

ARMENIAN ATROCITIES AND ACTIVITIES OF THE BOZO BANDS IN MARAŞ DURING THE GREAT WAR

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ahmet EYİCİL*

Abstract:

There had been numerous Armenian upheavals took place in Maraş since 1862. These rebels were a group of Armenian nationalists incited by Russian, French, British, and American governments for their political purposes. This case was repeated again during the Great War, when France, Russia and Britain organized the Armenian and some Kurdish groups to create unrest in Turkey for the destruction of the Ottoman Empire. The Armenian groups increased their rebellious activities when the Ottoman armies were in a fierce fight in the Dardanelles. Moreover, the Armenians exempted from military duties and armed by the Allied Powers, committed their outrageous atrocities against the Muslims in this period. This, however, was not enough for the Allied Powers. Besides Armenians, they also provoked and armed a Kurdish group called as Bozo bands in Maraş at this time. Eventually, the Bozo and Armenian bands, under foreign instigations, came to an agreement to act together in Maraş. As a result of their bandit activities the security of Maraş Province was seriously threatened and many civilians and soldiers lost their life. Despite the lack of necessary troops and ammunition the Turkish administration succeeded in stopping all kinds of bands' activities in Maraş in July 1918.

Keywords:

The Province of Maraş, Armenian Rebellious Activities, Atrocities against Muslims, Bozo Bands, the Allied Powers

ARMENIAN ATROCITIES IN MARAŞ

At the turn of the 20th century, Maraş Province contained considerable number of Armenian population. According to 1908 Aleppo Province yearbook of the Ottoman Empire, there were some 11,180 Armenians and 3,567 Catholics out of total 67,974 population, in central Maraş. The number of Muslim population was 46,557. According to the same yearbook, there were 4 Armenian, 3 protestant, 2 catholic and 1 Latin churches and total 15 Christian schools in central Maraş. There were also 6

* Sütçü İmam University, Department of History, Lecturer, Kahramanmaraş.

churches, 2 monasteries, besides 5 Christian elementary schools and 1 high school in Zeytun (Süleymanlı). Three churches in Elbistan and 1 Armenian Church and 4 protestant schools in Göksun were also in service.

As other minorities did, the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire enjoyed a great deal of religious freedom. The Ottoman minority rule obtained enormous privileges and opportunities especially for their economic wealth. The descent of the Ottoman Empire from power and the rising of nationalist movements in this part of the world under foreign instigations encouraged some unfaithful Armenian nationalists to rebel and work against the Sublime Porte.¹ There were numerous rebellions and mutinies among the Armenian population influenced by the adverse political propaganda carried out by Russia, America and Europe against the Ottoman Empire. 1862-Zeytun, 1863-Van, and 1863-Çarsancak was some of the big Armenian mutinies in the Ottoman Empire.²

The American College and the American missionaries in Maraş played a prominent role in the organization of the rebellion took place in Zeytun. The missionaries provoked the Armenians against the Ottoman rule by spending of millions of dollars. By 1868, the Americans further extended their activities by establishing a consular office in Maraş.

There were some four hundred American educational institutes in Turkey during the reign of Abdulhamit II (1876-1909.) When the Ottoman government required license for American missionary institutions, the American Embassy applied for license for only 10 institutions and the government granted licenses for those institutions, which three of them were in Maraş; American Divinity School, American Girls' School and the Residence for the missionaries. This, in turn, resulted in a rapid increase in the number of American missionaries and their activities in Maraş.³

While the American institutions in Maraş and elsewhere in the country encouraged the Armenians for being aware of their national and political entities apart from the Ottoman Empire, some nationalist Armenian political organizations engaged in militant activities for the establishment of an Armenian state in

¹ Abdullah Emircan, Mehmet Emin Gerger, *Ermeni Vahşeti*, (İstanbul, 1992), pp.15-16.

² A. Nimet Kurat, *Türkiye ve Rusya*, (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı Yay., 1990), p. 113.

³ Yaşar Akbıyık, *Milli Mücadelede Güney Cephesi: Maraş*, (Ankara: Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi, 1999), p. 312.

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Anatolia. The Huntchak Committee, centered in London, worked for the propagating the Armenian cause in the European capitals. The Committee was under total political and financial control of the British government and it was used for British political interests. In 1895 the leader of the London branch of the Huntchack committee, Nazar Beg, masterminded a rebellion in Zeytun. A propaganda group sent from Britain armed the people and told them that the British would help the Armenian rebels sending arms and money. Moreover, they told that British navy would occupy Mersin and İskenderun ports to deliver them their assistance.

