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АРМЯНСКИЕ НАЦИОНАЛЬНЫЕ ДИВИЗИИ НА СТАЛИНГРАДСКОМ И КАВКАЗСКОМ ФРОНТАХ

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Аннотация. Великая Отечественная война стала серьезным испытанием для всех народов Советского Союза, в том числе для армянского народа. С первых дней войны в Советской Армении началась работа по реализации ее военного потенциала. Перед республикой стояли чрезвычайно важные задачи: переориентировать всю свою деятельность на нужды военного времени, организовать мобилизацию, набрать кадры взамен ушедших на фронт и обеспечить бесперебойную работу в тылу. Кроме того, необходимо было организовать военную подготовку населения, собрать народное ополчение, построить оборонительные укрепления в приграничных районах и т. д. Формирование национальных дивизий сыграло важную роль в мобилизационной работе, проводившейся в первый период войны. Цель данной работы – осветить ключевые исторические события, связанные с участием армянских дивизий в Сталинградской битве и обороне Кавказа. Исследования свидетельствуют о том, что армянские дивизии прошли трудный героический боевой путь в Великой Отечественной войне, внесли значительный вклад в разгром фашистских войск. Полученные данные подтверждают, что армянские дивизии сыграли важнейшую роль в Сталинградской битве – событии, ставшем поворотным моментом как в Великой Отечественной, так и во Второй мировой войне. Кроме того, их участие в обороне Кавказа было решающим для предотвращения продвижения врага на территорию Советской Армении.

Ключевые слова: фашизм; Великая Отечественная война; мобилизация; армянские дивизии; боевой путь; Сталинградская битва; Кавказский фронт.

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АРМЯНСКІЯ НАЦЫЯНАЛЬНЫЯ ДЫВІЗІІ НА СТАЛІНГРАДСКІМ І КАЎКАЗСКІМ ФРАНТАХ

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Анатацыя. Вялікая Айчынная вайна стала сур'ёзным выпрабаваннем для ўсіх народаў Савецкага Саюза, уключаючы армянскі народ. З першых дзён вайны ў Савецкай Арменіі пачалася праца па рэалізацыі яе ваеннага патэнцыялу. Перад рэспублікай стаялі надзвычай важныя задачы: пераарыентаваць усю сваю дзейнасць на патрэбы ваеннага часу, арганізаваць мабілізацыю, набраць кадры наўзамен тых, якія пайшлі на фронт, і забяспечыць бесперабойную працу ў тыле. Акрамя таго, неабходна было арганізаваць ваенную падрыхтоўку насельніцтва, сабраць народнае апалчэнне, пабудаваць абарончыя ўмацаванні ў прыгранічных раёнах і г. д. Фарміраванне нацыянальных дывізіяў адыграла важную ролю ў мабілізацыйнай працы, якая праводзілася ў першы перыяд вайны. Мэта дадзенай працы – асвятліць ключавыя гістарычныя падзеі, звязаныя з удзелам армянскіх дывізіяў у Сталінградскай бітве і абароне Каўказа. Даследаванні сведчаць аб тым, што гэтыя дывізіі прайшлі цяжкі гераічны баявы шлях у Вялікай Айчыннай вайне, унеслі значны ўклад у разгром фашысцкіх войскаў. Атрыманыя даныя пацвярджаюць, што армянскія дывізіі адыгралі найважнейшую ролю ў Сталінградскай бітве – падзеі, якая стала паворотным момантам як у Вялікай Айчыннай, так і ў Другой сусветнай вайне. Акрамя таго, іх удзел у абароне Каўказа быў вырашальным для прадухілення прасоўвання ворага на тэрыторыю Савецкай Арменіі.

Ключавыя словы: фашызм; Вялікая Айчынная вайна; мабілізацыя; армянскія дывізіі; баявы шлях; Сталінградская бітва; Каўказскі фронт.

