasians vainly enough tried to put forward their own conditions. On 22 March a part of the delegation returned to Tiflis and came back with new proposals for partial territorial concessions. But the Turks were getting tired of the discussions and on 6 April an ultimatum from Istanbul was received demanding the complete evacuation of the disputed districts by the 10th of the month.

Vehip Paşa had been moving his troops towards the Transcaucasian frontier since the last week of March. Along the Black Sea coast the 37th Caucasian Division was marching on Batum, while the 5th Caucasian moved on Ispir in the valley of the Çoruh. The 11th Caucasian was in general reserve at Erzurum as the whole of the Turkish I Caucasian Corps (36th, 10th and 9th Divisions) prepared to cross the frontier and march on Kars. (Cf. Map 19.) On the Turkish right, IV Caucasian Corps moved forward with the 12th Infantry Division approaching Malazgirt and the 5th Infantry Division preparing to occupy Van.

On 30 March the Turks took the frontier post at Karaorgan; on the left, their patrols reached Bardiz and on the right, Karakurt. As at Erzurum, the Turks were undertaking a wide outflanking movement

in order to dislodge possible Armenian resistance round Sarikamiş. Nazarbekov noted this manoeuvre. He knew that the Turks could bring three divisions against his own thirteen weak battalions (including the 3rd and 7th Regiments which had come up from Aleksandropol), and he was aware of the increased activity of Muslim irregulars on his line of communications with Kars. He feared encirclement by a superior force in the narrow Sarikamiş defile. On 5 April the Armenian lines were attacked at the point where the *chaussée* forks to Karaorgan and to Karakurt. At the same time the volunteer brigade of Colonel Morel on the Armenian right flank was attacked in the region of the Eşek-meydan Pass at Verişan and that village was lost. The danger of a Turkish outflanking movement towards Novo-Selim in the plain had increased. On the night of 5-6 April the Armenians evacuated Sarikamiş and withdrew towards Novo-Selim, where new positions were taken up in the hope of checking the Turkish advance in the direction of Kars. Among the men at the front there was no doubt that they were facing a renewal of the war with the Turks, but the newly established rulers of Transcaucasia still continued to believe in a peaceful solution and their intervention deprived the troops on the frontier of their last chance of serious resistance.

Without following any strategic plan but rather by force of circumstances, the Armenians, by 10 April, found themselves better concentrated than they had been before. They now constituted two groups: that of Kars composed of seventeen battalions in the Novo-Selim area with four battalions in reserve at Aleksandropol;¹ and that of Erevan consisting of nine battalions including the 5th Rifle Regiment and the two Van volunteer regiments who were on the march from Van to Iğdir.

Something could be done with these thirty battalions (15,000 men) even against the four or five Turkish divisions which were advancing against them (25,000-30,000 bayonets). But there was certainly little possibility of holding the Turkish advance on Kars along a line improvised to the north-east of Sarikamiş in the plain round the railway station at Novo-Selim. The thirty Turkish battalions of I Caucasian Corps with their stronger artillery and their irregular horse could easily outflank the Armenian lines.

The Armenian General Arefiev (Areshiantz) commanding at Novo-Selim evidently intended to bar the principal approaches to Kars from

¹ The Hınıs and Karakilise volunteer regiments had arrived from the Eleşkirt valley.

the south-west—several tracks as well as the railway line and the two *chaussées* leading from Sarikamış and from Karakurt. The Armenian line ran from Engica along a stream to Bezirgangeçit and Novo-Selim and from there to Karapinar, Tiknis, Ağadeve. Thus 9000 riflemen had to hold a front of over twenty-five miles. Three Turkish divisions were slowly concentrating against this thinly held line which, on 19 April, was attacked at two points, at Novo-Selim in the centre and at Ağadeve on the Armenians' extreme left. The Turks succeeded in capturing the mountain overlooking the village of Ağadeve, but they were thrown back as the result of a vigorous counter-attack. Another counter-attack re-established the situation at Novo-Selim but only for a short time. The Turks brought up fresh troops and pierced the Armenian line at several points on both sides of Novo-Selim. After 6 p.m. the Armenians were already in full retreat towards Benliahmet, having extricated themselves with losses which did not exceed 350 men. The Turks remained on the battlefield.

General Lebedinski (Transcaucasian commander-in-chief), together with General Nazarbekov and several staff officers among whom was Colonel Chardigny, head of the French military mission, visited the front on the day of the Novo-Selim fight and took an optimistic view of the possibilities of continued resistance. Later in the day Lebedinski elaborated this view at a meeting of the Armenian National Assembly at Aleksandropol. A majority of the Assembly voted in favour of maintaining the struggle. The attitude adopted by the Transcaucasian government and Diet was, however, somewhat different. Since 8 April the Trebizond delegates had been insisting on the acceptance of the Turkish ultimatum and on the 10th the authorization to accept had been telegraphed from Tiflis. Its arrival at Trebizond may have been delayed, since on the 12th the Turkish general commanding the troops approaching Batum sent a message demanding the surrender of that fortress and the surrounding area not later than the 13th. On receipt of this new ultimatum, the Transcaucasian Diet changed its attitude—despite the reserve of the Tartar deputies. The Diet supported the government in a sudden decision to reject the ultimatum. Thus it seemed that from 14 April the state of war had at last been legalized by the government in Tiflis. In fact, on that same day, units of the Turkish 37th Division, supported by Laz and Acar irregulars, attacked Batum. Within a few hours the commandant of the fortress, with his garrison of 3000 including 600 officers, decided to surrender. The rest of the Georgian Corps withdrew to the Muha-Evstate position, so well fought over in the Crimean

War and the War of 1877-8, between Kobuleti and Ozurgeti. This event, during the following week, produced a new change in the attitude of the Transcaucasian government. On 22 April the complete independence of the Transcaucasian Federative Republic was proclaimed by the Tiflis Diet. The head of the government, the Georgian Menshevik Gegechkori, yielded his post to another Georgian of the same party, Akaki Chenkeli, who was acting as president of the delegation at Trebizond. Thus a week after the rupture with Turkey which preceded the abortive defence of Batum, Chenkeli was entrusted with the renewal and continuance of the peace negotiations.

After the fighting at Novo-Selim the troops of both sides were moving nearer to Kars. Early on the morning of 23 April the Armenians occupied a line running through the villages of Samova, Karaçoban (Garamvartan) and Bozkale to the railway station at Vladikars. From this point the line extended east of the Kars-çay to the village of Kaniköy, six or seven miles from the town and only about three miles from the outer forts. During the morning Turkish columns deployed and skirmishing began. By 2 p.m. General Nazarbekov had received three telegrams. Chenkeli informed the general of the existence of the new independent republic. Two telegrams from the newly appointed minister of war, the Georgian General Odishe lidze, ordered Nazarbekov to cease fire in agreement with the Turkish military authorities on that front. Nazarbekov was ordered to remit his government's decision to the Turkish general in front of him (Yakup Şevki Paşa) in the hope that the message might be conveyed to Vehip Paşa. Thus a complete muddle existed in the Armenian lines when the Turks informed the messenger who approached them under the white flag that they had no instructions from their army or corps commanders and that while the Armenian proposal would be communicated to Vehip Paşa they had, in the meantime, no alternative but to continue operations.

A reply from Turkish headquarters arrived on the following day accepting the proposal for an armistice on the condition that the Armenians withdrew within the line of forts round Kars. At the same time Turkish troops began to move round Kars towards Mezrea railway station thus endangering Armenian communications with Aleksandropol. During the day of the 24th, Colonel Morel was twice sent to negotiate with Colonel Kâzim Bey commanding the Turkish vanguard in front of Kars. Vehip Paşa now put forward the condition that the Armenians should surrender the forts on the left bank of the Kars-çay during the morning of the following day (the 25th) and

those on the right bank during the afternoon. The Armenian withdrawal beyond the Arpa-çay was to be completed within three days. Nazarbekov found that he had no choice but to accept.

At 9 a.m. on 25 April the first Turkish units entered Kars. It was a few months over forty years (1878-1918) since the great storm of Kars by a Caucasian army under the command of the Armenian Loris Melikov.

By the evening of the 26th the retreating Armenian troops were at Başgedikler and on the 28th they crossed the Arpa-çay. All the guns of the fortress and all the war material stored there were left to the Turks.¹

The political confusion created by events in Tiflis and by the Trebizond negotiations had prevented the Armenians from making any serious attempt to defend Kars, at least for the period necessary to permit the partial evacuation of stores and the destruction of the great reserves which had been piled up there. But if the unfortunate Armenian military leaders thought that their troubles were over after their retreat from Kars beyond the old Russian frontier of 1877 they were wrong, and new surprises awaited them. When, on 11 May, the peace conference renewed its sessions—now at Batum instead of Trebizond—Vehip Paşa declared that the old peace conditions were no longer acceptable to the Turks, since the Armenians and Georgians had replied to the original Turkish proposals by armed resistance. The territories earlier in question had been conquered by force of arms and Vehip Paşa found himself obliged to put forward new demands. These demands comprised:

(a) the occupation by Turkish troops of the regions of Akhaltzikhe, Akhalkalaki and Aleksandropol;

(b) the transfer of the control of the Aleksandropol-Echmiadzin-Nahçivan-Julfa railway, required for the transport of Turkish troops to northern Persia;

(c) the free use by the Turks of all Transcaucasian railways so long as the war against Great Britain continued.

These demands were an indication that *the first phase* of Turkish action in Transcaucasia was complete and that *the second phase* was now about to be undertaken. The easy capture of Batum and Kars had convinced Enver Paşa that he might revert to his Pan-Turanian offensive of 1914 and the attainment of two immediate aims seemed to have become practical politics. These aims were the conquest of

¹ Including 100 modern field guns and twelve 6 in. howitzers, 100 fortress guns of 1877 model and several hundred still older pieces—a complete artillery museum.

Baku and the annexation to the Ottoman empire of both Caucasian and Persian Azerbaijan.¹ Subsequently, if the world war and the disintegration of the Russian empire continued, even more ambitious schemes might be undertaken: the penetration of Transcaspia and Turkistan and the projection of Pan-Islamic revolt against the British into Afghanistan, southern Persia and northern India.