In September 1895, local nationalist leaders held a meeting with the propaganda group in Karanlıkdere to decide the date and place of the rebellion. On October 19, according to the decisions taken in this meeting, the Zeytun Uprising, with the participation of some 6,000 Armenians armed with modern British weaponry, started. The rebels occupied the governmental buildings and took the soldiers, officers, local and other authorities as hostages. As it was planned, the rebellion spread all over the region in a short period of time. In return, Zeytun was surrounded by governmental troops. The British, French and the Russian Embassies were worried that the governmental troops would harshly crack down the rebellion. Thus, they asked the rebels to end the uprising. As a result of the Embassies' intervention the rebels accepted to surrender. The Ottoman government did not punish the rebels, but allowed the rebel leaders and the Huntchak bandits to leave the country.⁴

The Armenian Church also had long supported the militant Armenian separatist movements. In a meeting in Paris in 1905, the Armenian committees, profoundly influenced by the Patriarch, decided to establish an Armenian state in Cilicia (Adana and Maraş).⁵ The Ottoman Empire's participation in World War I

⁴ Ahmet Eyicil, *Maraşta Ermeni Siyasi Faliyetleri*, (Ankara: Gün Yayıncılık, 1999), pp. 214-226; *Osmanlı Arşivi Yıldız Tasnifi Ermeni Meselesi* (Ottoman Archives, Yıldız Collection for Armenian Question), Tarih Araştırmaları ve Dökümanasyon Merkezi Kurma ve Geliştirme Vakfı, (İstanbul, 1989), p. 433.

⁵ Erdal İter, *Ermeni Kilisesi ve Terör*, (Ankara, 1996), p. 55.

brought a hope for the Armenians to achieve their ultimate goal, the establishment of an Armenian state. The Armenians were provoked and used by Britain, Russia and France to weaken the Ottoman Empire from inside. Local Huntchak Committee in Zeytun under the leaderships of Çakıroğlu Panos, his brother Solakoğlu Mesrup and Yeni Dünyaoglu Nisan committed atrocities against the Muslims to help to the realization of the Armenian project in Cilicia.

The Armenian nationalists created great difficulties for the Ottoman government and for its army. They massacred innocent Muslims and engaged in guerilla warfare against the army with the support of the enemy powers to worn the Turkish army behind. According to estimates, during the Armenian massacres in the periods between 1878 and 1915, some 1,5 million Muslims were killed. The Armenian terror and treason caused the government to enact the Relocation Law on May 27, 1915. This Law aimed to deport the Armenians, who had lived in rural areas out of the government's control and who had harmed the lives of people and state's interests, to distant regions far away from war zones.⁶

During the war, the Armenian bands increased their activities in Maraş. On April 23, 1914, a gendarme detachment was sent to Zeytun to arrest eight Armenian criminals hiding in a house. The criminals, who refused to surrender, opened fire against the gendarme troops and killed an innocent civilian. The troops surrounded the house but local Armenians, with the help of the Patriarch, prevented the capture of the criminals. As the incident went out of the control, those troops were forced to go back to Maraş in empty hands.⁷

On August 17, 1914, the Armenian rebels ambushed some 100 Muslim youths and killed them around Zeytun who were from neighboring Andırın and were discharged from the Zeytun Military Command upon completing their military services. Same Armenians also killed many people from Beşen village.

The Armenians who gathered at the house of a Huntchak committee leader, Çakıroğlu Panos, decided to ambush the governor's building, killing the governor and cutting the

⁶ Emircan, *Ermeni Vahşeti*, p.26.

⁷ *Askeri Tarih Belgeleri Dergisi* (Hereafter quoted as ATBD), (*Documents related to Military History*), No. 86, Document No. 2048, (Ankara, April 1987), p.1.

communication lines. Fortunately this heinous plan was not put into action due to fact that they were not able to take the necessary precautions and give the necessary orders on time.⁸

On September 2, 1914, an Armenian bands of forty robbed 21 Muslim passengers nearby Zeytun and seized 12 000 kuruş (Ottoman currency) from them. Due to intensified Armenian oppression, thirty soldiers located in Zeytun escaped from their barracks. To prevent Muslim retaliation against the Armenian atrocities, the government sent a squadron of 200 soldiers to Zeytun. Although more troops were demanded, the battalion of 1160 men providing security of the city was not allowed to leave Maraş.⁹