ARMENIAN NATIONAL DIVISIONS ON THE STALINGRAD AND CAUCASIAN FRONTS

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Abstract. The Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union was a severe challenge for all the peoples of the union, including the Armenian people. From the very first days of the war, Soviet Armenia began work on realising the republic's military potential. It faced extremely important tasks: first of all, to reorganise all its activities on a military basis, to ensure mobilisation, to recruit personnel to replace those who had gone to the front, and to continue the work of the rear without interruption. After all this, it was necessary to organise military training for the population, form a people's militia, build defensive fortifications in border areas, etc. The formation of national divisions played an important role in the mobilisation work carried out in the first period of the war. This article aims to highlight key historical moments involving Armenian divisions during the Battle of Stalingrad and the defence of the Caucasus. Research indicates that these divisions endured a challenging combat path throughout the Great Patriotic War, contributing significantly to the defeat of Nazi forces through courage and self-sacrifice. The findings show that Armenian divisions played a crucial role in the Battle of Stalingrad, an event that proved decisive for the outcome of the Great Patriotic War and World War II overall, as well as in the defence of the Caucasus, which helped prevent an enemy advance into Soviet Armenia.

Keywords: fascism; Great Patriotic War; mobilisation; Armenian divisions; combat path; Battle of Stalingrad; Caucasian front.

Introduction

At sunrise on 22 June 1941, German fascist troops violated the non-aggression pact signed in 1939 and attacked the Soviet Union without declaring war. In a short period, the fascist troops captured the Baltic states, Belarus, Ukraine, and western regions of Russia, blockaded

Leningrad, and approached Moscow. A serious danger loomed over the entire USSR [1, p. 150]. The Soviet government, assessing the situation, issued a statement on 22 June calling on the people to defend their homeland. The Armenian people sent tens of thousands

of their children to the front. Armenian national divisions were created, which were crowned with military glory on the fronts.

The purpose of this study is to identify and highlight the contribution of Armenian divisions on the Stalingrad and Caucasian fronts. The relevance of this study stems from the need to re-evaluate historical facts in light of current political realities and recent geopolitical developments.

Given the fact that the Great Patriotic War was repeatedly mentioned, however, the issue of the participation of Armenian divisions in the Battle of Stalingrad and on the Caucasian Front was not discussed in detail.

The source base for the study consisted of archival documents, press publications by military units during that period, scientific publications. Quite a lot of information on this topic is provided by the materials stored in the funds 1007 and 741 of the National Archives of Armenia (NAA), where the detailed information about the formation of divisions and the combat direction is given.

The works of K. Harutyunyan [2–4] are of great scientific importance, in which the author mentions the contribution of the Armenian people to the war. The work of V. V. Litvinenko [5], in which the Battle of Stalingrad is discussed in detail, is valuable for highlighting the issues to be considered. The author critically analyses the existing estimates of human losses in the battles of Stalingrad and calculates the casualties of the Soviet and German forces in the Battle of Stalingrad based on a unified concept. The work «The Great Patriotic War of 1941–1945» stands out as a source of scientific value [6], which discusses the prehistory of the German attack and the events of the first three months of the Great Patriotic War, and then the current situation, the rallying of the Soviet people in defense of the Motherland. Some information about the Caucasian front is also given by E. F. Krinko and A. Yu. Bezugolnyi [7] in a scientific article co-authored, the authors discuss the pre-war plans of the nazi leadership, the real threats of the seizure of the Caucasus.

Research methodology

The methodological foundation of the study is based on the principles of historicism and historical-comparative analysis. The availability of the aforementioned sources enabled the identification and delineation of the research subject. Archival materials from the NAA were utilised to clarify chronological frameworks and contextual details. Furthermore, the use of data and materials published in scholarly sources made it possible

to examine the participation of Armenian military units and to emphasise their role in the war.

Adhering to the principles of historical authenticity, the research was carried out through the examination of factual evidence and the comparative analysis of diverse materials. The collected data substantiate the conclusion that Armenian divisions made a significant contribution to the victory of the Motherland in the war.