The two weak and newly created entities of Georgia and Armenia, across whose territories ran vital roads and railways, alone lay in the way of these intercontinental conquests. It was clearly not difficult to overcome their resistance and the forces available to Vehip Paşa were adequate for the purpose. But a wider extension of Turkish action required more troops, since it was probable that the British would not remain indifferent to the fate of Baku and northern Persia. Some reaction on the part of the Soviet Government, newly established in Moscow, was also possible. In spite of the dangerous situation of the Turkish army in Palestine, the Turkish 15th Infantry Division on its way back from the Rumanian front was halted at the Bosphorus with a view to transport by sea to Batum. Even more than troops, Enver needed leaders capable of understanding and interpreting his ambitious schemes. He recalled his half-brother, Nuri Paşa, from Tripolitania (where he was organizing a rather successful resistance to Italian penetration of the hinterland) and appointed his uncle, Halil Paşa, to the command of the 'Army of Islam' on the Caucasian front.

Turkish aspirations in the eastern Caucasus soon became apparent not only to the British but also to the Germans. And the Germans did not remain indifferent to plans which might come into serious conflict with their own. In April 1918 when Enver's plan acquired definite form the Germans were already extending their occupation of Ukraine and preparing to assume control of the northern littoral of the Black Sea. The Germans reached Kharkov on the 20th and soon afterwards they were in Sevastopol and Rostov. A German representative, General von Lossow, was an active presence at the Batum Conference while the adventurous Colonel Kress von Kressenstein—not very friendly to the Turks after his own failure in Palestine—appeared at Tiflis where he established the best possible relations with the Georgian members of the Transcaucasian government. In

¹ The Tartars of Caucasian Azerbaijan and the varied Tartar and Turkoman elements who make up the majority of the population of Persian Azerbaijan speak dialects of Turkish akin to Osmanli. At the same time the culture and historical tradition of both Azerbaijanians have always been Iranian rather than Anatolian or Ottoman.

the capital on the Kura the German colonel found the atmosphere very favourable to an intrigue directed to the establishment of a barrage against the Turkish designs on Baku.

The Germans were not very much interested in the success or failure of the Pan-Turanian campaign. But they were in desperate need of the oil of Baku and they were convinced that once the city were in Turkish hands there would be little oil produced even if the pipe-line were allowed to pass under the private control of Enver and all his near and distant relatives and adherents. Von Kressenstein managed to sustain a lively activity in Tiflis during the month of May and he showed himself the man for an emergency. He was aware that Georgian troops could offer no effective obstacle to the Turks, but the Turkish command might become embarrassed if Georgian detachments were covered by the German flag. For the purpose of giving a German cover to Georgian military movements, von Kressenstein mobilized all available men of German origin in and around Tiflis—from the personnel of his legation to prisoners of war and the peasants of the old German settlements like Elenendorf. Meanwhile the Georgian members of the Transcaucasian government saw in German protection the only possible salvation for their own national interest. Their small and badly organized armed force, scattered between Poti, Kutaisi and Tiflis, was incapable of preventing the Turks from occupying the line of the Transcaucasian railway. And the opinion was general among Georgians that once the Turks had been admitted to the country they would never leave it.

For the Armenians the situation was rather different. The Germans were not interested in the defence of Armenian territory and were ready rather to encourage the Turkish move across Armenia into northern Persia in order that any British move towards Baku might be checked. With only indefinite hopes of ultimate support from the British, the Armenians had no alternative but to show fight to the invader. Furthermore, the Armenians feared that the mere passage of Turkish troops through their country would encourage the Muslim elements on their southern and eastern borders to indulge in bloody and anarchic attacks on Armenian villages. Threatened with imminent invasion from the west and with the prospect of internecine racial conflict in their rear, the Armenians understood that even capitulation might only postpone the decimation—or virtual extermination—of their people. The prospect of the ultimate victory of the western powers must have seemed at least uncertain to observers in Erevan in May 1918, and it has in fact rarely fallen to the lot of a people to

confront such a desperate and seemingly hopeless situation as that which threatened the Armenians in the early summer of 1918. The Turks, meantime, were in haste to fulfil their grandiose plans, and while negotiations and armistices were still the order of the day, they pursued their march beyond the Arpa-çay.

For their Transcaucasian offensive the Turks had available nine well-equipped infantry divisions—something between 55,000 and 60,000 seasoned infantry with the addition of several thousand irregulars—who in the mountainous country in which operations were to take place, were useful for diversions and for threatening the communications of a numerically inferior opponent.¹

The wide implications of the Turkish plans, however, made these forces scarcely sufficient for the tasks which awaited them. Thus the Turks could concentrate against the Armenians (who were now in two groups based respectively on Aleksandropol and Erevan) only five out of the nine divisions allocated to the Caucasian front. The disproportion of forces, therefore, was not altogether overwhelming. Against 30,000 Turkish infantry the Armenians could rally some 20,000 rifles—units not always well disciplined nor tactically efficient, but at the same time stubborn and courageous in defence of the homes which lay at their backs.²

The numerical relation of the opposing armies and the particular character of the elements making up the Armenian force, who were in great part volunteers with experience of irregular war and a perfect knowledge of the terrain over which operations were to take place, might have suggested the adoption of the strategy and tactics of partisan war. Here a distinction must be made between *guerrilla war* as conducted by small groups of armed men able to disperse and gather again and *partisan war* engaged by compact mobile detachments, each 500–1500 strong and equipped with field guns and machine guns. The Armenian terrain favoured a 'partisan' strategy, since both the railways and the main roads—which the Turks were

¹ At 15 May 1918 the Turkish order of battle in Caucasia was as follows: (a) Batum and Oltu, 37th and 5th Caucasian Divisions of II Caucasian Army Corps; (b) between Kars and Aleksandropol, 36th and 9th Caucasian Divisions of I Caucasian Army Corps; (c) region of Ardahan, 10th Division of I Caucasian Army Corps; (d) in general reserve at Kars, 11th Division of II Caucasian Army Corps; round Diyadin and Bayazit with patrols in the passes of the Ağrı-dağ, 12th Division of IV Army Corps; (e) on the march from Van towards Başkale and the Persian border, 5th Infantry Division of IV Army Corps; (f) awaiting transport from Istanbul to Batum, 15th Division.

² The Armenian command could still dispose of more than fifty field guns and 1000 cavalry organized in two regiments.

obliged to secure before they could proceed against Baku—ran along valleys which were flanked by great mountainous massifs easily defensible by small and active detachments and offering at the same time a refuge to the Armenian peasants and their livestock from the plains. For such a war the Armenians had excellent leaders—famous partisan chiefs like Antranik, Amazasp and Dro. A partisan strategy could not have prevented the Turks from taking possession of the main lines of communication, but it could have made the continuous use of these lines hazardous and difficult. A partisan strategy corresponded too to the political necessities of the Armenian situation, and primarily the need to provide refuge for the bulk of the Armenian peasant population in areas difficult to conquer pending changes in the immediate international situation. An Armenian partisan strategy, which might well have held inviolate the Armenian uplands during the summer of 1918, might have given the Armenians both heart and respite and might have constituted a serious embarrassment to the Turks in their effort to organize their advance to Baku and the Caspian. Unfortunately for the Armenians, while their newly established government continued to experiment in diplomacy, their military leaders persisted in the illusion that they were commanding a 'regular' national army which it was necessary to manoeuvre in the field according to the classic rules of 'regular war'.

The Armenians, still awaiting the results of the diplomatic permutations at Batum, were taken by surprise when the Turks suddenly initiated the second phase of their Transcaucasian offensive. On the night of 14–15 May the Turks presented the Peace Conference at Batum with an ultimatum demanding the evacuation of Aleksandropol within twenty-four hours and the withdrawal of Armenian troops to a line twenty-five miles to the east of the town. Without awaiting a reply, Turkish troops crossed the Arpa-çay at dawn on the 15th and advanced towards the Tiflis-Aleksandropol *chaussée*. In haste and disorder the Armenians began to retreat from Aleksandropol towards Delijan. As at Kars, vast stores were abandoned to the enemy.¹

General Nazarbekov's headquarters were at Karakilise, a town thirty-five miles to the east of Aleksandropol, through which runs the railway to Tiflis and the *chaussée* to Delijan. He issued the following battle orders:

(a) 1st Rifle Division (twelve battalions) and the 8th Rifle Regiment

¹ Since the Russian conquest of Kars in 1877, Aleksandropol had ceased to be a fortress but it continued to be used as the principal depot for the Transcaucasian front.

(six battalions) to hold a line west of Amamli station, where a branch of the *chaussée* forks south to Erevan;

(b) the Erzurum, Erzincan, Hınıs and Karakilise volunteer regiments (eight battalions) and the two cavalry regiments (1000 sabres) to march south along the *chaussée* to Erevan as reinforcements for the group based on Erevan;