A telegram sent to the office of the Ministry of Internal Affairs on October 24, 1914, signed by some fifteen prominent figures in Maraş society, stated that the Armenian bands had burned Andırın governor's building, and they used all forms of oppression methods against the people in Maraş, killing and pillaging people leaving numerous children orphans and women widows. According to the telegram, the Armenians especially terrorized and shed bloods in mountainous areas since 1910. The telegram complained that the Armenians recently attacked 60 soldiers who were going to Zeytun Garrison and they run away with 250 liras, which were seized, from the soldiers. Some prominent people benefited from this insecurity for their economic wellbeing and for other reasons, prevented the punishment of the criminals using their influences. For example, the murderers of Gendarme Ahmet who was killed in the fight were freed before his blood was dried off. According to the same telegram, the Muslims were disturbed with this situation and the situation might create a Muslim reaction against the Armenians.¹⁰

The Armenian assaults and killings in and around Zeytun alienated the Muslims and they requested the government to stop Armenian cruelties. The Maraş Gendarme Division chased the Armenian criminals but they refugee to the rocky Tekke monastery nearby Zeytun. During the chase, Captain Süleyman¹¹ and twenty-

⁸ Veysel Eroğlu, *Ermeni Mezalimi*, (İstanbul, Sebil Yayınevi, 1995), pp.97-98.

⁹ *ATBD*, No: 81, Document No. 1806, (Ankara, Aralık 1982), p.19.

¹⁰ *ATBD*, No: 86, Document No. 2049, p.5.

¹¹ The name of Zeytun has been officially changed Suleymanlı in the memory of Gendarme Major Suleiman Beg killed by the Armenians. See, Yalçın Özalp, *Milleti Sadıka Patırtısı ve Maraş*, (İstanbul: Fatih Gençlik Vakfı Matbaası İşletmesi, No date), p.325.

five soldiers were killed some thirty-four soldiers were also wounded. Although some rebels were captured most of them escaped in the night taking advantage of mountainous terrain.¹²

On March 18, a small gendarme division was ambushed by thirty Armenian bands in somewhere between Marash and Zeytun. Six soldiers were killed during the attack. At the same time, new recruits who were coming to Zeytun accompanied by two gendarmes were captured and locked in a church.¹³

On April 10, 1915, the Armenian bands attacked gendarme division carrying ammunition to Zeytun. There was no peace and comfort in the region due to constant attacks of the Armenian bands. On March 18, 1915, while the Turkish army was fighting in the Dardanelles to defend the homeland, the Armenians started new rebellions and atrocities to create insecurity and lower the morale behind the fronts.¹⁴

Due to increased Armenian assaults, on March 25, 1915, the government sent troops to Saint Mary monastery where the bands had taken a shelter. The clashes continued until midnight. At the end, 37 rebels were killed and 100 of them were wounded. But 8 soldiers were killed 26 were wounded by Armenians. Five rebels were also captured after the chase. A large amount of ammunition besides some Armenian publications and the seal of the Hunchack committee were seized by the security forces.

As a result of insistent chase and deterrent measures 300 bands were surrendered on May 29. The Armenian bands gathered in Ali Kayası and Sultan Mountain. A division equipped with mountain cannon was sent against them in order to prevent a possible Armenian massacre in mountainous regions.¹⁵ The bands who managed to survive from this battle stationed in a strategical location called Fındıcak and rebelled there.¹⁶ Four hundred Armenian bands in Fındıcak village burnt houses in the neighboring villages and killed 10 Muslims. On 20 July, in a battle between the Armenians and the 132. Regiment, 2 soldiers were killed and three soldiers were wounded. As the battle spread over

¹² Eroğlu, *Ermeni Mezalimi*, pp. 99-100.

¹³ ATBD, No: 81, Document No. 1820, p.98.

¹⁴ Eyicil, *Maraşta Ermeni...*, p.333.

¹⁵ Eyicil, *Maraşta Ermeni...*, p.340; ATBD, No: 86, Document No. 2053, p.23.

¹⁶ Eyicil, *Maraşta Ermeni...*, p.342.

and intensified, the Commander of the Fourth Army, Cemal Pasha, asked for the regiment to be reinforced by additional troops.¹⁷

The rebellion in Findıcak lasted until August 1915, and during the fight some seven thousand Turks, 5,000 thousand civilian and 2,000 soldiers were killed by the Armenians. Moreover, the security forces in the same rebellion killed 2100 Armenian rebels.¹⁸

Cemal Pasha was well aware of the cost of any further Armenian rebellions in southern Turkey and thought that this would pose a serious threat to the security of the southern Turkey. He also knew that in case of any other Armenian rebellion, the government needed to station considerable number of troops in densely Armenian populated areas such as Zeytun, and this hence would cause to weaken the Ottoman military power in the front.¹⁹ The Armenians who lived in Antep, Urfa, Maraş, Dörtıyol and Zeytun, had rebelled several times and they were waiting for the right time for a new rebellions. Their rebellion could help the cession of Syria from the Empire.