Results and discussion

Among the tasks carried out in the early stages of the war, the formation of national divisions, which took place in Armenia in the first days of the war, occupied a special place. In 1922, the 76th Armenian division was formed. With the start of the Great Patriotic War, the 89th, 261st, 390th, 408th, and 409th Armenian rifle divisions were quickly formed in the Soviet Army, with their ranks mainly filled by Armenians. The 89th Taman rifle division, which was awarded three times, performed great feats in the Great Patriotic War, marching from the Caucasus Mountains to Berlin. According to Resolution of the State Defence Committee of the USSR of 22 November 1941 No. 935, as well as Directive of the People's Defence Committee of the USSR of 28 November 1941 No. 3218, the 474th rifle division began to form in Yerevan on 15 December as part of the 45th army of the Transcaucasian front.

The latter was mainly replenished with human and material resources from the Armenian SSR. Military units and subdivisions of the division were also reple-

nished from Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenian-populated areas of Georgia. On 5 January 1942, by order of the People's Commissariat of Defence of the USSR No. 780101, the 474th rifle division was renamed the 89th rifle division¹. On the eve of its departure to the front, the 89th rifle division had 11 782 men in its ranks, 11 674 of them were Armenians (99.1 % of the total personnel)². Colonel S. Zakyan was appointed commander of the division, and Lieutenant Colonel A. Kazarian was appointed chief of staff. The division consisted of three rifle regiments and one artillery regiment, as well as of separate professional units³. S. Zakyan was later appointed commander of the 390th rifle division. Under his leadership, Armenian military units fought heroically against the German invaders. Together with other army units, Armenian soldiers repelled an attack by the German 22nd panzer division on 20 March 1942 and defeated the enemy. Colonel S. Zakyan died heroically in fierce fighting⁴. From December 1941 to early August 1942, military units of the 89th Taman rifle division intensively trained in combat

¹NAA. Fund 1007. Inv. 3. File 4. Sh. 5.

²Ibid.

³History of Armenian people / ed.: S. P. Agayan [et al.]. Yerevan : Acad. of Sci. of the Arm. SSR, 1970. Vol. 8. P. 48 (in Arm.).

⁴Battle Banner. 1942. 10 Apr. (No. 188) (in Arm.).

skills in Yerevan, preparing to enter the battle. Later, on 4 August 1942, they received orders to go to the front⁵.

According to Resolution of the People's Commissar of Defence of the USSR of 9 August 1941 No. 459 and Directive of the People's Commissar of Defence of the USSR of 11 August 1941 No. 2/539004, the 408th rifle division began to form in Echmiadzin and then in Yerevan [2, p. 214]. As of 25 September 1942, the division had 11 463 personnel, 11 125 of it were Armenians, accounting for 97.1 %. Colonel P. Kitsuke was appointed commander of the division. In the spring of 1942, soldiers of other nationalities who were part of the 408th rifle division were transferred to other military units, and their places were taken by Armenians. At that time, the 408th rifle division became an Armenian division in terms of its composition. It consisted of three rifle regiments (the 663rd, 670th, and 672nd) and one (the 963rd) rifle regiment [8, p. 10]. In August 1942, the division command reported that they were ready to be sent to the front. In the autumn of 1942, the 261st rifle division was formed in Armenia, fully manned by Armenian soldiers. The division commander was Colonel N. Baloyan, the military commissar was Senior Battalion Commissar A. Kananov, and the political chief was L. Shahbazyan. The division's regiments were stationed in various settlements. It remained in the rear until the end of the war. The division trained reserves and replenished the military units of the active army. Tens of thousands of Armenian soldiers who underwent combat and political training in its ranks went to the front. The division published the Armenian Red Army newspaper «Struggle for the Motherland», which shared combat experience with the soldiers and helped them master the art of war [8, p. 12].

The 409th rifle division was formed by order of the Military Headquarters of the Supreme Command of the Soviet Army on 28 June 1941 in Stepanavan⁶. According to Resolution of the State Defence Committee of the USSR of 9 August 1941 No. 459, the 409th rifle division began to be formed as part of the 45th army of the Transcaucasian front.