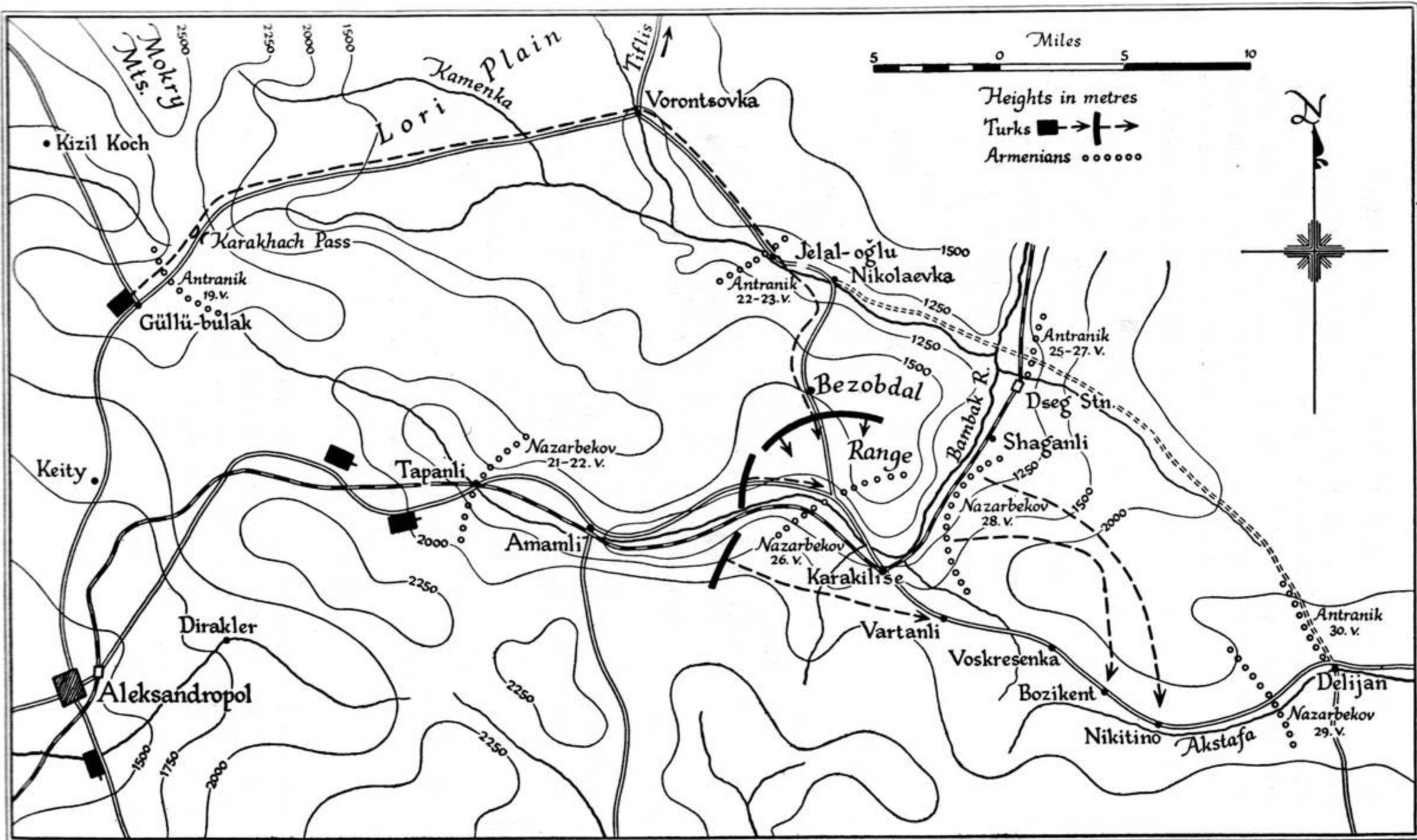
(c) the Lori and Akhalkalaki volunteer regiments (four battalions) under Antranik to take up a position at Güllü-bulak where the Aleksandropol-Tiflis *chaussée* forks to Tiflis and Akhalkalaki.

As Erevan was the capital of Armenia the dispatch of reinforcements in that direction was politically unavoidable; and the main force at Amamli still had the possibility of rejoining the Erevan group by the *chaussée* Delijan-Erevan. Antranik's flank group at Güllü-bulak was a fortunate idea, but this force was too weak to be effective in regular operations.

Once in Aleksandropol the Turks had in their hands the important junction where the line from Sarikamış and Kars joins the main Tiflis-Julfa line. It remained necessary, however, to throw back the Armenian force covering the road junction at Amamli which controlled the alternative route to Erevan and Echmiadzin round the northern and eastern flanks of the Alagöz massif. The Turks decided also to strike at Antranik's flank group across the fork of the roads to Tiflis and Akhalkalaki. The 5th Caucasian Division advanced against Antranik, while the 36th with units of the 9th were deployed for the attack on the Armenian line in front of Amamli. Here, during 21 and 22 May, the Turks, who were only slightly stronger than the Armenians in infantry, easily threw back Nazarbekov's main force. The Armenian commander decided to concentrate towards Karakilise and to stand there to the end. On the 24th one of his units even proved able to counter-attack and to drive back the Turkish vanguard to Amamli.

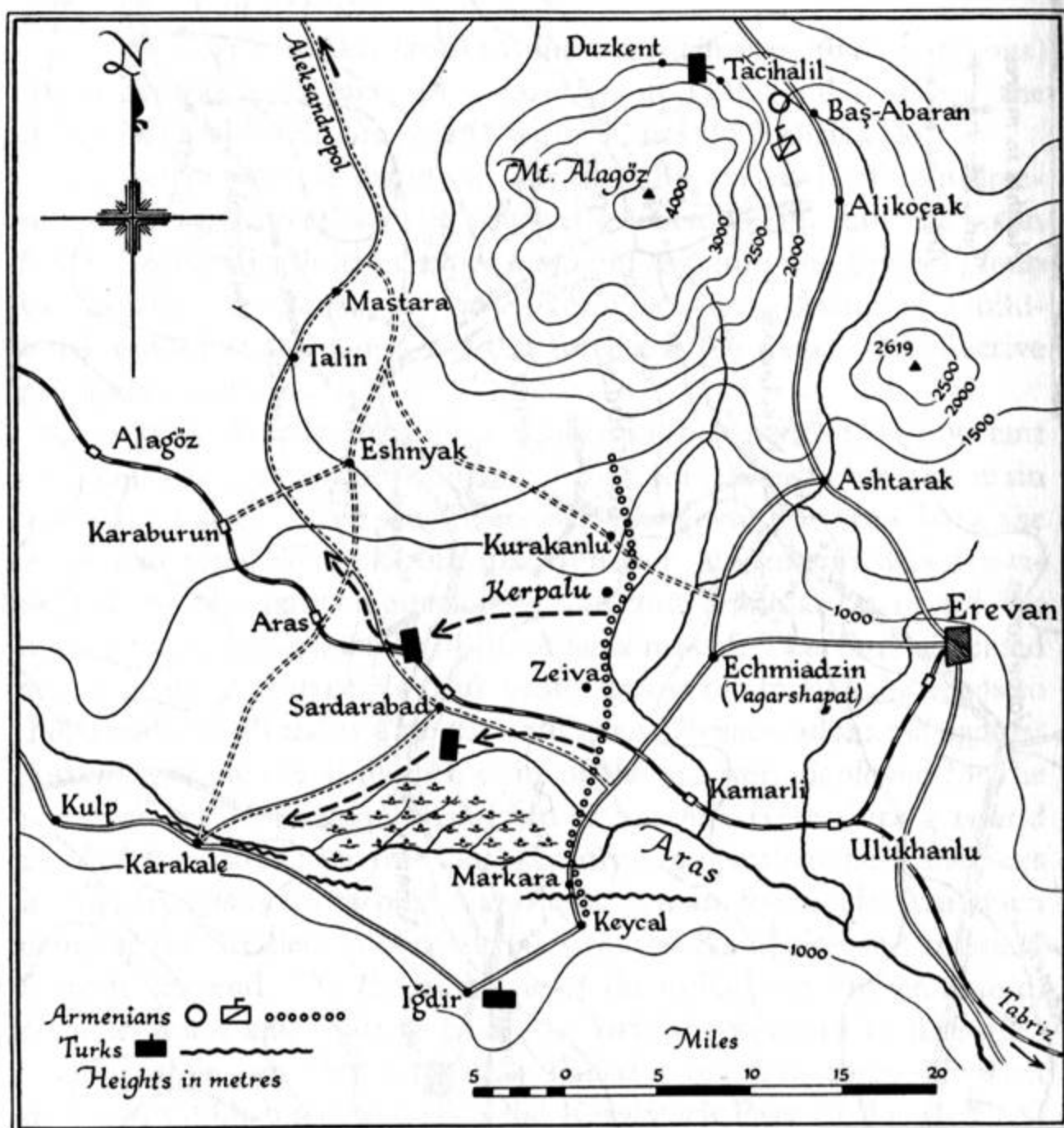
Meanwhile, on the 19th, the Turkish 5th Caucasian Division captured Güllü-bulak and then the Karakhach Pass on the Aleksandropol-Tiflis road. Antranik retired to Vorontsovka with the Turks on his heels. From Vorontsovka the partisan leader turned south-east towards Karakilise since he feared to be cut off from the main force under Nazarbekov. He fought a two days' rear-guard action near Jelal-oğlu, then retired to the railway station of Dseg (twenty-five miles north of Karakilise).

Between 26 and 28 May, in the region of Karakilise took place the most serious fighting in all this curious Turco-Armenian war. On this occasion the Armenian rifle regiments fought stubbornly, but the



Map 34. Aleksandropol-Delijan, May 1918

Turks concentrated against the Armenian line to the west of Karakilise both the 36th Caucasian Division and units of the 5th Caucasian advancing from Jelal-oğlu. On the 27th, Nazarbekov lost the village of Bezobdal and the mountain over it, and the Armenian right flank was moved back to Shaganli station. On the following day the Turks



Map 35. Erevan area, May 1918

outflanked the Armenian left, captured Vartanli and cut the *chaussée* to Delijan. Only with the greatest difficulty did Nazarbekov succeed in extricating his main force. The retreating Armenian troops, marching by mountain paths, regained the *chaussée* at Bozikent and Nikitino and, on the 29th, took up a position covering Delijan. Nazarbekov's main force had now been reduced by losses, and perhaps by desertions, to 5000 fit men with a morale which was not now very high.

Next day Antranik joined Nazarbekov at Delijan, but he refused to recognize the armistice which was at this moment concluded and withdrew with a part of his men into the mountains overhanging Lake Sevan (Gökçe).

Round Erevan General Silikov (Silikian) was meanwhile fighting his own campaign. On 15 May Silikov had his main force, amounting to between 6000 and 7000 men,¹ concentrated in the area round Echmiadzin and Sardarabad. He had strong patrols out to the south of the Aras in the region Iğdir-Karakale who were in contact with pickets of the Turkish vanguard which had occupied Diyadin, Bayazit and the passes of the Ağrı-dağ. On 18-19 May the Turks developed their offensive from south of the Aras. The 12th Division deployed across the Ağrı-dağ with its left at Karakale and its right towards Halfali near Iğdir. At the same time Kurdish irregulars appeared on the northern bank of the Aras in the neighbourhood of Nahçıvan. Silikov thus found himself under pressure from the south and east and threatened from the north following the fall of Aleksandropol and the Amamli cross-roads. In this latter direction he was covered only by two regiments of volunteers which had been detached from Nazarbekov's group and were holding the tracks over the Alagöz massif. With Amamli in Turkish hands there was a possibility that the enemy might move south by the main *chaussée* direct on Erevan (seventy-five miles from Amamli station). Silikov found that the best solution in the circumstances was to form a small but reliable force of 1000 picked riflemen under the experienced partisan leader Dro. Provided with plenty of machine guns and four field guns this group took up a position in the defile of Baş-Abaran blocking the main road thirty miles to the south of Amamli.