The Eastern Mediterranean commanders of the British and French armies exploited the Ottoman's delicate situation with its Armenian citizens and asked Armenians to rebel while the Ottomans were in a fierce battle in the Dardanelles against the British and French armies. The Armenians who fully received the support from the enemies of the Ottoman Empire complied with the French and British call. The head of the American National Armenian Defense Committee Miran Seraslan, sent a letter to the British Foreign Affairs Ministry stating that his organization had been prepared to wage a rebellion with the help of Armenian brigades in Sis (Kozan), Haçin (Saımbeyli), Fırnıs, Marash and Findıcak. He indicated that with this help the Armenians could control the region from the Taurus Mountains to the Mediterranean, and hence this would help to prevent the Ottoman Army advancing towards Egypt.²⁰

Against the approaching danger, the government decided to deport all Armenians resided in Zeytun.²¹ Cemal Pasha was

¹⁷ ATBD, No: 81, Document No. 1836, p.176.

¹⁸ Eyicil, *Maraşta Ermeni...*, pp.342-47.

¹⁹ Akbıyık, *Milli Mücadelede...*, p.310.

²⁰ Akbıyık, *Milli Mücadelede...*, p.311.

ordered that he should take the necessary precautions to deport the Armenians resided in Zeytun and Maraş to Konya.²² The government erased debts of the Armenians who were deported from Maraş.²³ The Armenians who were engaged in businesses were excluded from deportation.²⁴ The ones mistreating the Armenians during the deportation were punished and the Ministry of Finance compensated the Armenians who were victimized by any form of mistreatment.²⁵

In April 1916, there were still total 8845 Armenian population of whom 3845 men and 5000 women after the deportation. While 500 of them were Gregorian the rest were Catholic. At this time, as the new waves of Armenian unrest began, the Catholic Armenians were also deported except the Gregorian ones which remained to stay in the city because of their peaceful attitudes. At this time, Hırlakyan, the previously convicted influential Armenian leader and ex-deputy of the Ottoman Parliament was also deported to Mesken. He was in the Catholic faith and became very rich by selling merchandise to the state. Hırlakyan had provided 50,000 Martini and Schneider guns and 20,000,000 bullets to the Armenian rebels during the 1895 uprising.²⁶

Some number of Armenian criminals escaped from the deportation and found a haven in non-Muslim villages.²⁷ When they succeeded in escaping from the government's chase they hide themselves in desolate mountains and they managed to communicate with Armenian Taurus railroad workers. The Armenian outlaws attacked Muslim villages and murdered and pillaged the people with Armenian railroad workers and the employee came back to their works denying their involvement into terrorist activities.²⁸

²¹ *Osmanlı Belgelerinde lerinde Ermeniler (1915-1920)*, (O.B.E.) (the Armenians in Ottoman documents), Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü Osmanlı Arşiv Dairesi Başkanlığı, (The Administration of Achieves of Prime ministry , the office of Ottoman achieves), (Ankara 1994), p.28.

²² *ATBD*, No: 81, Document No. 1823, p.112.

²³ *O.B.E.*, p.37.

²⁴ *O.B.E.*, p.39.

²⁵ *O.B.E.*, p.188.

²⁶ *O.B.E.*, p.147.

²⁷ *ATASE*, folder No. 5168, dossier No. 16, Document No. 20.

²⁸ *ATASE*, folder No. 5168, dossier No. 16, Document No. 20-2.

