

*(16) Evacuation of Batoum Province.*

After the evacuation of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia, there was a period of comparative quiet, during which Batoum province prospered under British administration. In January, 1920, the *de facto* recognition of the Georgian and Azerbaijan Governments by the Allied Governments was received with great satisfaction by these two peoples, and later similar recognition was accorded to the Armenian Government.

Early in February, 1920, the question of the evacuation of the province was again raised, and in March disturbances commenced, due to Georgian aggression, influenced by an anticipation of the peace terms. The situation was further complicated by an advance southwards along the Black Sea coast road of the victorious Bolshevik forces from Novorossisk and by a threat by Turkish forces from the Olti direction.

On the night of 26th/27th May a revolution took place in Baku. This was arranged by local Bolsheviks assisted by Turkish elements, Dagestani levies, and certain troops and representatives of Soviet Russia. This new regime adopted towards Georgia and towards the Tartar population a most intolerant attitude, which resulted in a complete breach between the Georgian and Azerbaijan Republics and a state of war upon the frontier near Poiili, followed later by Tartar insurrections within Azerbaijan. All French and British officials in Baku were arrested and imprisoned.

The Georgian Republic had meanwhile commenced negotiations with Soviet Russia.

A serious situation immediately arose in Georgia. The threat of Bolshevism caused the Georgian Government to endeavour to strengthen its position by adopting measures to establish a strong foothold in the province of Batoum by the despatch of various columns to invade its borders, and these columns came into contact with the hostile Adjarian inhabitants. This action on the part of Georgia I found it necessary to prohibit, and British troops had to be despatched to enforce my orders.

Although the Georgian Government accepted my demands, the result was to bring into a ferment, closely resembling a state of war, a province which for 18 months had enjoyed peace and comparative prosperity.

I visited Batoum on 10th May, and found the situation there so critical that I considered the garrison, which consisted of only two battalions, to be insufficient. I accordingly requested the move to Batoum of a French battalion, which had been set aside by the French authorities for that purpose.

Early in June instructions to prepare for the final evacuation of Batoum were received, and all commercial firms were warned of the fact.

The situation in the province was at the time one of some difficulty, owing to the hostilities which had broken out between the Adjarians and the Georgians, and it appeared possible that the former might attempt to frustrate the Georgian occupation by cutting the railway between Batoum and Tiflis. Guards along the vulnerable portions of the line were therefore increased. The constant demands from the Georgian authorities for their troops to be allowed immediately to occupy the town were refused, as no further action could be taken

until the arrival of the officials sent out by His Majesty's Government to negotiate the transfer. The British proposals for the relief of the Allies by Georgian troops were accepted by the Georgian staff on 28th June, and during the early hours of 1st July all British troops on the railway down to Kobuletti inclusive were relieved without incident, notwithstanding the fact that some 4,000 armed Adjarians had concentrated on the hills some few miles away. These, however, had stated that they would not fire on British troops. Three days later all remaining British troops on the railway were relieved, and Georgian troops and armoured trains arrived on the outskirts of the town. Their ceremonious entry was made on 7th July. British guards were at once relieved, and by evening no British troops remained outside the dock area.

The civil administration was handed over at the same time, the Georgian authorities taking over all departments as they stood. In the presence of the British and French High Commissioners and the Georgian Minister for Foreign Affairs Allied flags were struck, and the Georgian flag broken on the flagstaff at a formal parade at 6 p.m. on 7th July. On the 8th and 9th the transports sailed for their respective destinations, and the British occupation of the Caucasus came to an end.

The successful carrying out of this operation reflects the greatest credit on all ranks of the garrison. The work of the staff and administrative services was especially creditable.

The Royal Navy, under Rear-Admiral Sir M. Culme-Seymour, K.C.B., M.V.O., was most helpful, and rendered valuable services at all times.

The attitude of the civil population throughout testified to the respect and admiration felt for the garrison, and clearly showed the esteem in which the troops were held.

*(17) General Remarks.*

The health of the troops while in Transcaucasia was generally good. Towards the end of the summer of 1919, however, malaria reappeared in the force, and was a source of some anxiety. The fact that many of the men then serving with the Army of the Black Sea had previously suffered from this malady while in Macedonia had a considerable influence on the medical statistics.

Relations between the troops and the inhabitants were invariably friendly. The smart appearance and steady behaviour of the British and Indian troops made a deep impression on the inhabitants from the first, and the good nature and the general lack of arrogance on the part of officers and men made them very popular.

In reviewing the work done by all ranks of the forces in the Caucasus it should be borne in mind that the whole administration of this huge country, with the exception of that of the railways, was carried on, without any special increase of personnel, by the Divisional and Brigade staffs and by regimental officers from the troops in occupation. Military Governors and Military Representatives were also entirely regimental officers, and in many cases very young regimental officers.

Non-commissioned officers and even privates had at times to fill positions of great responsibility, requiring the exercise of much tact and initiative.