On 20 May units of the Turkish 12th Infantry Division occupied Iğdir. The Armenians concentrated the 1st and 2nd Van Regiments and the cavalry regiment on the northern bank of the Aras defending the bridges at Markara and Karakale. On the 21st, Silikov's main group² was attacked near Sardarabad by two regiments of the Turkish 11th Caucasian Division on the march from Aleksandropol. The Armenians were holding the line of villages, Kurakanlu-Kerpalu-Zeiva, a few miles to the west of their holy city and patriarchal seat of Echmiadzin. The Turks were not in greater force than the

¹ The 5th and 6th Rifle Regiments and one battalion of the 4th; the 1st and 2nd regiments of Van volunteers, one cavalry regiment and twenty-eight guns.

² Now reinforced by four volunteer battalions but weakened by the dispatch of Dro's group to Baş-Abaran and the provision of a garrison for Erevan.

Armenians and, using all his reserve, Silikov successfully counter-attacked on 23 and 24 May. He not only recaptured Sardarabad but pressed back the enemy as far as Ani and Mastara, some thirty miles to the north of Sardarabad. The same day Dro was fighting the 3rd Regiment of the 11th Caucasian Division which was advancing from Amamli to Baş-Abaran. Silikov reinforced him with the 2nd Cavalry Regiment and on the 25th Dro counter-attacked.¹ Fighting continued on the 26th and on the 28th Dro was reinforced by infantry sent up by Silikov. On the 29th he was able to throw back the Turks to the north of Baş-Abaran, and remained in firm possession of this important defile.

Thus both Silikov and Dro, operating on terms of numerical equality with the enemy, had each secured an important success. But the failure of Nazarbekov against the 36th and 5th Caucasian Divisions made the situation of the Erevan group still rather precarious. Nazarbekov needed reinforcements and Silikov had to move up both his Van regiments to Semenovka on the Erevan-Delijan road. He concentrated his remaining troops, with the exception of Dro's detachment, at Sardarabad and the Markara bridge. The armistice, concluded on 4 June, supervened. The Turkish 12th Infantry Division, which had remained strangely inactive during the fighting at Sardarabad, now crossed the Aras at Karakale and joined the 11th Caucasian Division. Between 7 and 9 June the Turks were still skirmishing with groups of Armenian volunteers who had refused to recognize the armistice. The Turks occupied the Julfa railway at the Sardarabad, Echmiadzin and Ulukhanlu stations. They refrained from taking possession either of the branch line to Erevan or of the Armenian capital itself. General Silikov and the partisan leader, Dro, had gained the only real—if modest—Armenian successes in this strange Turco-Armenian war which, after a confused preliminary period, had lasted just three weeks. Four Turkish divisions had been diverted to these operations, and it could scarcely be claimed that the Armenian resistance had seriously delayed the development of Turkish plans in Caucasia. A far more serious delay was, in fact, produced not by the courageous decision of the Armenians to fight but by the political manoeuvres of the Georgian leaders.

Within a week of the ultimatum to the Armenians (14–15 May), the Turks presented a further ultimatum to the Transcaucasian government in Tiflis demanding the immediate transfer of the line of the Transcaucasian railway running from Batum through Tiflis to

¹ On this occasion the Armenian horse executed a successful mounted attack.

Baku. The Transcaucasians played for delay on the ground of discussing the details of a peaceful arrangement and on the 27th a *coup de théâtre*, prepared by Colonel Kress von Kressenstein, took place in Tiflis. The Georgian members of the Transcaucasian government proclaimed Georgia a republic independent of the Transcaucasian Federation. The new republic, furthermore, accepted a German protectorate. Von Kressenstein and von Schulenburg themselves announced this protectorate from the window of Tiflis town hall. The Armenian and Tartar members of the Transcaucasian government became the guests of the now completely independent Georgian Republic.

The impression in Batum was great: Halil and Vehip were furious, and the latter warned the Georgians that the Turkish ultimatum remained in force and that on 30 May Turkish troops would move on Poti and Kutaisi. Von Lossow demonstratively left Batum on his way to Germany to report. The first consequence of this new development was that on 4 June the Turks signed a 'treaty of peace and friendship' with the Armenians. At the same time Vehip found himself unable to realize his threat to invade Georgia when he understood how well the three Prussian officers had prepared their ground.

Immediately following the proclamation of the Georgian Republic, the main Transcaucasian railway line was occupied by mixed Germano-Georgian detachments. Georgian and German flags were flying at all the stations. And the situation became something more than a joke when, on 3 June, two German battalions, sent from the Crimea, landed at Poti. Companies of German troops soon made their appearance in the ports of Sukhum and Poti, along the railway and roads leading from Tiflis to Aleksandropol, at the frontier station between Georgia and Azerbaijan and in Tiflis itself. Berlin recalled the German detachments from the Syrian front and the 217th Infantry Division was ordered to proceed from Ukraine to Georgia. Something like a real conflict had arisen between Turks and Germans. On 5 June, Enver Paşa, accompanied by General von Seeckt, sailed from Istanbul to Batum in search of a decision satisfactory to both sides.

These exalted personages came to Batum at the moment when the Turco-German conflict had reached its height. An obstinate man, Vehip Paşa had ordered his troops in the region of Aleksandropol¹ to march on Tiflis. On 10 June advancing units of the Turkish 9th Caucasian Infantry Division came into contact with

¹ Where the 9th Caucasian Division had replaced the 11th, which had been moved towards Erevan.

Germano-Georgian detachments at Vorontsovka on the main road leading to Tiflis across the valley of the Khrami and along the railway which follows northward down the valley of the Borchalu. Two German companies were in the line with some of Kress's volunteers and a number of Georgian militiamen. After brief skirmishes the Turks threw back the Germano-Georgians and took a considerable number of prisoners. On the following day this 'scandalous incident' provoked a telegram from German general headquarters, threatening the withdrawal of all German troops and officials from Turkey. The Turks were summoned to halt their advance into Georgia and to release immediately all prisoners taken in the frontier actions.

Some drastic change was clearly necessary. In a few days Enver found a new form for his Caucasian plans. Vehip Paşa, now no longer *persona grata* to Turkey's allies, was recalled to Istanbul. A new operational force, the Ninth Army, was constituted under Yakup Şevki Paşa (commander of I Caucasian Corps) with its base in the region of Aleksandropol and the Aleksandropol-Julfa railway. The object of the Ninth Army was stated to be active resistance to the British and Bolshevik threat to Caucasia and Persia.¹ In giving his Ninth Army the operational direction of northern Persia, Enver pretended to satisfy German general headquarters which remained very critical of Turkish Caucasian and Pan-Turanian plans and was interested only in creating difficulties for the British command in the East.

However, Enver had by no means renounced his plans and he now hoped to realize them with the aid of the 'Army of Islam'. Under this title it had been decided to organize within the territories of the 'Republic of Azerbaijan', now no longer a part of the Transcaucasian Federation, an armed force of Azerbaijan Tartars. A base was chosen at the ancient Muslim town of Ganja (R. Elizavetpol) lying on the Tiflis-Baku railway where the northern foothills of the Shah-dağ massif slope down to the valley of the Kura.

To form a disciplined nucleus for the Army of Islam, the Turkish 5th Caucasian Division, which was then round Delijan, had to cross Armenian territory (with or without the consent of the Armenians) and reach Akstafa station on the Tiflis-Baku railway, which station

¹ The Ninth Army was made up of the 5th, 9th, 36th and 11th 'Caucasian' Divisions and 12th and 5th Infantry Divisions. The 37th and 10th 'Caucasian' Divisions, under Esat Paşa, continued to occupy the region Batum-Ardahan-Kars while the 15th Division, on arrival from Rumania, was treated as a strategic reserve for the Turkish forces in Caucasia.

was some thirty miles south-east of the frontier of the newly established Georgian and Azerbaijan Republics. There was a good *chaussée* between Delijan and Akstafa and a fair road from Akstafa to Ganja. The Turks had only 100–120 miles to cover between Delijan and the headquarters of the Army of Islam. The 5th Caucasian Division was able to enter Ganja on 20 June. A few days later Enver's half-brother, Nuri, who had travelled by a circuitous route through northern Persia, arrived to take over command of the Army of Islam, which now numbered about 6000 Turkish regulars and 10,000–12,000 Tartar volunteers and militiamen.

Thus was consummated a skilfully conceived political move to counter the Germans: the Turks were now in a position to develop their Caucasian plan, directed first of all to the capture of Baku; but they had evaded German objections since they were using neither Georgian territory nor Georgian railways and were basing their operations on the temporarily occupied part of Armenia with the good *chaussée* from Aleksandropol via Delijan to Akstafa station.

With the last week of June the contest for Baku may be considered to have started. It was a complicated affair since there were many competitors for the possession of the oil city.

(a) *The Turks* based their hopes on being the strongest military force in the immediate vicinity of the Caspian. The 5th and 36th Caucasian Divisions (and if necessary the 15th Infantry Division) were available to reinforce the 9th. The Azeri militia might be developed to a strength of between 20,000 and 30,000, and Turkish agents planned to raise some 10,000–15,000 irregulars among the tribes of Dağistan. Enver not only hoped to conquer Baku in four to six weeks, but he already saw his brother's green banner on the Terek and the lower Volga and even in Transcaspia. A British move through northern Persia was anticipated, but the Ninth Army of Yakup Şevki Paşa could oppose it with four or five divisions.