The deported Armenians as well threatened the security of the places where they passed. The government tried to provide sufficient number of guards to prevent insecurity for the local citizens and the Armenian deportees. For example, 200 Armenian rebel leaders who were deported from İzmir were brought to Zor via Maraş under enormous security precautions.²⁹

On December 5, 1917, it was reported that the Armenian bands around İslahiye committed numerous atrocities against the Muslims with the help of Armenian railroad workers who delivered the guns and the ammunition to the band members. These guns were stolen from the Locomotive Brigade. The security was tightened in order to prevent further Armenian terrorist activities by these gangs and Colonel Fuad Bey was assigned to control the activities of the people working in the construction site.³⁰

Moreover, the terrorist activities in other regions were carried out. A detachment of 30 was sent from Kilis and Antep in order to chase the Armenian bands who were located in Ali Kayası, the north of Maraş. The chase of these bands was only completed on February 14, 1917, after assigning additional troops.³¹

The first battalion of the Tenth Reserve Regiment was deployed in Maraş by November 16, 1917, in order to neutralize the Armenian bands terrorizing the Maraş region. This regiment was not effective in the first two months. The detachments consisted of forty soldiers were sent to Pazarcık and Andırın. The operations started on January 16, 1918. Unfortunately, the commander of the operation did not properly observe his responsibilities and he was not successful in maintaining the discipline among his troops. Thus, this encouraged the Armenians to further their rebellious activities in Maraş.

The authorities demanded for the deployment of better-trained troops in Maraş under the supervision of the regional inspector in order to stop increased Armenian terrorism.³² But the Armenian bands increased their aggression. The officer Nedim Efendi from the first battalion of the Tenth Reserve Regiment was killed in an

²⁹ O.B.E, p.158.

³⁰ From Twelve Army Corps Command to Military Commissioner, Adana, 5.12.1917, No. 4851. ATASE, Folder No. 4223, Dossier No. 84, Document No. 1-3, 1-4, 1-5, 1-6, 1-7, 1-8.

³¹ From İslahiye to the Detachment Command, 14.2.1917. ATASE, Folder No. 4223, Dossier No. 84, Document No. 1-16.

³² ATASE, folder No. 4218, dossier No. 17, Document No. 4.

armed clash in Kösüdere of Göksun and his gun was seized.³³ Law and order in the city were completely destroyed by January 27, 1918. The Muslims had great difficulties in entering and going out the city. The Armenians lived in the neighboring villages also joined terrorist activities in the city.³⁴

THE ACTIVITIES OF THE BOZO BANDS DURING THE GREAT WAR

Besides Armenian gangs there were other bandit groups around the province of Maraş in which they broke out the order and carried out massacres around the city during the World War I. This

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was a militant disloyal group called as Bozo Bands organized by Bozo who was from the Bozo clan in Pazarcık town. Some local clans gave their support to this group and this group collaborated with the Armenian bands as well. They were a group of Kurdish people. The Bozo bands grew fast and during the mid-war they began to murder the people regardless of women, children and elderly. To counter this, the government troops, on January 17, 1918, entered into an armed clash

with the Bozo in Cimikan Mountains of Pazarcık. Six band members were killed but there were two casualties in the troops. The rest of the terrorists escaped taking for the advantage of the darkness but their chase was continued.³⁵

In order to do the job, second battalion of the Tenth Reserve Regiment, and the troops sent from Antep moved from Köseceli village and reached the operation site. Some volunteers from

³³ From the Emergency Armies to the Command of the 12th Army, 21 .1. 1918. ATASE, Folder No. 4218, Dossier No. 67, Document No. 4-2.

³⁴ ATASE, Folder No. 4218, Document No.4-5.

³⁵ From the Inspector of the Emergency Armies sent to the Command of the 12th Army, 22 .1. 1918. ATASE, Folder No. 4218, Dossier No 67, Document No 4-4, 4-29.

Karalar and Tilkiler clans also joined the troops. The troops, which completed the logistic preparations moved towards the Gani Mountain.³⁶ They involved into an armed clash with the Bozo bands in Duman Tepe. Lieutenant Avni and three soldiers were seriously wounded and three soldiers were killed during the shootout.³⁷ Six band members were also killed in same clash.³⁸

Two more battles carried out against the Bozos but with no success. The troops under the command of Lieutenant Ali and the supporting groups under the command of lieutenant Hasan had a third battle with the gang on January 22, 1918 near Ufacıklı village of Pazarcık town. The battle continued for four hours. Five soldiers were killed and two of them were also wounded. The bands lost nine men and three animals. The head of the Bozo got wounded in the battle. Meanwhile lieutenant Avni was wounded and, later, he died in Cinife (Yavuzeli) village.³⁹ On January 25, 1918, the head of the battalion was re-instructed to neutralize and arrest the band members. It was also proposed that the soldiers of the Tenth Reserve Regiment be rewarded in order to keep the morale of the soldiers high.⁴⁰

On January 30, 1918, a detachment was sent against the Bozo to crash the bands before the reserve troops arrived. The people from Kötürük clan who knew the whereabouts of the gang supported this detachment. Some thirty people from the same clan were armed and a small civil detachment of fifteen under the control of military was formed against the Bozo.⁴¹

Three detachments, each consisted of 25 soldiers were formed in Pazarcık. Local people volunteered and local government supported this military action. Each soldier was given 150 cartridges and every regiment three boxes of ammunition. The military was extremely attentive to distribute the guns and ammunition to the volunteers.⁴² The volunteers were not allowed

³⁶ From the Inspector of the Emergency Armies to the Command of the 12th Army, 22 .1. 1918. ATASE, Folder No 4218, dossier No 67, Document No 4, 26.