By a Resolution of the State Defence Committee of the USSR of 20 November 1941 No. 459, the 409th rifle division was included in the 45th army of the Transcaucasian front. Initially, the division operated as a foreign unit. As of 15–20 November 1941, the division had 2523 Armenians in its ranks. At the end of 1942, the 409th rifle division under the command of A. Vasilyan numbered 13 837 men, 13 460 of them were Armenians. The military commissar was A. Ayrapetyan, the deputy commanders were Colonel I. Prokopenko, Colonel S. Stepanyan,

and the head of the politburo L. Vardanyan. The division consisted of three rifle regiments (the 675th, 677th, and 684th) and one (the 690th) artillery regiment⁷. In early February 1942, foreign soldiers serving in the military units of the 409th rifle division were reassigned to other divisions, and the unit was subsequently replenished with Armenian personnel. On 23 February 1942, the division began publishing its Armenian-language newspaper «Battle Banner». Thus, the 409th rifle division was reorganised into an Armenian national military unit. At the end of November 1942, the division received the order to go to the front [9, p. 12]. It left the city of Lenakan for the front, took up positions on the front line north of the city of Grozny, and fought for the liberation of the city of Mozdok⁸. On 8 January 1944, the 409th rifle division was given the honorary title «Kirovograd» in recognition of its role in the liberation of the city of Kirovograd⁹. For its participation in the liberation of the strategically important cities and railway junctions of Novoukrainka and Pomoshnaya, the division was awarded the Order of Bogdan Khmel'nitsky of 2nd class. The division then participated in the liberation of Moldova, Romania, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Austria as part of the 2nd Ukrainian front¹⁰.

Only one of the Armenian national divisions formed during the Great Patriotic War did not participate in combat operations from the day of its formation until the end of the war. It was the Armenian 261st rifle division. This division was tasked with defending the relevant section of the Soviet-Turkish border on the territory of Soviet Armenia. At the start of the war, it had 9384 personnel, 7499 of it were Armenians. The division consisted of the 974th, 976th, and 978th rifle regiments, as well as the 809th artillery regiment. Until the day of its disbandment in the summer of 1945, the division honourably fulfilled the tasks assigned to it. The 261st rifle division also trained reserves and replenished the military units of the active army with marching battalions [9, p. 14].

The 390th rifle division, which was formed on the Kerch front under combat conditions, also stands out among the Armenian national units. It began to form on 25 August 1941 in the Georgian cities of Makharradze, Poti and Zugdidi as a non-national unit. Colonel I. Vingradov was appointed commander of the division, A. Sotnikov was appointed military commissar, and Lieutenant Colonel G. Sikhuralidze was appointed chief of staff. The division consisted of three rifle regiments (the 784th, 789th, and 792nd), and one (the 954th) rear regiment. In early March 1942, a delegation from the Armenian SSR led by M. Papyan arrived in Kerch and

⁵NAA. Fund 1007. Inv. 3. File 3. Sh. 2–3.

⁶Ibid. Fund 741. Inv. 1. File 27. Sh. 1.

⁷Ibid. File 3. Sh. 1–3 ; Ibid. File 7. Sh. 2–3.

⁸Ibid. File 27. Sh. 3–4.

⁹Ibid. Sh. 9.

¹⁰Ibid. Sh. 11.

presented the division and its regiments with battle flags. The Armenian soldiers swore to fulfil their sacred duty with honour [9, p. 14].

The Armenian 76th mountain rifle division, previously formed in Soviet Armenia in 1920–1922, which was reorganised into a non-national unit in 1938–1940, was replenished in 1941 with human and material resources from the republic, regained its national identity, and went to the front in September. The division was especially distinguished in the Battle of Stalingrad¹¹.

In the very first period of the war, the Armenian divisions, taking part in the fighting, honourably fulfilled their duty to the Motherland. Talented military leaders have emerged from among the Armenian soldiers, whose names have forever entered the annals of the Great Patriotic War.