(b) *The Germans* did not have at hand in Georgia any force sufficient to move against Baku. They continued their fight, therefore, only on the diplomatic plane. The first German move was an invitation by the 'Allies' (i.e. Germans, Austrians and Turks) to the representatives of the Caucasian peoples to attend consultations in Istanbul. During July these consultations took the form of a series of conversations and intrigues in the Ottoman capital. The Caucasians were tempted in turn by Germans and Turks, but the Georgians remained firmly pro-German and the Tartars equally pro-Turkish. The Armenians were clearly in a helpless situation and the repre-

sentatives of the mountaineers, who included some wealthy *bourgeois* from the Grozny oilfields, were happy to be courted by so many imposing statesmen and generals. But in studying these Caucasian guests the Germans came to a definite conclusion: the key to the Baku problem lay not in Transcaucasia but in Moscow. The Germans now proposed to invite Soviet delegates to join the Constantinople conference, but the Turks expressed themselves as definitely opposed to the idea. The Germans thereupon entered into secret negotiations with the Soviets, and the first sign of this *rapprochement* between Berlin and Moscow was the recognition by the Soviets of a Georgian independent state (20 August).¹

Anti-German sentiment grew rapidly in Turkish political circles, and the rumour spread that the Germans were negotiating with the Don Ataman Krasnov (who was received by the Kaiser at Spa), with the object of securing Cossack co-operation against both the Turks and the British at Baku.² By the end of August the Turks received news that a Germano-Soviet agreement on Baku was practically concluded.³ A storm of indignation shook the Turkish press. Enver sent an order to his brother to take Baku immediately. This order was only accomplished on 14 September, on the eve of a series of events which were destined to bring about the complete collapse of the Ottoman empire.

(c) *The Soviets* were practically in the same position as the Germans in relation to Baku. The Red army had not the armed forces on the lower Volga nor in the northern Caucasus adequate to prevent the occupation of Baku by the Turks. The Soviet point of view was, however, categorically expressed: Baku must remain within the Russian Soviet Republic, since the oilfields were absolutely necessary to the economy of Russia. The Soviets had never recognized the claims of either the Transcaucasian Federation or of the Azerbaijan Republic to Baku. The Soviets were ready to resist Turkish pretensions with arms, but by force of circumstances the limited number of Red Guards available were compelled to co-operate with such uneasy

¹ Enver countered this move by landing a Turkish contingent at Sukhum. Georgian officials were expelled and the union of Abkhazia with the north Caucasian 'Mountain Republic' (*Gorskaya Respublika*) was proclaimed. When the German and Soviet governments protested, Enver denied the landing of Turkish troops and attributed events at Sukhum to the spontaneous action of the Abkhazians (Pomiankowski, *Zusammenbruch*, p. 373).

² The Kaiser had also received the Ukrainian, Hetman Skoropadsky, at Spa and, about this time, a Kalmyk prince.

³ For Germano-Soviet relations at this time, see Kazemzadeh, *The Struggle for Transcaucasia*, pp. 135, 142, 150.

allies as the Armenian national militia and the Cossacks of Colonel Bicherakov, which latter force had been supported and largely organized by the British. British help was at the same time suspect as 'capitalist and imperialist intervention'. In the negotiations with Germany the Soviets went no further than the promise of economic concessions. But after the capture of Baku by the Turks and in the light of the changed situation on the western front the Soviets, on 25 September, suddenly denounced the Treaty of Brest Litovsk with Turkey and required the immediate withdrawal of Turkish troops from Transcaucasia.

(d) The pretensions of the *Azeri Tartars* to Baku were natural enough, since the great majority of the population of the surrounding country districts were Tartar by blood and Muslim by faith. But neither the Transcaucasian nor (later) the Azerbaijan states were recognized by the Soviets, and the Revolutionary Committee at Baku, supported by the Red Guards and, more or less, by the levies of the Armenian national organization, was the only actual power in the city and the oilfields area. While the railway to Tiflis was cut by Tartar bands the Revolutionary Committee still retained a connexion with central Russia by the Caspian and Astrakhan. At the time when the Transcaucasian Federation was set up there were leaders who genuinely believed in the possibility of collaboration between the three Transcaucasian nationalities; but this state of mind was only of brief duration, and an insignificant pretext was sufficient to start terrible street-fighting between the Armenian and Tartar sections of the population of Baku (30 March to 1 April 1918). As the Armenians found support among the Reds (who regarded the Tartars as a counter-revolutionary element) the fighting soon became a massacre of the Tartar population. Several thousands of Tartars were killed and almost half the Muslim population of Baku fled the city. The 'March events' were a very bad beginning for the Armenians since they held promise of a bloody Muslim revenge in the future. Throughout Azerbaijan the Tartars took up arms. They began to organize something like a regular force at Ganja out of ex-regiments of the so-called 'Savage Division'¹ and demobilized soldiers (with a few officers mostly of Tartar blood). The efficiency of these 'national' troops was impaired by a lack of discipline even more marked than that existing among the Armenian regulars who had fought at Amamli

¹ Recruited largely from among the Muslim peoples of Dağistan and Azerbaijan, who had distinguished themselves by their *élan* in numerous battles on the Russian western front.

and Sardarabad. Nuri Paşa found the Army of Islam neither numerous nor of any appreciable military value. And the contact of this improvised force with the askers of the Turkish 5th Caucasian Division was not calculated to improve the fighting morale of the latter.

(e) *The Armenians*, who in practice were relatively more heavily committed to the struggle for Baku than any of the other competitors, were actually the least interested in the fate of the oilfields. But at Baku the Armenians faced in major form the tragic problem which had tried them in the lesser towns of Turkish and Russian Armenia: the defence of the Armenian civil population which was threatened with the prospect of massacre and deportation and even with extermination. The problem existed also in the smaller centres of eastern Transcaucasia where the Armenians lived in dangerous proximity to their hereditary neighbours and enemies the Muslim Tartars. Shemakha, Shusha, Nukha and other ancient towns of the Kura basin had seen many phases of the conflict between the two races. The Armenians early began to form 'national' battalions in these places and at Kazakh near Akstafa station on the vital line of Turkish communications between Delijan and Ganja.

At Baku the situation had at first seemed particularly favourable to the Armenians. Between January and March 1918 several thousand soldiers of Armenian origin, demobilized from the Russian front, had gathered in the city. These troops, with several scores of officers, unable to proceed further to their homes, seemed to be ideal material for the formation of an Armenian national corps. The Armenian Colonel Bagratuni, with the protection of the National Committee and without opposition from the Red soviet of soldiers' and sailors' delegates, began the work of organizing his compatriots. The Turco-Tartar danger was appreciated in equal degree by both the national and Red elements and co-operation was furthered by the fact that Stepan Shaumian, the Red chief in Baku and, indeed, one of the foremost leaders of the revolutionary movement in Russia, was an Armenian. But the formation of the Baku force was only in process when Tartar volunteers moved on the city along the Ganja-Baku railway. They were stopped at Hajikabul station (April), seventy-five miles from the city, by the partisans of Amazasp, veterans of the mountain warfare round Lake Van in the years 1914-16.

(f) *The British* seemed to the Armenians to represent the only possibility of an ultimate salvation. During the spring and summer of 1917 the British had continued to rely on the assurances of the

Russian command in Caucasia, and the front in Armenia and northern Persia had retained the appearance, if not the substance, of normality. Even in September and October Baratov's troops were still responsible for security between Kirmanshah and the Caspian and VII Caucasian Corps was occupying the region between Tabriz and Urmia. It was only after the November Revolution and the opening of the negotiations at Brest Litovsk that the British began to concern themselves seriously with the political and military future of the area between the Black Sea and the Caspian. Self-determination was then the fashion and it was natural, with the not too remote prospect of the liquidation of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires, that the crisis of the Romanov empire should have promoted the consideration of all kinds of possibilities in connexion with the minority nationalities which now found themselves without a centre of attraction. British action in Caucasia seemed to meet the strategic requirements of the situation in the Middle East and at the same time to respond to the centrifugal phenomena which had produced, first the Transcaucasian Federation and then, within a few months, the republics of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. The negotiations undertaken by the new Soviet government at Brest Litovsk were a serious embarrassment to the governments of the western powers and the refusal of the Transcaucasian Federation to send delegates to Brest Litovsk naturally attracted their attention and invited their support. Somewhat exaggerated views were held, even at Russian general headquarters on the Caucasian front, of the prospects of holding the line conquered during the last three years with the support of national formations and some confidence was placed in the numerous bands recruited from Armenian and Assyrian (Nestorian) refugees which were ready to oppose the Turks in the region round Lake Van.

Early in January the skeleton of 'Dunsterforce' (under Major-General Dunsterville of the Indian Army) was constituted at Bagdad. It was at first intended that Dunsterville, with a numerous staff of officers and non-commissioned officers and considerable funds, should make his way across Persia to the Caspian and establish direct contact with the Transcaucasian authorities in Baku and Tiflis. It was anticipated that the Georgians and Armenians, with British support in trained cadres and funds, might be able to sustain the weight of a Turkish attack while the Azeri Tartars might be deterred from actual participation on the side of the Turks. Strangely enough no substantial British forces were moved up into northern Persia to support Dunsterville's mission—possibly in view of the difficulty of

organizing the movement of large bodies of troops in the winter conditions of the Iranian plateau.¹

With all his energy Dunsterville was only able to reach Enzeli on 17 February, and only then because the continuous stream of demobilized Russian troops returning to their homes gave him cover against the turcophil, Kuchik Khan, who was holding, with bands of Jangalis, the Manjil Pass on the road from Kazvin to Enzeli. Dunsterville was already too late: Enzeli was in the hands of Red committees, and the Reds at that moment were chiefly interested in the conclusion of the Brest Litovsk negotiations. Passage was refused to the British mission and Dunsterville narrowly escaped a Jangali ambush on his return to Hamadan. In Hamadan, Dunsterville, who found the situation daily deteriorating and the remnants of Baratov's corps quite unable to maintain internal security, began to prepare for the occupation of northern Persia by British troops. He succeeded in taking into British service Bicherakov's volunteer detachment of partisans which had done so well on the advance into Iraq during the previous year. Thus 1200 seasoned Cossacks were added to the 200 British officers and other ranks who arrived in Kirmanshah at the end of May; the two groups represented the only armed forces at the disposal of the British general. In June some serious reinforcements began to arrive: the 14th Hussars, a battalion of British infantry and another of Gurkhas; one battery, four armoured cars and five hundred lorries. But in June the Turkish offensive by several divisions against Tabriz and the Urmia region was already in full swing, and by 1 July the first movements of the Army of Islam against Baku became known.