³⁷ ATASE, Folder No. 4218, Dossier No. 67, Document No. 4-29.

³⁸ ATASE, Folder No. 4218, Dossier No. 67, Document No. 4-26, 4-27, 4-28.

³⁹ ATASE, Folder No. 4218, Dossier No. 67, Document No. 4-3, 4-30.

⁴⁰ ATASE, Folder No. 4218, Dossier No. 67, Document No. 4-12.

⁴¹ ATASE, Folder No. 4218, Dossier No. 67, Document No. 4-9.

⁴² ATASE, Folder No. 4218, Dossier No. 67, Document No. 4-18.

to act alone and, except their sickness, leave the detachment before the mission was completed.⁴³

Due to unsuccessful military actions against the Bozos, the XIIth Army Commanding Office, on January 31, 1918, ordered the military branches to nullify the entire Bozo bands for sure.⁴⁴ The lack of peace and security in Maraş seriously threatened the security of transportation of military provisions and ammunition. Maraş requested 300 professionally trained soldiers from Adana to secure military transportation.⁴⁵ But there were only 245 recruits in Adana, who completed their three-week training.⁴⁶ On February 1, 1918, those soldiers were assigned to the command of the Maraş Gendarme regiment to fight with Pazarcık bands.⁴⁷

By February 7, 1918 many villages in Antep, Maraş, Besni, Rum Kale and Pazarcık which were under the threat of Bozo bands were freed from their terror. Some nine-band members were killed during the chase in Cimikanlı, Mucakanlı, Gani Mountain, Kara Kale, Ufacıklın and Yapalak. A detachment of twenty under the command of lieutenant Şükrü also chased Atir Ali band which were terrorizing the Zeytun region. The people who provided logistic and material assistance to the bands were also investigated.

Lieutenant Naci, the commander of the Detachment II, wounded the brother of Bozo, Abuzer, on February 7.⁴⁸ Two band members were also killed on February 11 1918. Although Abuzer managed to escape he, later, was found dead. 550 cartridges and some gunpowder were found near his body.⁴⁹

On February 12, 1918, the Bozo bands, which managed to survive, attacked Mırtık village in Antep region and pillaged the people and then, they pillaged Karakesik village of Pazarcık town seizing 50 liras and 20 mecdiye (Ottoman gold coin) from the villagers. Next day, when those outlaws arrived to Akbıyık village, governmental troops and the commander of Karabıyık Gendarme

⁴³ ATASE, Folder No. 4218, Dossier No. 67, Document No. 4-20, 4-22, 4-23, 4-24, 4-25.

⁴⁴ ATASE, Folder No. 4218, Dossier No. 67, Document No. 4-13.

⁴⁵ ATASE, Folder No. 4218, Dossier No. 67, Document No. 4-7.

⁴⁶ ATASE, Folder No. 4218, Dossier No. 67, Document No 4-8.

⁴⁷ ATASE, Folder No. 4218, Dossier No. 67, Document No. 4-15, 4-16.

⁴⁸ From 4th Division to 12th Army Command, Adana, 7.2.1918. ATASE, Folder No. 4218, Dossier No. 67, Document No. 9.

⁴⁹ ATASE, Folder No. 4223, Dossier No. 84, Document No. 1-21, 1-22.

station, Sergeant Ökkeş, with his ten soldiers were involved in all day long armed clash with the bands in the rocky terrain of the village. During the fights, two sergeants and one soldier were killed and twenty soldiers were wounded but the band lost its five prominent men, and additionally, five of them were wounded. The bands retracted in the darkness carrying their dead and wounded ones with them but their chase was continued.⁵⁰

The operation was extended to a much wider region in order to prevent a possible retaliation of the band. II. Army Pursuit Detachment in Pazarcık and the Division 44 located in Islahiye worked together. Additionally, on February 11, 1918, some 150 soldiers were sent to Maraş from Osmaniye.⁵¹ On February 16, a further battalion was sent to Islahiye.⁵²