After failing in the Moscow direction, the German fascist forces redirected their main offensive toward Crimea, the Caucasus, and Stalingrad. From 17 July 1942 to 2 February 1943, the largest and most decisive battle of the Great Patriotic War, the Battle of Stalingrad, unfolded between the Don and Volga rivers [5, p. 40]. The enemy aimed to break through Soviet defenses with deep penetrations in the Taganrog and Kursk sectors along a 650-kilometer front, encircle and destroy the forces of the Bryansk, Southwestern, and Southern fronts west of the Don using mobile strike groups, and thereby regain the strategic initiative. Soviet troops were ordered to hold the Stalingrad defensive lines at all costs and not to surrender a single position [10, p. 178]. The Supreme Command of the Soviet Army's plan to encircle and destroy the enemy grouping at Stalingrad was implemented under the leadership of generals N. Batutin, A. Eremenko, K. Rokossovskii, and F. Golikov, and coordinated by representatives of the Supreme Command Headquarters (generals G. Zhukov, A. Vasilevskii, and N. Voronov)¹².

Between 23 November and 10 January 1942 surrounded on the outskirts of Stalingrad, 330 000 German troops lost about 140 000 soldiers¹³. From 19 November 1942 to early January 1943, 144 150 enemy soldiers and officers were taken prisoner¹⁴. The Battle of Stalingrad lasted 200 days and ended with the encirclement and complete defeat of the German troops. The defeat of the enemy at Stalingrad was one of the largest and most important military and political events of the World War II, marking the beginning of a radical turning point in both the Great Patriotic War and the entire course of the World War II. The sons of the Armenian people, especially the Armenians who joined the ranks of the national divisions, made a significant contribution to this historically significant victory and created glorious pages of self-sacrifice. The Armenian 76th rifle division took part in the Battle of Stalingrad from its

very beginning to its conclusion. In the first days of the offensive, with powerful support from artillery, tanks and aviation, the division broke through enemy positions in the area of the village of Dimitrovka and captured the largest nazi defence hub – the village of Karpovka, as well as the strategically important aerodroms «Pitomnik» and «Gumrak». The enemy was no longer able to stop their advance. On 10 January 1943, Soviet troops launched an offensive to destroy the enemy's Stalingrad group [6, p. 91].

The 51st guards division took an active part in these combat operations as part of the Don front. On 27–29 January 1943, units of the division fought bloody battles in the central part of the city, and the next day, continuing street fighting, cleared the streets of Irtyshskaya, Rakhinskaya, Karskaya, Dnepropetrovskaya, Azovskaya, Donetskaya, Respublikanskaya, Solnechnaya and Kommunisticheskaya of nazi troops. On 31 January, the southern enemy group ceased resistance. On 2 February, the northern enemy group also surrendered [3, p. 55]. German Army Commander Field Marshal F. Paulus, who had received this rank a few days earlier, and a total of 17 generals were taken prisoner [6, p. 90]. For its bravery in battle on 23 November 1942, the division was reorganised into a guards division and subsequently renamed the 51st guards rifle division. By order of the People's Commissar of Defence of the USSR of 23 November 1942 No. 375, it was awarded the title of «guards». The order stated, in particular: «In the battles for our Soviet Motherland against the German invaders, the 76th rifle division showed examples of courage, discipline and organisation. Constantly fighting the German invaders, the 76th division inflicted heavy losses on the fascist troops and destroyed the enemy's manpower and equipment with its crushing blows, mercilessly crushing and smashing the German invaders. For its courage, steadfastness, discipline and organisation in the battles for the Motherland against the German invaders, the 76th division was reorganised into the 51st guards division... The reorganised division was awarded the Guards Banner...» [2, p. 231]. In addition to being awarded the title of «guards» for its successes, the division received the gratitude of Supreme Commander-in-Chief I. V. Stalin, participated in the parade of military units that distinguished themselves in the liberation of the city, and in 1943, on 19 June 1941, was awarded the Order of Lenin by Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR [2, p. 232]. Following the conferral of the title of «guards», the division's military units and individual subunits were also assigned new numerical designations. This honorary title significantly boosted the morale of the division's command and personnel, reinforcing their sense of duty and motivating them to intensify their efforts against the enemy. At the end

¹¹History of Armenian people / ed.: S. P. Agayan [et al.]. Yerevan : Acad. of Sci. of the Arm. SSR, 1970. Vol. 8. P. 52 (in Arm.).