Developments in the Caucasus certainly did not correspond with the hopes of continued resistance on the part of the Transcaucasian nations on which the original conception of Dunsterforce had been based. The Georgians had gone over to the Germans and the Armenian fight against the Turks was clearly proving ineffectual. With the Germans in Tiflis and the Turks in Aleksandropol it was obvious that either one or the other or both would not lose time in moving against Baku. Dunsterville received instructions to help the defenders of Baku—whoever they might be—in any possible way. Without awaiting the meagre reinforcements which were expected during the month of June, he set up headquarters at Kazvin. He decided to force a passage through the Jangali country and reach Enzeli. With only Bicherakov's Cossacks, their four horse-drawn guns, one squadron of hussars and a few armoured cars, Dunsterville succeeded in dis-

¹ For detailed discussion, see A. T. Wilson, *Loyalties*, vol. II, chap. II.

persing the three or four thousand irregulars which Kuchik Khan could put in his way (8 June)¹ and in a few days entered Enzeli. During July the arrival of his reinforcements allowed Dunsterville to garrison Resht and to protect the Kazvin-Enzeli road while his patrols were thrown out along the roads from Kazvin to Bijar and Tabriz. Fortunately for the British, the Turks (who were already in Tabriz) remained passive.

In Enzeli, Dunsterville found the Reds adopting an attitude very different from that which they had taken up in February; but, with the exception of Bicherakov's Cossacks, the British commander had no troops available for immediate action across the Caspian. It was decided to allow Bicherakov to co-operate temporarily and tactically with the Reds and to secure their aid in transporting the Cossacks by sea to Baku. However Bicherakov himself planned to land, not at Baku, but at Alyat, a point some forty miles to the south of Baku where the railway from Ganja approaches the Caspian coast and turns sharply north to the oil city. Bicherakov's intention was to preserve his independence of the numerous conflicting political authorities in Baku; at the same time he meant, by a bold raid along the line of the railway, to reach and destroy the important bridge over the Kura at Evlakh, thus seriously slowing any advance of heavy Turkish forces towards Baku. A shrewd adventurer and leader of men, Bicherakov was thus pursuing the twin aims of winning his transport by contributing to the campaign against the Turks and, at the same time, of bringing his men appreciably nearer to their homes on the Terek and the Kuban.

During the first week in July Bicherakov landed at Alyat, but the situation in Baku was less favourable to his plans than he had anticipated. Meantime, on the shores of the Caspian, Dunsterville was impatiently awaiting the reinforcements which had been promised him and which only came up during the first ten days of August. By the 9th he had available for immediate operational purposes only five battalions and four batteries, one cavalry regiment, a few armoured cars and one squadron of aircraft; five further battalions and another five batteries were strung out along his line of communications through Persia. 'Dunsterforce' came too late and proved too small. Its commander, now better informed than he had been six months before, had no illusions as to the potentialities of the local armed groups in Baku. Dunsterville's expedition, in fact, had no

¹ The Jangalis had been well supplied with German equipment and were commanded by a German major.

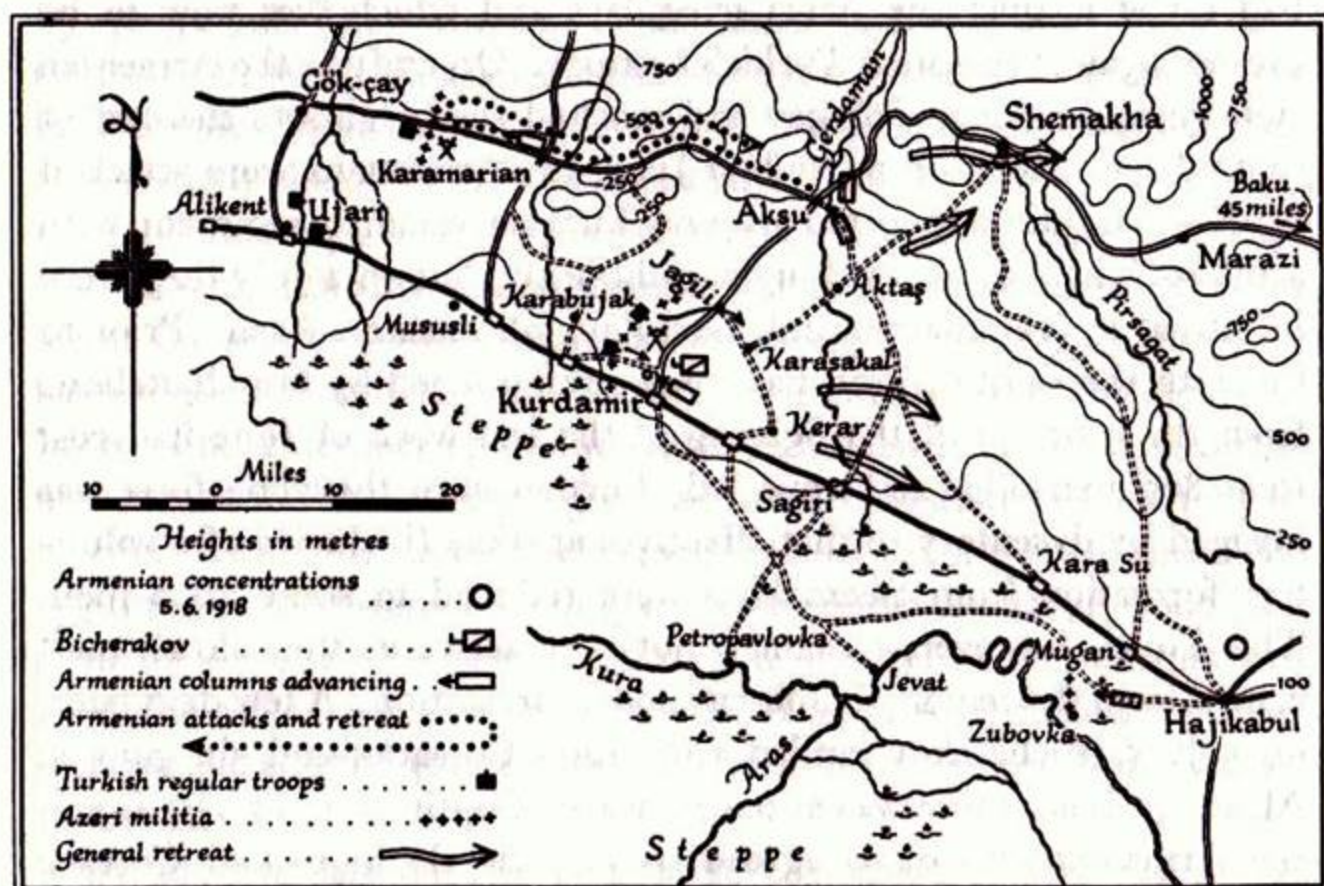
chance of success, and as it set sail across the Caspian—the only large stretch of water in the world which had never before floated British armed forces—events in France and Palestine had taken a decisive turn which made the risks involved in the weak attempt to succour Baku absolutely pointless.

At the beginning of June the forces available for the defence of Baku amounted to thirty battalions. The strength of each battalion was between 400 and 500 men and units were of a most heterogeneous character: Russian workers from the oilfields (mobilized by the Reds), Armenian ex-soldiers and levies from the Armenian civilian population, Armenian refugees from as near as Karabağ and from as far as Erzincan and Van. The majority of these formations were ill-disciplined and inefficient, but some proved not too bad and able and willing to fight. Plenty of rifles were available but there was a shortage of machine guns in working order. Fifty-four cannon were in condition, organized in two batteries of howitzers, six of field and one of mountain guns. The mounted arm was represented by two squadrons. As a defensive force it was not quite negligible, even with its uncertain and varied politics and its lack of officers and non-commissioned officers.

Curiously enough this essentially defensive force had begun its operational career with an offensive manoeuvre. This did not arise from strategic considerations: here, as elsewhere, the first task of a force largely Armenian proved to be the protection of an Armenian civil population. The Armenians, scattered in considerable numbers throughout Azerbaijan, were not, as a whole, taking refuge in Baku. There was a large group in the ancient Muslim town of Shemakha (sixty miles to the west of Baku), others at Salyany near the mouth of the Kura and in other rural centres. All these Armenians were in danger; their local armed volunteers might defend them against their Tartar neighbours but certainly could not prove effective against the Turks who had at this time already reached Delijan and who might be expected to move farther east. It was therefore decided to occupy as much of the country to the west of Baku as possible before the armed groups of Azeris were reinforced by regular Turkish troops. The Baku command decided to occupy the line from Shemakha through Aksu (on the *chaussée* from Kurdamir station to Shemakha), Kurdamir station (on the Tiflis-Ganja-Baku railway) and Petro-pavlovka village (on the Kura near the point of junction of the Aras with that river). If feasible, it was intended later to aim at the occupation of a line farther to the west running from the town of Nukha

southward to the Evlakh bridge over the Kura and then along the *chaussée* to Shusha.¹ The plan was not a bad one, but it required mobile and experienced forces able to act rapidly.

By 5 June an offensive force had been concentrated at Hajikabul station adequate to push back the advanced groups of Azeris westward along the railway line. The Armenian offensive was developed by three columns: on the right four battalions moved on Aksu with the objective of opening the road to Shemakha; in the centre nine battalions advanced along the railway on Kurdamir; and on the left four



Map 36. Operations along the lower Kura, June 1918

battalions moved along the Kura. By 15 June the line Aksu-Kurdamir-Petropavlovka had been reached except on the left. Only a few skirmishes had taken place, but strong groups of Azeris were known to be concentrating at Mususli station, 20 miles to the west of Kurdamir, and at Gök-çay on the road running north of and parallel to the railway to Evlakh.²

The right column met with resistance at Karamarian where fighting took place on 16 and 17 June. The Armenians captured Karamarian and maintained their position but were unable to make further progress. The stronger centre column, which had been

¹ There were important Armenian minorities in both Nukha and Shusha.