While the necessary precautions were taken against the Bozo bands, Göllo bands attacked Yezdan village of Pazarcık on February 12, 1918. On the other hand the Bozo bands moved towards Islahiye and began to disturb the workers and the German technical staff who were working on the railroad construction. The Gendarme troops were moved to Islahiye in order to neutralize these two groups of bands.⁵³

The people in Pazarcık were impatient and made demands from the government to crash the bands.⁵⁴ As a result, the XII. Army Corps Command was ordered to chase the bands until their complete destruction.⁵⁵ The battalion acted immediately and the local military inspectors provided the necessary support for the mobilization of the battalion to Pazarcık.⁵⁶

Some of the bands that survived from the armed clash in Islahiye were found dead on 2 March, with their guns and sixty cartridges.⁵⁷ One of the leaders of the Bozo, Oseb Hoca of Maraş was captured in İntili village. A trunk full of cartridges was seized during the inspection in the mountainous region between Bahçe and Hasanbeyli.⁵⁸

⁵⁰ ATASE, Folder No. 4218, Dossier No. 67, Document No. 12, 12-1-2, 13-1-2.

⁵¹ ATASE, Folder No. 4218, Dossier No. 67, Document No. 11-4, 11-9.

⁵² ATASE, Folder No. 4218, Dossier No. 67, Document No. 11-9, 11-11.

⁵³ ATASE, Folder No. 4218, Dossier No. 67, Document No. 4-32, 4-33, 4-34, 4-35.

⁵⁴ ATASE, Folder No. 4218, Dossier No. 67, Document No. 11-12, 11-13.

⁵⁵ ATASE, Folder No. 4218, Dossier No. 67, Document No. 11-17.

⁵⁶ ATASE, Folder No. 4218, Dossier No. 67, Document No. 11-19-20-21-22-23.

⁵⁷ ATASE, Folder No. 4223, Dossier No. 84, Document No. 1-21, 1-22.

⁵⁸ ATASE, Folder No. 4223, Dossier No. 84, Document No. 1-23.

The Armenians were disturbed by the military searches and desired to move other places for different reasons. For instance, on May 2, Elyası Abraham born in Mersin, but later banished to Maraş stated that he was ill and wanted to be sent to Istanbul or another big city. The authorities precede his application to the headquarters of 12th Army Corps in Adana.⁵⁹

According to the governmental documents, the number of the Armenian bands who terrorized Bahçe, Haruniye (Düziçi), İslahiye and Maraş was only thirty-seven. Those bands were stationed in the mountainous region surrounding Maraş. In April 1918, they attacked Ördekdere village. They also several times organized attacks on Pazarcık but security forces killed eighteen of them.⁶⁰

On July 2, 1918, Armenian bands of thirty attacked and pillaged several villages located between Bahçe and İslahiye. A detachment unit went against them but failed to capture the criminals who hide in mountainous terrain. The Armenian bands which escaped from the pursuit in Maraş, Antep, and Besni continued to terrorize the people.

The authorities demanded from the Ministry of Internal Affairs that the Armenian railroad workers who worked in mountainous İslahiye and Osmaniye and terrorized the region should be fired and deported.⁶¹ Gendarme detachments were assigned for the security around railroad construction places between İslahiye and Osmaniye. Additionally, the Armenians workers who either involved in band movements or helped the bands were arrested and deported from the region.⁶²

THE ULTIMATE DESTRUCTION OF THE BAND GROUPS

Rumors began to spread around in Southeastern Turkey in October 1918 that the British army would land some 5,000 Armenian volunteers from Cyprus and 2,000 British troops on Mersin and Antalya ports. It was planned that these troops would help the Armenians rebels around Maraş, İslahiye and Osmaniye.

⁵⁹ ATASE, Folder No. 4223, Dossier No. 84, Document No. 4.

⁶⁰ From Osmaniye Headquarters to the Command of the 12th Army, Adana, 22.03. 1918. ATASE, Folder No. 4223, Dossier No. 84, Document No.4.

⁶¹ ATASE, Folder No. 5168, Dossier No. 16, Document No. 20.

⁶² ATASE, Folder No. 5168, Dossier No. 16, Document No. 20-2.