¹²Battle Banner. 1943. 4 Jan. (No. 309) (in Arm.).

¹³Fight for the Motherland. 1943. 1 Febr. (No. 15) (in Arm.).

¹⁴Ibid. 1 Jan. (No. 4) (in Arm.).

of November and throughout December 1943, all military units successfully repelled enemy attacks aimed at breaking through the encirclement. After the war, one of the newly opened streets in the Dzerzhinsky district of Stalingrad was named after the 51st guards division. In addition to the 76th rifle division, the 136th (15th guards) and 138th (70th guards) Armenian rifle divisions also took part in the fighting, as did thousands of Armenians who joined the ranks of various divisions and actively participated in both defensive and offensive battles. In the Battle of Stalingrad alone, the number of Armenian participants reached about 30 000. Among the active participants in the Battle of Stalingrad were major generals S. Galadzhiev, I. Vekilov, H. Tumanyan, and one of the defenders of Pavlov's house, Mayor V. Avakimov. Among the heroes of Stalingrad were S. Burnazyan, M. Magatyan, G. Kalustov and others [9, p. 16].

The victory in the Battle of Stalingrad was of particular importance to the Armenian people, as Turkey had amassed 26 divisions on the borders of Soviet Armenia and was waiting for a convenient moment to attack. However, the victory in this battle sobered Turkey, which immediately withdrew its troops from the border¹⁵. The Battle of Stalingrad marked a turning point in the war, as the Soviet armed forces seized the strategic initiative from the enemy and maintained it until final victory.

The real threat of the seizure of the Caucasus by Nazi troops first arose in the autumn of 1942. On 21 November, enemy troops captured Rostov-on-Don. The Don was a major transportation hub in the south of the country, considered the gateway to the Caucasus [7, p. 5].

Particular attention should be paid to the plan of German leader Field Marshal P. von Hindenburg to conquer the Caucasus and the Armenian Highlands as a crossroads of the East, while the desire to pass through Iran to India found new expression in the Hitlerite command's plan, operation «Edelweiss», with which the enemy sought to encircle and destroy Soviet troops south and east of Rostov-on-Don, as well as to seize the entire Caucasus. The German side considered the conquest of the Caucasus a priority for economic reasons, as the army needed the natural resources of the Caucasus, the oil fields of Grozny and Baku, and the grain-rich regions of the Kuban. The struggle for the Caucasus lasted 442 days and became the second longest battle of the war after the defence of Leningrad [11, p. 71]. In history, this heroic battle is known as the defence of the Caucasus and is divided into two periods. The first period began in 1942. The first stage of the offensive lasted from 25 July 1943 to early January 1943 and was characterised by a temporary retreat of the army and stubborn defensive battles. The second period of offensive bat-

ties lasted from January 1943 to 9 October 1943, when the liberation of the Taman Peninsula completed the defeat of the enemy forces [4, p. 53]. All military branches joined the fight for the Caucasus: ground forces, the Black Sea Fleet, the Azov and Caspian flotillas, the Air Force, and partisans. Transcaucasian national military units played an important role in this struggle and were severely tested. The sons of the Armenian people took the most active part in the defence of the Caucasus. A significant number of them fought in the Armenian 89th, 408th, and 409th rifle divisions. On 7 August 1942, the command of the 89th rifle division was tasked with preparing to defend the right flank of Grozny, as the enemy had reached the Terek and the approaches to Grozny. On 13 August 1943, having reached Grozny, units of the 89th rifle division replaced the previous military units and took up defensive positions. Then, on the orders of the Military Council of the 9th army, the 89th rifle division took up defensive positions on the right bank of the Terek¹⁶. On 11 September 1942, the 408th rifle division, which was part of the 47th army of the Black Sea group, also left Yerevan for the front. In September, heavy defensive battles unfolded in the North Caucasus.