² The main road north of the Kura from Shemakha to the Alazani valley via Nukha and Zakatali forks, near the village of Khanapat, south to Shusha in Karabağ and south-west by west to Ganja.

awaiting results from the advance on the right—conceived as an outflanking movement—remained inactive at Kurdamir. The left was held up at Zubovka by commandos of mounted Azeri irregulars and failed to reach Petropavlovka. The Armenians remained on this line from 17 to 26 June but made no attempt to fortify it.

On the 26th, the Armenian command received information of the march of Turkish regular infantry¹ from Ganja to Evlakh and farther to Ujari station. Boldly but rather senselessly the Armenians decided to repeat their 'manoeuvre by the right', a movement which had failed against the Azeri irregulars and which was now to be pressed against seasoned Turkish infantry. On 27 June the Armenian right moved against Gök-çay and reached the heights to the east of that village. Here, on 29 and 30 June, the Armenians were attacked by Azeri militia supported by one Turkish infantry regiment with artillery. The Armenians fought stubbornly, but on 1 July they were in retreat to Karamarian and, next day, fell back on Aksu. Prior to the 27th the right column had been strengthened by four battalions from the centre, but the fighting of the last week of June had cost them 800 men killed and wounded. Furthermore, the whole force was ravaged by dysentery so that effectives at Aksu (inclusive of a volunteer formation from Shemakha) were reduced to some 2000 men. The Turks, however, remained not very active as they slowly concentrated in the region of Gök-çay and Ujari station. A few days later, on 5 July, Bicherakov landed with 1200 Cossacks and six guns at Alyat. In Baku there was at once a wave of optimism. The Reds and the Armenian Nationals agreed to put the distinguished Cossack colonel at the head of the 'active group' on the Aksu-Kurdamir line.

On 8 July Bicherakov arrived at Kurdamir. He worked out a plan of action whereby the Armenians at Aksu and Kurdamir were to hold on to their position while, with his Cossacks and 1000 picked men of the Baku force, he struck from Karasakal (on the Kurdamir-Aksu road) *between* the Turkish columns on the march from Gök-çay to Aksu and from Ujari to Kurdamir. There was, however, no time to put this plan into operation since, on the 10th, two Turkish regiments, supported by Azeri militia and mounted commandos, attacked with considerable energy on the front Kurdamir-Karasakal. The Armenian detachment at Kurdamir withdrew on Kerar station. Bicherakov had to conform to this move in order to avoid encirclement at Karasakal while the Armenian right swung back from Aksu. At the same time

¹ The 5th Caucasian Division.

the roads became crowded with swarms of Armenian fugitives from Shemakha and the surrounding countryside in flight towards Baku.

By the 15th Bicherakov had come to the conclusion that the 'active group' was unable to resist Turkish regular troops with artillery in the open field. He ordered the right column to retreat on Balajari station (a few miles to the north of Baku city) while the centre fell back on Hajikabul, in which direction they were still able to use rail transport. The Cossacks covered the retreat—no very difficult task since the Turks did not move in force beyond the line Aksu-Kurdamir.¹ By 30–31 July the remnants of the Baku 'active group' were concentrated between Balajari and Bibi-Eybat stations on a radius of four to five miles from the centre of Baku. Bicherakov's detachment lay on the right along the railway line to Derbent.

The slow *tempo* of the Turkish advance was proof that Nuri Paşa had his own difficulties. The terrible summer heat of the lower Kura basin, the lack of good drinking water, a long line of supply would all have tended to slow up a force better organized than the Army of Islam. The dysentery epidemic which had decimated the Armenians now struck the askers of the 5th Caucasian Division; and when Nuri reached Kurdamir he had only 4000 men fit for the firing line. The Azeri militiamen were deserting and there remained hardly 8000 men available for the conquest of Baku, half of whom were irregulars of doubtful value. As early as 15 July Nuri had been pressing for reinforcements, and the 36th Caucasian Division was moved from Delijan to Ganja.²

During the first days of August several changes occurred in the situation at Baku. The failure of the offensive operation, with the loss of 3000 in killed, wounded and sick, so impressed the Red committee that it decided to abdicate and to surrender the city. But the National Armenian organization, supported by *bourgeois* and moderate elements carried out a *coup d'état* on 1 August and, under the name of the Centro-Caspian Dictatorship, decided to continue the struggle and to seek help from the British at Enzeli. The Red units of Shaumian (Armenian) and Petrov (Russian) ceased fighting and were disarmed. The number of the potential defenders of Baku was thus reduced by a further 3000.

On 2 August, at the moment of maximum confusion in the city as

¹ Shemakha was occupied by Azeri militia.

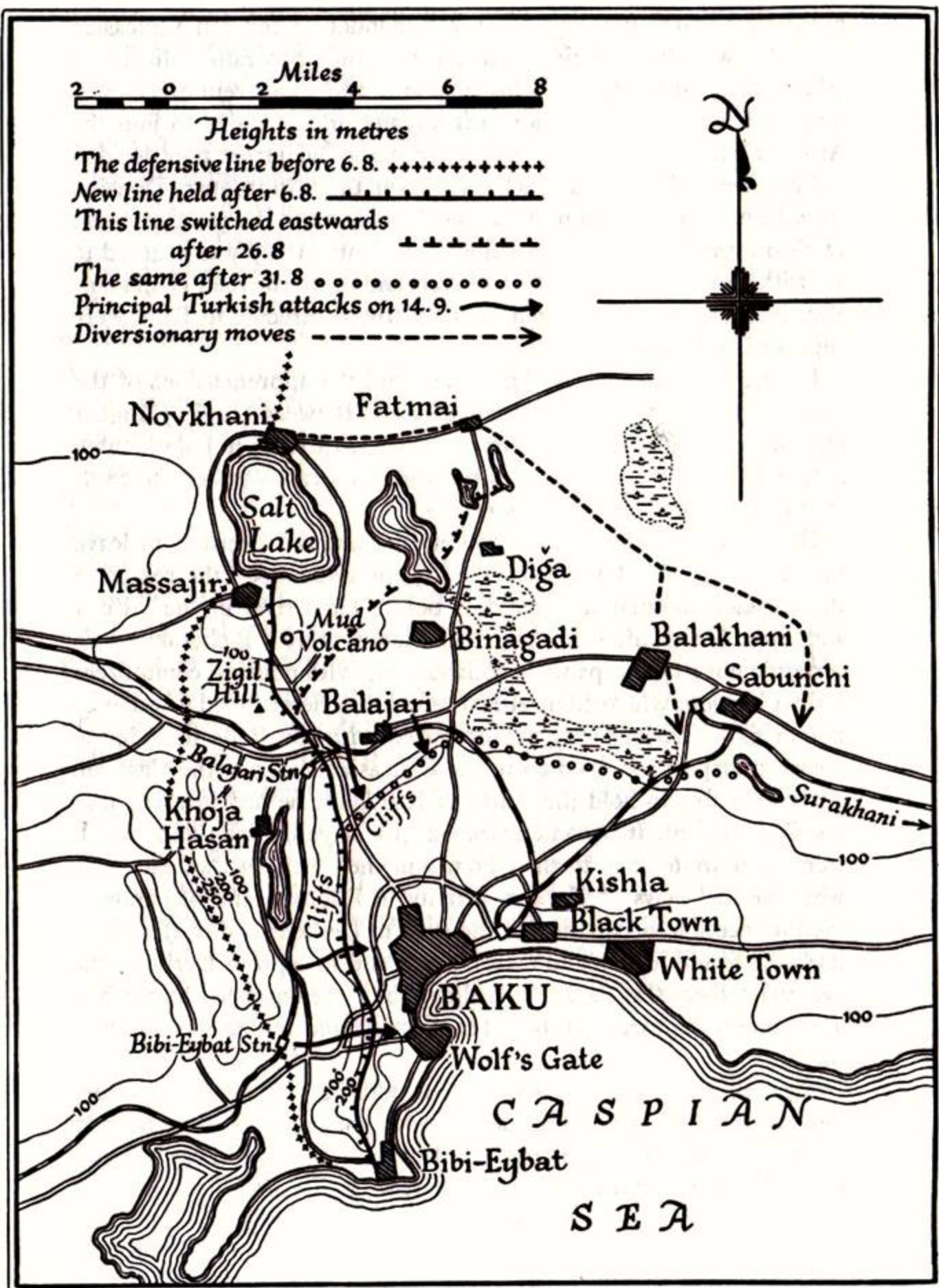
² The 37th Caucasian Division had been dispatched as reinforcements to Palestine via Batum and Istanbul; it was replaced by the 15th Infantry Division (newly arrived from Rumania). The 9th and 10th Caucasian Divisions remained to hold the region Ardahan-Kars-Aleksandropol-Karakilise.

a result of the political crisis, the vanguard of the Army of Islam approached the defensive line between Balajari and Eybat stations. If the enemy had pressed an attack this thinly held line must have been broken and the further defence of the city would have been impossible. But the timely appearance of Bicherakov's Cossacks on the Turkish left and rear suddenly produced a panic and the Turco-Tartars withdrew several miles to the west in a disorder which was interpreted in Baku as a complete victory. After some pursuit of the beaten enemy the jubilant Baku levies returned to the joys of the revolutionary city—no one took the trouble to occupy and fortify the high ground to the west of the railway line.

Another surprise followed: Bicherakov, without any explanations, withdrew from the Balajari region and marched north along the railway to Derbent with his Cossacks and a further 1000 men of the Baku garrison who preferred to link their fate with that of the only efficient commander in the disorganized and threatened city. Fortunately, the impression of Bicherakov's departure was alleviated by the appearance on the same day (4 August) of the first contingent of British troops. Seventy infantrymen and a few officers were landed: a handful of men but sufficient to prove, at last, that British aid was coming, and the facile enthusiasm of the crowd was stirred by stories that 20,000 or 30,000 British troops were on their way to the Centro-Caspian capital.

This enthusiasm proved rather helpful next morning (5 August) when the Turks launched their first attack against the city. They were trying to break through from Eybat station along the main road which penetrates a gap known as Wolf's Gate in the line of cliffs separating the town itself from the valley along which the railway runs north from Eybat to Balajari. The assailants were met by artillery and strong rifle fire. At some places they reached the upper line of the cliff wall, but Wolf's Gate was held and about noon the defenders counter-attacked and the Turco-Tartars were thrown back everywhere to the line of the railway. They managed to retain, however, the heights to the west of Railway Valley. On that day (5 August) the Baku garrison proved to have put up their best performance, at a cost of some 600 men and twenty officers killed and wounded. The Turco-Tartars suffered serious losses and left sixteen machine guns on the field.