The Armenian rebels were encouraged by those rumors and they planned to destroy the railway tunnels and manufacturing industry in the region to topple transportation and to create commodity crisis.⁶³

The Division 44, which was assigned to destroy the bands terrorizing Maraş, İslahiye, Bahçe and Osmaniye regions, adopted some new strategies. Accordingly, each regiment would select 20 soldiers, experienced in the fights against the bands and each soldier would be given two pair of shoes, and 120 cartridges. The detachments were also provided two animals to carry the ammunition.⁶⁴ The division was assigned to protect the manufacturing mills and the railroads.⁶⁵ Two battalions in Akyar village were moved to Kısık dale. The trenches in Kısık were repaired.⁶⁶ The troops around Mersin and Iskenderun ports were reinforced in order to prevent any attempts by the British troops landing those places.⁶⁷

After completing such preparations, a new operation started against the bands. On July 29, 1928, a military detachment from Osmaniye moved towards Yarpuz. Southern Hasanbeyli and İslahiye including Gavurdağı (Nurdağı) were searched and investigated and the troops were stationed in Germencik, south of İslahiye. Then, the troops in Germencik were divided into different divisions. A division moved towards Alakilise and another one towards Sabundere, and two others towards Kartaldağ and Büyükdağ. The divisions continued to move to northward from the region between Katırkale, Ökkeşbaba and Gavurgölü. After searching these regions the troops moved towards the mountains near Çakmaktepe south of Eoğlu (Türkoğlu). From here, troops marched to Comruk village. After searching the mountainous region between Kömürler (Nurdağ) and Eoğlu they moved towards Bahçe and Küçük İntilli village. All those troops were gathered in İslahiye after their general searches.

During the searches the people were treated well but the criminals and suspects were arrested and taken to the military

⁶³ From 12th Division to 44th Division Command, 19.09.1918. ATASE, Folder No. 5168, Dossier No. 16, Document No. 17/A, Document No. 5, 5-1-2.

⁶⁴ From 44th Division Command to the Commands of the 139th and 159th Regiments, 17.7.1918. ATASE, Folder No. 5168, Dossier No. 16, Document No. 20, 20-52, 20-7.

⁶⁵ ATASE, Folder No. 5168, Dossier No. 16, Document No. 5-3.

⁶⁶ ATASE, Folder No. 5168, Dossier No. 16, Document No. 5-5, 5-7-8-9.

⁶⁷ ATASE, Folder No. 5168, Dossier No. 16, Document No. 5, 5-1-2.

detachments headquarters in Osmaniye. In case the escaped bands from the search would seek shelter in neighboring regions, Maraş, Kilis and Pazarcık, the battalions patrolled their areas.⁶⁸ Additionally, the local authorities in Osmaniye, Islahiye and Bahçe were prepared.

The Armenian bands were dressed Ottoman military uniforms to confuse the troops. To prevent the clash between the troops, suspecting each other as cloaked Armenians, İbrahim Beg, a trustworthy local personality who knew the local people well was assigned to carry out the communications among the detachments using a password.⁶⁹

The detachments stationed in Yarpuz and Islahiye continued to search the Gavurdağı region on the night of 20 July. The detachment deployed in Islahiye region started the operation in the morning of 19th July. Especially, the region where the Armenian bands had long located was thoroughly searched. An Armenian band of 80 wondering in groups of fifteen were chased. Mardoros and some other Armenian bands were arrested and investigated then, they were sent to Osmaniye. Completing this mission, left wing of the detachments returned to Pazarcık.

On July 28, 1918, the soldiers killed some Armenian bands that wanted to buy bread in Haruniye. When this news was spread around, the Armenian bands that hid in the mountains around Haruniye escaped from the region. On the same day, the soldiers rushed into Islahiye to catch some 20 Armenian bands in Paşa Çiftliği. After a neck-to-neck battle with these bands their leaders Manukyan and Kabiryum from Hasanbeyli were killed. During the fight the Armenian bands stabbed a soldier to death. Two German brand guns, a hundred and fifty liras, a pair of earrings, two mecdiye coins and a gold watch-braislet were seized from the dead Armenians. The booty was given to the soldiers who participated in clash.⁷⁰ Eventually, the security of the region was only re-established as a result of hardworking searches and after determined pursuits carried out against the Armenian bands.

⁶⁸ ATASE, Folder No. 5168, Dossier No. 16, Document No. 20-8-9, 20-10-11-12-13.

⁶⁹ From 44th Division Command to Finance Department, Maraş Municipality and Heads of Pazarcık and Kilis Districts, 29. 07. 1918. ATASE, Folder No. 5168, Dossier No. 16, Document No. 20-14.

⁷⁰ From 44th Division Command to 12th Division Command, 21.07. 1918. ATASE, Folder No. 5168, Dossier No. 16, Document No. 20-18.