On 10 September 1943, the troops of the North Caucasian front, commanded by Colonel-General I. Petrov, broke through the seemingly impregnable «Blue line». The Novorossiysk – Taman operation, the final stage of the Caucasian Battle, has begun. On 16 September, Novorossiysk was liberated, and on 9 October, Taman was completely cleared of the enemy. This day marked the final stage of the Battle of the Caucasus [6, p. 11].

Enemy aircraft heavily bombed our units. Not receiving adequate reinforcements for a long time, the division's ranks gradually thinned. Under the command of Colonel P. Kitsuk, the 408th rifle division, supported by coastal troops, participated in the defence of Gelendzhik and its surroundings, then took part in a number of other settlements, defeating the Romanian 30th mountain rifle division, losing about 8000 killed and wounded [11, p. 78]. In October 1942, fierce battles took place in the Tuapse area, where, after suffering heavy losses, the division was reorganised into the 7th rifle brigade and continued to participate in battles for other settlements in the Caucasus. The 409th rifle division, which had been transferred to the Transcaucasian front, began its combat operations in the Mozdok area, participating in the liberation of Mozdok, Georgievsk, Mineralnye Vody, Stavropol, Armavir, and Krasnodar¹⁷. It was awarded orders and medals «For the defence of the Caucasus» by the Supreme Command Headquarters for its defence of the Caucasus and Kuban¹⁸. The defensive battles on the Caucasian front were followed by offensive battles aimed at encircling and defeating enemy troops in the North Caucasus and blocking their retreat routes to

¹⁵History of Armenian people / ed.: S. P. Agayan [et al.]. Yerevan : Acad. of Sci. of the Arm. SSR, 1970. Vol. 4. P. 551 (in Arm.).

¹⁶NAA. Fund 1007. Inv. 3. File 6. Sh. 27–28.

¹⁷Ibid. Fund 741. Inv. 1. File 27. Sh. 4.

¹⁸Ibid.

Rostov, Donbass and Crimea. The Black Sea Fleet, the fleets of the North Caucasus and Transcaucasian fronts, and the Caspian Sea took an active part in these combat operations. Advancing 600 km to the west, the Stavropol Krai, a number of regions of North Ossetia, Kabardino-Balkaria and the Rostov Region, and some territories of the Krasnodar Krai were liberated, and hundreds of thousands of citizens were freed from German captivity¹⁹. The enemy, unable to withdraw its troops along the Rostov roads, was forced to send the main forces to the Kuban and Taman Peninsula. A powerful defensive line was built here, called the «Blue line», which stretched from the Sea of Azov to the Black Sea. It consisted of several tiers with powerful firing points. The nazi command attached great importance to the fortifications of the «Blue line». The strong defence of the approaches to the Taman Peninsula and the terrain made it difficult for our troops to advance, which also required amphibious operations. More than 150 ships and the same number of combat aircraft participated in the liberation of the peninsula. The ground forces, mainly the 18th army, which included the 89th rifle division, delivered powerful blows²⁰. The latter took an active part and launched offensive operations in the direction of Mount Dolgaya and Height Sakharnaya Golovka. These were the first battles of the division under the command of Colonel N. Safaryan for the liberation of Novorossiysk and the Taman Peninsula. The general offensive on this sector of the front, as is known, began on 10 September 1943. The military units operating on the left wing of the division liberated Novorossiysk on 16 September. The military units operating on the right wing, having gone on the offensive, broke through the «Blue line» of the enemy's defense. Many enemy firing points were suppressed. It was necessary to suppress other firing points in order to clear the way for the advancing troops. Senior Sergeant H. Avetisyan took over this task. He climbed Mount Dolgaya and, at the cost of his life, suppressed the fire of enemy machine guns, closing the machine gun embrasure of the fascist wooden-earthen firing point with his body. Thus, he opened the way for his advancing comrades, ensuring their advancement. Then the division liberated Mount Dolgaya, H. Avetisyan was posthumously awarded the high title of Hero of the Soviet Union²¹. Continuing to pursue the enemy, units of the division advanced at night. Having advanced more than 30 km in 5 days of stubborn fighting, the division broke through the