A new stage in the fight for Baku now began. The Turks were markedly impressed by the resistance met on 5 August and, perhaps, yet further impressed by the rumours of the arrival of considerable



Map 37. Baku in September 1918

numbers of British troops. The commander of the 5th Caucasian Division, with his effectives reduced to some 3000 rather dispirited askers, decided to stand on his positions and await reinforcements. The 36th Caucasian Division was already on the move to join the Army of Islam. The reports received from the Baku front now decided Turkish general headquarters to move even the 15th Infantry Division from Batum to the region of Aleksandropol, while the 9th Caucasian Division was in transport to Julfa. The Ninth Army was ordered to act with more energy in northern Persia and to cut the road Hamadan-Kazvin-Enzeli, by which route British troops directed to Baku were supposed to be on the move.

In fact the hopes of the Armenians and the apprehensions of the Turks proved to be very much exaggerated. Between 4 and 17 August only one incomplete British brigade (the 39th) arrived in Baku—three battalions, a field battery and three armoured cars—under the command of Major-General Dunsterville.¹

Dunsterville might bitterly regret Bicherakov's decision to leave the defenders of Baku in the lurch, but he understood the reason of the Cossack commander's conduct before his arrival in the oil city and even better after his own experience there. Bicherakov was certainly not a type capable of collaborating with political committees and with troops who held meetings before they determined whether or not to fight; he had only compromised with the Reds in order to secure transport for his men to the Caucasian shore of the Caspian. After his effort to hold the Turks at Kurdamir he had foreseen that his Cossacks might become involved in a siege of Baku and cut off from their route back to their homes in the northern Caucasus. So when he had news of Turkish activity in Dağistan and of bands of mountaineers in occupation of the road to Derbent and of that town itself, he found it better to march north and to capture Derbent, the gate to northern Caucasia. Accordingly by forced marches he reached and quickly captured Derbent (12 August) and remained in station there.

Meanwhile in Baku, General Dunsterville was becoming more pessimistic every day. The defensive organization of the city was bad; the Centro-Caspian troops lacked discipline and most of them were in poor fighting spirit. The Russian General Dokuchayev, now commander-in-chief, was not the man to handle revolutionary volunteers, while the Armenian Colonel Bagratuni, an efficient organizer, was an invalid who was helpless in the tide of growing

¹ The infantry were drawn from the North Staffords, Warwicks and Worcesters.

disorder. British intervention had been planned on the basis of sending limited cadres of technicians to help the Caucasian national forces to organize their own resistance while the Armenians took the view that the British had come to fight for them and to assume the burden of the defence of the oil city.

The three battalions from the English midlands could do little in the situation in which they found themselves on the shores of the Caspian Sea. Baku was well covered from the west by a line of almost perpendicular, but not very high, cliffs. At the southern end of the cliff wall the main road zigzagged to the gap at Wolf's Gate. The line of cliffs might be defended easily enough even by the half-trained Armenian militiamen; one English battalion seemed sufficient support in the Wolf's Gate area. But four or five miles to the north of the Gate, the cliffs turn sharply north-east and then disappear in flats. Balajari station lies at the point where the railway, after following a line parallel with the cliffs, turns east, then south, and approaches Baku from the north-west through the area where the most important oilfields and refineries are situated. It was natural to assume that it would not be long before the Turks turned the Balajari region from the north and, moving east by south along the railway, tried to penetrate into the city taking the whole line of defence in rear. To prevent such an attempt it was necessary to extend the defensive line northward from Balajari through the points named Mud Volcano and Salt Lake to the northern shore of the Apsheron peninsula. Balajari was about equidistant (ten miles) from the northern and southern shores of the peninsula. And the forces in Baku were certainly inadequate to defend a front of seventeen miles (excluding the three miles occupied by the Salt Lake). Furthermore, the ground stretching to the north of Balajari was completely flat except for two small hills (one of which was Mud Volcano). The only course open to Dunster-ville under all the circumstances was to place the Warwicks and the Worcesters in the line to the north of Balajari, with two or three local battalions in support.

From the middle of August bands of Azeris began to penetrate into the northern part of the Apsheron peninsula, where defensive patrols had extended the line east from Balajari to the Balakhani and Sabunchi oilfields. Towards the end of the month the enemy became more active. The advance troops of the 36th Division had reached the Baku front and the Turks were extending their line to the east. On 26 August a company of the North Staffordshires in position on Mud Volcano was attacked by two Turkish battalions supported by light

and heavy artillery. The company lost all its officers and eighty men. Two more English companies were thrown in as reinforcements, but the two Armenian battalions supposed to be somewhere in the region of Balajari failed to appear. Dunsterville could only muster three English companies to hold the new line established between Balajari and Binagadi hill (to the east of Mud Volcano). The Turks attacked this line on 31 August, and again the English county troops were overwhelmed by superior strength in infantry and artillery. Nor were the Armenian reserve battalions willing to go into the battle. The precarious defence line was withdrawn still further to the east, between Balajari village and Diğa.

The circumstances of the two actions of the 20th and 31st caused General Dunsterville to lose patience. He addressed his reproaches to the Baku 'dictators' on the conduct of the Centro-Caspian troops and concluded that the further defence of the oil city was a waste of time and life. After several days' discussions Dunsterville declared his intention to evacuate his troops since no power on earth could save Baku from the Turks. It was, however, impractical for the British commander to attempt evacuation without agreement with the Centro-Caspian dictatorship, and since the dictators refused to approve his proposals to surrender the city there was no alternative but to await the final attack of the enemy.

This final attack was only delayed by the slow concentration of the 36th Caucasian Division. By 12 September the Army of Islam was able to muster some 7000 or 8000 Turkish troops and 6000 or 7000 Azeri irregulars. In the city British and Centro-Caspian effectives able (or willing) to fight were less than 8000. On the 14th, 3000 Turks and Azeris appeared on the extreme right of the defensive line in the region of Surakhani. This move proved to be no more than a feint; for, on the following day, the principal attack was launched by eight or ten Turkish battalions, with strong artillery support, on both sides of Wolf's Gate. This important point was captured early in the day, but British infantry with field artillery and six armoured cars (three British and three Russian) checked further penetration. With their homes immediately threatened, some hundreds of Armenians fought with a desperate resolution.¹

By 8 a.m. the Turkish attack at Wolf's Gate and at the angle of the line of cliffs near Balajari station seemed to have been held. A strong counter-attack might have thrown back the enemy to his original

¹ These men belonged to the detachment of 1000 Baku Armenians who had joined Bicherakov on 4 August; 500 of them had returned by sea from Derbent.

positions, but two or three unskilful attempts by the Baku volunteers failed. The Turks, meantime, began to shell the town and harbour with considerable effect on the morale of the population. By 11 a.m. the situation was clearly deteriorating and General Dunsterville gave orders for his shipping to be ready to leave. By 6 p.m. the last effort to organize a counter-attack in force had failed. An hour later the British troops began to withdraw towards the port with the North Staffords acting as rear-guard. By 10 p.m. all British were on board. The evacuation of the Baku troops and civil population continued throughout the night and by 6 a.m. of the 15th some 8000 Armenian troops and civilians had left the port. The Turks did not move forward from the line of cliffs until 5 a.m. of the 16th, when they entered the city to put an end to the massacre, pillage and incendiarism which had been started by the Tartar section of the population during the night of the 14-15th and which continued all through the day and night of the 15th. Recent estimates have placed the number of Armenians slaughtered at just under 9000.¹

The Turkish 5th Caucasian Division remained in Baku while the 36th moved northward along the railway on Derbent. Bicherakov had already evacuated this ancient gateway of the Caucasus and retired north to Petrovsk which he reached on 2 September. Despite the desperate situation of Turkey, the 36th Caucasian Division (now only 3000 strong) continued its triumphal Pan-Turanian march along the shores of the Caspian and in October occupied Petrovsk, from where Bicherakov had already moved to the Terek. The occupation of Petrovsk was the last and curiously useless gesture of the Army of Islam. The events of September on the Syrian front had already compelled the Turkish general staff to concentrate their 10th Caucasian and 15th Infantry Divisions at Batum with a view to transportation to the Bosphorus.

It remains to make reference to events in northern Persia in connexion with their bearing on the Caucasian campaign. Early in the summer of 1918 some 10,000 Assyrian and Armenian fugitives from Turkish territory had been gathered in the region of Lake Urmia. Provided with the remnants of Russian armaments and stores abandoned in this area and under command of some Russian officers (Colonel Kuzmin and others), the Assyrians and Armenians put up

¹ Kazemzadeh (*The Struggle for Transcaucasia*, pp. 143-4) gives a total of 8988, based on the findings of a special commission of the Armenian National Council. The figure may be compared with the estimate of 12,000 Azeri Muslims massacred by the Bolsheviks and Armenians during the March events in Baku; cf. p. 481 above and Kazemzadeh, pp. 72 ff.

a successful fight against the Turkish 6th Infantry Division advancing from the direction of Ruwandiz. Soon, however, the 5th Infantry Division appeared, followed by the 12th (both of the same IV Corps of the Ninth Army). Meantime, in July, the 11th Caucasian Division had occupied Tabriz while the 9th Caucasian Division reached Julfa in support. Despite the very slight British forces covering the road from Tabriz to Kazvin the Turks remained astonishingly passive. After repeated orders from Turkish general headquarters the 11th Caucasian Division undertook a slow advance at the end of August and by 6 September was at Miana. On the 12th, its patrols reached Zenjan, while the 12th and 5th Infantry Divisions, after the evacuation of the Urmia region by the Assyrians, penetrated to Bijar and Sinna.¹ Then the events of September in Syria put an end to this episode of the Pan-Turanian offensive.

¹ For details of the Assyrian (Nestorian) resistance, see art. 'Nestorians' by B. Nikitin in *E.I.* See also M. H. Donohoe, *With the Persian Expedition* (London, 1918); W. A. Wigram, *Our Smallest Ally* (London, 1920); and R. S. Stafford, *The Tragedy of the Assyrians* (London, 1935).