enemy's defenses and on 3 October was the first to reach the Taman Peninsula, for which the division was awarded the title «Taman». And the next day, the division's fighters liberated the large Primorskaya Village. Thus, the 89th rifle division completed the fighting on the Taman Peninsula. And on 9 October, thanks to the massive heroism of the front troops, the Caucasus was completely liberated from the enemy. 115 soldiers defending the Caucasus were awarded the high title of Hero of the Soviet Union, 6 of them were Armenians. For their personal courage shown in the battles for the liberation of Novorossiysk and the Taman Peninsula, sapper Private J. Karakhanyan and Senior Sergeant S. Arakelyan were also awarded the high title of Hero of the Soviet Union. Among the Armenian soldiers who distinguished themselves in the defensive battles of the Caucasus, Captain S. Mkrtumyan was the first to be awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union. From 24 June to 16 November 1942, he flew 27 combat missions on an Il-2 aircraft, destroying a large number of enemy military equipment, as well as hundreds of soldiers and officers. Lieutenant S. Tashiev also became a hero for his excellent performance of combat missions, personal courage and the shooting down of seven enemy aircraft. Senior Lieutenant G. Madoyan was also awarded the high title of Hero of the Soviet Union for liberating the railway station with his battalion in the battles for Rostov-on-Don, holding it for 6 days and repelling 43 enemy attacks during that time²². For the courage and bravery shown in this battle, many Armenian soldiers were awarded government awards, orders and medals, defending the honour of the Armenian people. They distinguished themselves by heroic actions in the air and navy, in various tank, artillery, cavalry units and partisan detachments, making a great contribution to the victory. The battles for the Caucasus are one of the glorious pages of the history of the Great Patriotic War. The Supreme Soviet of the USSR, highly appreciating the historical significance of the Battle for the Caucasus, put it on a par with the battles of Moscow, Leningrad, Odessa, Sevastopol, and Stalingrad and established the medal «For the defense of the Caucasus», which was awarded to 583 045 defenders [2, p. 215]. A comparative analysis of the available arguments allows us to assert that the Armenian divisions made a substantial contribution to the victory on the Caucasian front and, more broadly, to the overall success of the Soviet Union in the Great Patriotic War.

Conclusions

Summing up the topic of the study, we came to the following conclusions.

1. From the very first days of the struggle against fascism, the Armenian people rushed to defend their home-

land with all their might, and the active participation of Armenians was highly appreciated. The Armenian people sent tens of thousands of their sons to the front, and Armenian divisions were created, which were anointed with

¹⁹NAA. Fund 741. Inv. 1. File 27. Sh. 4.

²⁰Ibid. Fund 1007. Inv. 3. File 32. Sh. 18–19.

²¹Ibid. Sh. 21–22.

²²Ibid. Sh. 18–19.

military glory on the fronts. Armenian soldiers could be found on all fronts of the war, in all parts of the army.

2. The victory at Stalingrad shook the foundations of Nazi Germany, disrupted the plans of action of Turkey and Japan against the USSR, inspired both the allied countries and the forces waging an underground and guerrilla struggle against fascism. The Armenian 76th rifle division, which participated from the first days

of the battle to the end, made a great contribution to this victory and became a guards unit for its heroism.

3. The Battle for the Caucasus ended in a complete failure of the plans of the fascist command. After clearing the Caucasus of enemy troops, the Armenian divisions stopped the enemy's advance towards Transcaucasia at the cost of heavy losses and made their worthy contribution to the Caucasian front.

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